EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

23-11-2026

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GS 3: ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE
THE HINDU PAGE: 01

COP31 talks fail over omission of fossil fuel

Over 130 countries refuse to accept cover text as they allege attempt to 'greenwash' fossil fuels

India, China, Saudi Arabia support text; India says climate goal must match means of implementation

Grouping of developing countries says principle on developed countries' responsibility is diluted

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A stand-off on a fossil fuel phase-out on Sunday prevented countries at COP31 from achieving consensus on future climate action, despite the 12-day climate summit held in Antalya, Turkiye, running a record 48 hours into overtime.

The European Union led the objections to COP31 President Murat Kurum's consensus cover text that failed to mention explicitly about moving away from fossil fuels. The EU's stance was reportedly supported by 130 countries.

"There is nothing to do. We did all that we could," Mr. Kurum told the closing plenary, saying he would not advance any new text.

The COP31 was the first since the UN confirmed the rise in global temperatures was set to overshoot the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit, a scenario in which scientists say extreme weather impacts intensify.

Panama formally objected to the text, saying that as a country battling droughts and other perilous impacts of climate change, the lack of any commitment to keep the rise in temperatures below 1.5 degrees Celsius with firm action on phasing out fossil fuels was "a setback".

On the other side of the divide, India was among the nations, including China and oil-rich Saudi Arabia, which supported the cover text as they want to keep using fossil fuels for the foreseeable future, with Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav stressing that "climate ambition must go hand in hand with means of implementation."



Talking point: COP31 President Murat Kurum amid discussions as the climate summit in Antalya, Turkiye, concluded on Sunday after running into 48 hours of overtime. AP

'Risk of deep chasm'

Speaking on behalf of the EU, Ireland's Climate Minister Darragh O'Brien expressed "profound disappointment" over the outcome of the summit. "At a point where the world urgently needs action to avert disastrous levels of global warming, the draft cover decision falls well short," he said.

"We will not endorse a decision that does not respond to the science, that disregards the implementation gap, and that actually risks deepening the chasm between global commitments and the action required to correct the overshoot and bring 1.5 degrees Celsius back to within reach... We will not accept a COP that greenwashes fossil fuel," the Irish Minister added.

"Panama cannot support this decision. One, because it repeats previously agreed commitments without closing the gap between reality and what science demands. Two, because it weighs too much upon technologies such as CCUS [carbon capture utilisation and storage] instead of calling for deep changes, and three, because it weakens language agreed in previous decisions. This is a setback, a rollback," said Ana Aguilar, Panama's chief climate negotiator.

Saudi Arabia, China, and India, which are against explicit language on fossil fuel, favoured the way in which the cover text language was framed, while expressing misgivings on the lack of clarity on adaptation finance. The countries are part of the Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) coalition, who insist on the use of fossil fuel for the foreseeable future to further their economies, but have also significantly deployed renewable energy.

Nationally fixed goals

Mr. Bhupendra Yadav said that India's voice had shaped the draft COP31 outcome, especially on food security, livelihoods, and cultural practices recognised in action on methane. In a post on X, however, he emphasised that "climate ambition must go hand in hand with means of implementation. Energy transitions must be nationally determined, just and equitable, backed by finance, technology and capacity-building for developing countries."

Amandeep Garg, who led India's delegation but spoke in his capacity as a spokesperson on behalf of LMDC, said on the floor: "Everyone has worked tirelessly, and despite our discomfort with some elements of the text, are willing to move forward, and continue to engage."

LMDC expressed "concern" about the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibility not being adequately reflected, adding that there was a "dilution" of the principle of developed countries taking historical responsibility and meeting their obligations.

"At the threshold of crossing 1.5 deg. C, we have raised a fundamental point – we need to reflect why we are here. Whose emissions, both past and continuing, have exhausted the global carbon budget? The cover decision does not reflect this, and only repeats agreed paragraphs from previous decisions to reflect responsibility and does not connect this with the imminent prospect of exceeding 1.5 deg. C," he said.

GS 3: ENVIRONMENT & GOVERNANCE

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Paper tiger

Climate action has to be timely, with adequate resources and monitoring

That all was not well with the Green India Mission was clear even before its approval. After the UPA-I government announced it in 2008, the Ministry of Rural Development had objected to its financial design much before the Union Cabinet approved it in 2014. But the Environment Ministry proceeded anyway and retained largely the same arrangement when it revised the Mission in 2021. Following the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, on November 19, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) upbraided the Ministry for the Mission's virtual failure and for still not having issued the implementation guidelines for the revised form. The original 10-year vision was to expand forest and tree cover by 5 million hectares (mha), improve forest quality on another 5 mha, improve forest-related livelihoods for 3 million households, and sequester up to 60 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. The outlay was ₹46,000 crore. In 2014, the Cabinet approved ₹13,000 crore for 1.4 mha each of the first two objectives by 2018, but to be supported to the tune of 81.5% by Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), National Afforestation Programme (NAP), and MGNREGS funds. In 2021-22, the Ministry folded the NAP into the Mission and, in mid-2025, unveiled a revised version with an allocation of ₹12,190 crore to improve forest cover on 25 mha by 2030, including 24 mha through other schemes. The government had thus expanded the primary target but left the Mission responsible for only 1 mha.

