GS Paper II – Governance **Date:** 09.07.26

T.N. moves SC against HC order on quota for converts to Islam

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Tamil Nadu government has appealed against a Madras High Court decision that a convert to Islam cannot claim the status of Backward Class Muslim.

The High Court had declared unconstitutional a 2024 government order allowing converts to claim backward status.

The court was hearing the petition filed in 2022 by a man from Thoothukudi district who had embraced Islam and changed his name. He was born to Hindu parents. The certificate issued by the Sunnath Jamath, Kayathar, in 2015 had stated the petitioner had embraced Islam.

Application rejected

He had applied for a community certificate certifying him as 'Muslim Lebbai', a faith he claimed to follow. However, the Kayathar Tahsildar rejected his application. Challenging it, he had moved court.

Meanwhile, the 2024 government order notified that a convert to Islam from Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, Denotified Communities or Scheduled Castes ought to be treated as BC (Muslim) for availing the benefit of reservation.

The special leave petition was filed by the Secretary to the State in the Supreme Court.

The High Court, however, had held that when a Hindu, on conversion to Islam, did not carry forward the benefits of the Hindu caste or sub-caste. The convert's status in Islam was not decided by the caste he was part of prior to the conversion.

The court noted that Christian missionaries as well as Islamic preachers had maintained that their religions offered social equality unlike Hinduism, which had a caste hierarchy.

The special leave petition was filed by the Secretary to the State of Tamil Nadu in the Supreme Court. The appeal has arraigned the petitioner in the High Court, Sameer Ahamed N., the District Collector, the Revenue Divisional Officer and the Tahsildar as respondents.

GS Paper II – Governance

Checkbox caste

An open-ended method of counting caste may not yield usable data

The rehearsal for the second phase of Census 2027, underway in 16 States and Union Territories since July 6, carries a key feature: an "open column" where respondents can state their caste, which the enumerator will record. Unlike the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), which also had this feature, this counting of caste in the Census itself has statutory backing. The pre-test ends on July 20, and the government says that it will then finalise the methodology for counting caste. The hope is that the pre-test findings will corroborate what is known: an open-ended response on caste yields only unwieldy data, as seen in the 2011 SECC, which eventually proved unusable. It is not difficult to understand why. The method led the 2011 SECC to return more than 46 lakh "caste names", against the 4,147 in the 1931 Census, the last to tabulate caste. Respondents entered surnames, sub-castes and clan names as if interchangeable, inflating the count into incoherence. The Centre told the Supreme Court in 2021 that the SECC figures were too error-ridden to be relied upon for reservation. The pre-test should instead point to a better method – using the digital Census's hand-held devices, pre-loaded with a curated list of castes and sub-castes, so that the enumerator selects the 'correct' entry after asking the respondent. Mistakes and mismatches will happen, but as the 2022-23 Bihar caste survey revealed, this method could return more usable data.

Unlike the other identities – linguistic, religious and gender – that the Census notes, caste is an abstract, irrational one that designates people not by biological, physical, or professed attributes, but by a perceived, primordial identity conferred at birth and arranged in a hierarchy. Even this hierarchy is not self-evident, with the perceptions of social status of different castes often contradicting one another. India's Constitution, committed to social justice, set itself against caste by abolishing untouchability, forbidding caste-based discrimination and holding out the promise of a republic where birth would not determine a citizen's standing. So why count caste when the very act of enumeration can ossify or reify this abstract identity? The only rationale is that self-perceived or imposed caste identity creates social inequities, and welfare and social justice measures that address caste-based injustice can, over time, be expected to delegitimise the casteism rather than entrench it. Through sharper targeting of welfare and affirmative action, empirical caste data can also inform questions of the creamy layer and the sub-categorisation of castes and classes already benefiting from reservation. In these, better data are indispensable. If caste is to be counted, it should be counted well. The open-ended way of registering it will not serve the intended purpose.

