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GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE : 4

‘Vande Mataram advisory not a threat to conform’

Ministry’s advisory on National Song only prescribes protocol and those who do not sing it will not face any action, says SC; even then, there is burden on those who refuse to sing, argues petitioner

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

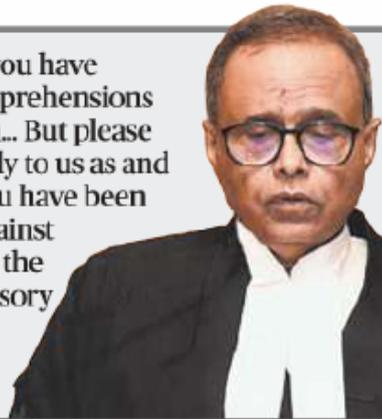
The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the January 28 guidelines issued by Union Home Ministry on playing National Song *Vande Mataram* in full at public and ceremonial occasions are not a “threat to conform” and do not fall foul of constitutional freedoms.

“..it is only an advisory... The Ministry feels the National Song is as much an expression of the national identity. You may have a different point of view. But we feel you have vague apprehensions of discrimination which do not have a clear nexus with the advisory now... But please come immediately to us as and when you feel you have been discriminated against or singled out on the plank of this advisory,” Justice Joymalya Bagchi addressed petitioner Muhammed Sayeed Noori, represented by senior advocate Sanjay Hegde.

Mr. Hegde began his arguments by noting the Ministry’s circular made the singing of the National Song “mandatory” and compelled citizens to participate in a social demonstration of loyalty which

We feel you have vague apprehensions of discrimination... But please come immediately to us as and when you feel you have been discriminated against or singled out on the plank of this advisory

JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI
Supreme Court



goes against one’s individual conscience. He pointed out that the circular has instructed the three-minute National Song to be played before the 55-second National Anthem, reducing the status of the latter to an “epilogue”.

Anthem vs. Song

Chief Justice Surya Kant, heading the three-judge Bench, said there was absolutely nothing in the January 28 circular to show that people who did not play or sing the National Song would face penal or adverse action.

“Even if there is no penalty and even if today there is no legal sanction, there is a huge burden on somebody who refuses to sing or stand up,” Mr. Hegde argued.

“What is that burden in

law here? The circular prescribes a protocol of when and how the National Song must be played, what is to be done when it is played, etc. We can understand if somebody sends you a notice saying you did not play or stand up for the National Song and your institution should be closed or derecognised as a result,” the Chief Justice reacted.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta intervened to emphasise that respect for the National Song was organic and, ideally, even an advisory was not necessary. He referred to Article 51A of the Constitution, which made it a fundamental duty to respect the National Flag and National Anthem.

Mr. Hegde said the National Anthem and National Song were distinct from each other. “..It was on Ja-

nuary 24, 1950 that Rajendra Prasad, as President of the Constituent Assembly, ended the controversy by saying *Jana Gana Mana* would be the National Anthem and *Vande Mataram* the National Song. When the Parliament subsequently inserted Article 51A [in the 42nd Constitutional Amendment], it spoke only of the National Anthem,” he explained.

He said India was a country which paid equal respect to all religions and everyone’s individual conscience, even that of an atheist. Mr. Mehta retorted that it was not as if people were being compelled to sing *bhajans*.

Justice Bagchi referred to the circular which said, “In all schools, the day’s work may begin with community singing of the National Song”. “The expression ‘may’ means you could sing as much as not sing. It allows individual conscience to take the decision,” he said.

Mr. Hegde said patriotism cannot be compelled, provoking the Chief Justice to ask if “patriotism cannot be compelled even for the National Anthem”.

The court refused to entertain the petition, terming it “premature”.

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

THE HINDU PAGE : 7

West Asia conflict: how finding oil changed the Persian Gulf's ecology

The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz bring oil and war to mind, but until recently the region looked very different: to see how, it is only necessary to look at its shallow waters and precarious coasts, where many fragile ecosystems live amid heat, salinity, ships, and geopolitical tensions

Ipsita Herikar

Military ships and oil tankers dominate how we imagine the Persian Gulf today. Yet beyond this familiar imagery of geopolitics and petroleum lies a mosaic of vulnerable ecosystems.

