Sanskriti IAS

23rd Mar 2026

IMPORTANT

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

DELHI CENTRE:
636, Mukherjee Nagar
New Delhi-110009

PRAYAGRAJ CENTRE:
1/1/8A, Stanley Rd,
Maharana Pratap Chauraha,
Civil Lines, Prayagraj, UP - 211002

9555-124-124
sanskritiias.com

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE : 8

'Double engine' — cute slogan, a serious federal question

S.Y. Quraishi

is a former Chief Election Commissioner of India

Every election season produces memorable slogans. Most fade once the votes are counted, but some linger and begin to shape how citizens think about governance itself. One such phrase is the "double-engine *sarkar*". At first hearing, it sounds harmless, even cute: two governments working in tandem to accelerate development. Yet, behind the metaphor lies a serious constitutional question about India's federal compact.

The idea is simple: if the same party governs both the Union and the State, development will move faster because the two governments will work in harmony. Taken at face value, this is unexceptionable. Of course governments at different levels should coordinate. That is indeed cooperative federalism. The real question is what happens when they do not share the same political ideology. But the "double-engine" slogan carries a deeper implication. It suggests that development flows preferentially to States governed by the same party as the Union government.

'Aligned States' benefit

During election campaigns the message is often made quite explicit: elect the party ruling at the Centre so that your State can benefit from faster development. If you do not, you will be starved of funds. This is where the constitutional difficulty begins.

India's Constitution does not envisage a system where State governments depend on the goodwill, or charity, of the ruling party at the Centre. It creates a federal structure in which the Union and the States are partners within their respective spheres. The Union government represents the Republic as a whole, not merely those States governed by the party in power in New Delhi.

Public money collected through national taxation belongs to the Union of India, not to the ruling party. Taxes are collected in the name of the Republic, from citizens of every State regardless of how they vote. The distribution of these resources cannot depend on which party governs a State. A citizen in Kerala or Tamil Nadu pays the same taxes as a citizen in Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh. The constitutional promise is that both will receive their fair share in return.

India's constitutional framers understood this danger. That is why they built institutional safeguards into the system. The most important is the Finance Commission. Under Article 280, the Finance Commission is appointed every five years to recommend how Union revenues should be shared with the States. Its purpose is vital: fiscal transfers must be rule-based, not politically negotiated. The Commission evaluates States on objective criteria – how far their incomes lag behind the national average, their population, geographic size, and fiscal capacity – so that politics cannot determine who gets what.

Fairness, not political alignment, must guide India's federal balance

Issues raised by States, federal friction

Recent debates around fiscal federalism show how sensitive this issue remains. Southern States have expressed concern that the use of more recent population data in allocation formulas may penalise them for having successfully controlled population growth. Another issue is the increasing resort of the Union government to cesses and surcharges, which fall outside the divisible pool and are not shared with States. This effectively reduces the quantum of resources available for constitutionally mandated sharing, concentrating more fiscal power in Union hands and weakening the financial autonomy of States. The Sixteenth Finance Commission, which is currently deliberating, will have to grapple seriously with these concerns if it is to restore confidence in the fairness of the fiscal federal arrangement

Governments in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have argued that States which acted early to stabilise population should not be penalised in the distribution of national resources. Senior Ministers from these States have at times remarked, in visible frustration, that they feel reduced to "beggars", pleading for funds that constitutionally belong to them. This is not the language of political theatre. It reflects a genuine structural grievance about the terms on which States participate in the Indian Union.

Federal friction is visible not only in financial matters but also in the legislative process. In recent years, Governors in some States have sat for long periods over Bills passed by elected legislatures, effectively using the constitutional office as an instrument of political sabotage. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have witnessed particularly prolonged delays. The pattern is difficult to ignore: the delays have been in States that are governed by parties opposed to the ruling dispensation at the Centre. A Governor who withholds assent to legislation passed by an elected Assembly is, in effect, a second engine running in reverse.