GS Paper II – International Relations

How India withstood the crisis in West Asia

Sachin Kumar Sharma

Director General, RIS, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal

Historically, sharp increases in oil prices have been among the biggest sources of macroeconomic instability for India. It was therefore unsurprising that when tensions in West Asia escalated, many thought that India would once again face an energy and economic crisis, derailing its growth path. It revived memories of the 1973 oil shock and the 1991 balance-of-payments crisis, with concerns over soaring fuel prices, imported inflation, and pressure on the external account. After all, India imports almost 90% of its crude oil and remains heavily dependent on the Gulf for oil, gas and fertilizers.

This time around, however, when the Strait of Hormuz was the epicentre of global anxiety, India proved not only the sceptics at home and abroad wrong, but also seems to have emerged stronger in managing its energy needs. Was this resilience of India a matter of luck, or was it the outcome of deliberate policy choices, institutional learning, and strategic preparation?

Defying the odds

Few major economies were as vulnerable to the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz as India, the world's third-largest oil importer. Heavy dependence on imported crude and LPG, combined with rising freight costs and maritime risks, created conditions for a severe external shock. Within weeks, the Indian crude basket crossed $120 per barrel; the import-linked cost of a domestic LPG cylinder rose above ₹1,600; and war-risk premiums escalated sharply. By conventional measures, India appeared particularly vulnerable. However, the real challenge was not merely managing higher energy costs but preventing a global supply disruption from translating into inflation and shortages at home.

Against all expectations, one of the world's most energy import-dependent economies turned out to be among the most price-resilient; India contained fuel and cooking gas inflation better than many advanced and emerging peers.

The numbers tell an extraordinary story. Petrol prices in India rose by just 7.5% during the crisis, compared with nearly 14% in Germany, 19% in the U.K., 45% in the U.S., over 50% in Pakistan and the Philippines, and almost 90% in Myanmar. The contrast was even starker in diesel prices. While the UAE saw prices surge by about 85%, India limited the increase to just 8%.

One saw a similar story in the kitchen. Even though India imports nearly 60% of its LPG requirements, a domestic cylinder continued to cost ₹942, or ₹642 for Ujjwala beneficiaries, which was cheaper than what it cost in Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, and dramatically lower than in the U.S., Australia and Canada.

However, the cushion came at a cost, as state-run Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) incurred ₹74,781 crore in losses on petrol, diesel, and LPG sales up to June 30 as global crude prices surged during the West Asia crisis. But that cost shows you the big picture. Instead of passing the full shock to consumers, the government and public-sector OMCs absorbed it, protecting household budgets and keeping fuel and cooking gas affordable throughout the crisis.

Weathering the storm

While several factors contributed to India's resilience during the West Asia crisis, four stand out. The first lesson of the crisis is that strategic relationships are themselves a form of energy security. In times of crisis, relationships matter as much as reserves. Decades of engagement with Iran and key Gulf partners ensured that channels of communication remained open even when tensions were at their highest. Iran's decision to facilitate the movement of Indian ships and the willingness of Gulf producers to continue supplying energy underscored a simple reality: foreign policy can be as important to energy security as oil fields.

Second, India had quietly built an insurance policy against geopolitical shocks by diversifying its supplier base. Energy partnerships stretching from Russia and the U.S. to Africa and Latin America gave India the flexibility to withstand disruptions far better than in previous crises. In geopolitics, putting all your energy eggs in one basket is no longer an option.

Third, the crisis vindicated a decade of energy planning. India had quietly built multiple layers of resilience such as higher ethanol blending, a rapidly expanding renewable energy base, larger strategic reserves and stronger refining capacity. These investments did not prevent the crisis, but they made the economy better equipped to absorb it.

Fourth, the crisis reflected the value of a whole-of-government approach, reinforcing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on breaking down ministerial silos and strengthening institutional coordination. The Ministries of External Affairs, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the Indian Navy, and the National Security Council Secretariat worked in close coordination to monitor risks, manage logistics, and protect energy supplies.

The result was a coordinated national response that turned potential disruption into an exercise in resilience.

The way ahead

The recent crisis shows us that the foundations of resilience are laid in years of preparation, and not in moments of panic. India's response reflected the dividends of strategic foresight, diplomatic outreach and whole-of-government coordination. As global uncertainties deepen, this resilience could become a defining pillar of 'Viksit Bharat'.

