

**The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC
CSE**

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Edition : International Table of Contents

<p>Page 01 Syllabus : GS II : International Relations</p>	<p>New Supreme Leader of Iran vows to keep Strait of Hormuz shut</p>
<p>Page 05 Syllabus : GS II : International Relations</p>	<p>India co-sponsors resolution passed by UNSC against Iran</p>
<p>Page 10 Syllabus : GS I & II : Social Issues and Justice / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Women's political participation in India</p>
<p>Page 11 Syllabus : GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>Electrifying industrial heat as a path to India's thermal independence</p>
<p>Page 12 Syllabus : GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam</p>	<p>CPI inflation quickens to 10-month high of 3.2% in February</p>
<p>Page 08 : Editorial Analysis Syllabus : GS III : Indian Economy</p>	<p>Economic Survey promises, impact of new labour codes</p>

Page 01 : GS II : International Relations

The geopolitical landscape of West Asia has undergone a seismic shift following the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on February 28, 2026, in a joint U.S.-Israeli strike. His son, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, has since been appointed as the new Supreme Leader. In his debut policy statement, Mojtaba Khamenei adopted a defiant stance, vowing to keep the Strait of Hormuz—a global energy artery—closed until reparations are paid and U.S. bases in the region are dismantled. This escalation marks a transition from a decades-long "shadow war" to a direct, high-stakes military and economic confrontation.

Key Highlights of the Statement

Strait of Hormuz as Leverage: The new leader confirmed that blocking the Strait is a deliberate strategic tool to exact "material reparations" for war losses.

Ultimatum to Regional Powers: He demanded that neighboring Arab countries shut down U.S. military bases, questioning the security guarantees provided by Washington.

Three Conditions for Peace: President Masoud Pezeshkian echoed this hardline stance, setting three prerequisites for ending the conflict:

Recognition of Iran's legitimate rights (including nuclear enrichment).

Payment of reparations for material and human losses.

Firm guarantees against future foreign aggression.

Expansion of War Fronts: Threats were made to open "additional fronts" in areas where the U.S. and Israel have "negligible experience," hinting at asymmetric or cyber warfare.

Geopolitical & Economic Implications

Global Energy Security

The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil chokepoint.

Volume: Approximately 20% to 34% of global oil consumption passes through this narrow waterway.

Impact: A prolonged closure has already seen maritime traffic drop to single digits. Global oil prices have spiked, threatening to trigger a worldwide inflationary cycle and "market catastrophe" as warned by energy majors like Aramco.

Shift in Iranian Internal Dynamics

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New Supreme Leader of Iran vows to keep Strait of Hormuz shut

Stanly Johny

In his first public comments since becoming Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei on Thursday asked neighbouring Arab countries to shut U.S. bases "as soon as possible", demanded reparations for the material losses during the war, and vowed to keep the Strait of Hormuz "closed".

"We will exact reparations from the enemy, and if it refuses, we will seize from its assets as much as we deem necessary and if that too proves impossible, we will destroy an equivalent portion of its assets," Mr. Khamenei said. His father, the former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was assassinated in an Israeli-U.S. strike on February 28.

Pledging to avenge "the blood of the martyrs", Mr. Khamenei said the "effective and regret-inducing defence" by Iranian forces would continue. "Furthermore, the leverage of blocking the Strait of Hormuz must certainly continue to be used," he said.

3 conditions to end war Earlier in the day, President Masoud Pezeshkian set three conditions for ending the war. "The only way to end this war – ignited by the Zionist regime and U.S. – is recognising Iran's legitimate rights, payment of reparations, and firm guarantees against future aggression," the President said.

The number of ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the critical maritime choke point connecting the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea through which roughly 20% to 34% of world's oil passes through, has come down to single digits in recent days as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has targeted cargo vessels in the Gulf waters. There were also reports that the Strait is being mined by the Guards.



Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei

"The countries of the region must clarify their stance regarding the aggressors against our dear homeland and the killers of our people," Mr. Khamenei, who is yet to make a public appearance since his appointment as the country's top leader, said, referring to Persian Gulf monarchies who were targeted by Iranian missiles and drones since the war began. "I recommend that they shut down those bases as soon as possible; for they must surely have realised by now that America's claim of establishing security and peace has been nothing but a lie."

Mr. Khamenei, according to Iranian officials, was injured in the February 28 strike, but is "safe and sound". The 56-year-old cleric thanked Iran's non-state allies such as Hezbollah, and said additional fronts would be opened "in areas where the enemy has negligible experience" if the "state of war persists".

'Legitimate right' During nuclear talks ahead of the war, Iran had consistently argued that as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), nuclear enrichment is "a legitimate right". This was also the first time a senior Iranian leader called for reparations as a condition to end the war.

Since the war began on February 28, Iran has maintained that it would not talk to the U.S. and accept a ceasefire.

THREATS EXCHANGED
 » PAGE 14

The appointment of Mojtaba Khamenei marks the first time since the 1979 Revolution that the Supreme Leadership has passed from father to son. This transition from a purely clerical meritocracy to a perceived dynastic system may invite internal domestic scrutiny and affect the regime's long-term legitimacy.

Regional Power Realignment

By targeting U.S. bases in Arab monarchies, Iran is forcing regional players (like Saudi Arabia and the UAE) to choose between their security alliances with the West and regional stability. This complicates the Abraham Accords and recent China-mediated rapprochements.

Related Static Section

1. Geography: The Strait of Hormuz

Location: Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

Bordering Nations: Iran to the north and the Musandam enclave of Oman and the UAE to the south.

Strategic Narrowness: At its narrowest, the shipping lanes are only about 2 miles (3 km) wide, making it highly vulnerable to mining and coastal artillery.

2. International Relations: The Office of Supreme Leader

Constitutional Role: Under the principle of Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist), the Supreme Leader is the highest political and religious authority in Iran.

Powers: Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, controls the IRGC, appoints the head of the judiciary, and half of the Guardian Council.

3. Impact on India

Energy Security: India imports over 80% of its crude oil. Any disruption in the Persian Gulf directly impacts India's Current Account Deficit (CAD) and fuel prices.

Strategic Ties: India has maintained a delicate balance between Iran (Chabahar Port) and the U.S.-Israel-UAE (I2U2) grouping.

