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Daily News Analysis

# The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

## Monday,20 April, 2026

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In March 2026, the ongoing West Asia crisis significantly impacted India's energy landscape. According to the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), India's crude oil imports plummeted by 17% year-on-year, marking a critical shift in procurement and consumption patterns. The crisis has triggered a volatile price environment and forced a strategic shift toward alternative fuels like Liquified Natural Gas (LNG).

# Amid conflict, crude oil imports declined nearly 17% in March

LPG cylinder sales to domestic households fell 8.1% in March, while those sold to non-domestic users was down almost 48%, as per official data

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

In the first full month of the ongoing West Asia crisis, India's crude oil imports declined nearly 17% year-on-year in March, according to provisional data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC).

As a result of the decrease, New Delhi spent about 4.9% less on its crude imports during the mentioned period.

As per the provisional data, India imported 18.9 million tonnes of crude oil in March. This was lower than the 22.8 million tonnes imported in the corresponding period last year. It spent $11.7 billion compared with $12.3 billion in the corresponding period a year ago.

However, the net import bill for oil and gas combined remained nearly flat at $11 billion, marginally down from $11.3 billion in the comparable period last year.

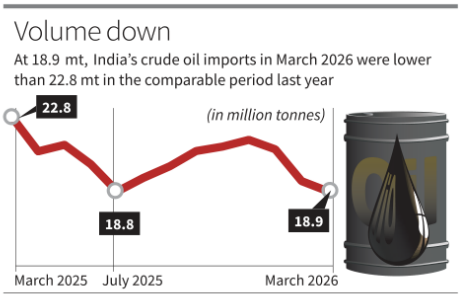
India's basket crude price averaged $113.49 a barrel in March, compared with an average of $69.01 in February.

The consumption of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) stood at 2.379 million tonnes in March, 12.8% lower than 2.729 million tonnes consumed in the same period last year. LPG cylinder sold to domestic households fell 8.1% in March to 2.219 million tonnes, while those sold to non-domestic users was down almost 48%. Bulk LPG sales were down by a massive 75.5%.

Amid India's push for piped natural gas (PNG) to alleviate some of the pressure from LPG, imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) surged by more than 20%.

India's total natural gas consumption rose 7.2% to 5,727 million metric standard cubic metre (MMSCM) on a year-over-year basis in March. However, it is essential to note that the PPAC, cautioning about provisional figures, held that the actual import figures of LNG could be lower due to the conflict in West Asia, which would consequently lower the consumption figures as well.

*(With PTI inputs)*




**Key Statistical Highlights (March 2026)**

| Indicator | Data Point | YoY Change |
|---|---|---|
| **Crude Oil Imports** | 18.9 Million Tonnes | ↓ **17%** |

| Indicator | Data Point | YoY Change |
|---|---|---|
| **Crude Import Expenditure** | $11.7 Billion | ↓ **4.9%** |
| **Indian Basket Crude Price** | $113.49 / barrel | ↑ **from $69.01 (Feb)** |
| **Domestic LPG Sales** | 2.219 Million Tonnes | ↓ **8.1%** |
| **Non-Domestic LPG Sales** | - | ↓ **48%** |
| **LNG Imports** | - | ↑ **20%** |
| **Total Natural Gas Consumption** | 5,727 MMSCM | ↑ **7.2%** |

**Critical Analysis of the Energy Sector**

**A. Geopolitical Vulnerability & Supply Chain**

The decline in imports highlights India's high dependency on the West Asian region for energy. Conflict in the region often leads to:

- **Maritime Bottlenecks:** Disruption in key chokepoints like the **Strait of Hormuz** affects the steady flow of tankers.
- **Increased Freight & Insurance:** Even if supply remains, the cost of shipping and insurance premiums rise, as evidenced by the spike in the Indian crude basket price to **$113.49/barrel**.

**B. The LPG Crunch and Industrial Impact**

The data shows a massive **48% drop in non-domestic LPG sales** and a **75.5% drop in bulk sales**.

- **Economic Impact:** This indicates a significant slowdown or fuel-switching in the industrial and commercial sectors (hotels, manufacturing), which could lead to inflationary pressures on end-products.
- **Household Impact:** A decline of 8.1% in domestic sales suggests that higher prices or supply constraints are affecting the common man's kitchen budget.

**C. The Strategic Shift to LNG and PNG**

As a silver lining, India is accelerating its transition to a gas-based economy.

- **Alternative Transition:** The **20% surge in LNG imports** demonstrates the government's push for **Piped Natural Gas (PNG)** to reduce reliance on imported LPG cylinders.
- **Infrastructure:** This aligns with the **One Nation, One Gas Grid** objective, aimed at increasing the share of natural gas in India's energy mix from ~6% to 15% by 2030.

**Related Data and Institutional Context**

**Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC):** An attached office of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) that assists in policy-making through data analysis.

**Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** In light of such declines, India's SPR (located at Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru, and Padur) becomes crucial to ensure energy security for roughly 9.5 days of net imports.

**The "Price Effect" vs. "Volume Effect":** Note that while volume fell by 17%, the spending only fell by 4.9%. This discrepancy is due to the **Price Effect**—the per-barrel cost increased so much that it almost neutralized the savings from buying less oil.

**Challenges Ahead**

**Inflationary Pressures:** High energy costs translate to higher logistics and manufacturing costs (WPI inflation).

**Current Account Deficit (CAD):** While the import bill was flat this month, prolonged high prices at $100+/barrel can widen the CAD and weaken the Rupee.

**Provisional Uncertainty:** PPAC warned that actual LNG figures might be lower due to the same conflict, suggesting the "gas-bridge" might also be under threat.

**Conclusion**

The March 2026 data serves as a wake-up call for India's energy resilience. While the decline in imports reduced the immediate dollar outflow, the underlying cause—geopolitical instability and price hikes—poses a long-term threat to economic growth. To mitigate this, India must fast-track its diversification of energy sources (Green Hydrogen, Renewables) and strengthen its Strategic Petroleum Reserves, while continuing the transition toward a Natural Gas-based economy to insulate domestic households from global shocks.

## UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques:Which of the following best explains the "Price Effect" in the context of India's crude oil imports?**

(a) Increase in import volume due to falling prices

(b) Increase in total import expenditure despite decline in volume

(c) Reduction in domestic consumption due to subsidy cuts

(d) Shift from crude oil to renewable energy

**Ans: b)**

## UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** The recent decline in LPG consumption reflects deeper structural changes in India's energy consumption pattern.Critically analyze.**150 Words)**

## Page 06: GS III : Science and Tech / Prelims Exam

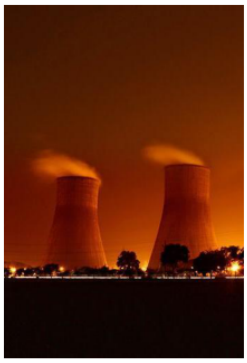
The enactment of the **Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025**, marks a watershed moment in India's energy history. By repealing the decades-old Atomic Energy Act (1962) and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act (2010), the government has signaled a transition from a state monopoly to a multi-player ecosystem. The Act aims to scale India's nuclear capacity from **8.7 GW** to a massive **100 GW by 2047**, utilizing private capital and international partnerships.