Such delays have drawn judicial attention. In *State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab* (2023), the Supreme Court of India made it clear that a Governor cannot use inaction to stall the legislative process. The Court emphasised that the Governor's office is not meant to function as a parallel political authority over an elected legislature.

More recently, in *State of Tamil Nadu vs Governor of Tamil Nadu* (2025), the Court observed that prolonged inaction by a Governor in assenting to Bills is constitutionally impermissible. These rulings together signal a firm judicial commitment to protecting the legislative sovereignty of elected State assemblies.

The experience of Delhi over the past decade provides a further illustration. Many initiatives of the elected government became entangled in disputes with the Lieutenant-Governor and the Union government. Courts eventually had to intervene. The lesson is not merely about one city; it is about what happens when the machinery of federal governance is used to punish a political opponent rather than serve the public.

Seen together – fiscal transfers, gubernatorial delays, and the Delhi impasse – these developments form a coherent pattern. The "double-engine" slogan is not merely a campaign metaphor. It is a description of how governance actually functions when political alignment is absent. And that is precisely the constitutional problem. The form of federalism survives; its spirit is quietly hollowed out.

India's federal system has faced similar tensions before. In earlier decades, Article 356 was frequently misused to dismiss elected State governments. The Court's landmark judgment in *S.R. Bommai vs Union of India* placed important limits on that practice. The challenge today is subtler: governments may remain in office, yet, governance itself may become hostage to political alignment.

Structural reform needed

What is needed is not merely judicial intervention, but structural reform. The Finance Commission's recommendations could be made more binding. A fixed statutory timeline, say, three months, could be prescribed for Governors to act on Bills, failing which assent would be deemed granted. Inter-State/governmental councils, already provided for under Article 263, could be revitalised as genuine forums for cooperative federalism rather than ceremonial gatherings. These are not radical proposals; they are logical completions of the constitutional architecture that the framers intended.

Political slogans will continue to animate election campaigns. But a slogan that implicitly threatens citizens with slower development if they choose the "wrong" party at the State level does not merely distort electoral choice; it corrodes the constitutional promise of equal citizenship. Development cannot depend on political alignment. It must rest on rules and institutions that treat every State, and every citizen, with equal fairness. That constitutional balance, not the number of engines pulling the same train, is the only engine India's federal democracy truly needs.

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE : 8

Digital exile

The government could be creating a system of arbitrary censorship

A decade-long trend in digital governance in India crescendoed last week when a slew of social media accounts operated by independent activists and journalists were blocked apparently for criticising the Union government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his government's West Asia policies and the LPG crisis. In seven years, from 2014 to 2021, the number of URLs, posts, and accounts blocked ballooned from 470 to 9,800; since then, there is evidence that entire accounts, especially if they were publishing politically unfavourable comments, were being blocked. There was a wave of censorship during the farmers' protest in 2020-21; the government restored many accounts after international outcry but this also demonstrated that it was not beyond mass censorship. Similarly, the government used emergency powers under the IT Rules to block links to a BBC documentary in 2023, which also expanded the definition of what constituted a "threat to public order". But when Twitter (now X) challenged several blocking orders, between 2021 and 2022, in the Karnataka High Court, the High Court dismissed the plea and fined Twitter, further emboldening the state to censor accounts.

In *Shreya Singhal* (2015), the Supreme Court of India upheld Section 69A of the IT Act 2000 precisely because of its procedural safeguards, including requiring reasoned orders and judicial review. In practice, however, the government has been diluting the safeguards through an expansive use of Rule 16 of the 2009 Blocking Rules, which requires blocking proceedings to be confidential. When this stipulation is invoked to withhold blocking orders or their reasons from affected parties, it undermines their ability to challenge the action in court, eroding the very safeguards that justified the constitutionality of Section 69A. The 2009 Rules also require blocking orders to be reviewed by a committee composed under the IT Rules 2009, yet this is an entirely executive body and has never overturned a government blocking order. In effect, the government is openly and systematically bypassing the right to be heard and violating the doctrine of proportionality. Rule 16 is a procedural rule, yet the government is using it to override the constitutional right to free speech while shielding itself from judicial review. A person's entire account being blocked amounts to a digital exile, removing the person from the public square, which is a hallmark of an authoritarian government rather than of a liberal democracy. The government's plan to decentralise blocking powers to multiple Ministries could effectively create a regime of arbitrary censorship, where any department can silence a critic without the specialised oversight, however flawed, of the IT Ministry.

