

**The most effective
way to do it,
is to do it.**

- Amelia Earhart



Important Issues of the Day

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- **23 killed in explosion – Page No.1 , GS 3**
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- **Costs and wages – Page No. 6, GS 2,3**
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Talks today, Trump says as Iran keeps ships out of Strait

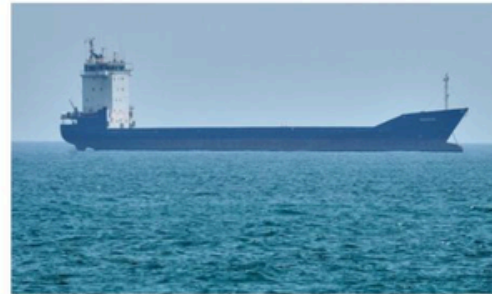
U.S. President threatens to destroy civilian infrastructure if Tehran does not accept deal; ceasefire set to expire soon even as stand-off continues

Associated Press
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Sunday that U.S. negotiators would head to Pakistan on Monday for talks with Iran, lifting hopes of extending a ceasefire set to expire by Wednesday.

The prospect of talks, which Iran did not immediately confirm, came as ships remain unable to transit the Strait of Hormuz amid threats from Iran and a U.S. blockade on ships heading to and from Iranian ports. The White House said Vice-President J.D. Vance, would lead the U.S. team with envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.

Iranian officials earlier on Sunday said that they remained open to negotiation, but held firm that ships would not pass the strait while the U.S. blockade remained in effect. "It is impossible for others to pass through the Strait of Hormuz while we cannot," Iran parliamentary Speaker Mohammed Bagher



Choppy waters: A tanker anchored in the Strait of Hormuz off the coast of Qeshm Island of Iran on Saturday. AP

'India's crude oil imports fell nearly 17% in March'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Amid the West Asia crisis, India's crude oil imports declined nearly 17% on a year-on-year basis in

Ghalibaf said in an interview on Saturday.

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March, according to provisional data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell.

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23 killed in explosion at fireworks factory near Virudhunagar in T.N.

S. Sundar
VIRUDHUNAGAR

In one of the deadliest accidents at a fireworks factory in Tamil Nadu in recent times, 23 workers were killed and eight injured in an explosion at Vanaja Fireworks Unit at Kattanarpatti near Virudhunagar on Sunday.

A second explosion at the unit injured 17, including six policemen and four firemen. Rescuers and presspersons who had gathered at the spot narrowly escaped unhurt.

Most victims were charred beyond recognition with many bodies blown away by the impact of the explosion. Firemen were seen collecting mutilated body parts strewn all around the unit. Many bodies were pulled out from the debris after one of the sheds came crashing down on the workers.

The condition of two persons is said to be critical with over 80% burns. All the injured, including a child and five women, were rushed to the Virudhunagar Government Medical College and Hospital.

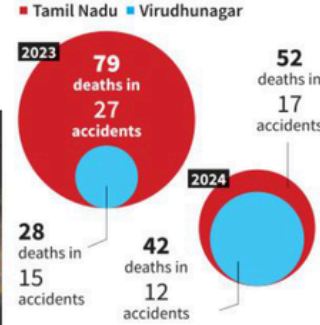
Following instructions from Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, Ministers K.K.S.S.R. Ramachandran and Thangam Thennarasu, along with local MLA A.R.R. Srinivasan,

Recurring disasters

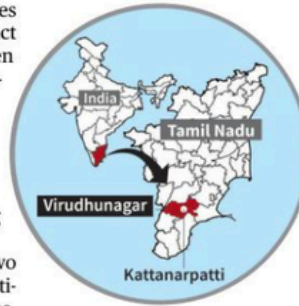
Data show that since 2022, at least 134 people had died and 89 had been injured in firecracker unit accidents in Virudhunagar district of Tamil Nadu



Torn apart: Rescue workers react after a blast during search operations near the firecracker unit in Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, on Sunday. G. MOORTHY



At least 21 people were killed in firecracker manufacturing accidents in Virudhunagar between April and August in 2025



from R.R. Nagar.