# 'Nuclear plants require lifetime commitment'

**Jacob Koshy**
NEW DELHI

As India opens its nuclear power sector to private participation under the newly enacted SHANTI Act, former regulators of the nuclear energy establishment and policy veterans said that nuclear power required "lifetime commitment," and maintaining "financial security" to account for "waste management, settlement of claims (caused by radiation), and decommissioning (nuclear power plants).

The Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025, as the government has articulated repeatedly, is to help India raise its installed nuclear power capacity from the existing 8.7 gigawatt (GW) to 100 GW by 2047. Unlike the previous half-century, it hopes to achieve this by allowing, in theory, private companies to run nuclear power plants and harness foreign funds for the purpose. Ravi Grover, member, Atomic Energy Commission and veteran nuclear engineer, at a talk in New Delhi on Saturday, said the SHANTI Act clearly prescribed duties and liabilities that power plant operators must adhere to, whether in the private or public sector.


The SHANTI Act reflects the effort to modernise the laws governing the nuclear sector.

"The prime responsibility for safety, security and safeguards lies with the licensee...Section 10 of the Act clearly and transparently spells out what a newcomer to the sector should know...there is no place for indulging in regulatory tricks. No one can fudge the half life of a radioisotope. If it is 30 years, it remains 30 years," he said.

Rajan Raghavan, vice-president, Tata Consulting Engineers Ltd., who represented Indian private sector companies interested in expanding their presence in India's nuclear power sector, said four priorities shaped investment decisions: site selection, affordable technology, government hand-holding, and tariff viability.

The 700 MW indigenous pressurised heavy-water reactor, Mr. Raghavan said, which the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) – a public sector company which is the sole operator of nuclear plants – plans to deploy in fleet mode over the next 10 to 12 years, was the "natural choice".

The 220 MW design, though indigenous, was finalised 15 years ago and would need substantial rework to meet current regulatory and safety benchmarks.

Foreign reactors, he cautioned, came with prohibitive costs and lengthy design-validation timelines for Indian conditions – "two to three years" before construction could even begin.

### Legal framework

Former Atomic Energy Regulatory Board Chairman. D.K. Shukla offered the regulator's view, arguing that the SHANTI Act finally provided a "unified legal framework" that separated control regulation from safety regulation – a clarity that was implicit earlier only because every player sat within the Department of Atomic Energy.

With private entities entering, he warned that issues previously considered minor would now become major. A central concern Mr. Shukla flagged was the lifetime commitment of nuclear operation demands. The Act, he noted, now required licensees to "maintain design support throughout the lifetime of the facility" – a requirement far weightier for nuclear than for other power plants, given the longer operating life. Every 10 years, operators must undertake a periodic safety review to demonstrate compliance with current safety standards.

"How do you modify or incorporate the new safety upgrade if you do not have the full-fledged design information and capability?" he said, pointing out that changes to one system can cascade adversely through others.

Design integrity must be preserved throughout the plant's life, he stressed, "whether technology is developed within the country or it is imported" – a pointed caution for private players contemplating foreign reactor imports without securing long-term design support arrangements.

### Core Features of the SHANTI Act, 2025

| Feature | Description |
|---|---|
| **Consolidation** | Repeals and replaces the **Atomic Energy Act, 1962** and **CLND Act, 2010** into a single unified framework. |
| **Private Participation** | Allows private Indian companies and foreign entities to build, own, and operate nuclear power plants. |

| Feature | Description |
|---|---|
| **Regulatory Status** | Grants statutory status to the **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)**, ensuring independent safety oversight. |
| **Liability Regime** | Sets clear financial caps on operator liability and establishes the **Atomic Energy Redressal Advisory Council** for dispute settlement. |
| **Waste & Fuel** | Retains state control over "strategic" elements like fuel production and radioactive waste management. |

**Key Analysis: The Concept of "Lifetime Commitment"**

Veteran nuclear experts emphasize that nuclear energy is not a "plug-and-play" sector. Unlike solar or thermal plants, nuclear facilities demand commitment across three distinct phases:

**A. Operational Integrity and Design Support**

As per Section 10 of the Act, operators must maintain **design support** for the plant's entire life.

- **Challenge:** If a private player imports a reactor, they must ensure the foreign vendor provides technical support for 40-60 years.
- **Periodic Reviews:** Operators are mandated to conduct a **Periodic Safety Review (PSR)** every 10 years to integrate new safety benchmarks.

**B. Financial Security and Decommissioning**

The Act introduces a "cradle-to-grave" financial responsibility. Operators must account for:

- **Waste Management:** Handling spent fuel and radioactive byproducts.
- **Radiation Claims:** Maintaining insurance or financial securities for potential accident claims.
- **Decommissioning:** The expensive process of safely shutting down and dismantling a plant at the end of its life.

**C. Technological Choices**

- **The 700 MW PHWR:** The indigenous Pressurised Heavy-Water Reactor (PHWR) is the "natural choice" due to its cost-effectiveness and validated design.
- **SMRs (Small Modular Reactors):** The Act facilitates the deployment of SMRs, which are easier for private players to finance and manage compared to large-scale reactors.

**Strategic Significance for India**

**Energy Transition:** To reach **Net Zero by 2070**, India needs baseload power that isn't coal-based. Nuclear is the most viable alternative to complement intermittent renewables like solar and wind.

**Economic Scalability:** Moving from a single-operator model (NPCIL) to having **10-12 active companies** will accelerate construction timelines through competition and better supply chain management.

**Global Integration:** By clarifying liability and opening for foreign funds, the Act seeks to revive stalled civil nuclear deals with countries like the US, France, and Russia.

**Challenges and Concerns**

**"Privatising Profits, Socialising Risks":** Critics argue that while private players earn from power tariffs, the catastrophic risks of a nuclear accident might still fall on the state if liability caps are too low.

**Technical Expertise:** Private newcomers lack the deep institutional memory of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE).

**Capital Cost:** Nuclear plants have high upfront costs and long gestation periods (10-15 years), making them high-risk investments for private debt financing.

**Conclusion**

The SHANTI Act, 2025, is a bold regulatory leap towards achieving "Viksit Bharat" goals for 2047. However, the "lifetime commitment" mentioned by experts serves as a cautionary note: safety and design integrity cannot be compromised for commercial speed. The success of this Act will depend on the AERB's ability to function as a truly independent and rigorous "watchdog" that ensures private participation does not dilute the gold standard of nuclear safety India has maintained for decades.