GS 3: HEALTH

THE HINDU PAGE : 9

India must use the AYUSH opportunity

Suchika Chopra

Assistant Professor of Economics at Krea University

Sabah Siddiqui

Assistant Professor of Psychology at Krea University

The 2026-27 Union Budget and India's new Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU) signals Ayurveda's ambitious leap into the global mainstream. The Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) Ministry's budget has nearly doubled in the past five years, reaching ₹4,408 crore this year. Further, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced three new All-India Institutes of Ayurveda, aiming to set top standards for traditional medicine, similar to how AIIMS leads modern medicine in India. These institutes will not just treat patients, they will teach and conduct advanced research as well. The Budget also turbo-charges the National AYUSH Mission, raising its funding by 66% to modernise dispensaries, establish AYUSH clinics inside government hospitals, and upgrade drug-testing laboratories.

Together, these measures reflect an effort to bring traditional medicine into the mainstream health ecosystem rather than treat it as an alternative silo.

Global reach

If the Budget gives Ayurveda depth within India, the India-EU FTA gives it global reach. In EU countries that don't specifically regulate traditional medicine, the trade deal allows Indian AYUSH practitioners to provide their services using qualifications obtained in India. It guarantees that Indian companies can open Ayurvedic clinics across Europe without the fear of sudden policy reversal. It also sets up a system where Indian safety certifications could eventually be accepted in Europe, which means that products approved in India might not need extra testing.

However, this policy is also a moment which will test whether the country can merge faith in heritage with the discipline of evidence. For this is not just an economic expansion; it is a structural repositioning of Ayurveda within India's health system and the global market. When the alternative moves from local clinics to international markets, it enters regulatory and scientific arenas that demand proof. These treatments, understood as Traditional, Complementary, and Alternative Medicine (TCAM), will be evaluated within stringent regulatory and vigilance frameworks. This is precisely the moment when regulatory harmonisation becomes essential. If AYUSH products are to circulate in EU markets, they must meet international standards of safety, manufacturing quality, and claims regulation. Global ambition demands scientific accountability.

For Ayurveda and other AYUSH systems to enter the global mainstream credibly, they must submit to rigorous, independent, and transparent scientific evaluation

Need for scientific evidence

If claims outpace evidence, India risks legal disputes, reputational damage, and the reinforcement of stereotypes about 'unscientific traditionalism.' For Ayurveda and other AYUSH systems to enter the global mainstream credibly, they must submit to rigorous, independent, and transparent scientific evaluation conducted by third-party research organisations. At present, many assessments are funded, designed, or overseen by the same Ministry that promotes AYUSH, creating a structural conflict of interest. Global credibility requires independently funded clinical trials, transparent methodologies, peer-reviewed publications, and the willingness to publish negative findings.

A common defensive move in debates around traditional medicine or cultural knowledge is to frame scientific scrutiny as colonial bias or Western epistemic dominance. Certainly, the history of colonial medicine in India involved the marginalisation and delegitimisation of local systems of healing. While that history should not be forgotten, it does not follow that all demands for empirical evaluation are acts of epistemic domination. Demanding evidence is not cultural betrayal, and scientific evaluation does not diminish tradition.

Coexisting systems

Furthermore, TCAM systems endure not simply because of cultural loyalty, but because they carry different imaginations of the body, health, and illness. To engage with TCAM seriously is to recognise that they are not merely collections of remedies but coherent epistemologies. Systems such as Ayurveda are organised around ontological commitments about what the body is, how it is constituted, and how disorder emerges. The body in Ayurveda, for instance, is not a collection of discrete organs but an interdependent system embedded in environment, diet, season, and social life. Health is a state of equilibrium across physiological, psychological, and ecological registers, and illness is a disturbance in patterned relations rather than a discrete lesion.