Together with the CAMPA, NAP, and MGNREGS funds never materialising, it is no surprise that the programmes to improve forest quality and forest cover have respectively fallen short by 91.8% and 97.5% *vis-à-vis* the 2014 target. The Environment Ministry had assembled a large programme around resources that it knew it could not control. Pro-climate work in practice ought to span government schemes to deliver action and justice, and the Ministry ought to have formalised the division of responsibilities and accounting system. The PAC's new demand that the Ministry submit an implementation timetable is insufficient. From the Jal Shakti Abhiyan in 2019 to the Dharti Aaba Janjattya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan in 2024, the government has often floated new programmes banking significantly on funds from existing schemes – an untenable policy when the latter also have their own obligations. And if the VB-G RAM G scheme was to also advance climate justice, the government should not have undermined the erstwhile demand-driven funding model and shifted more financial responsibility to the States. Climate action has to be timely, for which the Union government must dedicate adequate resources and proactively ensure that its initiatives are implemented.

GS 2: POLITY & INTERNATIONAL LAW
THE HINDU PAGE: 08

A louder gavel to bridge India's justice deficit



Rohit Gupta

An Indian international lawyer pursuing his doctorate in Cologne, Germany

On October 9, 2026, while at Nuremberg's Courtroom 600, the birthplace of international criminal justice, Judge Navanethem 'Navi' Pillay was announced as the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Dedicating the award to "the survivors of international crimes" and those ensuring that "impunity will not be allowed to reign", she called for upholding the promise to save the "world of tomorrow" from war and injustice – a call that demands deep introspection.

Let us begin at home: India's domestication of international criminal law (ICL).

Purpose of international criminal justice

International criminal justice exists to secure not only 'international' but also 'domestic' criminal justice; the qualification 'international' concerns gravity, not geography. India accepts that accountability for mass atrocity crimes is not a state's 'internal affair' but concerns the international community as a whole and humankind as a collective in its own right. India ratified the 1948 Genocide Convention and 1949 Geneva Conventions, which apply to wholly domestic situations and recognise every ratifying state's interest in others' compliance. India also voted for Security Council resolutions deeming internal crises threats to 'international peace and security' (Somalia (1992), Libya (S/RES/1970, 2011), Côte d'Ivoire (2011)).

The 'internal affairs' defence is thus wholly invalid. The further claim that international criminal justice is Anglospherical and thus India need not domesticate ICL is a regrettable excuse.

All citizens and state actors must, in good conscience, assert their own interest in preventing their state apparatus from being used by fellow citizens and state actors to commit, or abet, mass atrocity crimes. Refusing to acknowledge and criminalise them domestically protects none other than the perpetrators.

Does the ordinary Indian citizen care whether ICL is a neo-colonial project? Or whether the Nuremberg legacy was built on 'victor's justice'? Or whether other countries apply ICL with double standards? The answer is no.

The ordinary Indian citizen cares that genocide against them or fellow citizens is called, and punished as, genocide. The ordinary Indian citizen cares that the opprobrium of 'crimes against humanity' reflects their suffering and may prevent situations degenerating that far. The ordinary Indian citizen cares that India's armed forces are never credibly accused of war crimes, not because India rejects this vocabulary, but because they are so well-trained and rigorously committed to international humanitarian law (IHL), and violators are so diligently punished, that fighting justly trumps every other instinct, however tense the conflict.

The excuse of western hypocrisy distances us from reconciliation within our own victim communities. Naively associating ICL with the International Criminal Court begets the impression the law cannot exist without the institution. In Judge Dire Tladi's words, "the Court is only a court"; opposing it must not deprive our citizens of the rule of international criminal law.

Characterisation of mass atrocity crimes

As Justice S. Muralidhar observed, "neither 'crimes against humanity' nor 'genocide' is part of our domestic law of crime"; the former being identified in the 1984 anti-Sikh violence (*State vs Sajjan Kumar*, (2018)). India has no vocabulary for mass atrocities. Genocide, "the crime of crimes", would be prosecuted under the 2023 Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita ('BNS') through separate counts of 'murder' or 'grievous hurt' with 'promoting enmity', none of which captures genocide's gravity. This violates the principle of fair labelling: moral distinctions between more and less serious wrongdoing must be reflected in how offences are named, characterised and punished. As to 'war crimes', a framework exists but is inadequate. Of the 24 IHL conventions that India has ratified, only three have implementing legislation, which is necessary to make an international convention internally binding and for violations thereof to carry criminal liability.

The 1960 Geneva Conventions Act ('GCA') criminalises only one type of 'war crimes', grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, applicable only in international armed conflicts, leaving other customary war crimes uncriminalised.

Like the other two implementing legislation, the GCA bars prosecutions not initiated by the central government, leaving citizens no recourse against governmental failure or unwillingness to prosecute war crimes (*Rev. Monteiro vs Goa* (1969)). Across 66 years and seven international armed conflicts, the GCA has yielded zero prosecutions, despite credible reports of grave breaches. Prosecuting atrocious conduct without the 'war crimes' label is similarly inadequate. 'Ordinary crimes' under statutes such as the BNS: first, carry lower sentences (up to five years for 'wrongful confinement', against 14 under the GCA); second, only partially map onto certain grave breaches ('unlawful compulsory labour' hardly fits 'compelling a prisoner of war to serve in enemy forces'); and third, completely fail to criminalise others (deporting protected persons from occupied territory).