The Collector said there was a blast around 3.15 p.m. at the shed where chemicals were being mixed.

The fireworks industry is shut on Sundays, but the unit was operating without permission, he said.

'Violated norms'

Some 40 workers, men and women, were busy making firecrackers inside and outside the shed. "All these workers were supposed to be working in their sheds located away from [the site] where the chemical is mixed. But they violated safety norms," the Collector said.

Mr. Sukhaputra said additional medical teams

have been mobilised at the Virudhunagar Hospital. Besides, efforts are on to carry out post-mortem, with experts being brought in from Government Rajaji Hospital in Madurai.

"For any fireworks unit licensed by the District Revenue Officer, only 11 or 12 workers can be employed at any given point of time. That being the case, how can 23 persons die in a single accident," asked a fireworks factory owner. He feared that licensed units would face the brunt of knee-jerk reaction from the officials now.

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- **Illegal units-** The industry in Tamil Nadu has become much more dispersed with many illegal units.
- **Work burden-** Workers are engaged to work for 8 to 12 hours during the festival season.
- **Lack of regulation-** The cracker units function with little supervision, monitoring, or official inspections resulting in increased accidents.
- **Though the work in the unit happens year round, monitoring is done only during the festive season.**
- **Lack of training-** Many unit employ workers without any training resulting in mishandling of explosives by inexperienced and untrained youth.

- **Shortage of manpower- Petroleum and Explosive Safety Organisation (PESO), the licensing and**
 - **regulating authority for large fireworks units, is short-staffed.**
 - **There are only 5 officials to monitor more than 1000 units.**
- Health effects- Due to high chemical usage, lungs of the workers are affected and skins are burned.**

Petroleum and Explosive Safety Organisation (PESO)

- **PESO, formerly known as Department of Explosives, since its inception in 1898, has been serving as a nodal agency for regulating safety of hazardous substances such as explosives, compressed gases and petroleum.**
- **PESO's major work is to administer the responsibilities delegated under the Explosives Act 1884 and Petroleum Act 1934 and the Rules made there under with the motto "Safety First".**
- **Headquarters- Nagpur, Maharashtra**
- **Objective- Provide operational and technical advice and assistance to central government, states, local bodies, law enforcement agencies, industry, trade and end users**

Mains Question

Worker safety remains a critical challenge in India despite multiple legislative measures. Examine the causes of poor implementation of safety norms and suggest reforms.

विभिन्न विधायी उपायों के बाजूद िारत में श्रमिक सुरक्षा एक गंभीर चुनौती बनी हुई है। सुरक्षा मानकों के कमजोर क्रियान्वयन के कारणोंका

परीक्षण कीजिए तथा सुधार सुझाए।

No IDs, no questions: acid flows freely in city's neighbourhood markets

Shrimansi Kaushik

NEW DELHI

At a stationery-cum-general store in south-west Delhi's Palam Colony, when asked for the most effective and cheapest toilet cleaner, the shopkeeper sought a plastic bottle to pour the liquid into.

"₹20 for 500 ml. If you need a stronger liquid, I can get it from a manufacturer based in Kapashera at a slightly higher price of ₹50 per litre," he said.

Ground visits by *The Hindu* across Delhi revealed that despite laws meant to regulate the sale of corrosive substances,



Acid bottles for sale at a shop in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

acid remains easily accessible without ID proof or any enquiry into the purpose of purchase.

Highly corrosive and diluted acidic substances are

also available online.

April 14 attack

Delhi reported an acid attack case as recently as last week.

On April 14, a 26-year-old woman was arrested for throwing acid on a 21-year-old bride-to-be in north-east Delhi's Indira Vihar area. During their investigation, the police found that the acid was sourced from a hawker selling it as toilet cleaner.

To regulate acid sales, the Supreme Court in 2013 directed that buyers must show ID proof and sellers should maintain records. These guidelines were in-

corporated into the Delhi Poisons Possession and Sale Rules, 2015.