Recent Update: Diplomatic efforts by India have recently secured "safe passage" for India-flagged tankers following talks between EAM S. Jaishankar and his Iranian counterpart, highlighting India's strategic autonomy.

Conclusion

The rise of Mojtaba Khamenei amidst an active war signals a period of "Ideological Continuity with Tactical Aggression." For the international community, the primary challenge is preventing a total collapse of global energy supply chains while navigating a

leadership in Tehran that views economic leverage as a legitimate weapon of war. For India, the situation demands proactive "maritime diplomacy" to safeguard its energy interests and the safety of its large diaspora in the Gulf.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: The evolving conflict between Iran and the U.S.-Israel axis represents a shift from proxy warfare to direct confrontation. Analyse the geopolitical consequences of this shift for West Asian stability and India's strategic interests. **(150 Words)**

Page 05 : GS II : International Relations

In a departure from its traditional "strategic autonomy" and balancing act, India has co-sponsored a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution condemning the Islamic Republic of Iran. The resolution, backed by 134 countries and passed with 13 votes in favor (Russia and China abstaining), demands an "immediate cessation" of Iranian attacks on GCC nations and interference in the Strait of Hormuz. This move highlights India's evolving priorities, placing the safety of its 10 million-strong diaspora and energy security above its historical ties with Tehran.

India co-sponsors resolution passed by UNSC against Iran

The resolution demands the 'immediate cessation of all attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran' on GCC countries; India prioritises the safety of 'all civilians', says Ministry in wake of criticism over unbalanced responses on conflict in West Asia

Subhasini Haidar
 NEW DELHI

India has prioritised the safety of "all civilians", the government said on Wednesday in an effort to deflect criticism that it had only condemned Iran's actions, and not those by the U.S. and Israel in the ongoing war in West Asia.

On Wednesday, India co-sponsored a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) resolution at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) along with 134 countries that demanded the "immediate cessation of all attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran" against GCC countries Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan. The resolution was passed with 13 UNSC members voting in favour while Russia and China abstained.

It condemned "any actions or threats by the Islamic Republic of Iran aimed at closing, obstructing, or otherwise interfering with international navigation through the Strait of Hormuz".

"The resolution reflects



several of our positions," said Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal at a weekly press briefing on Thursday.

"We have a large diaspora in the GCC countries, and their well-being and welfare are of utmost importance. The Gulf is also very important for our energy security needs," Mr. Jaiswal added, in references to about 10 million Indians who live and work in West Asia, and India's energy purchases from the region that make up about 50% of its crude oil and 90% of its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imports.

In contrast, there are about 9,000 Indians in Iran and India has discontinued its energy imports from Iran since 2019, under threat of U.S. sanc-



tions. The Indian support for the UNSC resolution comes on the heels of a number of statements by the Ministry condemning specific Iranian actions such as the attacks on various countries across the West Asian region, buildings in Dubai, Omani facilities and a Thai ship bound for India.

U.S.-Israeli actions

However, India has not similarly condemned the attacks by the U.S. and Israel on Iran, in which an estimated 1,255 people have been killed, including Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, his family and advisors; the sinking of Iranian ship *IRIS Dena* in the Indian Ocean that had been hosted for exercises by India; or the

bombing of a school in Mubin in which 150 schoolgirls are believed to have been killed. Nor has India or the GCC-led resolution spoken about Israel's strikes on Lebanon, where the government said more than 630 people have been killed, and 8,00,000 displaced from their homes.

To a question from *The Hindu* about the seemingly unbalanced responses, Mr. Jaiswal said that the MEA had issued statements, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had made *suo motu* statements in both Houses of Parliament that regretted the loss of lives.

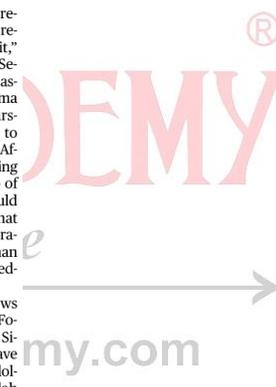
"As far as the question of the schoolchildren is concerned... we have issued several statements on the ongoing conflict. We have underlined the need for prioritising the safety of all civilians. We regret the precious lives lost, and express our grief in that regard," Mr. Jaiswal said.

In the past few days, India's "silence" on U.S. and Israeli actions has come in for criticism from a number of senior former diplomats speaking to the media and at various public events.

"Diplomacy should recognise complexity, not reduce it to a single culprit," former Indian Foreign Secretary and former Ambassador to the U.S. Nirupama Menon Rao said on Thursday in a post referring to the Ministry of External Affairs statement, suggesting that India's sponsorship of the UN resolution would "endorse a narrative that begins the story with Iranian retaliation rather than the escalation that preceded it".

In an interview to news agency ANI, former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal said India should have issued a statement condoling the death of Ayatollah Khamenei "to recognise that the head of state contrary to norms of international law has been politically assassinated".

Speaking about the March 4 submarine torpedo attack that sank the *IRIS Dena* "very close to India shores", former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said that India must assert itself in the face of U.S. actions. "Tactical subterfuge can easily result in strategic irrelevance," he added.



Core Drivers of India's Policy Shift

The "Diaspora First" Approach

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) explicitly cited the welfare of 10 million Indian citizens living in GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Jordan) as the primary reason for this stance. Any regional escalation directly threatens the livelihoods and safety of this massive expatriate community.

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Energy Security Realities

India's energy dependency has shifted drastically in the last decade:

GCC Importance: Accounts for 50% of crude oil and 90% of LPG imports.

Iran Diminishment: India has imported zero oil from Iran since 2019 due to U.S. sanctions.

Maritime Stability: As a net security provider in the Indian Ocean, India cannot overlook the mining or closing of the Strait of Hormuz, which would cripple the Indian economy.

Specific Provocations

India's condemnation follows several direct hits to its interests:

The targeting of a Thai ship bound for India.

Attacks on infrastructure in Dubai and Oman (key Indian hubs).

The sinking of the Iranian ship IRIS Dena near Indian shores, which raised maritime security alarms.

The "Balance" Debate: Criticism and Response

The Charge of "Unbalanced Response"

Critics, including former Foreign Secretaries, argue that India's silence on U.S.-Israeli actions is conspicuous:

Assassination of a Head of State: No formal condolence for Ayatollah Khamenei.