Courts-martial cannot try 'war crimes' under the GCA, only 'civil offences' (same as 'ordinary crimes') and even narrower 'military offences', which under the Army, Navy and Air Force Acts concern crimes against the military establishment, rather than against civilians and enemy combatants. 'Torture', for example, would be grossly misclassified as acts 'prejudicial to good order and military discipline'. Moreover, unless the offence is punishable by death or life imprisonment, courts-martial can award significantly lower punishments than criminal courts (*Sikkim vs Jasbir Singh* (2022)).

Admittedly, the Geneva Conventions require not the 'war crimes' label but "effective penal sanctions", meaning comprehensively covering the substance of grave breaches and being specific enough to delimit criminal from permissible conduct (ICRC, 2025). Even where war crimes are criminalised, prosecutors may prefer domestic characterisations to avoid evidentiarily onerous elements. Evidence-, efficiency- and justice-driven deviations from fair labelling are, within limits, legitimate. Legislative recognition of atrocity crimes, regardless of follow-on prosecutions, serves a broader norm-signalling purpose, a valuable pre-crime effect. As it stands, however, India's framework cannot be considered 'effective'.

A further, perhaps sharper, pain point is the lack of any 'war crimes' regime in non-international armed conflicts, arguably India's predominant preoccupation. Worse still is the claim that India has only ever had 'internal disturbances', and thus no occasion to apply IHL. Yet, whether such a conflict exists is a matter of objective criteria: the conflict's intensity and duration, and the parties' degree of organisation. It involves no value judgment on the cause for which one fights and confers no legitimacy on either party.

Ample evidence suggests some past conflicts, such as with the CPI (Maoist), crossed this threshold, given the organisation of the Maoists and Salwa Judum, a civilian vigilante group Chhattisgarh recruited, trained and instructed to fight alongside state and central forces. In *Nandini Sundar vs Chhattisgarh* (2011), the Supreme Court starkly condemned the State government, but neither invoked IHL nor labelled any party's acts 'war crimes'. While Maoists were at least prosecuted, no member of the Salwa Judum or the security forces has yet been tried for widely reported war crimes.

Imperative of a principled approach

India's own approach to accountability must not be riddled with double standards. To be sure, sovereign interests must be balanced; one must be cognisant of a government official's Herculean task of maintaining a state's integrity and legitimacy. But one must not succumb to the facile belief that admitting fault reduces, rather than enhances, one's standing. Alongside political, economic and military concerns, an equal and competing instinct against impunity must be cultivated amongst the republic.

To be a Vishwaguru, India must lead by example, establishing not only a genuinely adequate legal framework but also a credible and public record of accountability for mass atrocity crimes. The stroke of the gavel must yield louder than victims' cries of suffering.

India must not deny its citizens the protection of the rule of international criminal law

GS 2/GS 3: IR & SPACE TECH
THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Thumba to Kourou, over 60 years of space partnership



Thierry Mathou

The Ambassador of France to India

India and France are charting a shared space future

For over 60 years, France and India have shared one of the longest-standing and most trusted space partnerships in the world. At a time when the international environment has become increasingly complex, this partnership matters more than ever before.

Since 1998, their strategic partnership has reposed on defence cooperation – from the Alouette III/Chetak and Rafale aircraft to Scorpène submarines built in India – and people-to-people ties, expanding over time to include artificial intelligence, the blue economy, and much more. What is remarkable about their special global strategic partnership is that, at the core of their national security doctrine, they both share the concept of strategic autonomy. Strategic autonomy does not mean isolating oneself from partners. On the contrary, it means building up one's own capacities, own analysis, and own decision-making process to be a useful and reliable partner. France has consistently backed India's rise as a global power, including its permanent seat at the UN Security Council.

Legacy of space cooperation

Space is one of the most enduring dimensions of their partnership. India-France space cooperation, launched in 1964, enabled India to produce Centaure sounding rockets and to master solid-propulsion technology, paving the way for the Rohini rockets. Since then, Ariane has launched more than 20 Indian communication satellites, while India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle has carried French Earth-observation satellites, such as SPOT (Satellite Pour l'Observation de la Terre/satellite for earth observation), into orbit. India-France joint missions such as Megha-Tropiques for climate studies in 2011, and SARAL-AltiKa for oceanography in 2013, provide compelling examples of how their bilateral cooperation can benefit the planet.

Today, the jointly developed Thermal infraRed Imaging Satellite for High-resolution Natural resource Assessment (TRISHNA) mission for thermal infrared observation of the earth's surface is a true, comprehensive technological cooperation between their respective space agencies, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Centre National d'Études Spatiales (CNES). It will improve understanding of water resource management, agriculture, and climate change. France is responsible for the thermal infrared instrument, while India is providing the satellite platform and an optical sensor allowing simultaneous visible and thermal observations. This will improve data analysis, making TRISHNA a vital tool for informed policy decisions and sustainable water use.