However, on the ground, procurement often requires little more than walking into a neighbourhood hardware or cleaning-supply shop and asking for toilet cleaner or acid for cleaning.

On display

In Dwarka's Sector 7, one shop displayed the substance openly in an unlabelled plastic bottle placed alongside branded cleaners. "This is what people usually buy as it is much cheaper than alternatives. Customers are often jani-

tors or domestic workers," the shopkeeper said. He said that while diluted acid is commonly sold for household use, stronger industrial-grade substances can be arranged on request.

Ease of access is compounded by the wide availability of such substances across retail networks, from chemical wholesalers to provision stores.

In Naraina, a hub for industrial supplies, a chemical trader asked about the intended use but did not seek identification.

"We maintain records for bulk industrial clients, but smaller quantities are sometimes sold openly, of-

ten in unlabelled containers," the shopkeeper said.

Similarly, in Daryaganj and the Narela Industrial Area, retailers asked about the purpose of use but did not verify identity.

Home Ministry report

According to the Home Ministry's 2023 'Malham' project report, 80-90% of perpetrators source acid from household products or small-scale industrial units. "Acid causes skin necrosis, and the severity depends on concentration, exposure area, and duration," said Sameek Bhattacharya, head of plastic surgery at RML Hospital.

- **At a stationery-cum-general store in south-west Delhi's Palam Colony, when asked for the most effective and cheapest toilet cleaner, the shopkeeper sought a plastic bottle to pour the liquid into.**
- **“₹20 for 500ml. If you need a stronger liquid, I can get it from a manufacturer based in Kapashera at a slightly higher price of ₹50 per litre,” he said.**
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- **However, on the ground, procurement often requires little more than walking into a neighbourhood hardware or cleaning-supply shop and asking for toilet cleaner or acid for cleaning.**

- **Law Commission of India's 226th Report (2009) recognised acid attacks as crimes causing permanent physical and psychological harm, stressed their gendered nature, and called for distinct penal provisions and rehabilitation support.**
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023: Acid attacks are now treated as a specific and serious offence under Section 124 of BNS, prescribing a minimum punishment of ten years' imprisonment, extendable to life, along with a just and reasonable fine to meet the victim's medical expenses.**
- **The law also penalises attempted acid attacks with five to seven years' imprisonment and mandates that all public and private hospitals provide free first aid and medical treatment to**
- **victims, with denial attracting criminal liability.**

NALSA (Legal Services to Victims of Acid Attacks), Scheme, 2016: Under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), through the NALSA (Legal Services to Victims of Acid Attacks) Scheme, 2016, provides priority legal aid support.

- **Model Poisons Possession and Sale Rules, 2013: The 2013 Supreme Court (SC) of India order mandated strict regulation of the sale and availability of acid, requiring buyers to produce a photo identity proof and sellers to maintain detailed purchase registers.**
- **Pursuant to this order, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an advisory to all States and framed the Model Poisons Possession and Sale Rules, 2013 under the Poisons Act, 1919, directing States to formulate their own rules since the subject falls within the State domain.**
- **However, despite these directions and model rules, implementation remains weak and uneven across most States, allowing easy access to acid to persist.**

- **Laxmi vs Union of India (2013):** The Supreme Court gave acid attacks a specific recognition in criminal law, moving them out of general injury provisions and treating them as a distinct and serious offence.
- SC mandated that acid attack survivors are entitled to a minimum compensation of Rs 3 lakh, with Rs 1 lakh payable within 15 days for immediate medical treatment and the remaining Rs 2 lakh within 2 months for aftercare and rehabilitation, including reconstructive surgeries.
It prohibited over-the-counter sale unless the seller maintained a register/logbook recording the buyer's details and quantity sold.
- **Justice JS Verma Committee (2013):** In the aftermath of the Nirbhaya case, the Justice JS Verma Committee examined structural failures in addressing violence against women and explicitly highlighted acid attacks as a gendered crime.

