

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Edition : International Table of Contents

<p>Page 05 Syllabus : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>India to tap augmented solar capacity, coal to weather El Nino, summer power demand</p>
<p>Page 05 Syllabus : GS I, II and III : Indian Society, Justice and Economy / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>'48% of NSE firms have no women as key managers'</p>
<p>Page 06 Syllabus : GS II : Social Justice / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Work in progress : India must strengthen public sector hospital capacity</p>
<p>Page 09 Syllabus : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Concrete closing in on the city's green heart</p>
<p>Page 10 Syllabus : GS II & III : Social Justice and Environment / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Unmindful of nature's vagaries, their toil for survival continues</p>
<p>Page 06 : Editorial Analysis Syllabus : GS II : International Relations</p>	<p>India's global right linkages, costs and consequences</p>

The recent record peak demand of **256.1 GW** (recorded in April 2026) highlights a structural shift in India's power consumption. This surge is not merely seasonal but driven by deeper factors: rapid economic expansion, the proliferation of data centers, the electrification of railways, and a skyrocketing demand for cooling solutions (air conditioning) exacerbated by record-breaking heatwaves.

The El Niño phenomenon, which typically leads to weak monsoons and extended dry, hot spells, threatens to create a "worst-of-both-worlds" scenario: decreased hydro-power generation alongside a massive spike in electricity demand.

India to tap augmented solar capacity, coal to weather El Nino, summer power demand

Saptaparno Ghosh
Jacob Koshy
 NEW DELHI


Amidst expectations of further increase in energy demand with peak summers approaching and an El Nino in sight, India could be looking at meeting its increased power requirements from the traditional coal-powered thermal plants and augmented solar plants.

In fact, when the country scaled its peak demand of 256.1 gigawatts on April 25, thermal plants nearly retained its dominant position accounting for 66.9% of the generation, while solar augmented its position to account for 21.5% of the power generated.

The augmented solar capacity and traditional thermal plants are of pivotal importance in the dual paradigm of peak summers and El Nino effects.

Renewable growth
 Solar contribution reaches new highs amid rising peak demand * in million units

Date	Peak demand during the day (GW)	Solar generation* (contribution to total daily generation in %)	Wind generation* (contribution to total daily generation in %)	Total generation*
30-05-2024	250	421 (7%)	437 (7.4%)	5,887
09-01-2026	245	488 (9.4%)	274 (5%)	5,168
24-04-2026	252	665 (11%)	199 (3%)	6,014
25-04-2026	256	657 (10.8%)	156 (2.5%)	6,102



Although, speaking to *The Hindu*, highly placed government officials said the country was in a stable position with adequate supplies of coal to meet a potential increase in power demand.

While the historical data assessing contribution of each of the power sources could not be traced, for context, an average contribution of each of the sources through the day indicates solar energy accounted for about 8.9% of power generated on the

day of peak power demand in 2025, 7.3% in 2024, about 6% in 2023 and 5.63% in 2022. Though solar power makes up about 30% of India's installed power capacity at present, it cannot be fully utilised due to limited battery storage. In fact, solar power is frequently curtailed to keep the grid stable.

Manoj Kumar, India Analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) says: "With stronger transmission networks, more flexi-

ble grid operations, and faster battery deployment, a larger share of evening and night-time demand can also be met through non-fossil sources."

Essential to note here that India added a record 44.61 gigawatts of solar capacity in the fiscal year 2025-26, which was more than the double it had added in the preceding fiscal.

Hotter months ahead

On Friday, the India Meteorological Department said El Nino conditions –

which usually translate to weak monsoon rains and therefore longer dry spells – are likely to prevail during most of the monsoon months from June to September. Temperatures in May, broadly, would be less searing with more rain than what is usual for May expected over most parts except eastern India. Gujarat, Maharashtra, coastal Odisha, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh and Himalayan foothills are likely to see more than its usual share of 'heatwave' days.

Ample coal stocks

India has approximately 200 million tonnes of coal stocks as on date, thus, with approximately 2.3-2.4 million tonnes being utilised daily by thermal plants, the stocks would suffice for more than 83 days, a highly placed government official told *The Hindu*.

Critical Analysis of the Energy Mix

1. The Stability of Thermal Power

Thermal power plants (primarily coal-based) continue to act as the **backbone of India's grid stability**. Accounting for roughly **66.9%** of the energy mix, thermal power provides the "baseload"—the reliable, dispatchable power needed to keep the grid operational when weather patterns fluctuate. The government's maintenance of approximately **200 million tonnes of coal stocks** (providing an 83-day buffer) is a strategic measure to insulate the country from immediate supply shocks during the summer.

2. The Solar Surge and the Integration Challenge

Solar power's share in the energy mix has risen significantly (accounting for **21.5%** during the recent peak). India's rapid addition of 44.61 GW of solar capacity in the last fiscal year marks a major milestone. However, this progress faces a significant bottleneck: **Grid Inflexibility and Curtailment**.

- **The Intermittency Problem:** Solar energy is inherently variable. As seen in recent data, significant portions of generated solar power are frequently "curtailed" (wasted) because the grid cannot absorb the sudden influx, or because storage infrastructure (batteries/pumped hydro) is insufficient.
- **Moving Beyond Generation:** The policy discourse is shifting from "Generation Adequacy" (simply adding more solar panels) to "**System Flexibility**." To truly harness solar, India must invest in:
 - **Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS):** To store daytime solar for night-time peak demand.
 - **Pumped Storage Hydropower (PSH):** To provide large-scale energy shifting.
 - **Smart Grid Infrastructure:** To dynamically manage and balance the load.

UPSC Perspective: Implications for Governance

For an aspirant, this situation demonstrates the practical application of several GS-III topics:

- **Infrastructure (Energy):** The transition from traditional centralized coal power to a decentralized, hybrid grid.
- **Environment & Climate Change:** The adaptation strategy to combat El Niño-linked climate stressors.
- **Economic Security:** How energy availability directly correlates with industrial output and GDP growth.

Conclusion

India's energy roadmap is evolving into a hybrid model where thermal energy ensures stability, and renewable energy drives growth. The key takeaway for policy is that **capacity addition is not enough**. The next phase of India's power sector reform must prioritize **transmission network upgrades, inter-state grid flexibility, and aggressive battery deployment**. Unless the grid is made flexible enough to absorb the surge in solar generation, India will continue to underutilize its cleanest and most abundant energy resource during periods of extreme demand.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques:The term “Baseload Power” refers to:

- (a) Peak electricity demand during summer
- (b) Minimum level of demand on an electrical grid over a period
- (c) Renewable energy generation capacity
- (d) Power generated during emergencies

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: “India’s energy transition is constrained more by grid limitations than generation capacity.”Discuss.(150 Words)



The recent study by the Udaiti Foundation, analyzing the representation of women in National Stock Exchange (NSE)-listed firms, highlights a persistent disparity in India's corporate landscape. Despite India's rapid economic growth, the "glass ceiling" remains robust, with a significant deficit of women in leadership roles and a concerning trend where women are disproportionately represented in lower-wage positions. This report serves as a critical indicator of the progress—or lack thereof—towards India's goal of inclusive economic development.

'48% of NSE firms have no women as key managers'

A.M. Jigeesh
NEW DELHI

Almost half of the 2,647 companies listed on the National Stock Exchange do not have any women in key managerial positions at all, according to an analysis of company submissions.