In September 2026, France hosted an Indian delegation led by ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan at the International Space Summit in Paris convened by President Emmanuel Macron, alongside the Bengaluru Space Expo (BSX), where CNES and the French space industry had a major presence. Also in September, French Minister for Higher Education, Research and Space Philippe Baptiste met Minister of State - Department of Space Jitendra Singh in New Delhi to discuss strengthening India-France cooperation in space and science. Cooperation now not only covers institutional partnership but also extends to industry and innovation ecosystems.

Partnership to production

The agreements between French and Indian companies at the International Space Summit and during BSX embody our ambition: "Make in India, together with France". The French approach has always been, whenever suitable, to offer as much indigenous production in India as possible. In the space sector, the reforms conducted by India since 2020 have brought impressive results. More than 400 space start-ups have been established, India's first privately developed orbital launch vehicle successfully reached orbit in July 2026, and the sector is projected to grow rapidly in the coming decade.

The French space industry is eager to partner with Indian companies. France had the chance to reiterate this commitment as the guest of honour country of the 2026 India International Space Conclave. France brings unique strengths to this partnership. First, their longstanding strategic partnership has allowed them to build a trusted and privileged relationship. Second, their historical inter-agency cooperation has resulted in day-to-day exchanges between their scientists and engineers. Third, France's space ecosystem has the talent, scientific excellence, technological innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit required for the next era of global space exploration.

Safer space

France is willing to put these strengths at the service of its cooperation with an exceptional partner such as India, especially considering the multiplication and increasing complexity of space activities. The use of outer space, given the growing number of operators involved, raises a range of issues, and demands that the two countries stand together to ensure its peaceful use, be it for space sustainability in the face of the threat posed by space debris proliferation, the safe use of outer space as a central theme, compliance with space law, transparency, and the protection of the critical infrastructure which our societies depend on every day.

As stated by President Macron during the International Space Summit, "Those who invest and lead today will shape tomorrow's partnerships and opportunities". From Thumba to Kourou, Bengaluru to Toulouse, and Delhi to Paris, France and India have always reached for the stars together. In a turbulent world, they intend to keep doing so, showing that their close strategic partnership and shared ambition remain their strongest guiding lights.

GS 2: INDIAN POLITY
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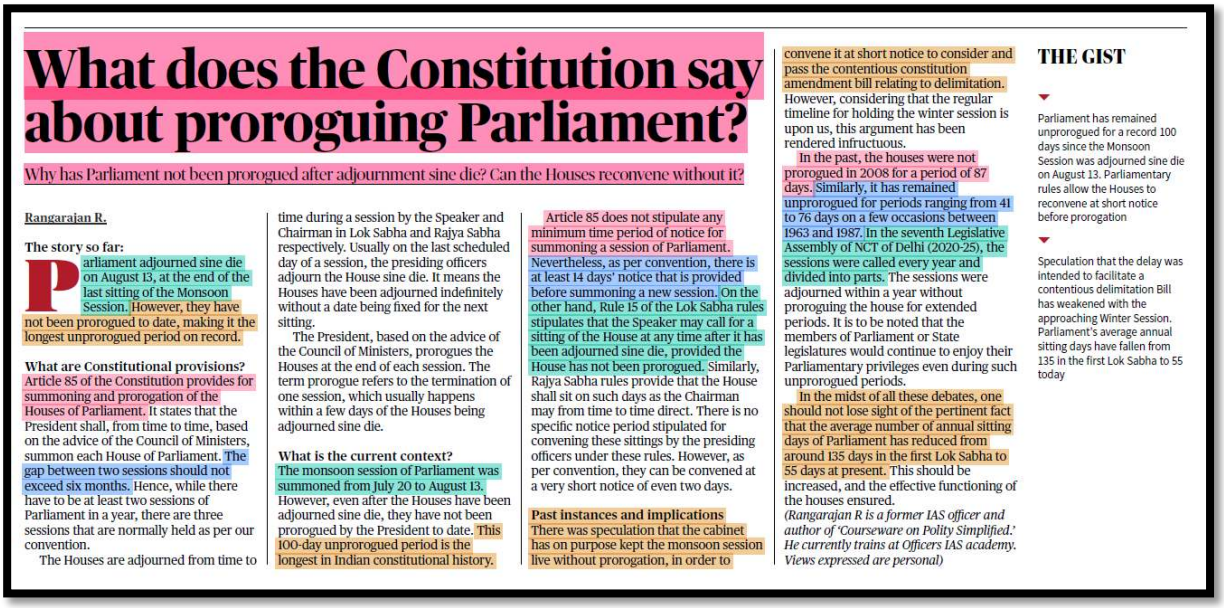

What does the Constitution say about proroguing Parliament?

Why has Parliament not been prorogued after adjournment sine die? Can the Houses reconvene without it?

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

Parliament adjourned sine die on August 13, at the end of the last sitting of the Monsoon Session. However, they have not been prorogued to date, making it the longest unprorogued period on record.

What are Constitutional provisions?

Article 85 of the Constitution provides for summoning and prorogation of the Houses of Parliament. It states that the President shall, from time to time, based on the advice of the Council of Ministers, summon each House of Parliament. The gap between two sessions should not exceed six months. Hence, while there have to be at least two sessions of Parliament in a year, there are three sessions that are normally held as per our convention.

The Houses are adjourned from time to time during a session by the Speaker and Chairman in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha respectively. Usually on the last scheduled day of a session, the presiding officers adjourn the House sine die. It means the Houses have been adjourned indefinitely without a date being fixed for the next sitting.