**UPSC PrelimsExam Practice Question**

**Ques:** Which of the following best describes the concept of "lifetime commitment" in nuclear energy policy?

(a) Continuous fuel supply agreements with foreign countries

(b) Long-term tariff fixation for nuclear electricity

(c) Responsibility of operators from construction to decommissioning

(d) Mandatory government ownership of nuclear plants

**Ans:c)**

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:**The SHANTI Act, 2025 marks a paradigm shift from state monopoly to a market-driven nuclear energy regime in India.Critically examine.(**150 Words)**

## Page 07 :GS III : Science and Tech/ Prelims Exam

Malaria remains a formidable global health challenge, claiming over 600,000 lives annually, primarily children in sub-Saharan Africa. While traditional interventions like Insecticide-Treated Nets (ITNs) and Indoor Residual Spraying (IRS) have been effective, the emergence of insecticide-resistant mosquitoes and drug-resistant parasites has plateaued progress.

In this context, the "Transmission Zero" project—a collaboration involving the Ifakara Health Institute (Tanzania) and Imperial College London—represents a paradigm shift. New research confirms that Genetically Modified (GM) mosquitoes can effectively suppress malaria parasites from real-world infections, moving biotechnology from controlled labs to endemic settings.

# How altered mosquitoes could reshape malaria control

New research has confirmed that genetically modified mosquitoes can suppress malaria parasites from real-world infections, not just laboratory cultures; it also reported that advanced mosquito genetic engineering can be carried out in malaria-endemic regions, helping build local scientific expertise and regulatory capacity

Manjeera Gowravaram

For decades, malaria control has worked by reducing the number of mosquitoes and treating infected people. As a result bed nets, indoor insecticide spraying, and effective medicines have saved millions of lives. Yet malaria remains one of the world's deadliest infectious diseases, killing more than half a million people each year, most of them children in sub-Saharan Africa.

Anti-malaria efforts have also slowed in many regions as mosquitoes become more resistant to insecticides and the malaria parasite evolves resistance to drugs.

These setbacks have led scientists to reconsider a long-held assumption: that the only way to fight malaria is to kill mosquitoes.

For more than 20 years, researchers have explored an alternative: modifying mosquitoes so they no longer carry malaria parasites.

### 'Transmission Zero'

This idea is now moving closer to reality through a genetic technology called a gene drive. A series of studies over the past few years has shown that gene drives can spread through mosquito populations under increasingly realistic conditions.

One recent study published in *Nature*, led by Tibebu Habtewold and Dickson Lwetoijera at the Ifakara Health Institute in Tanzania, working with collaborators at Imperial College London, demonstrated for the first time that genetically modified mosquitoes can block malaria parasites circulating in endemic African settings.

The work forms part of "Transmission Zero', a Tanzania-led and internationally supported project developing genetic mosquito control.

### How gene drives work

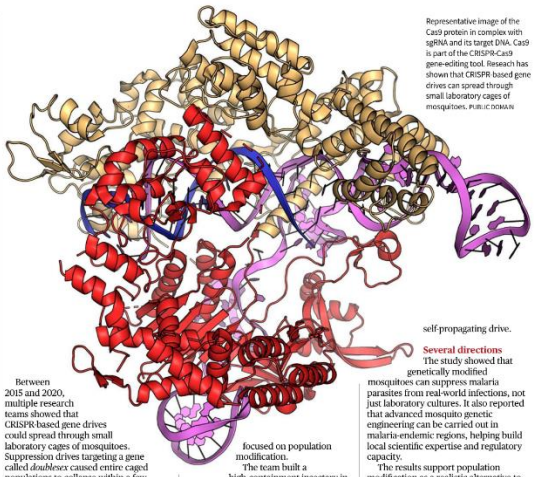
An organism normally has a 50% chance of passing a specific gene to its offspring. A gene drive alters this rule.

Using the gene-editing tool CRISPR-Cas9, scientists design a genetic system that copies itself onto the partner chromosome during reproduction. As a result, far more than half of the offspring inherit the modified gene, often over 90%. Over multiple generations, this biased inheritance allows a gene to spread rapidly through a population.

Researchers are developing two main types of mosquito gene drives.

The first is population suppression. These drives disrupt the genes essential for female mosquitoes to develop or become fertile. As the drive spreads, more females become sterile, causing mosquito populations to shrink or collapse.

The second approach is population modification, also called replacement. Here, mosquitoes remain alive but carry genes that prevent the malaria parasites from developing inside their bodies. This strategy thus reduces the mosquitoes' ability to transmit malaria.



Representative image of the Cas9 protein in complex with sgRNA and its target DNA. Cas9 is part of the CRISPR-Cas9 gene-editing tool. Research has shown that CRISPR based gene drives can spread through small laboratory cages of mosquitoes. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Between 2015 and 2020, multiple research teams showed that CRISPR-based gene drives could spread through small laboratory cages of mosquitoes. Suppression drives targeting a gene called *doublesex* caused entire caged populations to collapse within a few generations. Other studies engineered mosquitoes to produce molecules such as antimicrobial peptides or antibodies to harm the malaria parasites.

As small cages provide an overly simple environment, researchers built large indoor cages that allowed mosquitoes to swarm, mate, feed, and reproduce in more natural ways.

In 2021, researchers at Imperial College London and partner institutions described experiments designed to mimic real mosquito populations. A small number of mosquitoes carrying a *doublesex* suppression gene drive were released into stable populations of *Anopheles gambiae*.

Over eight to ten months, the drive steadily increased in frequency, egg production collapsed, and every experimental population eventually died out. Importantly, the researchers didn't detect any genetic changes that would both block CRISP-Cas9 and allow mosquitoes to evade the gene drive while remaining viable.

The experiments indicated that gene drives could work safely in messy real-world settings as well.

### The Tanzania study

While suppression drives aim to cut mosquito numbers, the Tanzania study focused on population modification.

The team built a high-containment insectary in Bagamoyo in Tanzania that allowed advanced genetic work to be carried out in a malaria-endemic country rather than having to develop the technology elsewhere, then importing it to Tanzania.

The researchers engineered local *Anopheles gambiae* mosquitoes to produce two antimicrobial peptides in their midgut after taking a blood meal.

Instead of using laboratory parasite strains, the team collected blood samples from children with malaria in three nearby villages. Both modified and unmodified mosquitoes were fed on this blood, and the team tracked the development of parasites.

In ordinary mosquitoes, parasites develop normally and reach the tissues linked to the salivary glands, starting transmission. In the modified mosquitoes, the parasites were severely impaired and often failed to reach the infectious stage. In some experiments, none of the modified mosquitoes carried potentially transmissible parasites.