Delimitation — a case of to be or not to be

A special session of Parliament to consider the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 – and also the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, and the Delimitation Bill, 2026 – for readjustment of Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly seats across the country and implementation of reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies (linking it to proposed fresh delimitation for which there was a separate Delimitation Bill) ended in a spectacular way. The proposed delimitation was to reallocate the number of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly seats among States (and Union Territories with legislatures), and determine the territorial boundaries of each constituency, based on data from the 2011 Census. The total number of Lok Sabha seats was proposed to be increased to 850. The special session was convened at a time when electioneering for the ongoing Legislative Assembly elections is at its peak in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, which did not go down well at all with several Opposition parties.

Law and practice

Articles 82 and 170 (3) of the Constitution require a readjustment of the number of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats in each State and the extent/boundary of every constituency, after each Census. The first delimitation exercise in independent India was carried out in 1950-51 by the Election Commission of India, in consultation with Parliamentary Advisory Committees established for various States. As the delimitation exercise could not await the completion of the 1951 Census, given the urgency of conducting elections at the earliest, the first delimitation was based on estimated population figures, as of March 1, 1950, as provided by the Census Commissioner.

After the completion of the first general election, a fresh delimitation did take place based on the 1951 Census as per the mandate of Articles 82 and 170. Subsequently, readjustment of constituencies, both in terms of number and boundary, was carried out after the Census in 1961 and 1971. The delimitation based on the 1971 Census was completed in 1976. Subsequently, the Forty-Second Amendment of the Constitution of India froze further delimitation until the Census



K.F. Wilfred

Former Senior
Principal Secretary
of the Election
Commission of India

The delimitation debate raises questions on representation and equity

of 2001. The temporary freeze on delimitation control measures actively promoted by the Indira Gandhi government. It was intended to ensure that States successfully curbing population growth were not disadvantaged in terms of representation in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies due to lower population figures, while States with higher population growth did not gain a corresponding increase in seats.

The issue of population growth

The temporary freeze on delimitation ended in 2001. However, the government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the time decided that it was necessary to continue the freeze on the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The government decided to redraw the territories of constituencies to ensure *inter se* parity in terms of population across them, as this balance had been disrupted/disturbed due to large-scale internal migration of people in search of employment and livelihood since 1971. To this end, the Constitutional provisions were amended in order to provide that territories of the constituencies would be readjusted on the basis of the 2001 Census figures without altering the number of Lok Sabha or Assembly seats.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons in the Bill for the Constitution (Eighty-fourth Amendment) Act, 2001, *inter alia*, stated that, in view of the progress of family planning programmes across different parts of the country, the government – under the National Population Policy strategy – decided to extend the freeze on undertaking fresh delimitation up to the year 2026. This was intended as a motivational measure to enable State governments to continue pursuing the goal of population stabilisation.

Therefore, the apparent thinking at that point of time was that population growth would stabilise across all States within the next 25 years. As per the provisions of Articles 82 and 170(3), as amended in 2001 by the Eighty-Fourth Amendment Act, the freeze on further delimitation is to be in place until the population figures of the first Census to be taken after 2026 are published. In fact, a new national Census (against the delayed 2021 Census) is under way.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the current Delimitation Bill, 2026, *inter alia*, noted

that the growth of population across different constituencies along with migration from one place to another – especially rural to urban migration – “have resulted in varying density of population in electoral constituencies”; the Bill sought to address this issue. Ironically, for bringing about parity in population among constituencies, both intra-State and inter-States, the population figures of the 2011 Census were to be adopted – this means that the base data to be used for course correction or updating would have been 15-year-old population figures.

Looking ahead

There is nothing to suggest that migration has either stopped or slowed since 2011, or that population growth has stabilised uniformly across all regions. Against this backdrop, there is no assurance/guarantee that constituencies based on the 2011 Census would stand the test of parity or uniformity in terms of population – and, by extension, in the electorate – at the point when the delimitation exercise would have been completed.

It was quite likely that when constituencies are finally carved out a couple of years down the line, many of them would exhibit clear and evident real-time disparities when compared with the principles set out in the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the present Bill.

