EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

30-10-2026

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (HEALTH)

THE HINDU PAGE: 07

Can new fortified potato variety help with India's hidden hunger problem?

Kufri Jamunia is a purple skinned and fleshy potato with higher levels of certain nutrients compared to regular potatoes; at present, however, taking into account its production costs, pricing, uptake in the market and its ability to deliver these nutrients, it is unclear if it can help with hidden hunger

Vasudevan Mukunth

Scientists at the ICAR-Central Potato Research Institute (CPRI) have developed a new potato variety called 'kufri jamunia' that has higher levels of anthocyanins, vitamin C, and certain micronutrients than regular potatoes. The Central government has been promoting it of late as a means to address hidden hunger, i.e. when people consume enough calories but still do not receive the necessary nutrients.

Usually, experts who fortify foods, focus on items like rice and iodised salt, which a large number of people in India consume, often throughout the year, thus ensuring the added nutrients are delivered to a significant chunk of the population. Kufri jamunia is however a potato, which people in India generally consume much less consistently than rice or salt, and the micronutrient intake depends on preparation methods and how the body absorbs them.

Kufri jamunia offers nutritional advantages, but they are substantial in some aspects more than others. Questions also linger about its ability to resist disease and retain nutrients through different Indian cooking methods.

The variety reportedly has a mealy texture. In one CPRI assessment involving 64 people, 95% rated its overall acceptability 'good to excellent' and 56% said its taste was very good. This study cohort, though, is too small to generalise the results. CPRI researchers themselves have proposed that kufri jamunia can be used in curries, parathas, soups, baked goods, and dehydrated flours.

Importantly, kufri jamunia potatoes also have purple skin and flesh, which could affect consumer interest. Research on other biofortified foods has already shown that while people are generally willing to pay modest premiums — the national average cost of ordinary potatoes purchased wholesale is around ₹17/kg — whether they accept a new variety depends on its appearance, their awareness, taste, and of course local preferences.

How was is developed

The CPRI team developed the kufri jamunia variety by crossing two potato lines, MS/8-1148 and CP4242, in 2015. MS/8-1148 is high in vitamin C whereas CP4242 had purple skin and flesh. The result, formally called MSP/16-307, could naturally accumulate higher concentrations of specific nutrients as it grew. The team then conducted trials, including multi-location testing, in 2021-2023.

Based on the trial data, the Central Sub-Committee on Crop Standards, Notification and Release of Varieties for Horticultural Crops approved the variety in mid-2024 and the government notified it in November that year. The variety's plants produce 10-12 medium to large tubers each and mature in around 90 days. The purple colour comes from anthocyanins — organic compounds also found in jamun and blueberries.

According to the Press Information Bureau, 100 g of kufri jamunia flesh contains around 42.75 mg of vitamin C (versus 23.15 mg in regular potatoes), 42.05 mg of anthocyanins, 2.28 mg of zinc (versus 0.28 mg), 3.22 mg of iron (versus 0.57 mg), and 161 micrograms of carotenoids. And per the CPRI team's findings themselves, published in *Potato Journal* in 2025, 100 g of kufri jamunia was found to have a range of carotenoid levels, from 15.6 micrograms in Kanpur to 298.4 micrograms in Raipur, during the multi-location trials. Kufri jamunia also contains slightly less zinc than kufri neelkanth and slightly less iron than kufri manik; the latter are other coloured potato varieties developed at the Institute.

Anthocyanins are known to have antioxidant properties, although whether the same benefits will accrue when delivered by kufri jamunia potatoes is not known. And in the absence of similar studies, the same caveat goes for iron and zinc. A 2016 study in *Food Chemistry* examined purple-fleshed potatoes and reported that steaming and microwaving generally preserved more of the nutritional substances than stir-frying did. However, again, research specific to kufri jamunia is not available.