The researchers also demonstrated a split gene drive. One mosquito line carried the anti-malaria genes while another provided the Cas9 enzyme. When combined, about 94% of offspring inherited the protective trait, allowing the researchers to test the protective genes without immediately deploying a fully self-propagating drive.

### Several directions

The study showed that genetically modified mosquitoes can suppress malaria parasites from real-world infections, not just laboratory cultures. It also reported that advanced mosquito genetic engineering can be carried out in malaria-endemic regions, helping build local scientific expertise and regulatory capacity.

The results support population modification as a realistic alternative to population suppression, with potentially fewer ecological risks because it doesn't aim to eliminate an entire species.

At the same time, researchers acknowledge some major challenges. Developing effective anti-parasite genes is difficult. Different pathogens, and even different strains of the same parasite, may require different or combined molecular weapons to prevent resistance. This is why gene-drive research is moving in several directions.

Researchers are also exploring self-limiting and reversible gene drives, as well as molecular 'off switches' that could slow or stop spread.

Most scientists have emphasised that gene drives can't be a standalone solution. Eliminating malaria will still depend on bed nets, spraying, medicines, vaccines, surveillance, and strong health systems. Gene drives, if proven to be completely safe and acceptable, could be an additional tool.

In the final analysis, no gene-drive mosquitoes have yet been released into the wild to control malaria; whether it will one day depends on extensive ecological risk assessment, regulatory review, and community engagement.

*(Manjeera Gowravaram has a PhD in RNA biochemistry and works as a freelance science writer. gmanjeera@gmail.com)*

### THE GIST

- Scientists are reconsidering a long-held assumption — that the only way to fight malaria is to kill mosquitoes
- One recent study published in *Nature* demonstrated for the first time that genetically modified mosquitoes can block malaria parasites circulating in endemic African settings
- Using the gene-editing tool CRISPR-Cas9, scientists designed a genetic system that copied itself onto the partner chromosome during reproduction. As a result, far more than half of the offspring inherited the modified gene, often over 90%
- The results of the study support population modification as a realistic alternative to population suppression, with potentially fewer ecological risks as it doesn't aim to eliminate an entire species

**The Science: Understanding Gene Drives and CRISPR**

Traditional inheritance follows Mendelian rules (50% chance of passing a gene). A **Gene Drive** bypasses this, ensuring a specific trait is passed to almost all offspring (**>90%**).

**Two Main Approaches to Gene Drives:**

| Approach | Mechanism | Goal |
|---|---|---|
| **Population Suppression** | Targets the doublesex gene to make female mosquitoes sterile. | To cause the mosquito population to **collapse/shrink**. |
| **Population Modification** | Replaces the population with mosquitoes carrying **anti-parasite genes**. | To make mosquitoes **incapable of transmitting** malaria. |

**Key Findings of the Tanzania Study (Nature, 2026)**

**Real-World Efficacy:** Unlike previous studies using lab-grown parasites, this study used blood from children in Tanzanian villages. The GM mosquitoes successfully blocked parasites circulating in the **actual endemic environment**.

**Antimicrobial Peptides:** Engineered Anopheles gambiae mosquitoes produced molecules in their midgut that impaired parasite development, preventing them from reaching the salivary glands.

**Split Gene Drive:** Researchers used a "split" system (separating the anti-malaria gene and the Cas9 enzyme) to safely test the trait without a full, uncontrollable release into the wild.

**Local Capacity Building:** The establishment of a high-containment insectary in **Bagamoyo, Tanzania**, proves that advanced genetic engineering can (and should) be led by scientists in malaria-affected nations to build local regulatory and scientific expertise.

**Significance for India**

**National Framework:** India aims to be **Malaria-Free by 2030**. Integrating biotechnology could accelerate this goal, especially in regions with high insecticide resistance.

**Regulatory Precedent:** The **Department of Biotechnology (DBT)** and **ICMR** can draw lessons from the Tanzania model regarding high-containment facilities and community engagement.

**Ecological Safety:** India's biodiversity requires the "Population Modification" approach, which is considered safer as it avoids the total extinction of a species, thereby preserving the food chain.

**Ethical and Ecological Concerns**

**Ecological Imbalance:** Removing or altering a species could have "cascading effects" on predators (birds, bats, fish) that feed on mosquitoes.

**Off-Target Mutations:** Using **CRISPR-Cas9** carries the risk of unintended genetic changes that might make mosquitoes more resilient or dangerous in other ways.

**Cross-Border Spread:** Gene-drive mosquitoes do not respect national boundaries. A release in one country could permanently alter the ecology of a neighboring country without its consent.

**Community Consent:** There is a critical need for **Social License**—ensuring local communities understand and approve of the release of GM organisms.

**Conclusion**

The progress in gene-drive technology marks the beginning of a new era in "precision public health." However, it is not a "silver bullet." Genetic control must be viewed as a complementary tool to be used alongside vaccines (like R21/Matrix-M), bed nets, and strong primary healthcare systems. As the technology moves toward wild release, rigorous Ecological Risk Assessments (ERA) and international legal frameworks will be essential to ensure that this scientific triumph does not result in unforeseen environmental consequences.

**UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question**

**Ques**: **Which of the following best distinguishes "Population Suppression" from "Population Modification" in gene-drive strategies?**

(a) Suppression increases fertility, while modification reduces it

(b) Suppression reduces population size, while modification alters disease transmission ability

(c) Suppression uses viruses, while modification uses bacteria

(d) There is no difference between the two

**Ans:b)**

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:**Gene-drive technology represents a paradigm shift in vector control strategies.Discuss its mechanism, potential, and associated risks.(**150 Words)**

## Page 09:GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam

On April 13, 2026, the industrial belt of Noida (Gautam Buddha Nagar) witnessed a severe flare-up of labor unrest, characterized by protests, arson, and clashes with law enforcement. While the immediate trigger was a demand for wage parity with neighboring Haryana, the unrest reflects deeper, structural fractures in India's labor market—specifically the **"informalization of the formal sector"** and the widening gap between nominal wage growth and the real cost of living in the Delhi-NCR region.

# *Why Noida's factory unrest is about more than just wages*

Even after the post-protest revision of wages, workers argue that the increase is nominal and that they are constrained by high cost-of-living

DATA POINT

Devyanshi Bihani

The streets of Noida's industrial belt saw scenes of unrest on April 13 as protesting factory workers set vehicles ablaze, hurled stones, and clashed with the police. Workers from multiple units gathered in large numbers, accusing employers of low wages, irregular payments, and exploitative practices. The protests point to a structural issue in India's labour market, where industries may be formally registered, but workers within them often lack basic protections such as written contracts and social security.