It wasn't always this way. Just six decades ago, these waters were busy not with warships but fishing boats, and the glittering megacities that now line the coast were then little more than fishing villages.

The Gulf coastline is remarkably young. Formed 3,000 to 6,000 years ago as the sea flooded the Arabian basin through the Strait of Hormuz, it is today a shallow, semi-enclosed sea spanning about 226,000 sq. km, with an average depth of just 30 m.

Its shallowness and limited water exchange with the open waters of the Arabian sea drive its extreme conditions. The summer temperatures regularly exceed 35 °C while the high rate of evaporation keeps the water salty to the tune of 44-70 parts per thousand — almost twice as salty as open sea water.

Yet life persists.

Life on the edge

At the boundary of land and sea lies the intertidal zone — shaped by cycles of exposure and submergence to heat and hypersalinity.

These are dynamic systems where organic matter breaks down and is recycled, helping microorganisms survive in the adjacent waters. Beyond them, lagoons host specialised microbes and commercially important species like shrimp. Mangroves are fish nurseries, migratory bird refuges, and carbon sinks.

The mudflats also sustain shrimp as well as coastal food webs while the offshore seagrass meadows are among the Gulf's most productive ecosystems, proving to be places where fish and pearl oysters spawn.

These meadows are also important feeding grounds for sea turtles. Five of the world's seven sea turtle species occur here, including the critically endangered Hawksbill sea turtle, and nest along parts of the coast despite the wars.

The Gulf's waters also support the world's second-largest population of dugongs outside Australia, with an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 individuals. Dugongs are marine mammals that depend almost entirely on seagrass to survive.

Scattered across these waters are coral reefs covering an area the size of Goa. They support several fish and invertebrate communities. Importantly, they can survive extreme conditions, making them a natural laboratory for scientists to understand how coral ecosystems might respond to climate change.

Together, the Gulf is a finely balanced ecological network adapted to extremes.

At its peak, in the 18th to the early 20th centuries, the Gulf's oyster beds supported a thriving economy that supported nearly 80% of the world's Basra pearls, named after a port in Iraq. This system collapsed when Japanese cultured pearls entered the market in the 1920s.

Then people found oil. By the 1970s, oil had made West Asia one of the world's fastest growing regions. Today, the Gulf region alone produces nearly a third of the world's oil, with around 800 offshore



Birds take flight around vessels in Persian Gulf waters near Hormuz Island, Iran, in 2011. (AP/WIDEWORLD)

platforms and more than 25,000 tankers moving in and out every year. Nearly a fifth of the world's oil passes through these waters.

This wealth has driven rapid urbanisation. The number of people has tripled in four decades, with more than 85% of people and economic activity concentrated within 100 km of the coast.

Coastlines remade

Large-scale land reclamation, dredging, and engineering have transformed the shorelines. In Dubai alone, more than 60% of the natural coastline has been changed.

Projects such as Palm Jumeirah have altered currents and sediment flows, eroding sand in some areas and causing sand to accumulate in others, leaving beaches to be maintained constantly.

Nearly two-thirds of the salt flats have disappeared, mangroves have shrunk, and natural beaches have been replaced with seawalls that eliminate nesting grounds for birds and turtles. Seagrass beds and mudflats have been buried under land reclamation projects, removing important nursery habitats for marine life.

The consequences have also extended offshore. Coral reefs have been buried or smothered by sediments while dredging and construction have disrupted natural flows.

These physical changes have been compounded by industrial pressures such as desalination and pollution.

The Gulf hosts about half of the world's desalination plants, with over 200 facilities producing around 11 million cubic metres of freshwater every day. They produce hot, saline brine, often laced with chemicals and heavy metals, that is discharged into the sea, where it accumulates in the semi-enclosed basin, further raising temperatures and salinity.

The Gulf coastline is remarkably young. Formed 3,000 to 6,000 years ago as the sea flooded the Arabian basin through the Strait of Hormuz, it is today a shallow, semi-enclosed sea spanning about 226,000 sq. km, with an average depth of just 30 m

Intake systems also remove plankton and larvae, disrupting the base of the food web.