The President, based on the advice of the Council of Ministers, prorogues the Houses at the end of each session. The term prorogue refers to the termination of one session, which usually happens within a few days of the Houses being adjourned sine die.

What is the current context?

The monsoon session of Parliament was summoned from July 20 to August 13. However, even after the Houses have been adjourned sine die, they have not been prorogued by the President to date. This 100-day unprorogued period is the longest in Indian constitutional history.

Article 85 does not stipulate any minimum time period of notice for summoning a session of Parliament. Nevertheless, as per convention, there is at least 14 days' notice that is provided before summoning a new session. On the other hand, Rule 15 of the Lok Sabha rules stipulates that the Speaker may call for a sitting of the House at any time after it has been adjourned sine die, provided the House has not been prorogued. Similarly, Rajya Sabha rules provide that the House shall sit on such days as the Chairman may from time to time direct. There is no specific notice period stipulated for convening these sittings by the presiding officers under these rules. However, as per convention, they can be convened at a very short notice of even two days.

Past instances and implications

There was speculation that the cabinet has on purpose kept the monsoon session live without prorogation, in order to convene it at short notice to consider and pass the contentious constitution amendment bill relating to delimitation. However, considering that the regular timeline for holding the winter session is upon us, this argument has been rendered infructuous.

In the past, the houses were not prorogued in 2008 for a period of 87 days. Similarly, it has remained unprorogued for periods ranging from 41 to 76 days on a few occasions between 1963 and 1987. In the seventh Legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi (2020-25), the sessions were called every year and divided into parts. The sessions were adjourned within a year without proroguing the house for extended periods. It is to be noted that the members of Parliament or State legislatures would continue to enjoy their Parliamentary privileges even during such unprorogued periods.

In the midst of all these debates, one should not lose sight of the pertinent fact that the average number of annual sitting days of Parliament has reduced from around 135 days in the first Lok Sabha to 55 days at present. This should be increased, and the effective functioning of the houses ensured.

(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

- Parliament has remained unprorogued for a record 100 days since the Monsoon Session was adjourned sine die on August 13. Parliamentary rules allow the Houses to reconvene at short notice before prorogation
- Speculation that the delay was intended to facilitate a contentious delimitation Bill has weakened with the approaching Winter Session. Parliament's average annual sitting days have fallen from 135 in the first Lok Sabha to 55 today

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 08

Why is India Inc not investing? It wants certainty, government loves surprises



PRAVEEN CHAKRAVARTY

SUPPOSE SOMEONE pushed you off a cliff without warning. Later, if the same man invites you to a hilltop picnic, promising glorious views and a feast, would you go? The answer to this is also the answer to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's question to India Inc — why are you not investing enough, creating well-paying jobs and producing high-quality goods?

For 33 minutes at last week's FICCI annual conclave, PM Modi scolded the country's top industrialists. "I cut corporate tax, yet you did not invest. I raised the income tax threshold, but you did not raise salaries or hire more people. You ran away from agriculture. You produce poor-quality goods for Indian consumers," he said.

Modi is absolutely right about the symptoms of India's economic disease. Nearly $100 bn was given away as tax cuts to corporate India since the cut of 2019. That's almost what the Union government has spent on education since then, reflecting a misguided belief in 'trickle-down' economics, that the tax cuts will spur investment and create jobs.

Corporates pocketed the savings and eschewed investment. Their savings (retained profits) rose to 11.2 per cent of GDP in 2023 from 10.5 per cent before the cut, and investment remained stagnant at 12 per cent of GDP. Not enough jobs have been created by private industry over a decade, disillusionment over which brought young people to Jantar Mantar after an alleged paper leak. PM Modi also suffered the ignominy of thousands of unemployed youth forcing out his cabinet minister. He is right to be livid.

Who ended up paying for this $100 bn corporate bonanza? The middle class. For the first time in India's recent history, salaried individuals are paying more income tax than companies. The middle class is subsidising the boardroom.

Back in 2014, Modi announced a grand Make in India scheme that has cumulatively set aside roughly $30 billion in outlay for corporates to increase manufacturing's share of GDP to 25 per cent. Twelve years later, forget an increase; the share of manufacturing has come down. One can almost sympathise with Modi's outburst against the corporates' "betrayal".

But these supposed corporate betrayals are just the second half of the story of India Inc spurning Modi's red-carpet invitation to invest. The reasons can be found in the first half of the story, in which corporates were being pushed over the cliff, unaware.

When you render the nation's entire currency stash worthless suddenly and instantly, you create scars that last long. When you declare a nationwide lockdown in four hours, leaving workers and businesses stranded, plans are shelved, payrolls are slashed, and boardrooms learn never to bet big again.

When the Enforcement Directorate turns super-aggressive and three times more corporate charges are filed than in the previous tenure, every promoter knows the process is the punishment and looks to flee abroad with their money (Indian corporates now invest three times more money abroad than before).

If Modi really wanted those FICCI suits to invest, the speech he needed to give would have taken two minutes. All he had to do was promise them that he would never again surprise them or interfere in their affairs

When the top leadership of one of India's most respected business groups is summoned to the Delhi home of the Home Minister with the Finance Minister in attendance, then the message in this ostensibly *suo motu* intervention in its internal affairs rings loud in Mumbai — no company is too big to be summoned, and a Delhi sign-off for important decisions is implicitly needed.