India had quietly built an insurance policy against geopolitical shocks by diversifying its supplier base

GS Paper II – Polity

What is the right to be forgotten?

How does the ruling balance privacy with open justice and free speech? What challenges remain in enforcing the right to be forgotten? What role does the DPDP Act play? Who should decide requests for erasure or de-indexing?

EXPLAINER

G.S. Bajpai


GETTY IMAGES

The story so far:

The Delhi High Court, in its recent ruling, has laid down the principles governing the right to be forgotten. The court has evolved a new jurisprudence to protect the privacy of those who continue to be victimised on account of their digital footprints on social media and elsewhere, despite having those matters settled in their favour.

What is the 'right to be forgotten'?

The "right to be forgotten" is the right to have information erased or de-indexed from the public digital environment when its continued accessibility is harmful and serves no public interest.

The concept came to the fore in 2014, when a Spanish citizen, Mario Costeja González, complained to the European Court of Justice that Google continued to display an old newspaper notice about the auction of his repossessed house even though the debt had been settled. The court ruled in his favour, laying the groundwork for the right to erasure, which was later incorporated into Article 17 of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

How has the idea of the right to be forgotten evolved in Indian law?

The Supreme Court's judgment in *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017) held that privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21, including the right to informational privacy. In the years that followed, however, High Courts adopted divergent approaches.

While some permitted anonymisation in limited cases, such as the Delhi High Court ordering the masking of names in certain matrimonial and criminal matters, others rejected similar requests on grounds of open justice.

The real challenge was the lack of a coherent framework to balance these competing interests, which the May 2026 Delhi High Court judgment sought to address.

What did the Delhi High Court decide?

On May 29, the Delhi High Court ruled in a batch of over 30 consolidated petitions, led by *Laksh Vir Singh Yadav v. Union of India*. The core issue was whether informational privacy could justify the de-indexing or masking of judicial records in a system committed to open justice. The court held that the right to be forgotten flows from Article 21's guarantee of dignity and informational privacy. The structured proportionality test is that retention must have a legitimate purpose, that the harm to privacy must be balanced against the public interest, and that the least intrusive means, typically by masking names instead of deleting the entire judgment, should be preferred. The court also prescribed a two-week deadline for legal databases to comply and explained that only the parties' names should be redacted, not the facts of the case.

How does the right to be forgotten interact with constitutional values?

This is not a stand-alone right. It frequently conflicts with freedom of speech and press under Article 19(1)(a), the principle of open justice, and the public's right to know. A right to privacy must be sacrificed when the public interest is of a high order, particularly in serious cases of crime, but the digital presence should not destroy a person's life long after the trial ends. The judgments are still publicly accessible by case number or a keyword search; only name-based searches are restricted.

What are the practical challenges?

The toughest aspect is enforcement. An acquittal judgment may still appear highly in name-based searches even after a court has ordered the removal of the search results. Search engines are designed so that the original accusation, or the "shadow of crime," is often the first thing the user sees. De-indexing can benefit at the search level, but it won't prevent mirrors, archive copies, or social media sharing. Without effective technical compliance and coordination among platforms, the right may remain largely symbolic.

What is the relationship between the right to be forgotten and DPDP Act?

As of now, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, offers a limited statutory right to erasure in section 12. It is primarily based on consent and does not explicitly address judicial records and public archives, where the right to be forgotten is most needed. The Act is deficient because rules have not been notified and the data protection board has not been completely effective.

Who should decide requests for erasure or de-indexing?

The challenge lies in balancing efficiency with accountability. Requiring every request to be decided by a court would create significant bottlenecks, while leaving such decisions entirely to technology companies raises concerns about due process and transparency. A more sensible approach would be a tiered system, where cases could be heard by platforms, contested ones by the data protection board, and judicial cases by courts.

The Delhi High Court has established an important framework, but until the Supreme Court rules on the matter, establishes a data protection board, and platforms comply with it, this ruling will be mostly declaratory. The conflict over freedom of expression and open justice is a reality. The task ahead is now to establish the institutions that facilitate it.