On average, there were 0.64 women in these positions per company in 2024-25, with only 10% of firms listed on the NSE employing more than one woman in such leadership positions.

Formal workforce

The study, conducted by the Udaiti Foundation, a non-profit organisation, found that women's representation in the formal workforce remained at 18%, a decrease of one percentile point compared to 2020-21. The situation is even worse among formal workers earning more

than ₹18,000 per month – while women made up 21% of this group in 2020-21, their share had shrunk to just 12% in 2024-25. In contrast, the representation of women among lower-paid employees, as defined by the Code on Wages, rose from 19% to 23% over the same period, indicating that women are being shut out of higher-paying jobs in the formal sector, and shunted to lower-wage positions.

The largest employment provider for women in the formal sector are hospitals and lab services, where women make up 48% of the workforce, followed by textiles (37%), consumer services (34%), and information technology (34%). In banks and fast-moving consumer goods firms, women account for 26% and 21% of employees respectively. Women make up only 2% of employees in the construction sector, ac-

cording to the Close the Gender Gap (CGG) data, collected by the Foundation.

Udaiti Foundation chief executive officer Pooja Sharma Goyal said the latest periodic labour force survey data (PLFS 2025) reiterates the fact that even when women secure regular wage jobs, the "quality" of that work often fails the test of true formalisation. "Women represent only 24% of regular wage employees. A staggering 57% of women in regular wage jobs have no written job contract and they earn ₹5,664 less than men in a month (₹18,353 vs ₹24,217). The new Labour Codes have clear provisions for pay parity and non-discriminatory hiring. But as the rules are finalised, it is critical that clear ground-level mechanisms are built in to translate these provisions into practice," Ms. Goyal said.

Key Findings of the Study

- **Leadership Deficit:** Nearly 50% of 2,647 NSE-listed companies have **zero women** in Key Managerial Positions (KMPs). On average, there are only 0.64 women per company in such roles.
- **Workforce Stagnation:** Women's representation in the formal workforce stands at 18%, a decline from previous years.

Daily News Analysis

- **The Wage Gap & "Quality" of Jobs:** There is a growing bifurcation in the workforce. Women's share in higher-paid jobs (earning >₹18,000/month) has shrunk from 21% to 12%, while their share in lower-wage positions has increased from 19% to 23%.
- **The "Quality" Gap:** A staggering 57% of women in regular wage jobs lack written employment contracts, indicating widespread informality even within the formal sector.

Sectoral Distribution of Female Workforce

The disparity in representation is stark across different industries, as shown in the table below:

Sector	Women's Share in Workforce (%)
Hospitals & Lab Services	48%
Textiles	37%
Consumer Services	34%
Information Technology	34%
Banks & FMCG	26% & 21% respectively
Construction	2%

Critical Analysis & Challenges

1. **Structural Barriers:** The decline in women's representation in higher-paying formal roles suggests that organizational structures are failing to facilitate the career progression of women, often due to biases or lack of support systems (e.g., career breaks for childcare).
2. **Informalization of Formal Work:** As noted by the Udaiti Foundation and highlighted in the latest PLFS data, many "formal" jobs lack the safeguards of formal employment (contracts, benefits, and equal pay).
3. **Regulatory Compliance:** While the Companies Act and SEBI mandates have boosted women's representation on Boards, the report suggests these mandates have not trickled down to Key Managerial Positions (KMP), where decision-making power is concentrated.
4. **Wage Parity:** Despite constitutional mandates (Article 39(d)) and the Code on Wages, the significant earnings gap (₹5,664/month less than men) persists, undermining the principle of "Equal Pay for Equal Work."

Way Forward

Daily News Analysis

- **Beyond Mandates:** Moving from "compliance-based" diversity (e.g., just filling board seats) to "culture-based" diversity by tracking gender metrics at every level of the corporate hierarchy.
- **Effective Implementation of Labour Codes:** The new Labour Codes consolidate 29 central laws; strict ground-level enforcement regarding written contracts and pay parity is essential.
- **Targeted Skilling & Infrastructure:** Addressing the "quality" of work requires investing in STEM training for women and ensuring safe infrastructure (crèches, secure transport) to facilitate longer-term participation.
- **Data-Driven Accountability:** Encouraging firms to adopt standard gender-disaggregated reporting (as seen in the BRSR framework) will improve transparency and allow for better benchmarking.

Conclusion

The Udaiti Foundation's report serves as a wake-up call for Corporate India. Achieving the goal of a \$5 trillion economy or becoming a global leader requires more than just high GDP numbers; it requires the active, equitable participation of the female workforce. Closing the gender gap is not just a social imperative but a necessary economic strategy to fully leverage India's demographic dividend.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Which of the following best describes the term "Glass Ceiling"?

- (a) Legal restrictions on employment
- (b) Invisible barriers preventing women from reaching leadership positions
- (c) Wage ceiling imposed by companies
- (d) Physical workplace safety barriers

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Why is female labour force participation low in India despite economic growth? (150 Words)

The 80th round of the NSO survey on household social consumption (health) serves as a landmark document. Coming in the post-pandemic era and coinciding with the maturity of the **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)**, the survey provides a comprehensive snapshot of India's progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC). While the data reflects significant strides in insurance penetration and primary care utilization, it simultaneously highlights structural weaknesses—specifically, an over-reliance on the private sector and a persistent "access gap" that threatens to keep healthcare costs catastrophic for many.

Key Trends: An Analytical Overview

1. The Insurance and Access Paradox

- **The Positive:** The survey indicates a threefold increase in government-funded health insurance coverage (PMJAY and state schemes). Rural coverage jumped from 12.9% to 45.5%, and urban coverage from 8.9% to 31.8%.
- **The Critical Gap:** Despite this, hospitalization rates have not recovered to 2014 levels. Insurance coverage is not synonymous with access. Many households hold insurance cards but still struggle to secure a hospital bed, often due to the uneven distribution of network hospitals or the refusal of private providers to accept insurance rates.

2. Financial Protection vs. Financial Deprivation

- **Mean vs. Median:** The data presents a dual narrative. The **median** out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) per hospitalization is relatively low (₹11,285), and it is near zero for public outpatient care. However, the **mean** OOPE remains high due to a small number of high-cost cases.
- **The Hidden Cost:** In private facilities, reimbursement rates under PMJAY are often below market rates. Consequently, private hospitals engage in "cost-shifting"—billing patients separately for diagnostics, consumables, and ancillary services, which erodes the protection that state-funded insurance is intended to provide.

3. Epidemiological Transition

- There is a clear shift from infectious diseases to **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** like diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular conditions. NCDs require long-term, expensive management, exposing the vulnerability of the current system, which is still largely geared toward acute care.

4. Increased Health-Seeking Behavior

- The "Proportion of Population Reporting Ailments" (PPRA) has doubled. While this

Work in progress

India must strengthen public sector hospital capacity

The 80th, and latest, round of the household social consumption (health) survey conducted by the National Statistical Office is the first comprehensive survey of its kind in both the post-pandemic era and the period in which the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) scheme attained maturity. The previous two surveys of the same kind revealed that most Indians did not have any form of health insurance. Since PMJAY's launch in 2018, the 80th round shows that insurance coverage has expanded around threefold, accounting for an increasing share of health-care financing in hospitals. However, the hospitalisation rate has not recovered to the 2014 level, meaning that having an insurance card still does not guarantee access to a bed, and hidden costs continue to limit access. The reimbursement rates under PMJAY and State-funded insurance schemes are often below market rates, so private hospitals compensate by billing patients separately for diagnostics and ancillary services. In other words, while state-funded health insurance is subsidising private health-care providers' access to low-income markets without also enforcing regulated prices, the combined system provides a safety net where insurance covers hospitalisation and the public network has improved financial protection for households seeking primary care. Second, the Proportion of Population Reported Ailing has doubled, while infectious diseases have declined and non-communicable diseases have increased. Economists have interpreted this as a sign of more people seeking care, thus becoming 'visible' to the health-care sector.