War and water

Algal blooms fed by sewage deplete oxygen and trigger mass fish deaths, such as those recorded off Kuwait's shores in 1999 and 2001. Chronic nutrient loading also disrupts coral physiology, increases bleaching, and suppresses the growth of seagrass.

Industrial pollutants further accumulate in marine life. The pearl oyster (*Pinctada radiata*), once central to Gulf economies, has borne the brunt of pollution and sedimentation, which have left behind degraded oyster beds.

Leaks, spills, and tanker traffic continue to damage ecosystems. The 1991 Gulf War spill devastated coastlines, mangroves, bird populations, and fisheries while oil fires spread pollutants far afield. The UN Compensation Commission awarded Kuwait \$52.4 billion for a clean-up; decades later, the effort is still underway.

These threats persist even today. The oil infrastructure continues to be a target of drones and missiles, and rising temperatures trigger repeated coral bleaching, pushing already stressed ecosystems to the brink.

The consequences extend far beyond the sea. Across West Asia, the Arabian

oryx, populations of the Asiatic cheetah, and the Arabian leopard have fallen sharply due to hunting and other conflicts. The Arabian oryx vanished from the wild by 1972. Then, the Phoenix Zoo in the U.K., Fauna & Flora International in the U.K., and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature reintroduced it in Oman in 1982, with populations later established across Saudi Arabia, Israel, the UAE, and Jordan. Meanwhile, the Asiatic cheetah survives in Iran in critically low numbers.

Repeated wars have also derailed conservation efforts. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 followed by the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 brought wildlife protection to a near halt, leaving protected areas to decay and wildlife populations to crash.

A narrowing window

Today, the Gulf is among the worst affected marine regions on the planet. But signs of awareness do exist. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have imposed limits on shrimp trawling. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are also leading mangrove restoration efforts and, together with Kuwait, have established marine protected areas to conserve what remains of these ecosystems.

As marine biologist and New York University (Alma Dhabab) professor John Burt noted in his work on Gulf ecosystems, the region's highly centralised governance — for all its deficiencies — could also facilitate rapid environmental action. What is required is for ecological concerns to be prioritised at the highest levels.

Time is also limited. Ecosystems such as coastal swamps, saltpans, oyster habitats, and the nesting sites of endangered sea turtles are already approaching points of no return.

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GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 1

U.S. IN NEGOTIATIONS, VANCE AND RUBIO PART OF TEAM: TRUMP

Sanctions relief to n-plan rollback: Iran receives US proposals via Pak

Iran silent, state TV claims plan rejected; Egyptian official says deal 'comprehensive'

Jon Gambrell, David Rising, Munir Ahmed & Aamer Madhani
Dubai, March 25

IRAN HAS received an American plan to pause the war in the Middle East, officials said Wednesday — a proposal sent even as Washington deploys paratroopers and more Marines to the region.

Tehran did not confirm receiving the plan and publicly dismissed the diplomatic effort. Iranian state television's English-language broadcaster, Press TV, quoted an anonymous official as saying Iran had rejected America's ceasefire proposal.

"Iran will end the war when it decides to do so and when its own conditions are met," Press TV quoted the official as saying. The official added Tehran will continue its "heavy blows" across the Mideast.

Two officials from Pakistan, which delivered the plan to Iran, described the 15-point proposal broadly, saying it addressed sanctions relief, a rollback of Iran's nuclear programme,

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E. THE 15-POINT PLAN, BROADLY

- Addresses sanctions relief: Pak officials
- Seeks rollback of Iran's nuclear programme
- Places limits on missiles with Tehran
- Calls for reopening the Strait of Hormuz
- Restricts Iran's support for armed groups



Iranian drones hit Kuwait International Airport, Wednesday. PTI

Disruption hits chemicals, steel, aluminium, textile, breweries

Pratyush Deep & Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, March 25

AS THE energy shock waves from the war in West Asia travel deeper, Indian manufacturers, ranging from steel, aluminium, textiles and even alcoholic beverages, are beginning to report operational disruptions on account of surging freight rates, stuck shipments, gas shortages and payment issues.