Collateral Damage: 1,255 Iranians killed and a school bombing in Mubin (150 girls killed) have not received specific condemnations.

Strategic Risk: Critics like Shyam Saran warn that "tactical subservience" to the U.S. might lead to "strategic irrelevance."

The Government's Defense

The MEA maintains that its position is rooted in International Humanitarian Law:

Prioritizing the "safety of all civilians" (not just one side).

Expressing "regret" for the loss of life via suo motu statements in Parliament rather than targeted condemnations.

Related Static Section

1. India-GCC Relations

Institutional Framework: India and the GCC have a Framework Agreement on Economic Cooperation.

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Remittances: The Gulf region is the largest source of inward

remittances for India (crucial for Forex reserves).

2. India-Iran Relations (The "Chabahar" Factor)

Chabahar Port: India's gateway to Central Asia (bypassing Pakistan).

INSTC: The International North-South Transport Corridor.

Challenge: Balancing the UNSC vote with the long-term strategic investment in Chabahar remains a diplomatic tightrope.

3. International Law & UNSC

Chapter VII Powers: The UNSC can authorize sanctions or force if a "threat to peace" is identified.

Principle of Non-Intervention: Often cited by Russia/China (the abstainers) to oppose resolutions targeting specific regimes.

Conclusion

India's decision to co-sponsor the resolution marks a "Realpolitik" turn in its West Asia policy. By siding with the GCC and the West against Iranian maritime disruptions, New Delhi has signaled that maritime commerce and diaspora safety are non-negotiable red lines. However, the challenge ahead lies in ensuring that this "tilt" does not permanently alienate Iran, which remains essential for India's connectivity dreams in Eurasia and its influence in Afghanistan.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: India's decision to co-sponsor a UN Security Council resolution condemning Iran marks a shift from its traditional policy of strategic autonomy. Critically examine the factors behind this shift and its implications for India's West Asia policy. **(150 Words)**

Page 10 : GS I & II : Social Issues and Justice / Prelims Exam

Over the last six decades, India has witnessed a "Silent Revolution" in its electoral demographics. Women, once a lagging voter segment, have now achieved near-parity with men in voter turnout. However, this electoral inclusion has not yet translated into structural equality. While the 2024 General Elections continued the trend of high female turnout, women's representation in the Lok Sabha remains stagnant at around 14%, highlighting a significant gap between participation as voters and participation as representatives.

Women's political participation in India

While the turnout of women voters has increased over the years, campaign participation still shows a clear gender gap. The disparity in Parliamentary representation also remains wide, reflecting limited candidature, party nominations, and constraints on political autonomy.

FULL CONTEXT

Sanjay Kumar
Vibha Mittal

The story so far:

Women's relationship with electoral politics has undergone a profound transformation over the past six decades. Women today vote in numbers nearly equal to men, and in several State elections, even surpass them. Yet this remarkable rise in participation has not translated proportionately into representation or power. The Indian case presents a striking paradox: electoral inclusion without structural equality.

Women as voters

In the decades after Independence, electoral participation showed clear gender disparities. Although women were formally included in the electoral process, their turnout remained significantly lower than that of men. In the 1967 Lok Sabha election, male turnout was 66.7 percent while female turnout was 55.5 percent—a gap of 11.2 percentage points (Chart 1). Similar disparities continued into the 1970s. In 1971, the gap widened slightly to 11.8 points. These patterns reflected structural constraints such as lower female literacy, restricted mobility, domestic responsibilities, and limited political outreach to women.

From the 1980s onward, the gap began to narrow steadily. By 2009 it had fallen to 4.4 percentage points. The most notable shift came in the last decade: in 2014 the gap dropped to 1.5 points, and in both 2019 and 2024 women voted at nearly the same rate as men.

A similar trend is evident in State Assembly elections between 1990 and 2025 (Chart 2). In the early 1990s, women's voter turnout was on average 4.5 percentage points lower than that of men. This gender gap narrowed steadily through the 2000s, falling to 1.8 percentage points during the 2005-07 elections and to -1 percentage point by 2008-10.

After 2011, the pattern reversed. Women began voting at slightly higher rates than men, with the average turnout gap turning positive at 1.13 percentage points during 2011-13 and widening to 2.82 percentage points in 2015-16. Although the margin moderated in subsequent years, it remained positive at 1.5 percentage points during 2020-25. Overall, the average gender turnout gap in State Assembly elections from 1990 to 2025 shows a clear long-term convergence, followed by a modest but sustained advantage in women's voter participation.

Electoral participation beyond voting
While voter turnout has approached parity, campaign-level participation continues to show a clear gender gap (Table 3). Across Lok Sabha elections from 2009 to 2024, men consistently report higher involvement in public political activities.

Women's participation in campaign activities has been gradually increasing, though a clear gender gap persists. Attendance at election meetings and rallies rose from 9 percent in 2009 to around 16 percent in recent elections, while men's participation has remained roughly double.

Similar patterns are visible in processions and door-to-door canvassing, where women's involvement increased

Winds of change

The data for the charts were sourced from the Women and Politics study conducted by Lokniti-CSDS

Chart 1: The year-wise difference between male and female voter turnout between 1967 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections

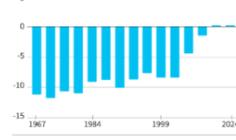


Chart 2: Average gender gap in State Assembly elections between 1990 and 2025

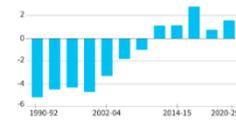


Table 3: Gender-wise participation in political activities over the years

Campaign Activity	2009		2014		2019		2024	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Election meetings/rallies	9%	26%	15%	34%	14%	29%	16%	31%
Participation in processions	5%	20%	6%	15%	8%	14%	11%	18%
Participation in door to door canvassing	6%	17%	6%	14%	7%	13%	11%	19%

from about 5-6 percent to 11 percent, yet still lagged behind men. These trends suggest that while women are becoming more visible in public political activities, but they have limited engagement in electoral campaigns.

A key factor limiting women's public political engagement is the need for family permission. The Lokniti-CSDS Survey on Women and Politics, conducted in 2019, shows that most women report requiring approval for activities such as attending rallies, candidate meetings, or campaigning. These constraints highlight that gender gaps in visible political participation are shaped not only by interest or capability but also by social and familial norms (Table 4).