And then the real elephant in India's corporate boardrooms: When one business group grows 15 times in market value, triples its market share in ports, enters eight new sectors and corners a significant share of state-owned banks' loans because it is apparently the "chosen" one, then every promoter comes to believe that the game is rigged, the umpire has a favourite and the smartest bet is to not play at all. Private investment has not vanished; it has been monopolised.

Businesses want certainty. Modi loves surprises. The two cannot coexist.

Ironically, even the one piece of good news corporate India received arrived as a shock. The corporate tax cut of September 2019 was not announced in the Budget speech, where such decisions belong and where boardrooms wait for them. It came barely two months after the Budget, sprung on an unsuspecting nation at a press conference in Goa. Markets soared for a day. Investment did not follow for a decade. A gift delivered as an ambush is still an ambush. What CFOs learnt that morning was not that taxes had fallen, but that anything could change, anytime, without warning.

That irony sums up the fundamental clash at the heart of this government's economic management. Businesses plan in decades; this government governs by surprises. A steel plant takes five years to build and 25 years to pay back. A refinery, a port, a chip fab, each is a bet that the rules of today will still hold in 2045. When the rulebook can be rewritten overnight, by a midnight address, a four-hour lockdown notice, a summons to a minister's home or a tax notice bigger than a company's revenue, no spreadsheet can price the risk. So, the rational promoter does the only rational thing left. She waits.

None of this is a secret. The economic advisers and bureaucrats in Modi's circle know it too. They are simply too scared or servile to tell him. Yet a middle-school student could have told the PM why India Inc is not investing. You cannot push someone off a cliff and then wonder why they decline your picnic invitation.

If Modi really wanted FICCI suits to invest, the speech he needed to give would have taken all of two minutes. All he had to do was stand up, promise them that he would never again surprise them or interfere in their affairs, no more overnight bans, no more knocks on the door and no more chosen ones. Instead, he chided, exhorted, lectured and taunted them for 33 minutes. Sermons do not unlock capital.

No prizes for guessing how corporate India will respond. It will do what it has done for a decade: Applaud publicly and tighten its wallet privately.

The writer is a Member of Parliament from Tamil Nadu & chairman of Data Analytics of Congress

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 08

Quad membership must translate into influence



SANJAY BHATTACHARYYA

THE QUAD Summit in Manila, the first in two years, was significant not merely for the revival of leadership meetings but also for its wider signalling. To partners, it signalled a transition from strategic intent to operational cooperation. It provided assurances to a democratic ASEAN. And the juxtaposition of the Quad and the Shenzhen trilateral meetings captured a defining feature of contemporary geopolitics: Accommodation by a global power in its simultaneous pursuit of coalitions and great-power consultations. The Quad joint statement identified items of operational cooperation in maritime security, economic resilience, AI technologies, connectivity extending to the Indian Ocean, cybersecurity and a business leaders' forum. The leaders reaffirmed opposition to unilateral attempts to alter the status quo through force or coercion, without explicitly naming China. Counterterrorism and support for ASEAN centrality were also reiterated.

The US provided reassurance to Indo-Pacific partners before Trump engaged Xi and Putin. The Manila and Shenzhen summits recognised the US as the pre-eminent power, sought by both friends and adversaries, but implementation capacity has yet to be tested. The US also conveyed its ability to pursue consultations with competitors without entirely relinquishing its regional security architecture. For Japan, the summit was important for its objective to be a principal security pillar in the Indo-Pacific with increased defence outlay. Australia strengthened recognition as the southern anchor of the Quad. India's geography, naval capabilities, economic potential and independent diplomatic relationships made it an essential partner. These factors reflect that India has strategic relevance, but not yet strategic primacy.

India's Quad agenda is to emerge as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean, protect sea lanes and monitor China's expanding maritime footprint. Building economic and technological resilience in critical minerals, supply chains, AI and cybersecurity is the key to reducing strategic dependency, attracting investment and developing manufacturing capability. India also seeks to pursue strategic autonomy to engage with the US, Russia, China and the Global South. The Manila summit delivered on most issues.

There was, nevertheless, a diplomatic irony. India was expected to host the 2025 Quad summit, but it was postponed by the Trump administration, indicating that US priorities were elsewhere. Eventually, the US convened it on the margins of ASEAN to balance the trilateral. India must ensure that its membership of the Quad translates into influence in global affairs. China has discomfort with the Quad, but maintained restraint on the Manila outcomes that addressed vulnerabilities arising from its dominant position in certain areas. Beijing pushed for a Shenzhen trilateral of "major powers", but it may be a one-off event in a world of geopolitical fragmentation. Emerging, middle and regional powers are unlikely to accept new structures of hegemony.

For India, the summits pose a more fundamental question: Will the emerging global order be shaped by a small group of great powers or a wider constellation of consequential powers? Only the accumulation of hard power can leverage India's position as it navigates the two competing but interconnected dimensions of coalition-building and great-power bargaining. India's diplomacy must not become captive to either.