Much of this originates, either directly or indirectly, from the trade disruption caused due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The Indian manufacturing sector is grappling with uncertainty due to cargo stuck at different stages of the supply chain, which could raise the cost of operations and even limit production hours.

A Mumbai-headquartered leading textile brand told *The Indian Express* that they were facing a severe shortage of raw materials and were only left with 30 days of stock as the West Asia conflict had delayed their import cargo.

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ALL-PARTY MEETING ON WEST ASIA CRISIS

Opp flags Pak mediation, Govt says India not a 'dalal' (broker) nation

Manoj CG
New Delhi, March 25

A DAY after US President Donald Trump called up Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed the situation in West Asia, the government Wednesday informed an all-party meeting that Modi made it clear to Trump that India wanted to see the war coming to an end because it was "affecting everyone".

When Opposition leaders enquired if Pakistan's role as a mediator between the US and

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Congress MP Mukul Wasnik after the all-party meeting on West Asia crisis, Wednesday. PTI

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 2

Iran receives US proposals via Pakistan

limits on missiles and reopening the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil is shipped.

An Egyptian official involved in the mediation efforts said it also includes restrictions on Iran's support for armed groups. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet released. Some of those points were non-starters in negotiations before the war: Iran has insisted it won't discuss its ballistic missile programme or its support of regional militias, which it views as key to its security. And its ability to control passage through the Strait of Hormuz represents one of its biggest strategic advantages.

Iran's attacks on regional energy infrastructure along with its restrictions on the strait have sent oil prices skyrocketing and sparked fears of a global energy crisis, in turn putting pressure on the US to find a way to end the chokehold and calm markets.

On Wednesday, as Iran launched more attacks on Israel and Gulf Arab countries, including an assault that sparked a

huge fire at Kuwait International Airport, it also continued to come under attack.

At least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division will be sent to the Mideast in the coming days, three people with knowledge of the plans told The Associated Press. The paratroopers are trained to jump into hostile or contested areas to secure key territory and airfields. The Pentagon is also in the process of sending about 5,000 more Marines, trained in amphibious assaults, and thousands of sailors to the region.

The 15-point plan now in Iranian hands is "a comprehensive deal" to reach a ceasefire, according to the Egyptian official.

Mediators are pushing for possible in-person talks between the Iranians and the Americans, perhaps as soon as Friday in Pakistan, the Egyptian and Pakistani officials said.

Trump has said the US is "in negotiations right now" and that the participants included special envoy Steve Witkoff, his son-in-law Jared Kushner, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance. He has not disclosed who from Iran

they are in contact with, but said "the other side, I can tell you, they'd like to make a deal."

Iran's Khatam Al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, which commands the regular military and the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, dismissed that. Iranian leaders have repeatedly denied talks are happening, while acknowledging that the foreign minister is in contact with various countries but not the US or Israel.

"Our first and last word has been the same from day one, and it will stay that way: Someone like us will never come to terms with someone like you," Lt Col Ebrahim Zolfaghari, a spokesman for the headquarters, said in the video statement aired on state television. "Not now, not ever."

Israeli officials, who have been advocating for Trump to continue the war against Iran, were surprised by the submission of a ceasefire plan, according to a person who was briefed on the contours of the proposal.

Any talks between the US and Iran would face monumental challenges. It's not clear who

in Iran's government has the authority to negotiate – or would be willing to, as Israel has vowed to continue killing the country's leaders.

Iran remains highly suspicious of the US which twice under the Trump administration has attacked during high-level diplomatic talks, including with the February 28 strikes that started the current war.

"We have a very catastrophic experience with US diplomacy," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei told India Today Tuesday.

The Israeli military said Wednesday afternoon it had completed several waves of airstrikes in Tehran. The army also said that as part of its strikes a day earlier it targeted an Iranian submarine development centre in Isfahan.