Solving an issue: The variety reportedly has a mealy texture. CPRI researchers themselves have proposed that kufri jamunia can be used in curries, parathas, soups, baked goods, and dehydrated flours. THULASI KAKKAT/PIB

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Cultivation factors

Nutrient availability and delivery constitutes one half of a biofortification programme; the other half is determined by cultivation.

At the Modipuram research station, according to the *Potato Journal* paper, the team recorded an average yield of 49.01 tonnes per hectare after three months, across three seasons, whereas subsequent multi-location trials, including at Modipuram, recorded an overall mean of 31.96 tonnes per hectare across north (36.77 tonnes), central (33.79 tonnes), and eastern (25.91 tonnes) India.

On the other hand, at these locations, kufri manik yielded 31.52 tonnes per hectare and kufri neelkanth 36.61 tonnes per hectare. Further, kufri jamunia could moderately resist late blight, a disease caused by the water mould *Phytophthera infestans*, in laboratory conditions but has been reported as 'susceptible' in the field. Late blight is a devastator of potato crops and the CPRI team has already recommended that farmers apply fungicide.

Next, the multi-location trials also produced 29.19 tonnes of marketable potatoes per hectare, versus 33.48 tonnes for kufri neelkanth. So if the costs of cultivation were equal, kufri jamunia farmers could need a 15% premium on the selling price to attain the same gross revenue. (A study published by a CPRI in *Indian Horticulture* in 2020 estimated that, for regular potatoes, the seed material accounted for 40-50% of the production costs vis-à-vis regular potatoes, with a per-hectare seed cost of around ₹60,000-75,000 per hectare.)

Taken together, there are many unknowns about kufri jamunia at this point to assess its overall cost-benefit ratio, including the cost of seeds and disease management, pricing, its uptake in the market, and how efficaciously it will deliver iron and zinc to the population. It would be premature as a result to deem kufri jamunia to be a proven solution to address India's hidden hunger.

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THE GIST

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GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

The examination overload, its enormous cost



Furqan Qamar

Vice Chancellor of the Integral University Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. He was the Secretary General of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Himachal Pradesh and University of Rajasthan, and Adviser (Education) in the Planning Commission

Once upon a time, not very long ago, students could focus on their education, confident that their academic results would determine admission to higher education and career opportunities. Today, millions of young Indians face not one examination but a cascade of them – a seemingly endless series of entrance examinations. Besides board examinations, aspiring engineers and doctors generally face entrance tests such as the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) and the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), respectively. Architecture and law aspirants must also navigate examinations such as the National Aptitude Test in Architecture (NATA) and the Common Law Admission Test (CLAT). Others must take the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) or institution-specific examinations. With affordable, quality higher education in short supply, many candidates make repeated attempts. Even a good bachelor's degree does not guarantee postgraduate admission.

Postgraduate aspirants face examinations such as the Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE), Common Admission Test (CAT), Common University Entrance Test for Postgraduate Programmes (CUET-PG) and various university-level entrance tests. Research aspirants face further qualifying examinations, including the National Eligibility Test (NET). The ordeal continues during recruitment. Academic qualifications merely establish eligibility, while employment often depends on examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), State Public Service Commissions, Staff Selection Commission (SSC) and Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS). The proliferation of entrance and recruitment examinations has turned education and employment into a relentless cycle of competitive testing.

The cost of competition

Each of these layers of examinations demands months of separate preparation, payment of separate coaching fees, and unexplainable suffering and distress. Somewhere in this labyrinthian relay race, the very examinations that were supposed to certify students' learning, abilities and achievements have been rendered irrelevant. It is time to ask a blunt question: why do we need all these additional gates when the school and university leaving examinations already exist to measure merit?

Separate examinations for admission and jobs were declared inevitable because school board and university examinations were argued to suffer from a lack of uniform standards and their susceptibility to manipulation and rampant use of unfair means. The argument assumes that the new layers of examinations would be free from these deficiencies. The on-the-ground experience has only proven that the designed cure is worse than the disease itself.