Data shows that even among regular wage and salaried workers in non-agricultural sectors, informality remains widespread. In 2025, about 58.2% of workers had no written job contract, while 51.7% were not eligible for any social security benefits. In addition, 47.3% were not eligible for paid leave. This means that a significant section of workers employed in formal establishments are, in practice, informally employed.

The extent of this informalisation varies across States **(Chart 1)**. Uttar Pradesh, where the Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida) protests took place, stands out on multiple indicators. Around 67.8% of regular workers in the State had no written contract, 62.4% were not eligible for paid leave, and 59.2% lacked access to any specified social security benefit. Further, 46.3% of workers in the State were simultaneously without a written contract, paid leave, and social security – among the highest proportions across States. Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan also report high levels of deprivation across these indicators.

One factor underlying this trend is the growing reliance on contract labour. Data indicates that the share of contract workers in total industrial employment has risen steadily over the past decade, from about 35% in 2014-15 to 42% in 2023-24 **(Chart 2)**. This suggests a structural shift in employment practices, with firms increasingly relying on intermediaries to hire workers. Workers hired through contractors are less likely to have written agreements, paid leave, or access to social security schemes such as Employees' State Insurance (ESI). This helps explain the contradiction at the centre of the Noida protests: workers employed within formal factories demanding basic protections typically associated with formal employment. The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) president, Sudip Dutta, pointed to broader concerns around workplace conditions, including long hours in difficult environments, lack of basic facilities, and how contract workers are vulnerable to arbitrary dismissals. He argued that the increasing reliance on contract labour has weakened the enforcement of labour protections on the ground.

While the increase in minimum wages **(Chart 3)** appears significant, it is because the base wage itself is very low. For instance, in Delhi, monthly wages for unskilled workers rose from ₹9,568 in April 2016 to ₹18,456 in April 2025 which is an increase of about 92.9%. In Haryana, wages were increased only by about 39% between 2016 and 2025. However, following the recent labour unrest reported from Manesar, Faridabad, and Gurugram, the State announced a revision of around 35% over the previous year, taking the overall increase since 2016 to about 88.6%.

In Uttar Pradesh, the minimum wage for unskilled workers rose from ₹7,107 in April 2016 to ₹11,313 in April 2026. The wage revision announced by Haryana on April 9, triggered protests in Noida, prompting the Uttar Pradesh government to announce an interim solution late that night. The State announced an interim increase of up to 21% for unskilled workers in industrial areas such as Noida and Ghaziabad, raising wages from ₹11,313 to ₹13,690 per month. It is also important to note that minimum wages in Uttar Pradesh vary by location. Workers in industrial districts such as Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ghaziabad receive higher wages than those in municipal areas and other districts.

However, nominal wage increases tell only part of the story. Consumer prices for industrial workers, a key measure of inflation, have also risen significantly over the same period **(Chart 4)**. Based on CPI-IW data from the Labour Bureau, price increases across key Delhi-NCR industrial centres range from about 43.7% to 52.7% since 2016. In Delhi, the increase stands at about 43.7%, while in Gurugram and Ghaziabad, it exceeds 50%. Across Uttar Pradesh's industrial centres including Kanpur, Lucknow, Varanasi and Agra, the increase ranges from about 49.8% to 51.5%. Even after the post-protest revision, workers argue that the increase in wage is nominal and that they are constrained by costs of living.

The pressure has intensified in recent months, as several industrial units have been affected by rising input costs. First due to U.S. tariffs and more recently due to disruptions linked to the Strait of Hormuz. But trade unions argue that the burden is being disproportionately passed on to labour. "Whatever be the pressure over the industries... it cannot be transferred to the workers," the CITU leader said. For workers, many of whom are migrants, the impact is immediate and visible in everyday expenses. "Which worker has an LPG connection?..They rely on the retail market," he said, adding that the cost of cooking fuel has risen around ₹3,000-₹4,000 in the last month.

Data suggests that the issue is not merely about wages, but about the nature of employment itself.

*(Inputs from Mayank Kumar and Ashok Kumar)*

## Reading into contracts

The data were sourced from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), the Labour Department and the Labour Bureau

**CHART 1:** Top 10 States with highest share of workers lacking paid leave, written contracts, and social security benefits (in %)

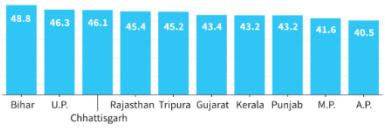



**CHART 2:** The share of contract workers in total industrial employment (in %)

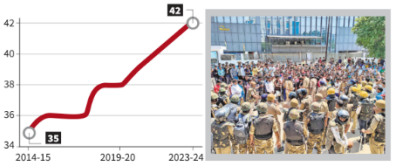





**CHART 3:** The change in minimum wages for unskilled workers across Delhi, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh

| State | Past minimum wage for unskilled workers (in ₹) | Revised minimum wage for unskilled workers (in ₹) | Estimated wage increase (in %) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delhi | 9,568 | 18,456 | 92.9 |
| Haryana | 8,070.44 | 15,220.71 | 88.6 |
| Uttar Pradesh | 7,107.64 | 12,356-13,690 *(Varies by district/municipal corporation)* | 73.8% - 92.6% |

*Note: Past minimum wage figures correspond to April 1, 2016 (Delhi); July 1, 2016 (Haryana); and April 1, 2016 (Uttar Pradesh). Revised minimum wage figures correspond to April 1, 2025 (Delhi); April 9, 2026 (Haryana); and April 14, 2026 (Uttar Pradesh)*

**CHART 4:** The industrial centre-wise increase in consumer price index for industrial workers (CPI-IW)

| State | Industrial centre | Increase (in %) |
|---|---|---|
| Delhi | Delhi | 43.7% |
| Haryana | Yamunanagar | 52.6% |
| Haryana | Faridabad | 48.1% |
| Haryana | Gurugram | 52.7% |
| Uttar Pradesh | Ghaziabad/Noida | 51.3% |
| Uttar Pradesh | Agra | 51.5% |
| Uttar Pradesh | Kanpur | 49.8% |
| Uttar Pradesh | Varanasi | 50.6% |
| Uttar Pradesh | Lucknow | 50.7% |

### The Core Issue: Informalization of Formal Labor

The paradox of Noida's unrest lies in workers within formally registered factories demanding rights typically associated with formal employment.

- **The "Paperless" Workforce:** Data from 2025 reveals that even in non-agricultural sectors, **58.2% of regular workers** had no written job contract.

**The Contractual Trap:** The share of contract workers in Indian industry has risen from **35% (2014-15)** to **42% (2023-24)**. This growing reliance on intermediaries (contractors) allows firms to bypass mandatory social security contributions.