Meanwhile, drone and rocket fire from the Iran-back Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon continued unabated. Since entering the fighting, the group has fired rockets into northern Israel around the clock each day, disrupting the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. – ASSOCIATED PRESS

GS 2: SOCIAL ISSUES : EDUCATION**INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 1**

IIT Kharagpur, IIM-A leap in QS world varsity ranks; ISM tops mining

IIT Kharagpur up 23 ranks; IIT Delhi & IIT Bombay slip on employer score

Abhinaya Harigovind
New Delhi, March 25

REFLECTING STRIDES made by the country's educational institutions in engineering, management studies and marketing, the Indian School of Mines (IIT-ISM) Dhanbad and the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIM-A), followed closely by IIT Kharagpur, have emerged as the top-ranked Indian institutions in the QS Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings by Subject 2026, released Wednesday.

IIT-ISM Dhanbad ranked 21 in 'Engineering – Mineral and Mining', while IIM Ahmedabad ranked 21 in two subjects — Business and Management Studies and Marketing. IIT-ISM Dhanbad was the highest-ranked Indian institution last year as well, ranking 20 in mineral and mining engineering.

At the 22nd position this year, IIT Kharagpur has jumped 23 ranks compared to last year's 45 in mining and mineral engineering category, breaking into the global top 25 for the subject.

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GS 2: EDUCATION

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 2

QS varsity rankings

• Top 5 ranks among Indian institutions

Institution	Subject	2026	2025
IIT-ISM Dhanbad	Engineering-Mineral & Mining	21	20
IIM Ahmedabad	Business & Management Studies	21	27
	Marketing	21	Debut*
IIT Kharagpur	Engineering-Mineral & Mining	22	45
Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences	Dentistry	25	26
JNU	Development Studies	26	29

* DEBUT ENTRY IN SUBJECT. SOURCE: QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS BY SUBJECT 2026

In the broad 'Engineering and Technology' category, five IITs feature in the global top 100, but have seen a drop in the rankings compared to last year. The top performer in the category, IIT Delhi, has dropped 10 ranks – from 26 last year to 36 this year. Both IIT Kanpur (from 72 last year to 86 this year) and IIT Bombay (from 28 last year to 42 this year) have dropped 14 ranks.

Explaining the drop among the IITs in the Engineering and Technology category, QS said, "For IIT Delhi and IIT Bombay, the employer reputation score has dropped more significantly than the academic reputation indicator. This highlights the importance of ensuring that graduates have the right skills that employers are seeking. Both have seen their scores in the citations indicator fall this year too."

As per the rankings, IIT Bombay's employer reputation score fell from 88.6 last year to 84.3 this year, while IIT Delhi saw a drop from 87.2 to 83.5.

"Additionally, this year has seen heightened competition globally. Institutions such as Seoul National University, University College London, University of Texas at Austin, University of British Columbia, Institut Polytechnique de Paris rose in key subjects within the broad faculty area to enter the top 30," QS added.

The global higher education analysts noted that India has seen "rapid strides" in Engineering, particularly in Computer Science, adding that "the most dramatic concentration of improvement" among Indian institutions is in Engineering.

India saw a total of 44 entries in the Computer Science and Information Systems category this year, up from 42 last year. According to QS, the US, UK, Germany and France, all saw fewer Computer Science entries in 2026, while India's representation expanded.

All six Indian institutions in the top 100 in Computer Science have improved their rankings compared to last year. The top performer in the subject is IIT Bombay (ranked 44, up from 76 last year), followed by IIT Delhi (ranked 45, up from 64 last year); ranked 65 is IIT Kanpur, 67 is IIT Kharagpur and at 79 stands IIT Madras. The only private institution in the top 100 in this cat-

egory is Vellore Institute of Technology (ranked 86).

On the gains among Indian institutions in Computer Science and a fall in the broader Engineering and Technology category, QS told The Indian Express: "Computer Science is one of eight narrow subject areas that sit under the broad faculty area... Across India's 18 entries in the Engineering & Technology broad faculty area, only four improved in the academic reputation indicator (Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, IIT BHU Varanasi and IIT Hyderabad). However, just four rose in employer reputation (Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Anna University, IIT BHU Varanasi and IIT Hyderabad). It is important to note that the rankings are relative and that these results do not suggest that IIT-Delhi and IIT-Bombay have gotten worse, but that global competitors have improved at a faster pace."