From participation to representation
If women have achieved parity as voters, representation in Parliament tells a different story.

In the first Lok Sabha in 1952, only 22 women were elected. For decades, women's representation fluctuated at modest levels. Even in 1977, the number dropped to 19. A visible shift began only in the 21st century. The number of women MPs rose from 59 in 2009 to 62 in 2014, and then to a historic high of 78 in 2019, before declining slightly to 74 in 2024 (Chart 5).

Yet even at its peak, women constituted only about 14 percent of the Lok Sabha—far below their near 50 percent share of the electorate.

The nomination bottleneck
The representational gap becomes clearer when examining candidature. In 1957, only 45 women contested parliamentary



Table 4: The share of who said they needed permission to participate in select political activities (in %)

Activity	Need Permission Yes (%)
Attend a political rally	64
Attend a candidate meeting	62
Join a protest	63
Campaign for a candidate or party	61

Chart 5: Year-wise number of women MPs elected to the Lok Sabha

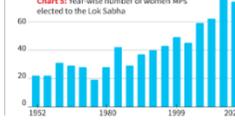


Chart 6: Gender-wise number of candidates in Lok Sabha elections

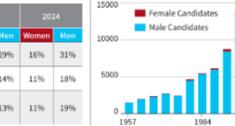


Chart 7: Success rate of male and female candidates in Lok Sabha elections (in %)

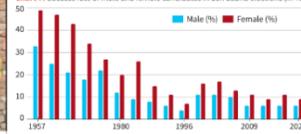


Chart 8: How women perceive having the same political views as their families (in %)



Table 9: The share of women who agree with the following statements about structural barriers (in %)

Statement	Agree (%)
Easier for women with a political background to enter politics	58
Easier for women from upper economic status to join politics compared to a woman from lower economic status	57
Parties routinely favour men over women, regardless of candidate merit	44
Voters are more likely to vote for men than women	44

Table 10: The reasons women are prevented from joining politics according to the surveyed women (in %)

Patriarchal structure	22
Household responsibilities	13
Individual barriers	13
Cultural norms	7
Financial or structural constraints	6
Negative image of politics	3
Other barriers	1

Table 10: The reasons women are prevented from joining politics according to the surveyed women (in %)

THE GIST

Post independence, electoral participation showed clear gender disparities. Although women were formally included in the electoral process, their turnout remained lower than that of men. From the 1980s onward, the gap began to narrow.

While voter turnout has approached parity, campaign-level participation continues to show a gender gap. Across Lok Sabha elections from 2009 to 2024, men report higher involvement in public political activities.

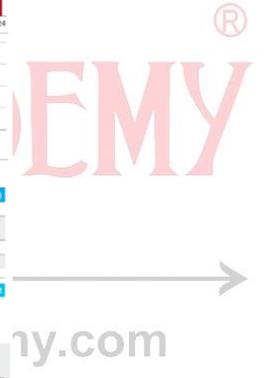
Representational gap in Parliament and State legislatures is prominent. Beyond family and social constraints, women also face systemic obstacles, with many perceiving that political opportunities are not equally accessible.

Beyond family and social constraints, women also face systemic obstacles within political institutions. Many perceive that political opportunities are not equally accessible. Data from the Lokniti-CSDS study on women and politics show that 58 percent of women believe it is easier for a woman from a political family to enter politics, while 57 percent feel that women from higher economic backgrounds have an advantage. Nearly half (44 percent) think that political parties prefer men when allocating tickets, and a similar proportion believe that voters favour male candidates over female (Table 9).

Structural and social barriers
When asked about the broader challenges that shape women's political participation, women pointed to a range of structural and social factors. Patriarchal structures are the biggest obstacle, cited by 22 percent of women, followed by household responsibilities (13 percent) and individual-level constraints such as lack of confidence, awareness or experience (12 percent). Cultural norms (7 percent) and financial or structural constraints (6 percent) were also reported (Table 10).

While women now vote at near parity, true power and representation remain limited. The passage of the Women's Reservation Bill provides a structural path to bridge this gap, but the challenge remains to ensure that women's participation translates into real authority and decision-making.

(Sanjay Kumar is a Professor and Political Analyst. Vibha Mittal is a Researcher working with Lokniti-CSDS. Views expressed by the authors are personal.)



The Evolution of the Woman Voter

The Closing Turnout Gap

Historical Context: In 1967, the gender gap in voter turnout was 11.2 percentage points.

The Convergence: By 2014, this gap shrunk to 1.5 points. In 2019 and 2024, turnout reached near-parity.

State Assembly Trends: In many states, women now outvote men. Between 2011 and 2013, the average turnout gap reversed to +1.13 percentage points in favor of women, sustaining a positive margin of 1.6 points through 2025.

Beyond the Ballot Box: Campaign Participation

While voting is reaching parity, "active" political engagement remains male-dominated:

Rallies and Meetings: Only 16% of women attend election meetings, compared to roughly 32% of men.

Canvassing: Involvement in door-to-door campaigning for women stands at 11%, showing an upward trend but still lagging behind men.

The "Permission" Barrier: A key takeaway from the 2019 Lokniti survey is that most women still require family approval to participate in public political activities, reflecting deep-seated social norms.

The Representation Gap: A Statistical Reality

The Nomination Bottleneck

Political parties often cite "electability" as a reason for not fielding women. However, the data contradicts this:

Candidature: In 2024, only 800 women contested out of thousands of candidates.

Success Rates: In 2024, the success rate for women was 9%, while for men it was 6%. This trend has been consistent since 1957, proving that women candidates are statistically more electable than their male counterparts.

Current Representation (18th Lok Sabha)

Total Women MPs: 74 (down from 78 in 2019).

Percentage: ~14% of the House.

Global Context: This is significantly lower than the global average and far behind countries that have implemented legislative quotas.

Barriers to Political Autonomy

The analysis identifies several "glass ceilings" preventing women from entering the political mainstream:

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Patriarchal Structures: Cited by 22% of women as the primary

obstacle.

Domestic Burden: Household responsibilities (13%) and lack of confidence/awareness (12%) limit active participation.

The "Dynasty" Entry: 58% of women believe it is easier for women from political families to enter the fray, suggesting that the "average" woman faces higher entry barriers.

Lack of Independent Choice: Only 50% of women reported voting without seeking advice from family members in 2024.