This stands in contrast to modern medicine, which has historically been grounded in anatomical localisation. Biomedicine excels at identifying specific causal mechanisms and intervening with precision at targeted sites. TCAM systems, by contrast, often operate through systemic logics. But the question is not biomedicine versus TCAM. The conceptual frames in TCAM do not need to replace biomedicine to be valuable. They can function as counterpoints that expand questions about what it means to be healthy. They offer alternative models of embodiment – models in which the body is ecological and dynamic.

Thus, the goal is not substitution but dialogue. In that dialogue lies the possibility of strengthening scientific inquiry across the spectrum of care. Therefore, public investment should fund intellectual openness and scientific freedom. Global ambition will be sustained not by assertion, but by evidence, transparency and the courage to be rigorously examined.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE HINDU PAGE : 9

India's dual dependence on West Asia for urea production

Data indicate that the West Asian conflict threatens both domestic urea production and the stability of its global supply chain

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has disrupted global trade, leading to LPG shortages and a surge in crude oil prices. Data show that the crisis could also affect India's supply of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), putting at risk the production of urea, a key fertilizer in the country's majorly agrarian economy.

The conflict has already started to impact India's urea supply. As of Sunday, industry sources told *PTI* that the country's urea plants are running at half capacity, with Petronet LNG Ltd, which operates India's largest liquefied natural gas receiving terminal, declaring force majeure amid disruptions to cargoes. The move triggered supply curtailments by state-owned gas distributors GAIL (India) Ltd, Indian Oil Corporation Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd.

India is heavily dependent on imports for its LNG supply, exposing many of its sectors to global shocks such as the U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran. Data show that in 2025, India bought more than 50% of its natural gas from the international market (**Chart 1**). In fact, India is the fourth largest buyer of natural gas in the world, with an imported supply of 261 lakh metric tonnes in 2025.

A majority of these imports – more than 40% of it – are tied to long-term contracts with suppliers in Qatar (**Chart 2**). This supply may be in jeopardy as Qatar's LNG cargoes pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which has now become a central chokepoint in the Iran-Israel conflict. The UAE and Oman also ship LNG along this route, and both countries contribute to India's imported LNG supply. Overall, more than 60% of India's imported LNG could be affected by the closure of the Strait.

In India, natural gas is primarily used to produce ammonia, which in turn is used to produce fertilizers. In FY26, about 30% of India's LNG supply was used for the production of fertilizers (**Chart 3**). Demand also comes from industry and gas-fired power and city gas networks which supply to households and vehicles.

LNG is the main feedstock for the production of urea, which is the most widely used fertilizer in India. Many urea plants use naphtha or fuel oil – both derived from crude oil – as their main input. However, as urea production is a highly energy-intensive process, these plants have switched to natural gas, which produces fewer emissions.

National urea consumption hit 387 lakh metric tonnes in 2025, following a decade of steady growth. While domestic production has also been increasing (India produced about 306 lakh metric tonnes of urea in 2025), it does not cover the country's demand. Due to this, India also relies on imports of urea.

Data indicate that the West Asian conflict threatens both domestic urea production and the stability of its supply chain. In 2025, India's urea imports exceeded 2,300 lakh metric tonnes, with a staggering 71% of these imports coming from West Asia (**Chart 4**). This total comprises 45% from Oman and a combined 26% from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, all of which rely on the Strait of Hormuz for transit.

Amidst this scenario, the Government of India issued the Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026, officially including the fertilizer sector in its priority list.

The government also stated that as of March 10, India's urea reserves have reached 61.51 lakh metric tonnes, about 10 lakh more than last year, ahead of the Kharif sowing season. However, only time can tell if India's import dependence for both domestic production and global supply trade will weather the ongoing geopolitical instability.