A total of 99 Indian institutions feature in the global rankings this year, up from 79 last year. In terms of the number of institutions represented in the rankings, India stands fourth globally, after the US (228 institutions), China (158) and the UK (114). On the flip side, QS noted that "the picture is not uniformly positive" with Arts and Humanities remaining "a weak spot".

In the broad subject area of Arts and Humanities, no Indian institution features in the top 100. The highest ranked Indian institution is Delhi University at 231, which saw a sharp drop compared to last year's rank of 160. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has also seen a steep fall in this category, from 177 last year to 260 this year.

Similarly, in Life Sciences and Medicine, no Indian institution is in the top 100, with the best performer being AIIMS Delhi (217). In the Medicine category, AIIMS ranked 105, up from 145 last year.

Among the top 10 highest ranked Indian institutions across subjects, there are two private universities – Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences at rank 25 for Dentistry and OP Jindal Global University at 35 for Law. The rankings cover around 1,900 institutions across 100 countries.

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY (ENERGY)

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 21

LPG DISTRIBUTORS WILL NOTIFY CONSUMERS ABOUT THE 3-MONTH COUNTDOWN

Switch to piped gas if available or lose LPG supply, says govt

'LPG supply will cease if a household does not apply for PNG within three months of receiving communication'

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, March 25

HOUSEHOLDS USING liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) will have to mandatorily shift to piped natural gas (PNG) in areas where PNG infrastructure and supplies are available, according to a government order aimed at accelerating natural gas network expansion and reducing dependence on LPG.

With the war in West Asia severely hitting India's LPG imports, the government has been appealing to consumers to switch to PNG if it is available in their vicinity to take some pressure off of LPG supplies. Some city gas distribution (CGD) companies have also announced incentives like some volumes of free gas and waiver of connection charges to encourage consumers to sign up for PNG connections.

The Centre has also urged states to help expedite PNG network expansion, and has even offered additional commercial LPG allocation if they take certain specific measures in this regard.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) has notified the Natural Gas and Petroleum Products Distribution (Through Laying, Building, Operation and Expansion of Pipelines and Other Facilities) Order, 2026 under the Essential Commodities Act. The order aims to facilitate the expansion of PNG networks, im-

prove last-mile connectivity, and promote a shift towards natural gas for cooking, transport, and industrial purposes. The order—the government expects—will help free up LPG supplies from areas that have PNG connectivity, allowing those volumes to reach consumers in areas that currently don't have PNG infrastructure.

According to the order, LPG supply shall cease if a household does not apply for a PNG connection—despite it being available—within three months of receiving formal communication to become a PNG consumer. Also, if the resident welfare association or the property owner fails to grant permission for city gas pipelines to be laid for the purpose of providing PNG connections, LPG supplies will stop three months after a notice is issued in this regard. In both these scenarios, residents will be notified of this three-month countdown by their LPG distributors "either by text message or telephonically or by recorded voice message". LPG supplies will continue only in cases where it is technically infeasible for the authorised CGD operator to provide PNG supply; no objection certificates will be provided to consumers in such cases.

According to Petroleum Ministry Joint Secretary Sujata Sharma, there are around 60 lakh households in India that have PNG infrastructure avail-



The Central government has also urged states to help expedite PNG network expansion.

REUTERS

able in their vicinity, but continue to use LPG.

She informed that so far in March, around 2.5 lakh new PNG connections—domestic and commercial—have been provided and 2.2 lakh LPG users have shifted to PNG.

Sharma said that this move is intended to reduce India's high import dependency for LPG, due to which the ongoing West Asia crisis has had such an impact on LPG supplies.

India depends on imports to meet 60% of its LPG requirement, and 90% of the imports come from West Asia via the critical chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz, where vessel movements have all but come to a halt. By contrast, India's reliance on imports for natural gas is around 50%, and 55-60%

of LNG imports come through the Strait of Hormuz. Also, in the most vulnerable segment of household consumers, India has a huge LPG consumer base with 33.3 crore domestic connections.

Households with PNG connections are far fewer at about 1.6 crore. In the current scenario, priority sectors continue to receive protected natural gas supplies, including 100% supply to the household PNG and CNG for transport segments, while supplies to industrial and commercial consumers are being regulated at around 80%.