Previous surveys singled out out-of-pocket expenses (OOPE) on health care as a leading cause of poverty. In the 80th round, while the mean OOPE has roughly doubled, the median OOPE has dropped, to ₹11,285 per hospitalisation and at nearly nothing for public outpatient care. Health-care expenses in India are a mix of many low-cost consultations and a few significant and expensive interactions, such as surgeries and chronic care. The two trends thus mean that while health care is becoming more affordable, thanks to the public sector absorbing the cost of primary and secondary care, health care's ability to inflict financial deprivation in a few cases remains high. Part of the problem is the AAM network, which provides free medicines and diagnostics, of Ayushman Bharat still being significantly underfunded relative to the needs of managing chronic diseases, and where the private sector dominates. Thus, overall, the poor have nominal coverage but are often excluded from the benefits of coverage in practice while the more insured middle class faces rising catastrophic costs. The next phase of health-care reform, after shielding care-seekers from poverty and achieving near-universal institutional delivery, will need to strengthen public sector hospital capacity to compete with the private sector for tertiary care.

might appear concerning, economists view this as positive—it suggests that citizens are more aware of their health, "visible" to the system, and actively seeking care, rather than suffering in silence.

Critical Challenges

- **The "Private Sector" Trap:** The survey confirms a high dependence on private healthcare (roughly 58% in rural and 65% in urban areas). Without strict price regulation, the private sector often treats insurance as a subsidy to enter low-income markets without passing the benefits to the patients.
- **AAM Underfunding:** The Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs) are the backbone of primary care, yet they remain underfunded relative to the requirements of managing chronic NCDs. When the primary tier fails, the burden inevitably shifts to the secondary/tertiary (hospital) tier, increasing costs for the household.

Way Forward for Health Policy

For India to move beyond "nominal coverage" to "effective care," policy interventions must prioritize:

1. **Strengthening Public Tertiary Capacity:** The public sector must be scaled up to compete with the private sector for tertiary care. If the public sector lacks the capacity, patients will continue to be pushed into high-cost private facilities, nullifying the gains of insurance.
2. **Strict Price Regulation:** Government-funded insurance schemes must enforce standard rates for all services, including diagnostics and consumables, to stop private hospitals from bypassing caps through "hidden costs."
3. **Chronic Care Integration:** The health system must evolve from an "acute-care" model to a "chronic-care" model, focusing on the long-term management of NCDs, which is where the middle class currently faces the most catastrophic expenditure.
4. **Audit of Public Health Utilization:** Policymakers must move beyond hospital-centric data. Future surveys should more accurately capture the "unmet need"—why many people who report ailments still do not seek formal treatment.

Conclusion

The 80th NSO survey proves that India has successfully shielded millions from the poverty trap of minor health episodes through free outpatient care and expanded insurance. However, the next phase of reform is not merely about increasing insurance coverage—it is about **institutional capacity building**. To ensure that health coverage does not remain merely a card in a pocket but a gateway to reliable, affordable, and high-quality care, India must urgently bridge the gap in public sector hospital infrastructure.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques:With reference to Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), consider the following statements:

1. It provides health insurance coverage for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
2. It is entirely funded by the Central Government.
3. It covers outpatient (OPD) expenses for all beneficiaries.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans:a)

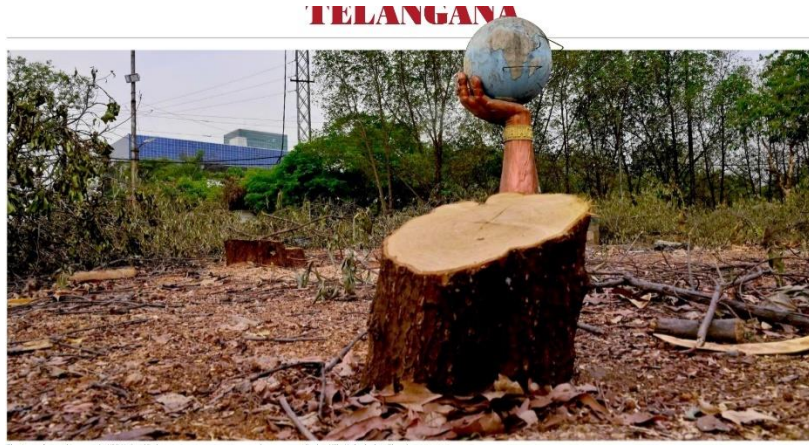
UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques:Evaluate the role of government-funded health insurance schemes in achieving Universal Health Coverage in India.(150 Words)



Page 09:GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam

The KBR National Park, often termed the "green lung" of Hyderabad, is currently the focal point of a significant environmental standoff. The controversy centres on the **Hyderabad City Innovative and Transformative Infrastructure (H-CITI)** project, which entails the construction of multiple flyovers and underpasses along the park's periphery. This project highlights the systemic challenges of balancing rapid urbanization with the protection of ecologically sensitive urban spaces.



The attempt of an aged tree near the KBR National Park seems to convey a message on saving greenery, at Begun Hills, Hyderabad, on Thursday.

Concrete closing in on the city's green heart

KBR National Park is at the centre of fresh public outrage, this time over the flyovers and underpasses rising around it under the Hyderabad City Innovative and Transformative Infrastructure project. This island of tranquillity in the heart of a bustling metropolis has faced threats since its inception, raising persistent questions over its very status as a national park. Swathi Vadhanandi explores the existential crisis confronting the urban haven

The year was 1976. Two little boys on a bicycle disappeared into the horizon. Moments later, two rain in their mid-50s came bounding down the same lonely road in a beach buggy, angling for young women as camera rolled. By one side on a long wall, resulting in a line of vegetation within. On the other by barren land, broken only by a few tin-roofed sheds.

The men were cheaters N.T. Rama Rao and Akhaya Nagawara Rao, playing cards 24-hours in the 'Vidya film distribution' road connected to the hills Road No.2 to the Jubilee Hills Checkpost junction. The sheds were Annapurna Studios, barely two years old then.

Out in the early 1990s, the road remained as narrow and deserted as it had been over a decade earlier. Inside the wall, the margin had grown greener, outside, the land stayed barren.

Three decades later, that verdancy has a name: KBR National Park. The barrenness has given way to commercial properties, each worth tens to hundreds of crores of rupees. The wall has been replaced by an iron fence, in place of the lonely single-lane road and have been buggy now stands a six-lane artery, check a block with vehicles competing for space.

Halfway around the park, heavy digging is already under way. The central median, 7 to 10 metres wide on either side of the Mahatma Agha Khan junction and cover rare stands of ornamental and bougainvillea, have been gouged into trenches seven to eight feet deep, with excavators roaring inside.

Soon, the national park will have been besieged from all sides of its eight kilometre periphery by a rash of flyovers and underpasses, termed as 'grade-separators' in officious, which would convert what had been a 12 feet EY road three decades ago into multi-lane highway maze of mile-centers.