Public examinations are marred by allegations of paper leaks and other unfair practices, such as dummy candidates, mark manipulation, and merit garbling, leading to repeated cancellations. Each incident wastes public money, delays admissions and recruitment, and erodes faith in the fairness of the system.

India's obsession with layers of examinations must end, and the focus must return to the forgotten value of sustained academic performance

Centralised counselling for seat allotments complicates the process. They also multiply anxiety, stress and mental trauma. Layering examination upon examination rather than distributing this pressure forces students to spend their entire adolescence running an unbroken loop of a preparatory marathon.

Additionally, such examinations entail exorbitant costs that ultimately fall disproportionately on families who can ill afford them. Children from the economically weaker and marginalised sections of society struggle to manage and often cannot. Far from being neutral arbiters of merit, these examinations have come to reward the ability to pay for preparation rather than raw ability or diligence in school.

Youth frustrations may have reached a tipping point, compelling them to take to the streets. Several States have seen protests of varying scales. It remains to be seen whether the proposed strengthening of the law against unfair practices in public examinations and the recommendations of the high-powered committee constituted in July 2026 will address these systemic deficiencies.

The present system of layered examinations suffers from design defects and systemic deficiencies. The National Testing Agency's continuing difficulties, despite a comprehensive review by a committee headed by a former space scientist in 2024, have raised questions about the effectiveness of the reforms. The constitution of another high-powered committee, in 2026, underscores the persistence of these concerns.

We are still thinking only of reforming this broken system without stopping for a moment to ask a critical question: how can we trust centralised public examinations conducted by agencies that have repeatedly failed to fulfil their responsibilities when we cannot trust years of assessment by teachers throughout a student's course of study?

Why bear such a heavy burden when, academically speaking, these layers of examinations cannot possibly substitute for the regular assessment of knowledge acquired over years of study? At most, they can evaluate candidates on a much narrower, often more coachable skill: ticking off the answer choices quickly under pressure in a specific question format, while disregarding years of demonstrated cumulative academic performance.

The result is a strange inversion. Students no longer study to learn; they study to clear filters. Classroom teaching has been relegated in favour of coaching-centre drilling. The board examination becomes a formality, and we have ended up with a system where the credentialing examination that ought to matter most – the one tied to actual classroom learning – now matters the least.

Merit already exists, use it

It makes sense to fix the school and higher education system, which has long been broken and continues to be hammered, causing further damage. Now is the time to focus on restoring the credibility of school and university examinations. Whatever their imperfections, these examinations are not arbitrary, as they assess knowledge acquired over years of study, involve continuous evaluation and are moderated by boards and universities with established standards. With some investment, they can become far better and more reliable measures of merit.

A student's Class XII marks or university Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) already reflect years of consistent performance – a far more holistic and harder-to-game measure of ability and diligence than a single high-stakes examination. If board and university examinations are inconsistent across States or institutions, the answer is to standardise and strengthen them through normalisation, common moderation frameworks, external audits and periodic score equating, rather than building an entirely separate examination system on top of them. If admission committees and employers doubt the rigour of certain boards or universities, those doubts should be addressed by reforming the assessment standards of these institutions, rather than requiring every student in the country to run a second, third or fourth race, regardless of where they studied.

Admissions to higher education institutions ought to be based on standardised and moderated school-leaving examination results. Scholarships and fellowships should be awarded on the basis of academic performance and track records. Recruitment to public services could be based on verified academic records and structured interviews. At most, a single national test at each exit level of the educational hierarchy could be conducted to assess students' scholastic aptitude, with the scores used to moderate board or university examination results.

Global practices

This is not a radical proposal by international standards. Many countries admit students to university primarily based on their school-leaving results, supplemented by references and essays, with marginal weight assigned to scores in language and scholastic aptitude tests. It is India's exceptional layering of tests, often to assess the same competency, tested repeatedly by different bodies, that is the outlier.