Related Static Section

1. Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (128th Constitutional Amendment Act)

Provision: Reserves 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Status: Passed in 2023; implementation is tied to the next census and subsequent delimitation exercise.

2. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

73rd and 74th Amendments: Mandated 33% reservation for women at the local body level.

Impact: Currently, over 20 states have increased this to 50% reservation, creating a pipeline of over 1.4 million women leaders at the grassroots.

3. Constitutional Provisions

Article 15: Prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex.

Article 325 & 326: Guarantees equal rights to be included in electoral rolls and Universal Adult Suffrage.

Conclusion

The "feminization" of the Indian electorate is a landmark achievement for democracy, but it remains incomplete. The shift from being a "silent voter" to a "decisive legislator" requires more than just high turnout; it necessitates a cultural shift within political parties and the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill. Until parties move beyond treating women as a "voter bank" and start viewing them as "policy makers," the structural gap in Indian politics will persist.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Which of the following Constitutional provisions guarantee equality and political participation for women in India?

1. Article 15 of the Constitution of India
2. Article 325 of the Constitution of India
3. Article 326 of the Constitution of India

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Women's participation in Indian democracy has evolved from being "silent voters to influential electoral actors. Examine this transformation and its implications for Indian politics. **(150 words)**

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Page 11 : GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam

The 2026 West Asian crisis—triggered by the assassination of Iran’s Supreme Leader and the subsequent blockade of the Strait of Hormuz—has exposed a critical vulnerability in India’s industrial backbone. With India importing nearly 50% of its natural gas, the resulting supply shocks have paralyzed key industrial hubs like Morbi (Ceramics) and Ludhiana (Textiles). This crisis has transformed "thermal independence" from a climate goal into a national security imperative, pushing India to accelerate the electrification of industrial heat and the adoption of Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST) technologies.



Mammoth task: Industrial heat currently accounts for around 25 percent of India's total energy consumption and shifting that load from gas pipes to electric wires would be an engineering challenge. REUTERS

Electrifying industrial heat as a path to India's thermal independence

As the conflict between the United States and Iran intensifies, the Strait of Hormuz has become increasingly volatile; with India importing nearly half of its natural gas, the crisis signals the urgency of accelerating the electrification of industrial heat

Vasudevan Mukundh

In the industrial town of Morbi in Gujarat, the air usually hums with the roar of gas-fired kilns producing millions of square metres of ceramic tiles. Today, however, a quarter of those kilns are cold. Nearly a thousand kilometres away in Ludhiana, Punjab, the textile hubs that clothe a third of India are facing a similar paralysis. The reason is geopolitical.

As the conflict between the U.S. and Iran intensifies, the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most vital oil and gas artery, has turned into a gauntlet. India imports nearly half of its natural gas and immediately felt the pinch – rendered more painful by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, slashing gas allocations to non-priority industrial sectors to just 65-80% of their contracted volumes.

The need for thermal independence
For the manufacturers in Morbi and Ludhiana who began experimenting with new energy models years ago, the present crisis must be a moment of validation as they accelerate towards concentrated solar thermal (CST) technology and the large-scale electrification of heat. For others, however, it can seem like an ultimatum to fast-track decarbonisation and, for India overall, a reminder that it needs thermal independence, i.e. a 'sovereign' source of heat, rather than just energy independence.

For decades, industrial heat has been synonymous with burning hydrocarbons like coal or gas. In Ludhiana's textile mills, for instance, large boilers burn gas to create steam used in dyeing and finishing. In Morbi, gas flames bake tiles at temperatures exceeding 1,000 °C.

Roof-top photovoltaic panels have become common but they are designed to produce electricity, not the raw, intense heat that industries demand, so this is

where CST has become relevant. While photovoltaics use semiconductors to convert renewable sunlight into a stream of electrons, CST uses precisely controlled mirrors to concentrate sunlight onto a receiver, where it heats a fluid like water or molten salt to up to 400 °C.

Most textile processes, including scouring and bleaching, require a temperature between 100 °C and 180 °C. By installing parabolic troughs on factory grounds or nearby land, these mills can generate pressurised steam directly from sunlight.

According to data from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, India has a CST potential of 15 GW. Adoption, however, remains low – but as gas prices have already tripled due to the war in West Asia, the payback period for a CST installation has already shrunk from seven years to less than three.

For more than a century, people at homes, engineers in laboratories, and industrial operators have burnt fuel to create hot air, then transfer that heat to a product even though it is highly inefficient. For instance, a gas boiler loses 20-30 percent of its energy just in the exhaust. The electrification of heat, on the other hand, replaces the flame with electromagnetic fields and plasma. For example, an induction stove passes an electric current through a coil, creating a magnetic field that generates heat directly inside the metal or in the material being processed. There is no intermediary substance like air or steam that takes away a part of the heat, so the efficiency rates of such heaters have been known to exceed 90 percent.

In Morbi, several forward-thinking ceramic units are also experimenting with plasma torches for their kilns. Here, gas is ionised to a state called plasma. Plasma torches also allow users to closely control their temperature, thus preventing under- or over-heating for different processes.

Infrastructural challenges

The bigger question, however, is whether India's grid is ready. If every factory in Ludhiana and Morbi switched to induction and plasma heating tomorrow, the power grid would likely collapse. This is because industrial heat currently accounts for around 25 percent of India's total energy consumption and shifting that load from gas pipes to electric wires would be an engineering challenge.

Most factories operate on a 24/7 cycle whereas solar and wind energy are intermittent, so in order to electrify heat for industry, India needs round-the-clock renewable power, which entails a large rollout of battery energy storage systems and pumped hydro storage. At present, India's storage capacity is in its infancy and without it, the grid is not in a position to sustain the large 'spikes' of energy that heavy industrial induction furnaces demand.

Second, local power grids in industrial clusters like Ludhiana are often ageing. High-capacity induction heating requires high-voltage substations and reinforced cabling for last mile supply. Asset loading reports from DISCOMs (electricity distribution companies) in industrial clusters suggest that roughly a quarter to a third of distribution transformers can be critically loaded during peak hours, with little headroom for additional demand.

These constraints accentuate CST's advantage, especially as a source of heat that does not depend on the grid. By generating thermal energy on-site and storing it in insulated tanks, a factory can continue operating even at night without drawing a single watt from the national grid. Thermal storage is also much cheaper than lithium-ion battery storage.