Grandly named Hyderabad City Innovative and Transformative Infrastructure, or H-CITI, the project is a blow-up version of the previous government's Strategic Road Development Plan (SRDP). What began in 2016 as six multi-level flyovers around the park has now been increased to seven flyovers and an equal number of underpasses.

The project promises relief from chronic congestion at key junctions including KBR Entrance, Akhaya Junction, Road No.45, Film Nagar, Agha Khan Junction and Cancer Hospital Junction. But as construction gathers pace, so also has resistance.

On April 26, several unaffiliated citizens from different walks of life gathered at the park's entrance, holding banners and raising slogans against the H-CITI project.

A note, circulated by the protesters says the project would require 20,000 tonnes of concrete, 15,344 tonnes of structural steel and excavation of 17,600 cubic metres of earth. Based on the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation's own bill of materials and calculations under the standard Indian Road Congress codes, they argue the cost of casting traffic may be far greater than what appears on paper.

The resultant impervious surface, computed at Hyderabad's 0.8 metres of annual rainfall and a standard runoff coefficient of 0.85, would channel about 54,212 cubic metres of rainwater annually into sewerage drains, sharply reducing groundwater recharge, the note says. It points out that surrounding neighbourhoods already depend on a declining water table.

Also flagged are carbon emissions, projected to rise by nearly 50,000 tonnes from the manufacture of cement and steel alone, before a single vehicle uses the flyovers, and before emissions from construction equipment, diesel consumption and transportation are counted. Ammonia, a warning, the note adds, would be aggravated by concrete spall curtains that typically run three to five degrees Celsius hotter than vegetation and street level of equal width.

That heat, activists warn, will affect not just residents but the park's rich biodiversity. The park is home to 100 bird species and migratory bird species, over 10 butterfly species, 600 varieties of flora, nearly 40 reptile species and 600 species of small fauna including wild boar, jackals, pangolins, small Indian civet, jungle cat, foxes and porcupines.

"Simply making the road one-way could have solved the traffic issue. Why spend so much public money and cause wildlife disturbance and climate destruction?" asks Ashwini Prate, an activist and nature enthusiast.

Long ESZ standstill
All these general concerns aside, one prominent contention reserved for this location had been the absence of the demarcation of Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ) as required for the national park for a very long time.

ESZs are notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, typically as buffer zones meant to absorb the impact of human activity on wildlife habitats. Activities such as mining, quarrying, polluting industries and major hydroelectric projects are prohibited within them, while construction falls under restricted category.

No ESZ existed for KBR National Park until its flyovers were first proposed in 2016 under SRDP. A wave of protests followed, with citizens and regular walkers opposing the lifting of 1,200 fully grown trees along the park's fringes to make way for the structures. The matter reached the national Green Tribunal, which took it up suo motu and in 2017, directed the MoEFCC to wait until the MoEFCC filed the ESZ.

A draft notification issued in 2018 proposed an ESZ varying between 1 and 2à metres around the park. It triggered severe public backlash, especially over the proposed 2à metre radius to the ministry, after which the environmental expert committee vetoed public hearings.

But activists along the final notification, issued in 2020 with the same ESZ lining, came outout at any such hearing. They moved the High Court and secured a stay on construction. When

the H-CITI project was later proposed, MoEFCC sought location of the stay, while activists argued that public hearing documents had still not been submitted.

At the later hearing, the stay was not extended further, giving the corporation enough room to push ahead with the project.

A 2022 Supreme Court ruling in the landmark Godavarman Thirumalai vs Union of India case, which mandated a one-kilometre ESZ around protected areas, came as a shot in the arm for the activists.

"If the present ESZ is declared void in the HC, then the default ESZ will be one kilometre, so to change which the government would need to go through a rigorous procedure all over again. On the government's side, if they can maintain the window granted by court by expediting the work, they can get the stamp of approval based on the nature of usage of public money, which has already been environmental regulations," shares an activist pleading anonymously.

Authorities see the matter differently. MoEFCC Commissioner R.V. Karan says KBR National Park is no typical wildlife sanctuary where one-kilometre ESZ can simply be fixed, it is at the centre of a thriving metropolis, where a kilometre peripheral space is occupied by thousands of establishments.

"It was part of the land obtained under the Urban Land Ceiling Bill, 1971, which was later declared as national park," Karan reminds.

Even before becoming a national park, it had already been shaped by lengthy legal battles and sustained activism by wildlife enthusiasts.

What now is KBR National Park was once the residence of Prince Mukarman Jai, grandson of the last Nizam of Hyderabad Saif, Mir Osman Ali Khan, Chirun Palace, along with its vast forested estate, was gifted to him by his father, Prince Asam Jai on his coronation as titular Nizam in 1967. A dispute over an acre over the extent of the land, which Mukarman Jai claimed rights over all 60 hectares, a Revenue Department survey concluded that over 28 hectares had been encroached upon.

After the land was resumed under ULC Act, the then Congress government led by chief minister K. Jayashankar Reddy was intent on converting it into a national park, as records show. "I recall there was significant pressure on the CM to allocate the land for housing requirements of public representatives such as MLAs and ministers. But he was adamant that the park should be declared as a protected forest area," reminisces Uday Krishna bedkveddi of Vasa Foundation, an environmental non-profit organisation.

Following a prolonged legal battle with the royal family, the land parcel was confiscated by the State government, barring about six acres on which its structures belonging to the Nizam's family stood.

In 1994, the then Andhra Pradesh government declared 142.5 hectares of greenery within the park as public Hyderabad National Park through a gazette notification. This followed the exclusion of 11.2 hectares along the periphery, varying between 120 and 200 feet in width, earmarked for future road widening. Soon after, it was renamed KBR National Park, after Mukarman Jai National Park.

In a curious turn after this, an organisation of local farmers, the Hyderabad Park Walkers' Association, formed, claiming a right to walk inside the national park and waging a prolonged legal battle to have its gates opened to the public. The walkers' collective even challenged the government's decision to notify it as a national park, arguing that it was located amid a residential area. They were opposed by the Nationalist Front Party, represented by its executive director Pranay Waghray, who argued that unrestricted public access inside the park would disrupt its fragile ecosystem, home to several Schedule I fauna and endangered species.

After years of litigation, the government finally issued a gazette notification in 1996, formally notifying KBR National Park with the same extent as before.

Taming the park's wild core
But in a twist soon after the turn of the millennium, the walkers gradually wore down official resistance and secured permission to enter the park on payment of a prescribed fee.

That access, however, came at a cost to the park. The existing wall was demolished and replaced with iron fencing. A walking track was carved out by closing vegetation in the strip earlier earmarked for road widening and exotic trees were planted along the route.

The result is visible today: an inner boundary and an outer boundary, with the intervening space used by walkers, only part of it officially falling within the ESZ.

Parking has now looks that now jut into the park from outside were over green cover; so was the land now occupied by the multi-level parking facility near the entrance gate.

The park has undergone several other changes over the past decade, many of which, critics say, have made large parts of it resemble a public park more than a national park. "We along with painting security guards walk with their entrance inside the park, irrespective of the ban on guns in the protected wildlife area. The forest department obliges these people, and is forever engaged in pleasing them by making changes to the landscape, planting lawns and exotic hedges, taking up construction of gazebos and creating barriers that cannot be overcome by the wild fauna like turtles," says Prate.

Around 2017, the then KBR government went a step further by setting up open gyms inside the notified wildlife area. In response to a Right to Information query filed by Prate in 2018, the Forest department admitted that two open gyms had been installed within the national park, along with the creation of lanes.