The LPG supply constraint has forced the government to heavily cut supplies to commercial and industrial consumers in an effort to ensure

● DIRE STRAITS

- There are around 60 lakh households that have PNG infrastructure available in their vicinity, but they continue to use LPG
- So far in March, around 2.5 lakh new PNG connections—domestic and commercial—have been provided and 2.2 lakh LPG users have shifted to PNG
- Priority sectors continue to receive protected natural gas supplies, including 100% supply to the household PNG and CNG for transport segments
- The LPG supply constraint has forced the government to heavily cut supplies to commercial and industrial consumers in an effort to ensure uninterrupted supplies to crores of households

uninterrupted supplies to crores of households that use the fuel for cooking. Additionally, the government ordered refiners to maximise LPG production, and directed them to divert propane, butane, and other streams from petrochemical manufacturing to LPG production.

These measures have led to an increase of 40% in domestic LPG production vis-à-vis pre-West Asia conflict levels, which means that India's own LPG production is now meeting roughly 55% of the country's demand versus 40% earlier.

Once the requisite pipeline infrastructure is established, PNG scores higher than LPG in terms of convenience for users.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 21

IRAN WAR HAS LED TO SURGE IN ASIAN LNG PRICES

Why Europe-bound LNG cargoes are now headed to Asia, including India

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, March 25

AMID THE effective halt in vessel movements through the Strait of Hormuz and liquefied natural gas (LNG) production suspension by Qatar, a growing number of LNG tankers that were carrying cargoes meant for Europe are diverting to Asia, including India.

According to maritime firm MarineTraffic, around 11 LNG tankers originally bound for Europe have diverted to Asia since March 3 "as buyers respond to tightening supply and rising spot prices following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and outages at Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG complex".

"The latest diversion involves the LNG carrier La Seine, which altered course from Montoir (France) to Asia on 19 March after loading in the United States. Other vessels, including BW Brussels and LNG Cross River, are now heading toward Dahej, India, while additional cargoes are signalling destinations in Taiwan and East Asia," MarineTraffic said Monday.

According to industry insiders and experts, the trend of LNG cargoes diverting to Asia could continue going forward, as long as LNG flows through the Strait of Hormuz remain heavily disrupted.

Various countries in Asia—India among them—have high dependency on West Asia, particularly Qatar, for LNG supplies. Unless supplies through the Strait of Hormuz normalise, Asian buyers are expected to compete with Europe for LNG supplies from alternative sources, even at soaring prices. In the current scenario where the physical supply risk is clearly present, supply security takes precedence over price.



Due to the surge in Asian LNG prices, cargoes — even from faraway US — are heading to Asia instead of Europe. AP

at least for sectors where LNG use is critical and demand inelastic. Apart from India, countries that are in the market to cover supply shortages from West Asia include the likes of South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, and Bangladesh, according to analysts.



Hormuz closure & Qatar outage

Most of the LNG exports from West Asia depend on the Strait of Hormuz to enter the international market. With vessel movements through the critical maritime chokepoint all but halted amid the West Asia war, supplies to Asian LNG importers, including India, have been hit, creating an immediate supply gap.

This has forced India and the other buyers to scout for LNG from alternative geographies through spot market purchases, which has led to a surge in Asian LNG prices, making it lucrative for cargoes even from faraway geographies like the US to head to Asia instead of Europe.

The Strait of Hormuz, under normal circumstances, accounted for one-fifth of global LNG flows. As for India, 55-60% of the country's LNG imports—mainly supplies from Qatar and the UAE—depend on the strait. India depends on LNG to meet around half of its natural gas requirement, which means that the West Asia war has effectively made 30% of India's natural gas supply unavailable.

Apart from the effective halt in shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, QatarEnergy has also suspended LNG production at its flagship Ras Laffan facility, which came under attack twice. QatarEnergy's primary LNG production units, liquefaction plants, and export infrastructure are all concentrated in Ras Laffan, making it the world's largest LNG hub that accounts for roughly a fifth of global LNG supply. Although QatarEnergy has so far not mentioned the impact on supplies to India, there have been concerns that long-term LNG flows to India could be impacted.

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