To survive the LPG crisis and complete the transition to electrified heat, India needs a 'National Thermal Policy'. Its current subsidies focus heavily on electricity (photovoltaics in particular)

whereas there are few incentives for direct-heat technologies like CST. The government should consider providing the same production-linked incentives to CST mirror manufacturers that it gave to solar cell manufacturers. India also needs to reform the carbon market to allow factories in Morbi, say, to sell their 'avoided emissions' through the nascent Carbon Credit Trading Scheme and use the revenue to offset the high capital cost of electric kilns.

Global policy lessons

Industries can also benefit from hybrid solutions given the inherent advantages of being able to modernise without junking their existing infrastructure first. For example, a CST system can operate during the day, a small gas-based backup system can support peak loads, and induction coils can provide heat for precision processes. The 'Mirah' project in Oman offers a useful example: engineers integrated one of the world's largest concentrated solar thermal plants with an existing gas-fired industrial operation. Thus, solar energy generates steam in daytime, reducing gas consumption by nearly 80%, while the gas boilers were on standby, and for nighttime use.

The 'Solar Heat for Industrial Processes' initiatives in Spain have allowed the company Solatom to develop plug-and-play solar thermal units, pre-assembled, containerised mirror arrays that a factory can install on a roof or a small parking lot and connect directly to its existing steam network. Denmark reformed its energy market to support 'heat purchase agreements', whereby an external provider installs and maintains a CST or induction system and the factory simply buys the heat at a fixed rate, typically cheaper than gas. Such solutions substantially lower the engineering costs for new adopters.

The Core Problem: The Industrial Heat Burden

Industrial heat accounts for 25% of India's total energy consumption. Traditionally, this heat is generated by burning coal or gas to create steam or hot air—a process that is highly inefficient, losing 20-30% of energy through exhaust.

The Gas Pinch: Non-priority sectors (like ceramics and textiles) have seen gas allocations slashed to 65-80% of contracted volumes.

Economic Impact: Gas prices have tripled, making traditional manufacturing unviable and shrinking the payback period for renewable alternatives from seven years to under three.

Technological Pathways to Thermal Independence

1. Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST)

Unlike Solar Photovoltaics (PV) which produce electricity, CST uses mirrors to focus sunlight to heat fluids (water/molten salt) up to 400°C.

Application: Ideal for textile processes like scouring and bleaching (100°C–180°C).

Benefit: CST generates heat on-site and can store it in insulated tanks (Thermal Storage), which is significantly cheaper than lithium-ion batteries.

Potential: India has a CST potential of 15 GW, though adoption is currently low.

2. Electrification: Induction and Plasma

Moving from gas flames to electromagnetic fields.

Induction Heating: Uses magnetic fields to generate heat directly inside the material, reaching efficiencies over 90%.

Plasma Torches: Ionizes gas to create intense, controllable heat (above 1,000°C), perfect for ceramic kilns in Morbi.

Infrastructural and Policy Challenges

Grid Constraints

The Load Shift: Shifting 25% of energy demand from gas pipes to electric wires could collapse the current grid.

Intermittency: Factories run 24/7, but solar/wind are intermittent. This requires massive investment in Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Pumped Hydro.

Last-Mile Issues: Distribution transformers in industrial clusters are already 25-33% critically loaded during peak hours.

The Need for a 'National Thermal Policy'

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Daily News Analysis

To facilitate this transition, the analysis suggests:

Production-Linked Incentives (PLI): For CST mirror and induction equipment manufacturers.

Carbon Credit Trading: Allowing factories to monetize "avoided emissions" to offset the high capital cost of electric kilns.

Heat Purchase Agreements (HPA): Adopting the Danish model where third parties install the tech and factories pay for the heat, reducing initial engineering costs.

Related Static Section

1. Geography & Economy: Industrial Clusters

Morbi (Gujarat): One of the world's largest ceramic clusters; highly dependent on imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).

Ludhiana (Punjab): The "Manchester of India," critical for the hosiery and textile industry.

2. Renewable Energy Initiatives

National Green Hydrogen Mission: Aims to decarbonize heavy industry.

PM-KUSUM: While focused on agriculture, it provides a template for decentralized solar adoption.

Energy Chokepoints: The **Strait of Hormuz** is a primary maritime chokepoint. Any disruption affects India's **Current Account Deficit (CAD)** and fiscal health.

3. Science & Technology: CST vs. PV

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Feature	Solar Photovoltaic (PV)	Concentrated Solar Thermal (CST)
Output	Electricity (Electrons)	Heat (Thermal Energy)
Storage	Chemical (Batteries - Expensive)	Thermal (Molten Salt/Water - Cheaper)
Best Use	Lighting, Electronics, Motors	Industrial Boilers, Furnaces, Kilns

Conclusion

India's path to thermal independence lies in a hybrid approach. By integrating CST for daytime steam generation, plasma/induction for high-precision heat, and maintaining a small gas backup for peak loads, India can decouple its industry from West Asian volatility. As the "Miraah" project in Oman and "Solatom" in Spain demonstrate, the technology exists; India now requires the policy framework to ensure that its industrial heartland does not go cold when the Strait of Hormuz closes.

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UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: The National Green Hydrogen Mission primarily aims to:

- A. Replace fossil fuels in household cooking
- B. Promote hydrogen as a clean fuel for industry and transport
- C. Replace solar energy in electricity generation
- D. Develop nuclear energy technology

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: "The future of India's industrial competitiveness will depend on its ability to achieve thermal independence." Critically analyse. **(250 Words)**

Page : 12 : GS III : Indian Economy / Prelims Exam

India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) based retail inflation rose to a 10-month high of 3.2% in February 2026. While this figure remains within the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) comfort zone, the upward trajectory is a cause for concern. The surge is primarily attributed to a sharp uptick in Food and Beverages (F&B) and a massive spike in precious metals, exacerbated by the ongoing geopolitical instability in West Asia.

Key Trends in February 2026 Inflation

The Food & Beverage (F&B) Surge

The F&B segment was the primary driver of the headline inflation increase.

Momentum: Inflation in this category jumped from 2.1% in January to 3.35% in February.

Impact: It accounted for 44 out of the 47 basis points (bps) of the total rise in headline inflation between the two months.