(G. S. Bajpai is Vice Chancellor at National Law University Delhi. He acknowledges the assistance of Vibhuti Sharma, Academic fellow, NLU Delhi. Views are personal)

THE GIST

- The Delhi High Court has recognised the right to be forgotten as part of the fundamental right to privacy under Article 21, laying down a framework that balances informational privacy with open justice and freedom of speech by favouring name-masking over deletion of judgments.
- While the ruling provides a legal framework for de-indexing and erasure requests, its effectiveness depends on enforcement by platforms, the operationalisation of the DPDP Act, and the establishment of institutions such as the data protection board.

GS Paper II – Governance

Over 42% rise in female enrolment in higher education since 2014: report

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India's higher education sector has recorded significant growth over the past decade, with total student enrolment rising to 4.5 crore in the 2023-24 academic year.

According to the latest reports of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for 2022-23 and 2023-24, released by the Education Ministry, this marks a 31.5% rise from 3.42 crore recorded in 2014-15. The multi-year survey data reflect an institutional participation rate of over 90%, drawing metrics from 59,533 higher education institutions across the country to outline major strides in inclusivity, female participation, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) adoption.

Steady progress

Women, STEM learners and marginalised communities drive sustained growth in higher education

	2014-2015	2022-2023	2023-2024	Growth since 2014-15
Total enrolment	3.42 cr.	4.46 cr.	4.50 cr.	↑ 31.5%
Female enrolment	1.57 cr.	2.18 cr.	2.24 cr.	↑ 42.2%
Overall GER	23.7	29.5	30.0	–
Female GER	22.9	30.2	31.2	–
STEM enrolment	91.5 lakh	–	1.02 cr.	↑ 11.4%

The data are self-reported voluntarily by registered institutions via a web-based portal utilising a data capture format. While the Education Ministry executes built-in validations and scrutiny checks, primary data quality remains the responsibility of the respective institutions.

The enrolment of female students in higher educational institutions rose from 1.57 crore in 2014-15 to 2.18 crore in 2022-23 and 2.24 crore in 2023-24, marking a 42.2% increase since 2014-15.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) stands at 1.08 for 2023-24, remaining consistently above 1.0 for seven consecutive years. This underlines a trend where female participation systematically outpaces male participation.

Also, India's gross enrolment ratio (calculated for the 18-23 age bracket) reached 30 in 2023-24. Notably, the female GER scaled to 31.2, distinctly higher than the national baseline. For the Scheduled Castes, the enrolment jumped 51.4% since 2014-15, reaching 69.72 lakh. The GER for SC students grew from 18.9 to 27.8. For the Scheduled Tribes, enrolment witnessed a 75.7% rise, climbing to 28.83 lakh, with the GER up from 13.5 to 22.8. With regard to the Other Backward Classes, student numbers grew 60.2%, from 1.13 crore to 1.80 crore over 10 years.

Enrolment in STEM fields climbed to 1.02 crore in 2023-24. "Mirroring the overall demographic shift, the female share in STEM programmes climbed steadily to 44%, up from 38.4% a decade ago," the report said.

GS Paper II – Social Issue

WHO flags growing inequities in access to cancer treatment

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

With an estimated 20.6 million new cases and close to 10 million deaths annually, cancer remains the second leading cause of death globally after cardiovascular disease, the World Health Organization's (WHO) first ever survey of people affected by cancer, released on Wednesday, said.

Beyond its impact on health, cancer remains one of the most financially and socially devastating challenges a household can face, the report said. The WHO survey found that at least 45% of affected people experience financial hardship, more than half report mental health challenges, and nearly all caregivers report strain, including unpaid services and social isolation.

The Global Status Report on Cancer, 2026, released by the WHO and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, warns that, without action, annual cases of cancer are projected to rise to nearly 35 million by 2050.

The report also indicates persistent and widening inequities in access to prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and supportive care, leaving millions of people without the services they need. Its analysis shows that while 87% of women with breast cancer survive at five years after their diagnosis in high-income countries, only about 42% do so in low-income countries. Fewer than one in three countries currently include cancer care in their universal health coverage packages.