The argument for dismantling India's entrance and recruitment examination pyramid is not an argument against standards. It is an argument that standards already exist, embedded in the school and university systems which India has spent enormous public resources building, and that repeatedly re-testing the same students for the same underlying competencies wastes money, invites corruption, and causes real harm to the wellbeing of young people. Reforming and trusting the examinations India already has would do more to promote genuine merit than adding yet another layer of examinations ever could.

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

Concerns over the collegium system

Retired SC judge Justice Sanjay Kaul has shared that former CJI D.Y. Chandrachud may have discussed proposed judicial appointments with the Centre before the collegium met to discuss them, prompting a broader debate on the evolution of the collegium system and ways to improve transparency in judicial appointments

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

The Story so far:

Retired judge of the Supreme Court Justice Sanjay Kaul has shared that former Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud may have discussed proposed names for judgeship with the Union Government even before the collegium met to discuss them. He characterised this as seeking the government's 'pre-approval', which erodes the judiciary's autonomy.

Provisions in the Constitution

Article 124 of the Constitution provides that judges of the Supreme Court shall be appointed by the President after consulting the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Similarly, Article 217 provides that judges of a High Court shall be appointed by the President after consulting CJI, Chief Justice of the High Court and Governor of the State. The original Constitution provided for consultation by the executive with the judiciary before appointments to safeguard judicial independence as well as to ensure quality, as judges are best equipped to assess the professional and technical merits of proposed candidates.

The collegium system

As per process laid down in the Constitution, judges were appointed by the government after consultation with the judiciary till 1980s. In the First Judges case (1981), the Supreme Court had upheld the primacy of executive in judicial appointments since it is accountable to the people. However, considering the need to maintain independence of judiciary and insulate it from political favouritism, the Supreme Court in Second Judges case (1993) created the collegium system for appointment of judges. This was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court's opinion in Third Judges case (1998). The collegium currently comprises the CJI and four senior-most Supreme Court judges for appointments to the Supreme Court, and the CJI and two senior-most judges for appointments to High Courts.



The collegium system for judicial appointments is a unique process devised by the SC. FILE PHOTO

The detailed procedure for appointment, as per the guidelines of the Supreme Court in Second and Third Judge cases, is captured in the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) for appointment of Judges prepared by the Union Law Ministry in 1998. As per the MoP, the collegium initiates the proposal for appointment of judges to the higher judiciary and sends the recommendation to the Central government. The Centre may return a recommendation in case of any objection or reservation with respect to any of the proposed names. However, if the collegium reiterates the recommendation, the appointment should be made.

The Parliament through the 99th Constitutional Amendment in 2014 had set up the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) to provide recommendations to the executive for the appointment of judges. The NJAC was to consist of the CJI, two senior judges, Union Law Minister and two eminent persons. This was however struck down by the Supreme Court in 2015 as it violated the basic structure of independence of the judiciary. Hence, the collegium process continues till date for appointments.

After the NJAC judgement, the government and the judiciary agreed to revise the MoP to usher in more transparency into the appointment process. However, owing to differences of opinion on some of the aspects of revised MoP drafted by the executive, it has not been finalised even after 11 years.

International practices

The collegium procedure for judicial appointments is a unique process that has been devised by the Indian Supreme Court, that has no parallel in any other democracy.

In the U.S., judges to the Federal Supreme Court are nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

In the United Kingdom, the independent Judicial Appointments Commission comprises 15 commissioners appointed from the judiciary, the legal profession, and the public. This JAC selects candidates for judicial office in courts and tribunals. Appointment of Judges to the U.K. Supreme Court (UKSC) is based on a selection commission that consists of President of the UKSC, a Senior U.K. judge, and three other members that includes a member of JAC.

In South Africa, there is a Judicial Service Commission (JSC) that consists of 23 members, including the Chief Justice and representatives from the judiciary, legislature, executive, lawyers and academia. This JSC recommends names to President for appointment of Judges.