The expenditure on gym equipment was met from the Zoo and Park Authority of Telangana, while landscaping costs were drawn from the Centre's Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats scheme, the Development of Parks, Road, and ZAPRI.

Disparaging across the spot where the NTR-ABP duo once courted young women on screen now lies a covered sunbath by the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply & Sewerage Board (HMWS&SB) along the park's edge. Lifts, scooters, and a revocable a storage chamber for sewage flowing from establishments across the road.

"Three pump sets were installed here by the water board to pump out the diverted sewage from the park, that they have completely disregarded the fact that with stormwater drains reconnected to the pump, the lake will be deprived of flows, and dry up," says Peddikoti, pointing to the series of iron lids concealing the storm water drains, valves and pump sets.

Water board's intervention came only recently, after social media influencers equated sewage flow filled hundreds of fish in the pond.

As per Telangana Pollution Control Board (TPCB) records, the average coliform count in Chirun lake during 2014 stood at 84,540 MPN (Probable Number) per 100 ml. Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) rose from 5.5 mg/l in 2022 to 16 mg/l in 2023, indicating significant organic pollution, poor water quality and severe threat to aquatic life since 2015. TPCB has been collecting water samples from Chirun Kunta for testing.

2. Contextual Background

- **The Project:** H-CITI is a successor to the previous Strategic Road Development Plan (SRDP). It proposes a network of seven flyovers and seven underpasses at key junctions surrounding the park.
- **The Standoff:** Environmentalists, citizens, and civil society groups have staged protests (notably in April 2026), citing threats to the park's biodiversity, groundwater, and micro-climate. The dispute is exacerbated by allegations of procedural violations, including the lack of public consultation and questionable environmental clearances.

3. Key Issues for UPSC Mains

A. The Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) Dilution

- **Regulatory Loophole:** While the T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India (2022) ruling mandates a default 1-km ESZ around protected areas, the KBR Park's ESZ has been contested and notified in places as narrow as **3 to 30 meters**.
- **Significance:** Activists argue that the shrinking of the ESZ is an "administrative convenience" to facilitate construction, thereby negating the purpose of an ecological buffer meant to absorb human-centric impacts.

B. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) & "Salami Slicing"

- **Lack of Cumulative Impact:** Critics point out that the government evaluates flyover projects individually rather than as a cumulative whole. This "salami slicing" of infrastructure projects allows them to bypass the rigorous EIA thresholds required for large-scale developments.
- **Regulatory Evasion:** There are allegations that the projects are being processed under exemptions that bypass Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and public hearings, raising concerns about the transparency of the governance framework.

C. Ecological & Hydrological Concerns

- **Urban Heat Island (UHI) Effect:** Replacing green cover with concrete/asphalt increases local temperatures (typically by 2–5°C), aggravating the UHI effect in an already warming city.
- **Groundwater Recharge:** The KBR Park acts as a vital catchment area. Creating impermeable surfaces (concrete/flyovers) reduces the groundwater recharge capacity, threatening the water security of surrounding neighborhoods that are already facing a declining water table.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** The felling and translocation of thousands of trees—often without scientific survival protocols—directly impact the park's function as a habitat for resident and migratory bird species and small fauna.

4. Governance & Administrative Challenges (GS Paper II - Polity & Governance)

- **Due Process Violations:** Activists allege that tree-felling permissions have been granted without proper adherence to the WALTA (Water, Land and Trees Act) procedures and that the Tree Protection Committee (TPC) reports are being produced in a manner that lacks on-ground empirical data.

- **Judicial vs. Executive Conflict:** There is a persistent tension between court-ordered stays on tree-felling and the aggressive push by civic bodies to meet infrastructure deadlines. The ongoing litigation highlights the difficulty in enforcing judicial directives in a rapid, executive-driven developmental environment.

5. Way Forward: A Sustainable Framework

To resolve the conflict between urban necessity and ecological sustainability, the following measures are essential:

- **Integrated Urban Planning:** Shift from "Car-Centric" infrastructure (flyovers) to "People-Centric" transit (robust public transport, metro expansion, and active mobility).
- **Participatory Governance:** Mandatory, transparent public hearings for any infrastructure project within or adjacent to a Protected Area.
- **Scientific Buffer Zones:** Re-evaluating the ESZ boundaries based on scientific, peer-reviewed data rather than administrative convenience, respecting the spirit of the Godavarman judgment.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Making Detailed Project Reports (DPRs), environmental clearances, and tree enumeration surveys publicly accessible to foster trust and ensure third-party oversight.

6. Conclusion

The KBR National Park issue is not merely a local grievance; it is a microcosm of the crisis facing India's metropolitan cities. For sustainable urban development, policies must integrate "**Green Infrastructure**"—which prioritizes the maintenance of natural ecosystems—as a fundamental asset rather than an impediment to progress. The ultimate test of a "Smart City" is its ability to preserve the natural lungs that sustain its inhabitants.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques:With reference to Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ), consider the following statements:

1. ESZs are notified around Protected Areas to act as shock absorbers for ecological systems.
2. The Supreme Court in T.N. GodavarmanThirumulpad v. Union of India (2022) mandated a uniform 1 km ESZ for all protected areas without exception.
3. ESZs prohibit all forms of human activity.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques:Examine the role of Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ) in conserving urban biodiversity. Highlight the challenges in their effective implementation. **(150 Words)**



The intersection of climate change and India's labor market has birthed a silent, systemic crisis. While global discourse on climate change often focuses on carbon footprints and policy targets, the lived reality for India's massive informal workforce—comprising nearly 82% of the total labor force—is one of survival over sustainability. As temperatures soar, the informal sector, which lacks occupational safety nets, is becoming the most vulnerable demographic, turning the "heatwave crisis" into a "climate justice" challenge.

Analysis of the Crisis

1. The "Heat-Poverty" Trap

For the informal workforce (construction, sanitation, farm labor), economic survival supersedes climatic warnings. The analysis reveals a stark reality: these workers often normalize symptoms of heat stress (headaches, dizziness, fatigue) as part of the job. This "normalization of suffering" is a significant hurdle in public health intervention, as workers perceive the environment as an immutable fact of life rather than a health hazard.

2. Health and Productivity Impacts

- The Biological Limit:** Scientific consensus, backed by institutions like the Sri Ramachandra Institute, indicates that the human body struggles to adapt to temperatures consistently above 37°C, especially in high-humidity conditions.
- Economic Cost:** Increased heat stress leads to cognitive impairment, dehydration, and increased heatstroke incidence. This directly lowers labor productivity, effectively trapping workers in a cycle of reduced physical capacity, lower wages, and increased medical expenditure.
- Rising Trends:** The sharp rise in reported heatstroke cases (from 833 in 2023 to 5,154 in 2025) suggests either a worsening climate scenario or, potentially, better reporting. Regardless, the public health burden is escalating.



Govindan and other workers, including a woman, digging a pit for an electricity pole near the Seed Access Road in Anaravali. (Devi) Hussaini, along with other workers, returning home after a strenuous day's work near Venkayyapalem in Thulluru rural of Cuddalore. (G) S S S

Unmindful of nature's vagaries, their toil for survival continues

Climate change and rising temperatures are a global concern, and environmental experts are calling for urgent measures to address this crisis. However, for informal workers, changing temperatures hardly matter, as they cannot afford to miss even a single day of work. Despite the intense conditions, they continue working with few or no protective measures, reports **Nellore Sravani**

Roads covered in dust, shimmering under the relentless heat, with construction activity all around, are a familiar sight in Anaravali. For the women engaged in weeding and road laying, however, it is simply another day of intense labour for a day's pay.