The Gold and Silver Factor

One of the most striking anomalies in the new CPI series is the high inflation in the 'Personal care, social protection and miscellaneous' category.

Rate: This category recorded a staggering 19.6% inflation.

Reason: This is almost entirely driven by the "relentless increase" in global prices of Gold and Silver, as investors flock to safe-haven assets amidst the U.S.-Iran conflict.

Core Inflation Stability

Despite the headline rise, Core Inflation (which excludes volatile F&B and Fuel/Light) remained steady at 3.4%. This suggests that demand-pull inflation in the broader economy is currently stable, and the current pressure is largely supply-side and commodity-driven.

Impact of the West Asia Crisis

Economists warn of a "second-round effect" in March 2026 due to the Strait of Hormuz blockade:

Fuel & Power: Anticipated spikes in electricity and gas prices as LNG imports are disrupted.

CPI inflation quickens to 10-month high of 3.2% in February

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Retail inflation in India quickened to a 10-month high of 3.2% in February 2026, driven up by inflation in the food and tobacco categories, the latest data shows.

The Consumer Price Index data released on Thursday by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation is the second edition of the new series of the Index, and so category-wise historical data is not yet available.

However, the new series allows for a calculation of the headline inflation numbers from February 2021. Data show CPI inflation was last higher in April 2025, when it was 3.3%.

Economists, however, warn that the ongoing disruption in fuel supplies due to the conflict in West Asia would likely push up inflation in March in the electricity, gas and other fuels, and restaurant and accommodation categories of the CPI.

"As expected, the uptick was almost entirely led by the food and beverages (F&B) segment, which accounted for as much as 44 basis points of the 47 basis points rise in the headline print between these months [January and February]," Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA said.

She added that core inflation, which excludes F&B and electricity, gas & other fuels remained unchanged at 3.4% between

'As expected, the uptick was almost entirely led by the food and beverages segment'

January and February 2026.

Inflation in the food and beverages category stood at 3.35% in February, up from 2.1% in January. The other category to see markedly higher inflation was 'pan, tobacco and intoxicants', which saw inflation quicken to 3.5% in February from 2.9% in January.

Notably, the new series also shows that inflation in the 'personal care, social protection and miscellaneous goods and services' has remained above 19% in both January and February, largely driven by the higher prices of precious metals.

That is, inflation in this category quickened to 19.6% in February from 19.02% in January.

West Asia crisis impact

"The main upward thrust comes from the personal care segment where inflation was 19.6%," Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist at the Bank of Baroda said. "The relentless increase in prices of silver and gold has contributed to this increase."

This will be a factor that will continue to exert pressure in March, too, given the global uncertainty, he added, saying that the rupee depreciation would also add to this.

Currency Depreciation: The weakening Rupee against the Dollar is making imports (including crude and edible oils) costlier, leading to Imported Inflation.

Service Sector: High input costs are expected to leak into "Restaurant and Accommodation" pricing.

Related Static Section

1. Basics of CPI (Consumer Price Index)

Released by: National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

Base Year: The 2026 data refers to a new series (the second edition), allowing for more accurate tracking of modern consumption patterns.

Components: Food and beverages carry the highest weightage (~45% in the rural basket and slightly lower in urban).

2. Monetary Policy Framework

Inflation Targeting: Under the RBI Act, the central bank is mandated to maintain CPI at 4%, with an upper tolerance of 6% and a lower limit of 2%.

Current Stance: With inflation at 3.2%, the RBI currently has "policy space" to keep interest rates stable, but the rising trend might lead to a shift from an 'accommodative' to a 'neutral' stance in the next MPC meeting.

3. Types of Inflation

Headline Inflation: The total inflation within an economy, including commodities such as food and energy prices.

Core Inflation: Headline inflation minus the volatile components (Food and Fuel). It reflects the underlying long-term inflation trend.

Conclusion

The rise to a 3.2% inflation rate in February 2026 serves as a "warning bell" for the Indian economy. While the number itself is technically low, the drivers—food and precious metals—are highly sensitive to global geopolitical shocks. For India, the challenge in the coming months will be managing supply-chain resilience and currency stability to ensure that the West Asian conflict does not translate into a cost-of-living crisis for the common man.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), consider the following statements:

1. It is released by the National Statistical Office.
2. Food and beverages carry the highest weightage in the CPI basket.
3. It is used by the Reserve Bank of India as the primary indicator for inflation targeting.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

(150 words)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Explain the difference between Headline Inflation and Core Inflation. How do these indicators help the Reserve Bank of India in framing monetary policy? **(150 Words)**

Page : 08 : Editorial Analysis

Economic Survey promises, impact of new labour codes

India's new labour codes, with draft central rules released in December 2025, have been presented as a reform with transformative potential. The Economic Survey 2025-26 makes an optimistic case: these codes are expected to increase formalisation from 60.4% to 75.5%, generate 77 lakh jobs, reduce unemployment, boost female labour force participation and contribute 1.25% to GDP by 2029-30. These projections assume that simplifying compliance for firms will incentivise formalisation and expand registered employment.

However, over 80% of India's workers are in the informal sector, and they remain outside most of the labour code protections. The scale of informality is increasing. Firms, when given flexibility, tend to respond by shifting away from formal employment. Between 2011 and 2023, direct factory employment fell from 61% to 47%. Contract workers grew to 42% of the factory workforce. Regular employment in central public sector enterprises declined by 30,000 workers in 2024 alone, replaced by casual and contract workers (Public Enterprises Survey 2025). The organised sector, once associated with stable employment, is shrinking in India. And the new codes accelerate this by loosening regulatory definitions and protections, making it easier for firms to avoid permanent employment relationships.

Formalisation illusion

A striking feature of the codes is how they respond to informality by raising the thresholds for protections. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code raises the definition of a "factory" from 10 workers to 20 (with power) and from 20 to 40 (without power), increases the contract labour threshold from 20 to 50 workers and raises the threshold for prior approval for lay-offs from 100 to 300 workers.

At the same time, the government expects these codes to increase formalisation. This rests



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The promises of reform cannot hide the realities in India's informal workforce

largely on expanding "fixed-term employment", that is, letting firms hire on short-term contracts instead of permanent jobs. Formal employment has historically meant job security, regular wages, social security and the ability for collective bargaining. Fixed-term employment offers some benefits under the codes, such as appointment letters and equal gratuity after one year, but undermines the key feature that distinguishes formal work from precarious work: job security.