Distressed supply: A farmer sprinkles fertilizer on a paddy field in the Nagaon district, Assam

Crop hazard

The data for the charts were sourced from the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, the Department of Fertilizers, and the International Gas Union

Chart 1: The composition of India's LNG supply in 2025-26 (in %)

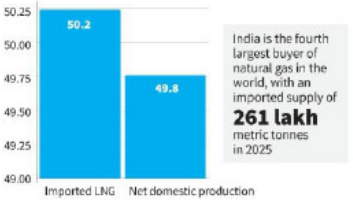


Chart 2: Country-wise share (%) of India's LNG imports in 2024-25

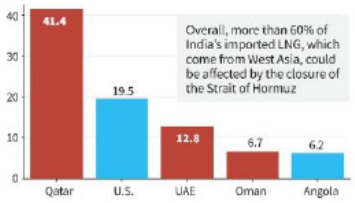


Chart 3: The distribution of LNG use in India in 2025-26 (in %)

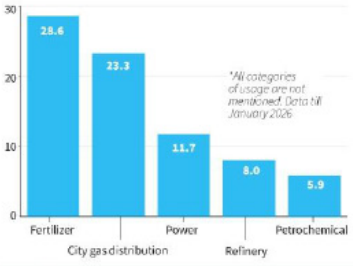


Chart 4: Country-wise share (%) of India's urea imports in 2024-25

1 Industry sources said that the country's urea plants are running at half capacity

2 Natural gas is used to produce ammonia, which in turn is used to produce fertilizers

3 LNG is the main feedstock for the production of urea, which is the most widely used fertilizer in India

4 Chart 3 and 4 only include the top 5 exporting countries

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE : 10

Is compulsory voting feasible in the Indian context?

How can voter turnout be increased without making voting mandatory?

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

The Election Commission has announced the poll schedule for five Assembly elections to be held in April-May 2026. In a separate hearing before the Supreme Court on a poll-related matter, the court raised questions regarding mandatory voting in elections.

What is the right to vote in India?

Article 326 of the Constitution grants every citizen the right to vote without any discrimination. It provides that any citizen who is not less than 18 years old and is not otherwise disqualified under the Constitution or any law on certain grounds is entitled to be registered as a voter.

Section 19 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, requires a citizen to be at least 18 years old and ordinarily resident in a constituency to be registered as an elector. Section 62 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, provides the right to vote to every person whose name is entered in the electoral roll of a constituency. In various cases, the Supreme Court has held that the right to vote is a statutory right.

Should voting be made compulsory?

Voting is essential for a functional democracy, but it is neither a fundamental duty nor a legal duty in India. Proposals for compulsory voting have long been debated.

The Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms, set up in 1990, did not favour compulsory voting, citing practical difficulties in implementation. Instead, it recommended improving voter participation through awareness campaigns.

The Law Commission, in its 255th report (2015), discussed the issue in detail. Compulsory voting does result in increased voter turnout by an average of about 7%. Nevertheless, this increase in participation is a direct corollary of the severity and strict enforcement of penalties for not voting.

Some democracies, such as Australia and several Latin American countries, have provisions for compulsory voting. In Australia, Argentina, and Brazil, voters may be fined if they fail to vote without valid reasons. In Peru, certain public goods and services are denied to non-voters.

Penalising non-voters by imposing fines or restricting their access to government services is an extremely harsh measure that will not work in the Indian context. From a constitutional perspective, compulsory voting could be seen as violating the fundamental right to freedom of expression under Article 19(1).

What can be the way forward?

Low voter turnout can result in candidates winning by securing a minority of the total votes in a constituency.

However, as discussed in the Law Commission report, compulsory voting is neither desirable nor feasible in India. The solution lies in fostering enthusiasm amongst voters to exercise their right to vote through innovative campaigns, especially using social media.