On an April morning at 10.30 a.m., the temperature reached 39°C. The roads were cluttered with infrastructure materials—cracks, wires, and huge pipes—while the absence of even the slightest breeze turned the place into a furnace. And these intense working conditions, labourers pressed on, some clad in yellow jackets, boots, and helmets, while others used only a towel to cover their heads for protection.

Paying no heed to the scorching sun, 57-year-old Govindan continues to dig a pit for the erection of an electricity pole, assisted by five young labourers, including a woman, along a stretch near the Seed Access Road in Anaravali. Hailing from Vinnamangam, Govindan sees Anaravali as a land of opportunities, and the rising mercury is too trivial a matter for him to worry about. "Whether it is rain or shine, we must work to earn our livelihood. Why should we bother about rising temperatures? Besides, we have gotten used to the hot weather," he says.

So far, they have managed to dig only 2.5 feet, but the pit needs to be 6 feet deep to support the pole. Each day, they dig six to six paces during their 12-hour schedule. The target is to erect 150 poles, and for this work they earn 5000 per day, with meals provided at the nearby Anna Canton.

Like Govindan, many people in the informal workforce do not perceive climate change and rising temperatures as immediate concerns. However, studies have shown that increasing global temperatures can severely impact the health of informal workers—including construction labourers, rag pickers, auto-rickshaw drivers, sanitation workers, vendors, and farm labourers, among others.

Health Impact

In a study titled "Quantifying the impact of heat stress on labour productivity in outdoor work places in southern India amid a changing climate", professors from Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research, Chennai, state that even small increase in global temperature will have significant effect on worker productivity, reducing their work capacity, exacerbating their economic hardship. High temperatures can impact cognitive functions, cause dehydration, and increase the risk of heat-related illnesses, thereby reducing efficiency and

performance, the report highlights.

According to the 2011 Census, approximately 82 per cent of the workforce in India works in ailing through informal means. As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises (ASUSE) for 2022-23, Andhra Pradesh has 45.7 lakh non-agricultural informal sector workers, accounting for 32 per cent of the State's total employed workforce. A significant proportion of these workers are concentrated in the Visakhapatnam and Amarnath regions.

Recognising the adverse impact of heat on the informal workforce, and considering the soaring temperatures in the State, the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APS/DMA) implements a heatwave action plan every year to mitigate heat-related stress. One of its key recommendations is to avoid outdoor work during peak hours, between 12 p.m. and 3 p.m.

While some workers, such as Govindan and his team, take a one-and-a-half-hour lunch break between 12.30 p.m. and 2:00 p.m., the same remains a luxury for many others. Lakshmi, 50, from the small village of Kalahasti near Yemuganam in Karnool district, gets only a 20-minute break from her farm work, which begins at 7:30 a.m. and continues until 3:30 p.m.

In April, she was engaged in harvesting chilli crops for over 15 days. "Every day, I would harvest 10-15 kg of chillies. We would break only for lunch and return to work immediately. The 'break time' would abate as if we stepped away from work for too long," she recalls. Her health suffered due to the strenuous labour in the scorching heat, yet what troubles her most is not the

temperature but the delayed payments under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). "Farm work used to fetch me ₹250 per day, but in 'rainy' (post-MGNREGS), the payments are delayed," says Lakshmi, the sole breadwinner for a family of seven, including her parents, two daughters, and their children. In addition to her wages, she receives a widow pension.

Due to experiencing headaches, diarrhoea, and a persistent ache in her hand, she left her job as a farm worker. She did not consult a doctor for the headache and diarrhoea, instead relied on over-the-counter medicines. However, the single medical attention for the hand pain and was advised to undergo physiotherapy. After taking a short break, financial pressures forced her back to work. She joined others in deslating an irrigation canal under MGNREGS to meet her family's daily expenses.

"Misconception" Labourers often avoid seeking professional help, believing their bodies are accustomed to high temperatures. However, the AISDMA report "Heatwave Action Plan-2025" highlights that the human body can only tolerate an environmental temperature of up to 37°C. Once the temperature rises above this, the body begins to absorb heat from the atmosphere.

In fact, heat-stress disorders can occur even at 27°C, when humidity is high and exposure is prolonged.

Vidya Venugopal, professor in the Department of Environmental Health Engineering at Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research, and one of the authors of the study mentioned above, explains that the body adapts to heat only to a certain extent. "Beyond that, what workers call 'getting used to' is really just learning to ignore symptoms like headaches, dizziness, and fatigue. Those don't disappear. They simply become normalised, and workers suffer silently every day," she says.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the year 2024 saw a record heat when the temperatures were 0.65°C above the

1991-2020 average, and the year 2025 was 0.28°C warmer than the long-term mean. IMD, Anantnag, Director S. Stella says due to rapid urbanisation and global warming, the number of heatwaves in the State has seen a gradual rise over the years. "Especially, the urban places in the State are registering higher temperatures due to lack of greening, increase in constructions, and weather systems," she adds.

In their report, "Heat wave exposure in India in current, 1.5°C, and 2.0°C worlds," IIT Gandhinagar professor Vinod Mishra and colleagues state that the frequency of severe heat waves could increase 30 times the current temperature by the end of the 21st century if the global average temperature is limited to 2.0°C above pre-industrial levels.

According to the Department of Health, Medical Education and Family Welfare, the number of heatstroke cases has seen a drastic increase over the past three years. In 2023, 833 cases were reported. In 2024, the number rose to 4,442 and in 2025, it reached 5,154. While health officials attribute this rise to improved reporting of heatstroke cases, weather experts point to the changing global scenario as a contributing factor.

Heatwave measures

In Andhra Pradesh, heatwaves have claimed more lives than any other natural disaster, according to the APS/DMA. After the State recorded 1,369 heatstroke deaths in 2015, the government introduced a heatwave action plan aimed at reducing heat-related illnesses and fatalities through warning messages and continuous monitoring. As a result, the number of deaths gradually declined.

In 2016, 223 deaths were reported, 236 in 2017, eight in 2018, and 28 in 2019. Between 2020 and 2025, only 2022 recorded three deaths, while 2025 was just one.

While the APS/DMA stresses on dissemination of warnings through line departments to ensure last-mile connectivity, both Govindan and Lakshmi claim they are not aware of such warnings. Lakshmi says that she has a small television at home, which, during the summer vacation, is mostly used by her grandchildren.

For others who do receive the messages, work must continue, and they head out with minimal or no protective measures.

Hussaini, a 64-year-old woman farm labourer, says even if they receive the alerts, they cannot afford to stay back at home. Walking back home to Venkayyapalem, a village in Thulluru rural of Gannur district, after completing the day's work, Hussaini says her husband suffered a heart attack recently and the law is dependent on her earnings.

She goes to around 7 a.m. and returns before 12 p.m. during summers. The walks more than two km to the place of work. "We have been working outdoors for years. If we feel hot, we take a break, sip water and resume work. We cannot afford to sit at home just because there is a heatwave," she says. Her sunburnt and worn out face points to physical exhaustion. She says headaches and burning in eyes are more common in summers, but she cannot afford to take leave. Hussaini gets ₹250 per day as farm labourer and ₹4,000 old-age pension from the A.P. government.