Grey areas

While the codes require platform companies to contribute 1%-2% of annual turnover for gig worker schemes, rules on how companies must contribute, benefit levels, coverage and claim details are all left to be "notified through subsequent schemes". The reskilling fund for retrenched workers follows the same pattern: employers must deposit 15 days' wages per worker. How to access these funds, who provides training and what skills are taught are unspecified. Like India's many cess and welfare funds, collection may happen, but utilisation may lag perpetually.

The Code on Wages creates a National Floor Wage and a National Minimum Wage but offers no clear methodology for setting either and how they will differ. The new rules make space for greater administrative discretion instead. Defenders of flexible labour markets often argue that minimum wages destroy jobs. The logic is that if you force employers to pay more than market rates, they will hire fewer workers. But decades of empirical research have shown that the job loss predictions consistently fail to materialise (Dube 2019). Higher wages reduce turnover costs for firms. And, when low paid workers get raises, they spend more on food, transport, housing and goods. The increased consumption boosts aggregate demand. In labour markets where employers often have substantial power to set wages below competitive levels,

minimum wages actually improve efficiency by reducing employer exploitation.

Further, the rebranding of labour inspectors as "Inspector-cum-Facilitators" might sound progressive, but when inspectors become facilitators helping employers comply, enforcement weakens. This is made explicit by allowing employers to compound serious violations such as wage theft or unpaid overtime by paying prescribed fines. If penalties are lower than compliance costs, breaking the law can become a rational business decision. This is particularly damaging in the informal sector. In the absence of unions, labour courts or workers' awareness of rights, labour inspectors could have been the only channel for redressal. Converting them to facilitators eliminates even this minimal accountability.

There are many assumptions

The labour codes fail to confront what drives informality in the first place. It is not that regulations are too complex for firms to navigate but that informality is structurally profitable. While technology is automating routine jobs, the new platform jobs it is creating are bypassing employment relationships entirely.

The optimistic projections of the Economic Survey rest on assumptions that contradict many of the labour market realities. Making formal jobs more flexible will not lead to formalisation as long as informality remains cheaper and more profitable.

Lower compliance costs will also not create better jobs if firms respond by replacing permanent workers with contract workers. The numbers may eventually materialise, such as higher formalisation percentages, but they will measure changes in how firms account for workers, not improvements in how workers actually live.

The views expressed are personal

GS Paper III : Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Practice Question: India's new labour codes aim to simplify labour regulations and promote formalization of the workforce. Critically examine whether these reforms will improve employment quality or merely increase contractualization. **(150 Words)**

Context :

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In December 2025, the central government released the draft rules for the four new Labour Codes, signaling a historic overhaul of India's industrial relations. The Economic Survey 2025-26 presents these reforms as a panacea for India's "missing middle," predicting a surge in formalization (from 60.4% to 75.5%) and the creation of 77 lakh jobs by 2030. However, labor economists warn that the codes might create a "formalization illusion" by prioritizing employer flexibility over worker security.

Government Projections vs. Market Realities

The Optimistic Forecast

The government expects the simplification of 29 central labor laws into 4 codes to:

Add 1.25% to the GDP by 2029-30.

Boost Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP) through flexible working hours and improved safety norms.

Encourage firms to expand by reducing the "compliance burden."

The "Contractualization" Trend

Contrary to the goal of formalization, Indian industry has seen a steady shift toward informal arrangements within the organized sector:

Factory Employment: Direct employment fell from 61% to 47% (2011–2023).

Contract Workers: Now constitute 42% of the factory workforce.

Public Sector: Regular jobs in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) decreased by 30,000 in 2024 alone, replaced by casual labor.

Critical Pillars of the New Labour Codes

1. Raising Thresholds (The Regulatory Gap)

The codes significantly raise the bar for when labor laws apply, potentially leaving more workers unprotected:

Factories: Threshold raised from 10 to 20 workers (with power).

Contract Labour: Threshold increased from 20 to 50 workers.

Lay-offs: Firms with up to 300 workers (up from 100) can now retrench without prior government approval.

2. Fixed-Term Employment (FTE)

The codes introduce FTE, allowing firms to hire workers on short-term contracts with statutory benefits (like gratuity after one year).

Pros: Provides a "formal" tag and appointment letters to temporary workers.

Cons: Eliminates job security, the traditional hallmark of formal employment.

3. The Shift in Enforcement

The transition from "Labour Inspectors" to "Inspector-cum-Facilitators" is a major administrative shift.

Intent: To help employers comply rather than penalize them.

Risk: Weakens accountability. If fines for violations (like unpaid overtime) are lower than the cost of compliance, companies may treat fines as a "cost of doing business."

Grey Areas: Gig Workers and Minimum Wages

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Daily News Analysis

Feature	Provision in the Codes	Critical Concerns
Gig/Platform Work	Companies to contribute 1%-2% of turnover to a welfare fund.	Implementation details (how to claim, eligibility) are yet to be "notified."
Minimum Wage	Introduction of a National Floor Wage.	No clear methodology on how it will be set or adjusted for inflation.
Reskilling Fund	Employers to deposit 15 days' wages for retrenched workers.	Historical data suggests such "cess" funds often remain unutilized.

Related Static Section

1. The Four Labour Codes

Code on Wages (2019): Universalizes minimum wages and timely payment.

Industrial Relations Code (2020): Streamlines dispute resolution and trade union registration.

Social Security Code (2020): Extends benefits to unorganized and gig workers.

Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020): Regulates health and safety standards across sectors.

2. Constitutional Provisions

Article 43: Directive Principle (DPSP) urging the State to secure a "living wage" and decent standard of life for workers.

Concurrent List (Entry 24): Both Centre and States can legislate on labor, explaining why "Central Rules" were released in December 2025.

Conclusion

While the new labor codes simplify an archaic regulatory web, their success hinges on whether they create quality jobs or merely documented ones. If "formalization" only means replacing permanent roles with fixed-term contracts, the numerical targets of the Economic Survey may be met without improving the standard of living for India's 450-million-strong workforce. The real test lies in the utilization of welfare funds and the effectiveness of the "Facilitator" model in protecting worker rights.