Article 81(2) of the Constitution provides that each State shall be allotted Lok Sabha seats in such a manner that the ratio of seats to population, as far as practicable, remains the same across all States.

There is no dispute that the letter of this Article only refers to population as a criterion. However, if we take a broader view, there would be inherent provisions in the Constitution to support the States to retain their scale of parliamentary representation. There may also be scope to incorporate additional parameters/markers alongside population, especially since the number of seats is expected to increase significantly this time, unlike the relatively modest/nominal increases in earlier exercises. After all, States are the component units forming the Union. Strong components will only strengthen the Union.

The views expressed are personal

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- **As the delimitation exercise could not await the completion of the 1951 Census, given the urgency of conducting elections at the earliest, the first delimitation was based on estimated population figures, as of March 1, 1950, as provided by the Census Commissioner.**
- **Subsequently, the Forty-Second Amendment of the Constitution of India froze further delimitation until the Census of 2001.**

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Mains Question

Explain the concept of delimitation. Why is it essential for ensuring representative democracy in India?

परिसीमन (Delimitation) की अवधिणा को स्पष्ट कीजिए। भारत में प्रतिनिधित्व लोकतंत्र सुतन जचित किने के ललए यह क्यों आवश्यक है?

Deceptively benign

India must move from fossil fuel to avoid amplifying imported inflation

While India's March retail inflation, at 3.4%, rose marginally from February's 3.2%, this increase is deceptively benign. This is evident from the upward pressure on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI), which climbed to a 38-month high of 3.88% in March. It is important to note that while the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has transitioned to a new base year of 2024, the WPI continues to use the 2011-12 base year, a divergence that must be kept in mind when interpreting the latest inflation data. While the March CPI appears comfortably within the RBI's 4%-6% tolerance band, the reading masks a far more complex build-up of pressures driven primarily by rising input costs, especially fuel prices. WPI inflation rose from about 2.4% in February to 3.88% in March, indicating a sharp month-on-month acceleration in wholesale price pressures. This has found only muted reflection in food prices, with the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) rising moderately from roughly 3.4% in February to about 3.8% in March.

Several factors are driving this divergence, chief among them the rupee's precipitous depreciation of about 2.5%-3% against the U.S. dollar. Given that crude oil and gas are globally traded in dollars, this has amplified imported inflation. The U.S.-Israeli war on Iran has disrupted supply chains for these critical fuels, pushing up global prices and transmitting inflationary pressures across economies. The rupee's depreciation has also raised the cost of imports, including fertiliz-

across economies. The rupee's depreciation has also raised the cost of imports, including fertilizers, plastics, and petrochemical products, which are key to pharmaceuticals, textiles and automobiles. While many firms have absorbed these costs, this may not be sustainable. At the same time, the contraction in exports (down about 3%-4% year-on-year) and imports (down about 5%-6% YoY) in March is not indicative of weakening demand alone, but of war-induced supply disruptions. In response, exporters – particularly MSMEs – are redirecting output to the domestic market, aided by policy relaxations that allow greater domestic sales from export-oriented units. This is creating localised supply gluts, delaying price pass-through even as producer margins compress due to rising input costs. The result is a temporary suppression of CPI. As these pressures unwind, inflation is likely to rise even as growth slows – pointing not to stability but to emerging stagflationary risks. The IMF's latest World Economic Outlook flags rising global recession risks and trims India's FY27 growth forecast to around 6.2%. The RBI, too, has echoed these concerns. This complex challenge underscores the vulnerability of oil-import-dependent economies. It also presents an opportunity for India to accelerate its shift to renewable energy.

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In India, which one of the following is responsible for maintaining price stability by controlling inflation?

- (a) Department of Consumer Affairs**
- (b) Expenditure Management Commission**
- (c) Financial Stability and Development Council**
- (d) Reserve Bank of India**

Economic growth is usually coupled with?

(a) Deflation

(b) Inflation

(c) Stagflation

(d) Hyperinflation

Mains Question

Inflation targeting may conflict with growth objectives in a developing economy like India. Critically examine.