Similar is the case with sanitation workers. An outdoor sanitation worker in Vijayawada, Parvathi, explains that most of them do not enjoy any benefits nor do they have sick-leave or sick leave for the permanent workers. "Neither are we given caps in summers nor gloves," she says. "In hot weather, heatstroke depends on their day-to-day earnings, so high temperatures or drastic weather conditions hardly matter to them, and relief is nowhere in sight. As Govindan says, 'rain or shine, they must continue to work.'"



3. The Policy-Reality Gap

While the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) implements heatwave action plans, the "last-mile connectivity" of these initiatives is largely missing:

- **Institutional Failure:** Many workers remain unaware of official weather alerts.
- **Economic Insecurity:** Even when aware, workers like those mentioned in the report cannot afford to lose a day's wage, highlighting the failure of current social security nets to provide "climate leave" or income support during extreme weather.
- **Urban Heat Islands:** Rapid, unplanned urbanization, characterized by concrete-heavy construction and minimal green cover, exacerbates the heat intensity in cities like Amaravati and Visakhapatnam, creating localized furnace-like conditions.

Key Concerns for UPSC Aspirants

- **The Gendered Impact:** Women in the informal sector, such as the farm laborers described, face a double burden—strenuous labor in extreme heat alongside household responsibilities, with even fewer resources for self-care or medical treatment.
- **MGNREGA Shortcomings:** The analysis highlights that delays in MGNREGA payments are often more concerning to workers than the heat itself. This points to a need for administrative efficiency in direct benefit transfers (DBT) to prevent workers from pushing their bodies beyond limits due to financial desperation.
- **Adaptation vs. Mitigation:** While global climate talks focus on mitigation (reducing carbon emissions), this report emphasizes the urgent need for **Climate Adaptation**—specifically, occupational safety standards for outdoor workers.

Way Forward: Policy Recommendations

1. **Occupational Safety Standards:** Governments must mandate "heat-safe" protocols for private and public construction sites, including compulsory rest hours, water availability, and shade, with strict enforcement.
2. **Climate-Resilient Urban Planning:** Integrating "cool roofs," increasing urban green cover, and promoting permeable pavements to combat the Urban Heat Island effect.
3. **Social Security for Climate Risks:** Expanding the scope of MGNREGA to include "climate hazard pay" or paid climate-leave, ensuring that workers are not penalized financially for staying indoors during extreme heatwaves.
4. **Last-Mile Awareness:** Using grassroots organizations, local television, and community leaders to disseminate heatwave warnings in accessible, vernacular, and non-technical formats.
5. **Strengthening Public Health Infrastructure:** Mobile clinics and rapid response teams need to be deployed near construction and labor hubs during peak summer months.

Conclusion

The plight of the informal workforce in India is a microcosm of the global climate inequality crisis. As India moves toward rapid urbanization, the goal cannot be growth at any cost. Climate action must be inclusive; it must protect those whose sweat builds the nation. Protecting the informal sector from the vagaries of climate change is not merely a moral imperative—it is a prerequisite for sustained economic development and social stability in a warming world.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the term “Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect”, consider the following statements:

1. It refers to higher temperatures in urban areas compared to surrounding rural areas.
2. It is primarily caused by increased vegetation cover in cities.
3. Use of concrete and asphalt contributes to this phenomenon.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) 1 only

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: “Climate change is no longer only an environmental issue but a labour market crisis in India.”Discuss. (250 Words)

India's global right linkages, costs and consequences

Philosopher John Locke tellingly argued that "things of this world are in so constant a flux, that nothing remains long in the same state". Seemingly localised events such as the French Revolution, the two world wars, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the September 11 attacks and Lehman Brothers' crash all kickstarted profound global disruptions. The 2008 financial crisis unleashed socio-economic pressures that heralded a tsunami of populist-autocrats leading right-wing parties (henceforth the Right). As evidenced by contemporary global upheavals (the conflict in West Asia being just the tip of the iceberg), this tsunami is the single biggest threat to the liberal world order.

Most analyses focus on the "what" of this phenomenon, namely that the Right is fashioning a neo-conservative world order – where nations have spheres-of-influence and might is right; are culturally pure (code for xenophobia and racism); and where the liberal world order's norms are vilified as impediments to a mythical golden period. Other analyses outline the similarities in the Right's domestic politics or how it embeds undemocratic and atavistic norms in the new world order they are forging. What is understudied is how the Right breathes life into its shared goals and why it acts like it does.

In deciphering the how, the Right has colluded to establish an "international ideological axis" over decades. Networks such as the International Democracy Union, the Movement, the National Conservatism Conference, the Conservative Political Action Conference, the Heritage Foundation (whose Project 2025 United States President Donald Trump is scrupulously unleashing globally) either train parties on manufacturing consent, create networking opportunities for right-wing politicians, frame coordinated responses on global issues, and weaponise their respective diasporas to support populist autocrats. Through these, the Right has unleashed undemocratic upsurges against progressive values and parties, as well as the liberal world order. It is no coincidence that 91 countries representing 72% of the world's population are classified as autocratic by the Varieties of Democracy Institute.

A global right alignment
The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s role in this counter-hegemonic project is illustrative. Having effected a gletschschaltung on the Indian state, the BJP has redeployed the nation's foreign policy systems to help redraw the global map ideologically. As outlined in a recent book, *India's Tryst with the World*, Indian missions are bypassed as the BJP's ideological outposts (the Hindu Swamysevak Sangh or HSS, the Overseas Friends of BJP and other Sangh Parivar affiliates) map and harass liberal academics working on India, obfuscate the targeting of foreign citizens (highlighted in a 2024 Canadian Security Intelligence Service report) and support the Right as part of an ideological internationalism.

Evidence of boots-on-the-ground collaboration can be found in the Operation Dharmic-Vote campaign in the 2019 British general election, which saw the Overseas Friends of BJP campaigning for Conservative Party candidates in



Salman Khurshid
Former Minister
for External Affairs



Pushparaj Deshpande
Director, Samrudha
Bharat Foundation

48 constituencies. Similarly, the 'Howdy Modi' and 'Namaste Trump' rallies stumped for Mr. Trump, as did Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pre-Operation Roaring Lion visit, which politically endorsed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of Israel's national elections.

Likewise, exorbitant funds are channelised for extremist causes (a 2022 report by Jasa Macher found that just seven Sangh Parivar affiliates in the United States spent over \$158.9 million on right-wing causes). Some of this has yielded results, as democratic regressions in France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. testify.

Although this evokes a perverse epicaricacy among some in India, the BJP's Janus-visage lies bare abroad. Belying efforts to project Mr. Modi as a Gandhian *vikas-purush*, the BJP's role in this international axis has sparked deep unease.

First, transparency groups have alleged that the Prime Minister's personalised diplomacy transcends collusion with populist-autocrats, and furthers the interests of cronies-capitalists (who support the BJP's politico-ideological objectives).

Second, progressive parties increasingly perceive the BJP's ideological internationalism as arming the Right in their respective nations. For example, as a *Daily Mail* report alleged, the BJP's involvement in fomenting tensions in Leicester vitiated politics and tried to strengthen the Right. Likewise, BJP delegations actively courting far-right parties across Europe has sparked deep unease among global progressives.

Third, the BJP's ideological adventurism has triggered diplomatic reprisals (including the expulsion of Indian intelligence officials from various nations – a historic first).