**UP's Specific Vulnerability:** Uttar Pradesh exhibits higher-than-average deprivation. Approximately **67.8% of regular workers in UP lack a written contract**, and nearly **46.3%** suffer from a "triple deprivation"—no contract, no paid leave, and no social security.

**Chart Analysis: State-wise Labor Deprivation (Regular Workers)**

| State | No Written Contract | No Social Security | No Paid Leave |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Uttar Pradesh** | 67.8% | 59.2% | 62.4% |
| **Bihar** | High | High | High |
| **Haryana** | Lower | Moderate | Moderate |

**The Wage vs. Inflation Debate**

While the Uttar Pradesh government announced an **interim 21% wage hike** (raising unskilled wages from ₹11,313 to ₹13,690) to pacify protesters, workers argue this is insufficient.

**The Base Wage Problem:** High percentage increases (e.g., 92% in Delhi since 2016) look impressive only because the starting base was extremely low.

**Cost of Living (CPI-IW):** The Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers shows that inflation in industrial hubs like Ghaziabad and Gurugram has exceeded **50% since 2016**.

**The "Hidden" Costs:** Trade unions point out that most migrant workers lack domestic LPG connections and buy fuel/food from the retail market, where prices have spiked due to the **West Asia crisis** (impacting energy and transport costs).

**External Pressures on Industry**

The unrest is not occurring in a vacuum. Industrial units in Noida and Ghaziabad are facing a **"Margin Squeeze"**:

**Supply Chain Disruptions:** Conflict in the **Strait of Hormuz** has increased container rentals and delayed shipments.

**Input Cost Inflation:** Rising prices of aluminum, steel, and chemicals have made energy-intensive production unviable for MSMEs.

**Labor as a "Shock Absorber":** Manufacturers, unable to pass costs to global buyers, often attempt to reduce operating expenses by suppressing labor costs, leading to friction.

**Government Response & Reforms**

Following the violence, the UP government introduced a **three-tier wage system** for the state:

**Tier 1 (Noida/Ghaziabad):** Highest wages due to the high cost of living in NCR.

**Tier 2 (Municipal Corporations):** Moderate hike (~15%).

**Tier 3 (Other Districts):** Lower hike (~9%).

**Enforcement:** The district administration has mandated salary disbursal by the 10th of every month and compulsory medical cover.

**Conclusion**

The Noida factory unrest is a symptom of a **"hollowed-out" formalization**. Merely moving workers into factories does not constitute formal employment if the core protections of the **Labour Codes** (Social Security, Wage Code) are not enforced at the ground level. To prevent future unrest, India must move beyond "reactive" wage hikes and address the **intermediary contractor system** while ensuring that the National Minimum Floor Wage accounts for the actual cost of urban living.



**UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:Which of the following best describes the phenomenon of "informalization of the formal sector"?**

**(a) Shift of workers from agriculture to industry**

**(b) Increase in self-employment in urban areas**

**(c) Formal enterprises employing workers without formal contracts or social security**

**(d) Decline in industrial employment**

**Ans: c)**

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question**

**Ques:**Discuss the widening gap between nominal wage growth and real wages in urban India. What are its implications for social stability?**(150 Words)**

## Page 10: GS II : Indian Polity / Prelims Exam

In April 2026, the Union government introduced two landmark legislative proposals: the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill and the Delimitation Bill, 2026. These aimed to fundamentally alter the composition of the Lok Sabha by increasing its strength from 550 to 850 seats. However, following intense debate over federal representation and the timing of women's reservation, the 131st Amendment Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha, leading to the withdrawal of the Delimitation Bill.

# On delimitation and Parliament seats

What is delimitation, and how does it work in India? What changes were proposed in the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill? Why was an increase in Lok Sabha seats proposed? What concerns did the Opposition raise against the Bills? What is the way forward?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

**The story so far:**

The Union government had introduced the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to increase the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats from the existing 550 to 850. It had also introduced a Bill to set up the Delimitation Commission in 2026. However, the Constitution Amendment Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha, and thereafter, the Delimitation Bill was withdrawn by the government.

**What are the existing provisions?**

Delimitation refers to the process of fixing the number of seats and the boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies. This exercise is carried out by a Delimitation Commission set up through an Act of Parliament. Such exercises have previously been conducted based on the 1951, 1961, and 1971 Censuses. The number of Lok Sabha seats, based on the 1971 Census, was fixed at 543 when the population was 54.8 crore. The number has been frozen, based on the 1971 Census, to encourage population control measures. As per the current constitutional provisions, this number is to be readjusted based on the 2027 Census.

In 2023, through the 106th Constitutional Amendment, Parliament provided for one-third reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. This would be through delimitation based on the next Census.

**What are the Bills?**

The 131st Constitution Amendment Bill proposed three key changes. First, to increase the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats from 550 to 850. Second, to empower Parliament to determine the Census based on which delimitation would be carried out. Third, to delink one-third reservation for women from the next Census in 2027 and to enable the same based on delimitation as per the last published Census of 2011.

The Bill proposed to increase the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats from 550 to 850. PTI

The Delimitation Bill, 2026, provided for the setting up of a Delimitation Commission from time to time by the Union government. This Commission would allocate Lok Sabha seats among the States and Union Territories based on the latest Census figures. Had the Bill been passed and a Commission immediately constituted, the allocation would have been based on the 2011 Census.

**What are the issues?**

The government argued that increasing the number of Lok Sabha seats by around 50% (from 543 to 816) would enable the seamless implementation of one-third reservation for women in an expanded House. This would have resulted in approximately 272 seats being reserved for women.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah gave an oral assurance that the number of seats in each State and Union Territory would be increased by 50% on a pro-rata basis, thereby not altering the current proportion of their representation in the total strength of the Lok Sabha.

However, the Opposition raised several objections. Firstly, there was no need to bundle women's reservations with delimitation. The 106th amendment in 2023 enables one-third reservation for women within the existing 543 seats. Second, the draft Bills did not contain an explicit provision for a pro-rata 50% increase in seats for each State or Union Territory. In fact, the Delimitation Bill provided that the allocation of seats would be as per the latest Census population. Third, the Opposition contended that such an important and sensitive subject requires detailed discussions and should not be rushed through in a brief session.

**What can be the way forward?**

Democracy implies government by the people. It follows that the government is elected by the majority with the broad principle of 'one citizen-one vote-one value'. This principle has been diluted in the interest of population control since 1976, when the delimitation exercise was frozen based on the 1971 Census. Given the federal nature of India's polity, the next delimitation process has to take into consideration the variation in population growth across States.

Mr. Shah offered to include an explicit provision to guarantee a 50% pro-rata increase in seats for each State and Union Territory. It was unclear whether this would have been provided in the Constitution Amendment or the Delimitation Bill. If it had been provided in the Constitutional Amendment, any future changes for the same could have been effected only by a two-thirds majority. However, if it had been provided in the Delimitation Bill, amendments could be made by a simple majority.