The way forward

The collegium system has ensured the independence of the judiciary from the executive, in the matter of appointments. Nevertheless, it has its own drawbacks like the lack of transparency and accountability. There is also resentment on account of alleged nepotism in this process whereby kith and kin of sitting judges are favoured for appointment to higher judiciary. The immediate reform would be to finalise the revised MoP that would bring in the required transparency and consultative process in appointments.

The long-term reform could be to revive the NJAC with a broader composition. It can include representatives from the legislature, the Bar Council and academia, like in South Africa and the U.K. This would make the consultation process more broad-based and inclusive. The judiciary could still be provided with a veto over the final recommendation to protect its independence.

(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

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GS 3: INFRASTRUCTURE
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 11

• INFRASTRUCTURE

Siang dam: Why the project to counter China faces opposition in Arunachal

Shinjini Ghosh
New Delhi, October 29

TENSIONS ARE rising in Arunachal Pradesh's Siang belt, with sections of the indigenous Adi community, youth leaders and residents objecting to the proposed Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP).

A 12-hour shutdown was called last Friday; reports of vandalism and violence emerged soon after it ended. On Thursday, several groups held a rally in state capital Itanagar, protesting the project and demanding the release of protesters and activists detained in connection with the agitation.

According to local residents, the project threatens them economically and socially, and also impinges upon the sentimental and cultural heritage attached to their ancestral land. Even as the government goes ahead with the pre-feasibility survey (PFR), apprehensions have only grown. The state government maintains that the SUMP is essential to counter China's proposed upstream dam and is a national security issue.

What is the Siang Project?

At 11,200 MW, the SUMP is touted to be India's largest hydropower project. Plans to harness the Siang and Subansiri rivers date back to 1982, when the Brahmaputra Board proposed three smaller projects; countering Chinese projects was not a primary concern then. In 2013, however, the central government raised concerns over Chinese projects on the Yarlung Tsangpo — as the Siang is known in upstream Tibet — and expressed interest in being a downstream user.

In 2017, the proposed Siang Upper Stage-I and Stage-II were merged under one umbrella, which eventually took shape as the SUMP. The project gained further prominence after China approved its 60,000 MW lower Yarlung Tsangpo hydropower project in December 2024.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Ninong Ering, Pasighat West MLA, said, "It is a national interest project. What if China purposely releases water and uses it [its dam] as a water bomb? We need checks and balances in place. This is why the Centre emphasised that we need this project."

• PROPOSED PROJECT



Experts, however, have questioned this argument. Himanshu Thakkar, coordinator of the South Asia Network on Dams, told *The Indian Express*: "The government is trying to say that the SUMP is required to counter China. But the problem is that we don't even know the basic dimensions of the Chinese project. Only when we know the operational SOP of the project will we know what kind of impact it will have on India and what needs to be done to take care of it."

Thakkar said it was essential for India to seek public details of the project from Beijing. "As a downstream country we have the right to that information. India is pushing for the project by just assuming that it will help counter the Chinese project. Even if India wants to go ahead with the project, it will not be possible without the full cooperation of the local community," he said.

What is the project's current status?

The SUMP is currently at the pre-feasibility survey stage. In September, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the project would not be "rushed beyond the feasibility stage."

Khandu said that if experts found the project not feasible, "there will be no further progress". The Chief Minister also assured extensive consultations with affected communities if the SUMP progresses beyond the feasibility stage, including a social impact assessment, an environmental assessment and preparation of a detailed project report.

Ering added, "The Chief Minister has already given the assurance that even after the PFR if villagers do not want the project to go ahead, then it will not be done. However, it should be kept in mind that the government will look into all aspects for the affected residents, including proper compensation and rehabilitation."

Dubit Siram, a resident of Geku village along the Siang, said it was unlikely that the government would step back once the PFR is completed. "It is unlikely that the PFR will say that the project is not feasible. When has it ever happened? The authorities should give it to us in writing that even after the PFR, the dam will not be built. Even if the PFR is done, we will not allow the construction of the dam," said Siram, a member of the Siang Indigenous Farmers' Forum.