India's Quad agenda is to emerge as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean, protect sea lanes and monitor China's expanding maritime footprint

The writer, a former diplomat, is professor at Jindal Global University

GS 3: AGRICULTURE & ENERGY

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The challenge is to sustain ethanol blending without hurting food security



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

BY ASHOK GULATI AND RAYA DAS

INDIA'S ATTAINMENT of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol (E20) in 2025-26, five years ahead of the 2030 deadline, is commendable. But sustaining it depends on ensuring ample supplies of feedstocks without jeopardising food security. Growing reliance on foodgrains in Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2026-27 has revived the food-versus-fuel debate. Due to tight sugar supplies, record prices and a weak monsoon in Maharashtra and Karnataka, the Centre has rightly directed oil marketing companies (OMCs) to cut sugar diversion for ethanol to zero. Their October tender excludes ethanol from cane juice, sugar syrup and B-heavy molasses, retaining only C-heavy molasses. This protects sugar availability for consumers but increases grain dependence for ethanol.

Launched in 2003 with 5 per cent blending in nine states and four UTs, the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme spent its first decade constrained by thin, sugar-dependent supplies. Administered prices, assured OMC offtake and the National Policy on Biofuels, 2018, which admitted maize and surplus foodgrains, lifted blending from about 5 per cent in 2019-20 to 20 per cent in 2025-26. The question is no longer whether India can produce enough ethanol, but from what, and at whose expense.

Rice and maize account for almost all of this shift. FCI rice entered the mix in 2020-21 with under 1 per cent of supply, reached 13.5 per cent by ESY25 despite a near-halt in 2023-24, and accounts for 44 per cent of ESY27 allocations. Ethanol allocations from damaged foodgrains rose 164 per cent over ESY26, raising concerns about storage-related quality losses. Maize's share increased from 6 per cent in ESY23 to 47 per cent in ESY27. It is also the mainstay of poultry feed and, increasingly, of dairy feed and starch. Mandi prices have already reached Rs 2,800 per quintal (Agmarknet), well above the MSP of Rs 2,400 per quintal. Either distillers bid maize prices higher, passing the cost on to poultry farmers and milk consumers, or they fall short of their commitments, putting E20 itself at risk.

The growing use of rice as ethanol feedstock carries substantial fiscal and environmental costs. FCI holds 39 MMT of rice and 20.27 MMT in rice-equivalent paddy stocks, more than five times the October 1 buffer norm. Rice allocations for ethanol rose from 3.11 MMT in ESY25 to an initial estimate of 7.2 MMT in ESY27. The latest ESY27 allocation of 483.8 crore litres of rice-based ethanol, comprising 159.9 crore litres from damaged rice and 323.9 crore litres from surplus rice, implies roughly 11.2 MMT of rice, using conversion factors of 2.5 and 2.22 kg per litre of ethanol, respectively (NITI Aayog, 2021).

The fiscal disparity is stark. FCI sells rice to distilleries at Rs 23.20 per kg, 47 per cent below its economic cost of Rs 43.91 per kg. ICRIER (2024) research shows that rice production in the Punjab-Haryana belt gets roughly Rs 10 as power and fertiliser subsidy per kg of rice. This means that the real economic cost of rice is nearly Rs 53.91/kg. The Department of Food estimates that it takes 2.5-3 kg of rice per litre of ethanol. Assuming an average conversion rate of 2.75 kg of rice per litre of ethanol, each litre of ethanol embodies Rs 148 in public expenditure. Interestingly, the price of ethanol paid by OMCs is only Rs 60.32/litre. That means that OMCs get an indirect subsidy of Rs 87.93 per litre of ethanol produced from rice. Applied to 11.2 MMT of rice allocated for ethanol, this implies a fiscal cost of more than Rs 35,800 crore to the exchequer.

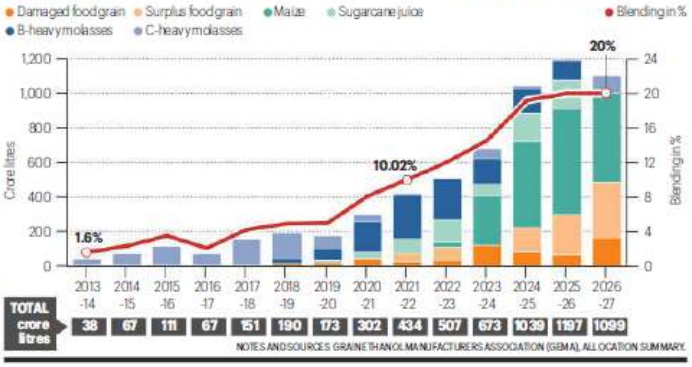
The environmental costs are equally alarming. In March 2026, the Petroleum Ministry informed Parliament that rice was the most water-intensive ethanol feedstock. At 2.75 kg of rice per litre of ethanol, and 4,000 litres of irrigation water required per kg of rice, each litre of ethanol embodies 11,000 litres of irrigation water. For 11.2 MMT of rice, this implies a potential water footprint of 44.8 billion cubic metres. Flooded paddy also generates methane emissions. ICRIER research estimates it at 5 tonnes CO_2e per hectare in the Punjab-Haryana belt (Singh and Gulati, 2025). In contrast, rainfed kharif maize requires one-fifth as much irrigation water as rice and generates much lower methane emissions.