For migrant workers, stricter implementation of the statutory holiday on the day of polling, coupled with an increase in transport facilities by running special buses and trains, can effectively increase participation. With the advent of newer technologies, robust and secure methods acceptable to all stakeholders for remote voting should be considered.

(Rangarajan R. is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified.' He currently trains at Officers IAS academy. Views expressed are personal)

THE GIST

- The right to vote in India is a statutory right under Article 326 and the Representation of the People Act, and compulsory voting is neither a fundamental duty nor a legal duty.
- While higher voter turnout shows a more representative democracy, compulsory voting is neither desirable nor feasible, and the focus should be on awareness, enthusiasm, and better access for voters.

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 4

Science of induction cooktop, in demand amid LPG pinch

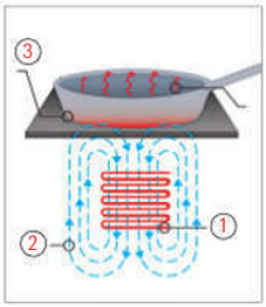
Arav Shah
New Delhi, March 22

THE WAR in West Asia has disrupted the supply of cooking gas to India and driven up the price of LPG cylinders, leading to a surge in the sales of induction cooktops in recent weeks. Traditional gas stoves rely on combustion to create an open flame, but an induction cooktop bypasses this chemical reaction. Its glass surface also remains relatively cool. So how does it manage to cook your food?

Electromagnetic heating

Beneath the smooth ceramic or glass surface of an induction cooktop sits a tightly wound coil of copper wire. Switching on the stove completes the circuit and allows alternating current (AC) to flow through the wire. Unlike direct current, the direction of the flow of electrons reverses at regular intervals in AC. This AC generates a rapidly fluctuating magnetic field directly above the cooktop (*see diagram*).

This changing magnetic field passes effortlessly through the glass surface and the surrounding air without heating either, allowing the surface to largely maintain its temperature. Any warmth it acquires actually comes from contact with the pan.



• MAGNETIC FIELD

1. Current flows through the electric coil.
2. The Alternating Current generates a magnetic field.
3. Placing utensil sets in motion processes that affect their temperature, and, in turn, heat food.

Conduction

Induction works best with ferromagnetic cookware — materials like iron or certain steels that respond to magnetic fields. Sometimes, only the base of the cookware may be made of such materials, often marketed as "induction base".

So, how does the food get heated? It has to do with Faraday's Law of Induction, which states that a changing magnetic field shall induce a voltage and, consequently, an electric current in all nearby electrical conductors, including metals.

When the metal pan sits inside this intensely fluctuating magnetic field, it acts as a conductor. Localised, swirling electrical currents are generated in the bottom of the pan itself. Known as eddy currents, these are pivotal to the heat-generation process.

But metals such as iron are not perfect conductors. They have an inherent electrical resistance. So, when the eddy currents swirl through the atomic structure of the pan's base, they encounter this resistance. The ensuing electrical friction between the two converts the kinetic energy of the moving electrons directly into thermal energy (heat).

This process is governed by Joule's Law of Heating, which explains how electrical energy is converted into heat when current flows through a material with resistance. The law states that the heat generated depends on three factors: the amount of current flowing, the material's resistance, and the duration for which the current is applied. The relationship with current is quadratic — the heat produced is proportional to the square of the current. This means that even a small increase in current leads to a larger increase in heat.

Energy efficient, some drawbacks

When the pan itself becomes the primary heat source, the energy transfer also becomes efficient. Induction cooktops convert about 85% to 90% of their electrical energy directly into cooking heat. In contrast, traditional LPG stoves hover around 40% to 50% efficiency.

While a gas flame loses a massive amount of its thermal energy to the ambient air around the pan, induction targets the heat exactly where it is needed. This is why induction cooking is faster, safer, and a more resilient alternative to unpredictable fossil fuels.

However, such cooktops are not without limitations. They are less durable than LPG stoves, harder to repair, dependent on electricity (which can be unreliable in India), and not compatible with all cooking styles.