Fourth, hate speech and racist attacks on Indian students abroad has mushroomed, while restrictions to visas for skilled Indian immigrants have escalated. Both suggest that the BJP-enamoured-diaspora's efforts to ingratiate themselves with the Right yield no returns.

Finally, the BJP's adventurism has also compromised India's national interests. For example, by condoning kidnappings and assassinations of heads of state, willfully ignoring the conversion of India's strategic backyard into a conflict-theatre, circumscribing India's historical support for a two-state solution and peace (because of an iron-alliance with Mr. Netanyahu's Likud party) and tacitly sanctioning coercive unilateralism in West Asia and South America, the BJP has undermined India's case on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir while imposing massive geo-economic and geo-political costs on India (as the adverse impacts of the war in West Asia prove).

The response to India's reticence
The world reads India's reticence under the BJP government as an abdication of India's moral leadership of the Global South, and not responsible statecraft. Contrary to Jawaharlal Nehru's principled internationalism (which successive Indian governments continued), in doing nothing to mitigate conflicts between NATO/Ukraine-Russia, or America/Israel-Iran, or the Palestine issue, the BJP government is tacitly conceding that nations can violently forge hemispheric hegemonies, which is why few

nations condemned China's aggression in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, or Pakistan after Operation Sindoor (2025).

This brings us to why the Right is dismantling the liberal world order. Focusing on the domestic to illustrate the point, even though the BJP blithely continues India's long-standing efforts to forge a multipolar world, it is primarily striving to inscribe itself into a global conservative cartography (partly because of its ideological proclivities, and partly because it mistakenly buys into its self-propagated synonymy with the nation state). The reason why the BJP's covert support for the dismantling of the rules-based world order (evocatively wrapped in decolonisation rhetoric) has traction is because of the injustices of the neoliberal world order – dealt with in the article in this daily, "Navigating the global economic transformation", October 16, 2025. After all, the Global North's economic colonialism (including structural adjustments, capital accumulation, cheap labour, environmental colonisation and trickle-down economics), and ruthless pursuit of national interests (including through sanctions and tariffs) predate the Right.

Similarly, the Global North's liberal incrementalism on overhauling international institutions (a *sine qua non* for India and the Global South) and inertia (despite conflicts afflicting five continents, there has not been a substantive United Nations Peacekeeping operation since 2014) has made the attack on transnational institutions seem kosher. Likewise, the Global North's promotion of cloud-capitalism has not only exacerbated socio-cultural fault-lines, but inevitably rewarded populist-autocrats.

Ironically then, it is the "progressive" establishment's standpatism that has paved the way for the Right. If progressives are to reclaim the centre, they must cut the self-created Gordian knot and shed familiar comforts. This means restoring confidence in shared futures, accommodating rising powers, honouring historical grievances, rewriting the geo-economic norms underpinning the world order, and reimagining multilateral institutions.

What the fightback must entail
Given the polycrisis engulfing us, progressives must shed their Macbeth-like fog of nostalgia, bureaucratic hesitation and technocratic chimeras. Eschewing liberal echo-chambers, progressives should mould new value-aligned partnerships with each other (especially between the Global-North and Global-South parties) and non-political stakeholders. This necessitates new institutional arrangements (like what Spain's Global Progressive Mobilisation and India's Bharat Summit promise) that allow structured dialogues between evangelical accelerators from all nations (which the Non-Alignment Movement once was). This means exerting unprecedented political will, and recalibrating operational methodologies (such as the recent Hungary, Poland and New York campaigns) to sway the silent majority more effectively than the Right. Only then can we weave multiple national visions into a global symphony, and put democracy back on track.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's collusion with the global right hurts India

GS Paper II: International Relations

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question: "India's foreign policy is increasingly witnessing a shift from strategic autonomy to ideological alignment." Critically examine. (250 Words)

Context : The recent discourse on the emergence of a "global right-wing ideological axis" highlights a significant shift in contemporary geopolitics. This analysis examines the arguments regarding the convergence of right-wing nationalist parties worldwide and the resultant implications for India's foreign policy, as discussed in recent commentary.

1. The Emergence of an "Ideological Axis"

The commentary posits that the post-2008 global financial crisis and subsequent socio-economic instabilities have fostered a "tsunami" of populist-autocratic leaders globally. This group is characterized by:

- **Networking:** The establishment of transnational platforms (e.g., International Democracy Union, Conservative Political Action Conference) that facilitate the sharing of political strategies, ideological framing, and electoral tactics.
- **Rejection of Liberal Norms:** A shared critique of the existing liberal world order, often framed as a quest for "cultural purity" or sovereignty, and a pushback against institutions that emphasize progressive or globalist agendas.
- **Diaspora Weaponization:** The strategic mobilization of diaspora communities to support political agendas in both their host nations and their home countries.

2. India's Shifting Foreign Policy Paradigm

Traditionally, India's foreign policy—rooted in Nehruvian principles of non-alignment, strategic autonomy, and non-interference—focused on state-to-state diplomacy. The critique argues that current policy, particularly under the BJP, reflects a departure toward "ideological internationalism":

- **Ideological Alignment:** The state is increasingly viewed as aligning with specific political parties or leaders abroad (e.g., interactions with the Conservative Party in the UK, the Republican Party in the US, or the Likud party in Israel) rather than maintaining the traditional, neutral stance of the Indian state.
- **Role of Affiliates:** The usage of organizational outposts (like the HSS or Overseas Friends of BJP) to influence foreign political discourse and target dissenters is cited as a significant shift in the operational methodology of Indian diplomacy.

3. Critical Implications and Costs for India

The analysis highlights several potential risks to India's national interests:

- **Diplomatic Reprisals:** The risk of becoming entangled in the domestic politics of other nations can lead to diplomatic friction, including the expulsion of intelligence officials and strained bilateral ties.
- **Diaspora Vulnerability:** The alignment of diaspora groups with specific right-wing parties can alienate other political segments, potentially making the Indian diaspora a target for hate speech, racist attacks, or visa-related restrictions.
- **Strategic Misteps:** The critique suggests that unconditional support for specific global leaders (e.g., in West Asia) may limit India's room for maneuver and contradict its historical stances, such as support for a two-state solution, thereby weakening its moral leadership of the Global South.

- **Crony Capitalism and Transparency:** Concerns are raised that personalized diplomacy may prioritize the interests of specific business conglomerates over broader national interests, compromising the transparency expected of the state.

4. Balancing Strategy and Ideology

- **Strategic Autonomy vs. Ideological Alignment:** The central tension is whether India is moving away from "Strategic Autonomy" (the ability to make decisions based on national interest without being beholden to any bloc) toward "Multi-alignment" (a pragmatic, transaction-based approach).
- **Soft Power and the Diaspora:** The Indian diaspora is historically considered a major "soft power" asset. If their political activism becomes partisan, does it enhance or diminish India's soft power? This is a critical area for debate.
- **Global South Leadership:** India's claim to lead the "Global South" requires a delicate balance between championing the concerns of developing nations (decolonization, reform of international institutions) and managing its complex relations with the "Global North."

Conclusion

The debate over India's global linkages serves as a reminder that foreign policy is not static. While governments naturally seek partnerships with leaders who share similar ideological leanings to advance national interests, the challenge lies in ensuring this does not come at the expense of India's long-term diplomatic credibility, national security, or the safety of its citizens abroad. Effective statecraft requires a synthesis—pursuing national interest through pragmatic cooperation while maintaining the principled independence that has historically defined India's place on the world stage.