Three key measures could help strengthen the programme. The first is a systematic study of the optimal supply and usage of feedstocks. A feedstock-specific, well-to-wheel assessment, benchmarked against the landed cost of imported ethanol, should guide procurement prices and allocations, replacing ad hoc adjustments. Second, the E20 mandate should be flexible. A dynamic blending band of E15-E20, tied to pre-announced triggers based on sugar output, grain stocks and maize prices, would allow the programme to contract in deficit years and expand in surplus ones, with ethanol imports as a safety valve. Third, diversification beyond first-generation food and feedstocks towards second- and third-generation alternatives is essential. The Pradhan Mantri Jaiv Indhan-Vatavaran Anukool Fasal Awashesh Nivaran (PM JI-VAN) Yojana, extended to 2028-29, supports ethanol from crop residues, industrial waste and algae, yet second-generation plants remain few and paddy straw is still burnt rather than distilled. Seaweed offers a third-generation option requiring no farmland, fertiliser or irrigation. Though yields are not yet commercially viable, targeted research and pilot coastal biorefineries could produce a genuinely green fuel that competes with neither food nor groundwater.

The food-versus-fuel debate is not new. For a country of about 1.48 billion people, which also feeds one of the world's largest livestock populations, it carries particular weight. Ethanol blending can reduce dependence on imported oil, but its gains must be weighed against pressures on food and feed security, groundwater depletion and the environmental costs of water-intensive crops. India has demonstrated its ability to scale up ethanol blending. The next challenge is to sustain that without compromising food security or environmental sustainability.

Gulati is distinguished professor and Das is fellow at ICRIER. Views are personal

ETHANOL BY FEEDSTOCK (CRORE LITRES) AND BLENDING (%)



NOTES AND SOURCES: GRAIN ETHANOL MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION (GEMA), ALLOCATION SUMMARY.

> For a country of about 1.48 billion people, which also feeds one of the world's largest livestock populations, the food-versus-fuel debate carries particular weight

GS 2/GS 3: SOCIAL SECURITY & ECONOMY

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ROLLOUT LIKELY IN FEBRUARY; EPFO IS ALSO IN FINAL STAGES OF LAUNCHING ITS UPI FACILITY

EPFO 3.0: Coverage for informal workers, tech overhaul in focus

Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, November 22

WITH THE objective to provide universal social security cover to all formal and informal sector workers, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is planning to launch EPFO 3.0 in February.

Under EPFO 3.0, the retirement fund body plans to undertake a complete overhaul of the technological infrastructure which will enable direct Universal Account Number (UAN)-linked provident fund (PF) contributions for all worker categories, two people aware of the matter told *The Indian Express*.

"The work on the tech front has begun. The platform will be built with a vision to handle data for 200 crore workers over the next 50 years. The tech upgrade will be the next-generation reform for the EPFO, where it will move towards becoming a complete paperless system," a person aware of the discussions said.

The EPFO is also in the final stages of launching its UPI facility, with the launch expected by December-end, the person said. "All trials have been done. Some tech glitches were coming in the trials and those have been resolved, and it is in the final stages now," another person said.

Under the facility, members will be able to withdraw PF using BHIM app. They will also be able to view available balance, balance eligible for withdrawal, and minimum balance.

Earlier this month, the EPFO had launched a WhatsApp service allowing EPF subscribers to access PF balance, latest transactions, and passbook.

Wider coverage

The EPFO 3.0 phase will pave the way for PF contributions for all unorganised sector workers and gig workers, in line with the Code on Social Security that brings gig and platform workers into the social security net for the first time.

The Code mandates aggregator contributions of 1-2% of annual turnover for social security, with total contribution not exceeding 5% of the amount payable by aggregator. The EPFO has nearly 8 crore active members and over 34 cr-ore total members with retirement corpus of nearly Rs 32 lakh crore.

It will also incorporate core banking solution software on its tech platform that will bring in a centralised system of operation, just like banks.

This will help members access their account and resolve issues at any regional office in India. It will especially help EPFO members who move around cities for work.

Since the next phase will cover all workers, the EPFO has to prepare for a large volume of transactions for a workforce of over 60 crore. As it expects around 2.5 crore gig workers, and building and other construction workers (BOCW) over next five years, the upgrade is being planned keeping in mind their inclusion into social security coverage for the first time.

UAN integration

The new phase of reforms will incorporate "one-to-many mapping" where one UAN will be registered with multiple employers and aggregators, showing total PF and pension contributions from all sources for workers while maintaining employer-wise breakdowns.

EPFO plans to allow third-party contributions such as NGOs, individuals, donor organisations, CSR, and track all contributions under each UAN with a configurable upper limit.

The new initiative will operationalise this through flexible co-contribution models, ensuring inclusion of delivery partners, drivers, and other platform workers.

The EPFO is moving into its next phase of reforms with approval for a systematic withdrawal plan, allowing subscribers to receive periodic payouts at retirement instead of withdrawing their entire corpus as a lumpsum.

The proposal was cleared at a meeting last week.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• GIG WORKERS' INCLUSION

EPFO 3.0 phase will pave the way for provident fund contributions for all unorganised sector workers and gig workers.

THE MOVE is in line with the Code on Social Security that brings gig and platform workers into the social security net for the first time.