"Cancer is a deeply personal disease that touches nearly all of us. But whether a person survives cancer should never depend on where they were born or what they earn," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, adding, "The inequities documented in this report are not inevitable; they are the consequence of choices, and they can be reversed through stronger and unified action."

The burden of cancer varies across regions. In 2024, Asia accounted for the largest share, with more than half of all cancer cases (50.7%) and deaths (56.5%) reflecting its large population. Europe carried a disproportionately high burden, contributing 21% of global cases and 20% of deaths despite having only about 9% of the world's population. In contrast, many countries in Africa and parts of Asia experience lower incidence but disproportionately high mortality.

GS Paper III – Economic Development

States contribute disproportionately more to welfare schemes

As revenues accrue to the Union, fiscally constrained States are carrying a growing share of welfare spending

DATA POINT

Revati Mathai
Rajendran Narayanan

Government expenditure on welfare schemes, or social spending, remains intensely debated. While some critics call it a fiscal 'burden', others call it a fiscal 'commitment'. In line with the constitutional imagination, several welfare schemes were turned into laws in the 2000s, creating a 'rights-based' welfare regime. Over the last decade, however, the emphasis has shifted away from rights towards cash transfers. A recent handbook of welfare in India called *Realising Rights* by the Centre for the Study of the Indian Economy, Azim Premji University, traces the history and budgetary implications of key central welfare programmes.

Chart 1 shows Union and State government allocations for welfare schemes in the financial year 2025-26. Union allocations are drawn from the Expenditure Budget 2025-26, except for the Maternity Entitlements scheme (PMMVY), which is taken from the Parliamentary Standing Committee Report No. 377. State-level allocations across schemes are not available in one source; the 2025-26 figures have therefore been collated from multiple sources.

For ease of presentation, social justice and empowerment, tribal affairs and minority affairs are grouped together, as are Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the PMMVY and the Public Distribution System (PDS). State allocations for social justice and tribal affairs are drawn from the RBI database, while those for minority affairs are unavailable and therefore excluded. The PMMVY and the ICDS are centrally sponsored schemes, with the Centre bearing 60% of the cost and States 40%. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was funded in a 90:10 ratio; its replacement with the VB-GRAM G Act will add much more to States' contribution.

States' share of school education spending is estimated at 75.2% using the latest Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education. Health expenditure is based on Statement 37 of RBI State Finances, while State food subsidy spending is drawn from the 16th Finance Commission reports.

Table 1 shows Union spending on PM Kisan, the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Finance Commission grants to local bodies, and State spending on cash transfers. According to the 16th Finance Commission Report, States spent ₹4.14 lakh crore on unconditional cash transfers.

Table 2 summarises total Union and State expenditure on the schemes and sectors covered in **Chart 1** and **Table 1**. Combined allocations for these selected welfare schemes in 2025-26 amounted to ₹24.20 lakh crore, or 6.77% of GDP, with the Union government's contribution accounting for just 1.89% of GDP. While real expenditure on social services has increased over time, the Union government's share has remained largely stagnant **(Chart 2)**, with the overall rise driven by States. Although India's tax to GDP ratio is comparable to middle-income countries, it lags behind on social security as a share of its GDP.

While tax revenues favour the Union government, the onus of funding falls disproportionately on States who already face budget constraints. Putting forth a strong macroeconomic case for increased social sector spending, a recent paper in the *Economic and Political Weekly* by Bose and Banerjee argues that human development and growth are a 'mutually reinforcing cycle of causation with success in one tending to promote success in the other'. The Union government must increase its fiscal commitment to the social sector to ensure that the welfare regime aligns with constitutional precepts.