What do communities stand to lose?

Condemning the recent vandalism reported from Pasighat, Ering said: "People have the right to be angry, but we are ready to hold conversations. Maybe we could have implemented the awareness programmes sooner. But there are elements that are instigating the protestors."

For the indigenous communities, the loss of ancestral land and livelihood are at the core of the issue. "We will be refugees in our own land," Siram said. Thakkar also stressed that for indigenous communities and residents along the riverbank, the Siang is like a "mother for them culturally, economically, socially and on religious terms."

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 11

• GLOBAL

Protests to power in 2 yrs: How Serbia student movement won polls



EXPERT EXPLAINS

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PROFESSOR AND JEAN MONNET CHAIR AT THE CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES, JNU

A STUDENT-LED movement in Serbia won a clear majority in parliamentary elections on Sunday, unseating President Aleksandar Vučić after over a decade. The development comes as many countries, including in Europe, witness student-led movements calling for fixing systemic issues, from corruption to education. How did Serbia go from a student movement to unseating the president in two years, and what effect could this have on the region?

What led to the student movement?

The student movement was triggered by the collapse of a canopy at a railway station in Novi Sad city in November 2024, which killed 16 people. The disaster soon became a symbol of alleged institutional corruption and lack of accountability.

It was followed by campus blockades that gradually escalated into mass protests. Students made decisions about the movement through open campus assemblies, where they debated and approved their course of action. What began as weekly protests and campus blockades soon became a national movement, as other parts of society, including teachers, actors, and farmers, joined the demonstrations. Allegations of collusion between the ruling party and organised crime also gained prominence, inspiring one of the movement's slogans: "Serbia or the Mafia?"

In September, after nearly two years of protests, Vučić announced snap polls and resigned as President, five months before the end of his second and final term. With control over the media and state institutions, he appeared confident of returning to power as Prime Minister.

The movement, meanwhile, sought to translate the protests into an organised electoral platform: "Student List – Students Win." The List brought together 250 candidates from diverse backgrounds, including more than 160 PhD holders. It excluded individuals previously associated with political parties. Its candidates included university teachers, actors, farmers and singers. Collectively, they developed a programme outlining their vision for the country.

To broaden its appeal and avoid internal divisions, the movement prioritised domestic issues, including media freedom, anti-corruption measures, institutional reform and education. It called on all opposition parties to support its candidates rather than field their own. The List won 141 of the 250 seats, forcing Vučić to concede defeat.

The movement adopted a cautious approach to contentious foreign policy questions. The List maintained that Kosovo remained part of Serbia, despite its declaration of independence in 2008. While around 100 countries have recognised Kosovo's independence, India, China, Russia and five European Union (EU) member states continue to withhold recognition. It also proposed holding a referendum on Serbia's EU membership, and opposed sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine war.

Why is Vučić's defeat significant?

Vučić has dominated Serbian politics since 2014, first as Prime Minister and later as President. He emerged as a prominent ultranationalist leader during the Yugoslav wars and NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999. He later co-founded the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and repositioned himself as a more pragmatic leader.

In power, Vučić pursued a multi-vector foreign policy, engaging with the EU while maintaining close ties with Russia. He also opened Serbia to Chinese investment, including the Belt and Road Initiative.

What does this mean for Europe?

The students' victory could provide a significant boost to student movements across Europe. It could inspire other movements, demonstrating how sustained, peaceful mobilisation can challenge deeply entrenched political regimes and bring about political change without violence.

It also has implications for the Russia-Ukraine War. No government in Belgrade can afford to ignore Serbia's deep historical, cultural, religious and economic ties with Russia. Both countries share the Orthodox Christian tradition. The List has announced that Serbia will halt arms supplies to all conflict zones, including to those western countries that subsequently supply weapons to Ukraine.