Article 81(2) of the Constitution provides that the ratio between the number of seats and the population of each State should, as far as practicable, be the same across States. While a 50% pro-rata increase may offer a middle ground between democratic and federal principles, it would still be appropriate to discuss the same in more detail through parliamentary committees. The other urgent reform needed in our democracy is to empower the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities, which engage with the citizens on a daily basis.

*(Rangarajan R. is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified'. He currently trains civil-service aspirants at 'Officers IAS Academy'. Views expressed are personal)*

**THE GIST**

- The proposed increase in Lok Sabha seats and changes to delimitation faced political opposition and were defeated in Parliament.
- The core issue remains balancing "one citizen-one vote-one value" with federal concerns, requiring wider consensus and detailed parliamentary scrutiny.

### What is Delimitation?

Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly constituencies to reflect changes in population.

**Objective:** To ensure "One Citizen, One Vote, One Value" by keeping the population-to-seat ratio roughly equal across constituencies.

**Constitutional Basis:** * **Article 82:** Parliament enacts a Delimitation Act after every Census.

**Article 81:** Defines the composition of the Lok Sabha.

**The Freeze:** The number of seats was frozen based on the **1971 Census** by the 42nd Amendment (1976) and later extended until the first Census after 2026 (i.e., the 2027 Census) to encourage population control measures in southern states.

**The 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill: Key Proposals**

The Bill sought to decouple the current deadlock between population control and democratic representation through three pillars:

**Expansion of the House:** Increasing the maximum strength of the Lok Sabha to 850 seats.

**Census Flexibility:** Empowering Parliament to decide which Census (not necessarily the upcoming 2027 one) would form the basis for redrawing boundaries.

**Accelerating Women's Reservation:** Delinking the 106th Amendment (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) from the 2027 Census, proposing instead to implement the 33% reservation based on the 2011 Census data.

**Why Increase the Seats? (The Government's Rationale)**

**Seamless Reservation:** An expanded House (increasing from 543 to ~816 active seats) would allow for **272 seats** for women without reducing the absolute number of seats currently held by men.

**Representational Burden:** Currently, one MP represents roughly 2.5 million people. In 1971, that figure was ~1 million. An increase would bring MPs closer to their constituents.

**Modern Infrastructure:** The New Parliament House (Sansad Bhavan) was specifically designed to accommodate up to 888 members in the Lok Sabha.

**Objections and Federal Concerns**

The Opposition and regional parties raised significant alarms:

**The "North-South" Divide:** States that successfully implemented population control (like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh) fear a "Demographic Penalty." If seats are allocated strictly by population, northern states (UP, Bihar) would gain significantly, while southern states' political clout would diminish.

**Bundling of Issues:** Critics argued that women's reservation could be implemented within the existing 543 seats and did not require a 50% expansion of the House.

**Legal Ambiguity:** The Bill lacked an explicit "Pro-rata" guarantee. Without a constitutional safeguard, a simple majority in the future could change seat allocations to favor specific regions.

| Feature | Current Status | Proposed (131st Bill) |
|---|---|---|
| **Max Seats** | 550 | 850 |
| **Basis of Seats** | 1971 Census | 2011 Census (Interim) |
| **Women's Reservation** | Post-2027 Census | Immediate (via 2011 Census) |

**The Way Forward**

The withdrawal of the Bills highlights that delimitation is not merely a mathematical exercise but a federal contract.

**Consensus through Committees:** Sensitive issues like seat allocation should be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) or the Inter-State Council to build a formula that protects the interests of states with lower population growth.

**Pro-rata Safeguards:** Any increase in seats must be accompanied by a constitutional guarantee that the proportion of representation among states remains stable, at least for a transitional period.

**Strengthening Local Governance:** As Rangarajan R. suggests, empowering Panchayats and Municipalities (73rd and 74th Amendments) can alleviate the representational burden on MPs by handling daily citizen engagement at the grassroots level.

**Weightage to Development:** Future Delimitation Commissions could consider a formula that gives weightage to both population and Human Development Index (HDI) markers to reward state performance.

**Conclusion**

While the 131st Amendment Bill failed, the underlying problem of outdated representation remains. India must find a "Middle Path" that respects the democratic principle of 'One Person, One Vote' while upholding the federal principle that ensures no state is penalized for its developmental successes. The eventual delimitation exercise must be transparent, consultative, and rooted in a long-term vision for India's parliamentary democracy.

## UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

**Ques: The primary objective of delimitation is to:**

(a) Ensure equal representation of states irrespective of population

(b) Maintain administrative convenience in elections

(c) Ensure equal population-to-seat ratio across constituencies

(d) Reduce the number of constituencies

**Ans: c)**

## UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

**Ques:** Critically examine the rationale behind increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha. What are the potential political and administrative implications? **(150 Words)**

# Delimitation — a case of to be or not to be

A special session of Parliament to consider the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 – and also the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, and the Delimitation Bill, 2026 – for readjustment of Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly seats across the country and implementation of reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies (linking it to proposed fresh delimitation for which there was a separate Delimitation Bill) ended in a spectacular way. The proposed delimitation was to reallocate the number of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly seats among States (and Union Territories with legislatures), and determine the territorial boundaries of each constituency, based on data from the 2011 Census. The total number of Lok Sabha seats was proposed to be increased to 850. The special session was convened at a time when electioneering for the ongoing Legislative Assembly elections is at its peak in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, which did not go down well at all with several Opposition parties.

**K.F. Wilfred**

Former Senior Principal Secretary of the Election Commission of India

The delimitation debate raises questions on representation and equity

**Law and practice**

Articles 82 and 170 (3) of the Constitution require a readjustment of the number of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in each State and the extent/boundary of every constituency, after each Census. The first delimitation exercise in independent India was carried out in 1950-51 by the Election Commission of India, in consultation with Parliamentary Advisory Committees established for various States. As the delimitation exercise could not await the completion of the 1951 Census, given the urgency of conducting elections at the earliest, the first delimitation was based on estimated population figures, as of March 1, 1950, as provided by the Census Commissioner.

After the completion of the first general election, a fresh delimitation did take place based on the 1951 Census as per the mandate of Articles 82 and 170. Subsequently, readjustment of constituencies, both in terms of number and boundary, was carried out after the Census in 1961 and 1971. The delimitation based on the 1971 Census was completed in 1976. Subsequently, the Forty-Second Amendment of the Constitution of India froze further delimitation until the Census of 2001. The temporary freeze on delimitation was introduced in the context of population control measures actively promoted by the Indira Gandhi government. It was intended to ensure that States successfully curbing population growth were not disadvantaged in terms of representation in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies due to lower population figures, while States with higher population growth did not gain a corresponding increase in seats.