विवरित जैसे विकासशील देश में मुद्रास्फीत लक्ष्यीकरण विकासके उद्देश्यों से टकरा सकता है। समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए।

Costs and wages

Governments must not view labour unrest as a law-and-order problem

The ongoing factory workers' protests in Noida's industrial belt are one of the largest industrial labour mobilisations in recent times. Violence has been documented as well: stone-pelting and attempts to breach police barricades, as well as a brutal police lathicharge. After Haryana hiked wages for workers by 35% following protests in Faridabad, Gurugram, and Manesar, workers in Noida realised that their own wages were lower, a situation exacerbated by the pinch in LPG supplies. Trade unions have demanded ₹18,000 to ₹25,000 a month – which the Uttar Pradesh government's interim hike of around 21% did not meet – and fixed working hours and holidays and overtime pay. The new Labour Codes that the Union government enforced from late 2025 allow a 12-hour single workday and specify wage floors but not actual wages, leaving them to the States. As a result, the Codes have allowed employers in certain States to extract more work from the longer workday at or near the statutory minimum pay. The share of contract labour in the formal manufacturing sector in India is the highest since 1997-98. Ironically, the provisions of the Labour Codes encourage the sector to persist with contract labour rather than appreciate job security, while also imposing limits on worker strikes. These, together with the energy crisis and increasing food prices, precipitated the protests.

under the protest.

In 2024, the Samsung workers' strike in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, was similarly over low wages, unpaid overtime, and the company's refusal to recognise unions. More recently, workers at the IOCL Panipat refinery went on strike demanding an eight-hour workday, better wages, and safer working conditions, as did workers at the NTPC plant in Patratu, and Adani's Raikheda plant in Raipur. This is practically a wave in the Labour Codes regime, showing that labour rights are paper tigers – exacerbated by Yogi Adityanath's claim that the protests were a conspiracy, followed by the interim hike. A worker who spends one-sixth of his monthly income on cooking costs alone does not need to be radicalised to understand that his wage is insufficient. Further, neither the State nor the Centre responded substantively to residential societies barring domestic workers who had joined the protests by displaying their photographs at the gates – a serious civil rights infraction. The Indian Labour Conference has not convened since 2015, and the Codes were passed without the tripartite consultation that it would have facilitated. The solution to the agitation, in sum, is simple: institute humane working hours and wages, and institute genuine labour reform that is well enforced. The problem only looks complicated because the government is dragging its feet.

- **The ongoing factory workers' protests in Noida's industrial belt are one of the largest industrial labour mobilisations in recent times.**
- **Violence has been documented as well: stone-pelting and attempts to breach police barricades, as well as a brutal police lathicharge.**
- **After Haryana hiked wages for workers by 35% following protests in Faridabad, Gurugram, and Manesar, workers in Noida realised that their own wages were lower, a situation exacerbated by the pinch in LPG supplies.**
- **Trade unions have demanded ₹18,000 to ₹25,000 a month — which the Uttar Pradesh government's interim hike of around 21% did not meet — and fixed working hours and holidays and overtime pay.**
- **The new Labour Codes that the Union government enforced from late 2025 allow a 12-hour single workday and specify wage floors but not actual wages, leaving them to the States.**

- **As a result, the Codes have allowed employers in certain States to extract more work from the longer workday at or near the statutory minimum pay. The share of contract labour in the formal manufacturing sector in India is the highest since 1997-98.**
- **Ironically, the provisions of the Labour Codes encourage the sector to persist with contract labour rather than appreciate job security, while also imposing limits on worker strikes.**
- **These, together with the energy crisis and increasing food prices, precipitated the protests.**
- **The solution to the agitation, in sum, is simple: institute humane working hours and wages, and institute genuine labour reform that is well enforced. The problem only looks**
- **complicated because the government is dragging its feet.**

Differentiating welfare and development

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In contemporary democratic politics, development has emerged as a central electoral promise, often framed as a politically resonant goal that transcends ideological divides. Political actors deploy the language of development to signal commitments to economic growth, infrastructure expansion, employment generation, and improved public services, thereby appealing to a broad spectrum of voters. In India, development-oriented campaigns have increasingly emphasised visible and tangible outcomes such as infrastructure, roads, housing etc. However, the political assurance of development can obscure distributional concerns, mask inequalities, or reduce complex socio-economic challenges to simplified slogans. Political parties' claims of delivering development are ridden with confusion between welfare and development and the pace with which development manifests.