States shoulder welfare

Data for the charts were sourced from Union Expenditure Budget 2025-26, 377th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee*, RBI database, Ministry of Education's Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, and 16th Finance Commission reports

TABLE 1: Centre and State expenses on cash transfers in FY 2025-26 (in ₹ lakh crore)

Scheme/Sector	Expenditure (₹ lakh crore)
(Centre) National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)	0.1
(Centre) PM KISAN	0.64
(Centre) Finance Commission Grants to local bodies (Urban and Rural)	0.75
State Cash Transfers	3.87

CHART 1: Allocations by Union government and States for select sectors (In ₹ lakh crore)

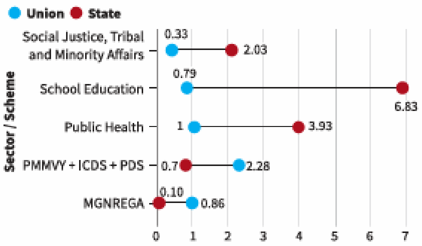
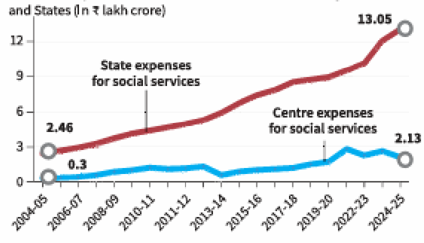


TABLE 2: Estimates of budgetary allocations by Union and State Governments for the schemes/sectors (Values in the first row are in ₹ lakh crore)

Category	Union Budget Allocations 2025-26	State Budget	Union + State Budget	% of GDP
Sum of allocations on selected schemes	6.73	17.46	24.2	6.77
Share of selected schemes as a % of total government expenditure	13.29	28.16	21.47	-
Share of selected schemes as a % of GDP	1.89	4.89	6.77	-

CHART 2: Expenditure on social services in real terms by Centre and States (In ₹ lakh crore)



Note: RBI Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy; State figures for 2023-24 are revised estimates and for 2024-25 are budget estimates, while Centre figures for 2024-25 are revised estimates. Real-term values are calculated using the GDP deflator from the RBI database, with 2011-12 as the base year

Revati Mathai and Rajendran Narayanan are affiliated with the Centre for the Study of the Indian Economy, Azim Premji University. Views expressed are personal. *The report was released in March by the committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports

GS Paper III – Science & Technology

India added 52.5 mtpa regasification capacity in 2025: IGU World LNG Report

Santosh V. Perumal
CHENNAI

India added 52.5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of regasification capacity across eight terminals, as it surpassed Spain to become the fourth largest market for regasification capacity in 2025, according to the International Gas Union's (IGU) World LNG Report.

Rising demand for fertilizer, city gas and utilities as well as the government's push for enhanced share of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the energy mix was seen helping the country

Among operational LNG regasification terminals in India, Dahej LNG (17.5 mtpa) stands out as the only ultra-large facility and ranks as the sixth largest globally.

Large-scale category

The remaining seven terminals fall into the large-scale category, each with a regasification capacity of 5 mtpa.

In 2025, India commissioned two LNG regasification projects, including one new onshore terminal, Chhara LNG, with a regasification capacity of 5 mtpa, and one expansion project at the Dabhol LNG terminal through the completion of its breakwater infrastructure.

The project has effectively enhanced the terminal's operational efficiency and has increased its capacity to 5 mtpa from 2.9 mtpa. Previously idle during the monsoon season, the Dabhol LNG terminal now enables uninterrupted, year-round operations after commissioning of the breakwater.

India currently has four LNG projects under construction, including one new terminal and three expansion projects at existing facilities, including the expansion of India's largest terminal, Dahej LNG.

Dahej LNG terminal ranks as the sixth largest globally.

Once commissioned, these projects are expected to add a combined 11.3 mtpa of regasification capacity by 2028.

According to the International Energy Agency, India's natural gas consumption is forecast to increase by nearly 60% by 2030, driven by robust growth in city gas distribution, industrial demand, and power generation.

India's LNG regasification utilisation fell to about 47% in 2025, down from 58% in 2024, reflecting a combination of weaker LNG imports during the summer months and an increase in regasification capacity following recent infrastructure additions.

Asia led the global LNG regasification capacity additions in 2025, with all new capacity coming from China and India, contributing 15.1 mtpa and 7.1 mtpa, representing 24% and 11.3% of global additions, respectively.

Although the Asia Pacific remained the largest LNG-importing region, IGU found imports into Asia fell by 9.2 MT to 108.7 MT, driven mainly by lower intake in China and India.