**The issue of population growth**

The temporary freeze on delimitation ended in 2001. However, the government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the time decided that it was necessary to continue the freeze on the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The government decided to redraw the territories of constituencies to ensure *inter se* parity in terms of population across them, as this balance had been disrupted/disturbed due to large-scale internal migration of people in search of employment and livelihood since 1971. To this end, the Constitutional provisions were amended in order to provide that territories of the constituencies would be readjusted on the basis of the 2001 Census figures without altering the number of Lok Sabha or Assembly seats.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons in the Bill for the Constitution (Eighty-fourth Amendment) Act, 2001, *inter alia*, stated that, in view of the progress of family planning programmes across different parts of the country, the government – under the National Population Policy strategy – decided to extend the freeze on undertaking fresh delimitation up to the year 2026. This was intended as a motivational measure to enable State governments to continue pursuing the goal of population stabilisation.

Therefore, the apparent thinking at that point of time was that population growth would stabilise across all States within the next 25 years. As per the provisions of Articles 82 and 170(3), as amended in 2001 by the Eighty-Fourth Amendment Act, the freeze on further delimitation is to be in place until the population figures of the first Census to be taken after 2026 are published. In fact, a new national Census (against the delayed 2021 Census) is under way.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the current Delimitation Bill, 2026, *inter alia*, noted that the growth of population across different constituencies along with migration from one place to another – especially rural to urban migration – "have resulted in varying density of population in electoral constituencies"; the Bill sought to address this issue. Ironically, for bringing about parity in population among constituencies, both intra- State and inter-States, the population figures of the 2011 Census were to be adopted – this means that the base data to be used for course correction or updating would have been 15-year-old population figures.

**Looking ahead**

There is nothing to suggest that migration has either stopped or slowed since 2011, or that population growth has stabilised uniformly across all regions. Against this backdrop, there is no assurance/guarantee that constituencies based on the 2011 Census would stand the test of parity or uniformity in terms of population – and, by extension, in the electorate – at the point when the delimitation exercise would have been completed.

It was quite likely that when constituencies are finally carved out a couple of years down the line, many of them would exhibit clear and evident real-time disparities when compared with the principles set out in the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the present Bill.

Article 81(2) of the Constitution provides that each State shall be allotted Lok Sabha seats in such a manner that the ratio of seats to population, as far as practicable, remains the same across all States.

There is no dispute that the letter of this Article only refers to population as a criterion. However, if we take a broader view, there would be inherent provisions in the Constitution to support the States to retain their scale of parliamentary representation. There may also be scope to incorporate additional parameters/markers alongside population, especially since the number of seats is expected to increase significantly this time, unlike the relatively modest/nominal increases in earlier exercises. After all, States are the component units forming the Union. Strong components will only strengthen the Union.

*The views expressed are personal*

**GS Paper II: Indian Polity**

**UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question:** The use of outdated census data for the delimitation of constituencies may fulfill legal requirements but fails the test of demographic parity. Critically analyze the challenges of conducting a fresh delimitation exercise in a diverse federal polity like India. **(150 Words)**

**Context :**The special session of Parliament in April 2026, aimed at passing the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill and the Delimitation Bill, 2026, concluded with the government withdrawing the latter after the former failed to pass. The proposed reforms sought to increase Lok Sabha seats to 850 and implement women's reservation by using 2011 Census data. This has reignited the debate over the "Demographic Penalty"—where states successful in population control fear losing political representation to states with higher growth rates.

**Historical Evolution of Delimitation**

| Period | Census Base | Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| **1950-51** | Estimated (1950) | First exercise by ECI before the first General Election. |
| **1960s/70s** | 1961 & 1971 | Seats increased to 543 based on the 1971 population (54.8 crore). |
| **1976 (42nd Amd)** | 1971 | The First Freeze: Seats frozen until 2001 to support population control. |
| **2001 (84th Amd)** | 1971 / 2001 | The Second Freeze: Total seats frozen until 2026; boundaries redrawn (2002-08) on 2001 data. |
| **2026 (Proposed)** | 2011 | Proposed increase to 850 seats; failed to pass. |

**The 2026 Legislative Framework: Key Provisions**

**Shift in Data Base:** The Bill proposed using **2011 Census** data instead of waiting for the results of the ongoing 2027 Census.

**Increased Capacity:** A proposed 50% increase in seats to accommodate the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam** (Women's Reservation) without displacing current male representatives.

**Correction of Disparities:** The **Statement of Objects and Reasons** argued that internal migration (rural-to-urban) has created "varying density," making current constituency boundaries demographically obsolete.

**Critical Analysis: The "2011 Census" Paradox**

Former ECI official K.F. Wilfred highlights a significant flaw in the proposed Bill:

**Outdated Data:** Using 2011 figures in 2026 means the "course correction" would be based on **15-year-old data**.

**Migration Trends:** Large-scale internal migration has continued unabated since 2011. By the time the new boundaries were finalized (roughly 2028), they would likely already fail the test of **population parity**.

**Constitutional Ratio:Article 81(2)** mandates that the ratio between seats and population should be "as far as practicable" the same across all states. Using 2011 data might satisfy the letter of the law but violates the spirit of "One Person, One Value" in real-time.

**The Federal Challenge: The "South vs. North" Divide**

The primary reason for the 50-year freeze (1976–2026) was to protect states like **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh**.

- **The Penalty:** If seats are strictly population-linked, these states would see their share of Parliament shrink despite their better performance in healthcare, education, and family planning.
- **The "Strong Union" Argument:** Experts argue that while population is the primary criterion in Article 81, the Constitution also views states as **component units**. Reducing the voice of performing states weakens the federal structure.

**Way Forward: Beyond Population**

- **Multi-Parameter Formula:** As the number of seats increases to 850, the government should consider incorporating markers other than just population—such as **geographic area, HDI, and economic contribution**—to ensure a balanced federal representation.
- **Consensus through Deliberation:** The defeat of the 131st Amendment suggests that "bundling" sensitive reforms (Women's Reservation + Delimitation) during peak electioneering is counterproductive. A **neutral commission** or **all-party committee** is needed.
- **The 2027 Census Anchor:** Instead of 2011 data, the exercise should ideally wait for the **first Census taken after 2026** (as originally mandated by the 84th Amendment) to ensure that the redraw is accurate for the next 25 years.

**Conclusion**

The withdrawal of the 2026 Bills provides a "cooling-off" period for India's polity. Delimitation is not just about drawing lines on a map; it is about the **renegotiation of power** between the Union and its States. Any future attempt must ensure that "Democracy" (representation by population) does not come at the cost of "Federalism" (representation of diverse regional units).