Complementary but different
The confusion between welfare and development arises from their frequent overlap in political and policy discourse. Welfare typically refers to immediate, redistributive interventions aimed at alleviating poverty, reducing vulnerability, and ensuring basic needs such as food security, income support, and access to essential services. Development, in contrast, denotes a broader, long-term process of structural transformation involving sustained economic growth, productivity enhancement, and expansion of human capabilities. However, in practice, the boundaries between the two often blur. This conflation is evident in the Indian context, where large-scale social protection programmes coexist with ambitions of rapid economic growth. The persistence of confusion lies in the differing time horizons and objectives: welfare is often short-term and consumption-oriented, while development is long-term and



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The views expressed
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production-oriented. A more coherent approach requires recognising welfare and development as complementary rather than interchangeable.

Tensions persist between welfare provisioning and development objectives, particularly in the context of fiscal constraints and concerns about efficiency. Excessive redistribution may distort incentives and crowd out productive investment. The design and quality of welfare programmes are critical determinants of their developmental impact, as poorly designed interventions may lead to leakages, exclusion errors, and limited effectiveness.

Political claims of delivering development often refer to short-term visible outcomes. Development is best understood as an incremental and long-term process rather than a series of discrete, short-term achievements. It involves the gradual transformation of economic structures, institutional capacities, and social outcomes over extended periods, often spanning decades. Unlike episodic policy successes or visible infrastructure projects, development unfolds through cumulative improvements in productivity, human capital, technological adoption, and governance systems. Scholars have emphasised the role of institutions in shaping this evolutionary trajectory, highlighting that sustainable development depends on the slow consolidation of rules, norms, and state capacity. Similarly, the capability approach associated with Amartya Sen underscores that expanding human freedoms – through education, health, and social inclusion – is a gradual process requiring sustained public investment and policy continuity. This perspective cautions against viewing development through the lens of immediate outcomes or electoral cycles, and instead frames it as a continuous, path-dependent process where incremental gains, if consistently

reinforced, lead to substantive and durable transformations. The notion of “quick development” as promised by political parties reflects a persistent fallacy in policy and political discourse, rooted in the expectation that complex transformations can be achieved within short time frames.

Dangers of welfare populism

Public goods such as quality schooling, public health systems, infrastructure, and rule of law are generally more conducive to long-term development than welfare populism. They raise productivity and generate broad, economy-wide benefits over time. Because they are non-excludable and produce strong positive externalities, their impact tends to be durable, cumulative, and inclusive. In contrast, populist ‘development welfarism’ such as politically motivated transfers which include free electricity, loan waivers, or cash handouts prioritise immediate consumption gains and electoral appeal. While these measures can provide short-term relief, they often do not expand productive capacity. Importantly when overused, they can strain public finances and crowd out investment in public goods. However, well-designed welfare schemes such as nutrition support, employment guarantees, or basic income floors can enhance human capabilities, reduce vulnerability, and even improve productivity. The problem is not welfare per se, but populist and fiscally unsustainable welfare that substitutes for, rather than complements, development.

Conflating populist welfare promises and long-term development goals poses significant risks as it prioritises short-term political gains over long-term economic capacity. The challenge for policymakers lies in designing welfare systems that are fiscally sustainable, institutionally robust, and aligned with long-term objectives. It is time that election manifestos acknowledge this and embark on refinements.

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- **Political actors deploy the language of development to signal commitments to economic growth, infrastructure expansion, employment generation, and improved public services, thereby appealing to a broad spectrum of voters.**
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