Serbia's European integration remains a major challenge. Accession progress has been held back by concerns over the rule of law, judicial independence, media freedom, the normalisation of relations with Kosovo and Serbia's limited alignment with EU foreign policy, particularly its refusal to align fully with sanctions against Russia. This may change, depending on the new government.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: "We stand ready to support reforms on the rule of law, media freedom, the fight against corruption and strong democratic institutions, and to work together to advance Serbia's future in the European Union." The new government may adopt a more cautious approach towards Chinese infrastructure investments.

Survival strategy

- The decentralised decision-making within the movement made it difficult for Vučić's administration to discredit it or arrest a key figure.
- Its independence from established parties helped preserve public trust.
- Students went beyond campus protests, engaging in door-to-door canvassing and reaching out to villages that supported Vučić.
- The movement remained peaceful and focused on domestic issues. By using national symbols rather than EU flags, the protesters made it harder for the administration to paint the movement as externally funded.

GS 3: ENERGY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 12

India must set a higher bar on clean energy targets



RITWICK GEORGE

AT THE Paris Agreement in 2015, India promised that by 2030, 40 per cent of its power capacity would come from non-fossil sources. It got there nine years early. It also pledged to cut the emissions intensity of its economy, the carbon emitted per rupee of GDP, by 33-35 per cent from 2005 levels. It met that goal too, with a decade to spare. The problem is that India's pledges ask little more than what the country is already on track to do.

With the Hormuz crisis sending oil above $100 a barrel, and ahead of COP31, it's time for India to set ambitious climate targets and deliver on them — because this is now the cheaper and safer path. In September, the UN announced the failure to limit global warming to 1.5 °C, calling for mass carbon removal, with no actual feasible ways to do so. NDCs were supposed to be aimed at reducing GHG emissions. India's targets have routinely been weak and not aligned with the aim of staying below 1.5 °C. The March pledge raises similar concerns about scope and ambition. India now promises 60 per cent clean energy capacity by 2035, despite already reaching nearly 53 per cent in February. It also promises to cut emissions intensity by 47 per cent by 2035. Intensity as a metric is skewed because it measures emissions relative to economic output. If an economy doubles while cutting intensity by 40 per cent, it will still emit 20 per cent more. Focusing on intensity also allows India to report steady reductions on paper while keeping emissions rising. Most major economies have committed to absolute limits, including China. India is the largest emitter still in the Paris Agreement without one.

What India's pledges leave out is also telling. It plans to grow coal capacity 46 per cent by 2035. Coal still generates more than two-thirds of India's electricity, and clean sources supplied just 29 per cent of India's power last year, despite a capacity of over 50 per cent. Since the Iran war began, India's crude imports through Hormuz have been disrupted. Coal cannot solve this; oil and gas fuel India's cars and kitchens. The way out is to electrify. Increasingly, the cheapest way to do that is the sun. In a national auction for round-the-clock clean power, winning bids came in at Rs 5.25, fixed for 25 years, while coal contracts signed in 2025 started at Rs 5.38 to Rs 6.30 and are projected to rise with fuel costs.

India should set more ambitious targets. It should name the year its power-sector emissions will peak and set an absolute limit (rather than its current intensity goals), the kind the Paris Agreement encourages developing countries to do. Second, measure what matters. Set targets for clean electricity actually generated, not just installed capacity. Chile has done this: Its renewables law required 20 per cent of its electricity generation to come from new renewables like wind and solar by 2025. It hit the target six years early and raised its goal to 70 per cent renewable electricity by 2030. Third, build the grid. India's problem is no longer generating clean power; it's delivering it. The country curbed clean power output in most months of 2025 because the grid couldn't absorb it. Over the past five years, it built only about 80 per cent of its planned transmission capacity, and on a single day this March, it lost enough renewable power to supply 5 million urban households because transmission lines couldn't carry it.

India should name the year its power-sector emissions will peak and set an absolute limit (rather than its current intensity goals), the kind the Paris Agreement encourages

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