

DISCIPLINE



Important Issues of the Day

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- **Work in progress – Page No.6 , GS 2,3**
- **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) –
Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **Mahendragiri – Page No. 10, Prelims**
- **Jabalpur boat capsized – Page No.10 , GS 3**
- **Solar capacity – Page No.10 , GS 3**

Commercial LPG, 5-kg cylinders to cost more

Price of commercial LPG hiked by ₹993 a cylinder and that of 5-kg cylinder by ₹261; price of ATF for international carriers raised; govt. also reduces excise duty on export of diesel, aviation fuel

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

Oil marketing companies (OMCs) on Friday sharply hiked the price of commercial LPG by ₹993 per cylinder and that of 5-kg free trade LPG by ₹261 per cylinder. Further, the price of bulk diesel was raised from ₹137 to ₹149 per litre.

Whilst the OMCs did not hike the price of LPG meant for domestic usage and that of aviation turbine fuel (ATF) for domestic scheduled carriers, the price of ATF for international airlines has been pushed up by \$76.55 per kilolitre from \$1,435 per kilolitre.

The prices of retail petrol and diesel are unchanged.

In a separate move, the



Fuel crisis: Commercial LPG cylinder delivery workers unload cylinders from a truck at a distribution centre. J. ALLEN EGENUSE

Ministry of Finance reduced the excise duty on the export of diesel to ₹23 for every litre from ₹55.5 per litre and that of ATF to ₹33 per litre from ₹42 per litre, whilst the special additional excise duty (SAED) on the export of petrol continues to remain nil.

The previous revision to

the excise duties on the export of diesel and ATF was done on April 11. The government said that the earlier upward revisions were to ensure the availability of these products in the domestic market and cushion against any impact on supplies. A reduction in the duty on exports is thus a

Congress slams government on hike in LPG rates

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday slammed the Narendra Modi government over the latest price hike for commercial LPG cylinders, with Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi calling it the "bill for elections". » PAGE 9

change in that stance.

Whilst the prices of domestic LPG being unchanged offer respite, the steep hike in prices of commercial LPG and that of 5-kg free trade LPG raise concerns.

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- **The prices of retail petrol and diesel are unchanged.**
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- **Dependency on Imports:**
- **India relies heavily on imports for LPG, with more than 60% of its needs being met through imports.**
- **This import dependence contributes significantly to the pricing dynamics of LPG in the country.**
- **India's LPG prices are influenced by the average Saudi Contract Prices (CP) for propane and butane.**
- **LPG is a mix of gases, mainly consisting of butane and propane, with the percentage of butane limited.**
- **The pricing formula for LPG in India is dependent on global market trends,**
- **particularly in the Middle East, which is India's largest LPG supplier.**
- **Impact on Consumers**

Mains Question

Rising fuel and LPG prices have cascading effects on inflation and household welfare. Examine the socio-economic implications of frequent fuel price hikes in India. (250 words)

Energy affordability is closely linked with social equity. Evaluate the impact of rising LPG prices on gender roles, health, and rural livelihoods in India. (250 words)



Sixth Nilgiri-class frigate joins fleet, boosting naval power

The Indian Navy on Thursday, took delivery of *Mahendragiri* (Yard 12654), the sixth ship of the Nilgiri-class (Project 17A) and the fourth constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited in Mumbai. According to Indian Navy, the delivery marks a major milestone in India's push for self-reliance in warship design and construction. Project 17A frigates are advanced multi-mission platforms built to tackle evolving maritime challenges. Designed by the Warship Design Bureau, the ships represent a significant leap in stealth, firepower, automation, and survivability, reinforcing India's indigenous defence capabilities, it further added.

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- **Project 17A: P17A ships feature enhanced stealth capabilities compared to their predecessors P17 (Shivalik) class, with improvements in hull design and weapon systems.**
- **The seven ships under Project 17A, are INS Nilgiri, INS Udaygiri, INS Himgiri, INS Taragiri, INS Mahendragiri, INS Dunagiri, and INS Vindhyagiri.**
- **The Project 17A design incorporates ‘State of the Art’ weapons and sensors that include supersonic surface-to-surface missiles, medium-range surface-to-air missiles, and rapid-fire Close-in Weapon Systems.**
- **These multi-mission frigates are designed to operate in a ‘Blue Water’ environment, meaning they can handle both conventional and non-conventional threats within India's maritime interests.**
- **An Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS) is also installed to optimize the ship’s functionality and crew coordination.**

Jabalpur boat capsized toll rises to 9; survivors allege negligence by crew

Survivor says they were not provided with life vests until water started entering the cruise boat; operator paid no heed to passengers' cry to take vessel ashore, instead he took it towards the middle of the dam, she says; M.P. govt. orders probe

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

Five more bodies were recovered on Friday from the Bargi Dam in Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh, where a cruise boat capsized the previous evening. Rescuers faced a difficult moment when they found the body of a mother clutching her four-year-old son under her life jacket.

The death toll has now reached nine, while four people, including three children, remain missing.

A diver of the Indian Army's 411 Parachute Field Company who recovered the bodies of Marina Messi and her son Trishaan, residents of Delhi, said, "It was very difficult to pull her out as she was holding her son. They were stuck behind a small window [in the vessel] and it proved tough to bring them out together because the mother's grip on the child was unyielding."

Ms. Marina's husband, Pradeep Messi, and their daughter survived the incident.

The tragedy unfolded on Thursday evening when a cruise boat of the Mad-



Officials recover the cruise boat, which overturned in the Bargi Dam due to a sudden storm, from the Narmada river in Jabalpur. ANI

hya Pradesh Tourism Department ran into a storm on its way back to the shore and overturned in the reservoir on the Narmada river. The boat was carrying 39 tourists and two crew members.

28 people rescued

According to officials, some of the 28 survivors, including the crew members, were rescued shortly after the tragedy by workers of a private construction company nearby; personnel of the NDRF, SDRF, local police, and home guards took over later.

Special rescue and div-

ided to pull the vessel out of the water. The whole task took about seven hours," Mr. Singh said, adding, however, that no more bodies or survivors were found in the boat.

Several witnesses and survivors recounted the horrors of the tragedy. They alleged lack of safety protocols, and negligence on part of the crew. They said they were not provided with life vests until water started entering the boat.

Ms. Marina's teenage daughter said, "All of a sudden, we were beset by strong winds and waves. People began screaming in terror and asked the pilot to take the vessel ashore, but he would not listen and took it further towards the middle of the dam. Then water began gushing into the cruise boat and it overturned."

"Nobody was providing life jackets, so my father and another person broke a locker and got the jackets. Since, the boat overturned suddenly and there was no time, my mother covered my brother with her jacket. We found them the same way," she said, adding that the crew did

not help anyone. The State government has announced financial assistance for the victim families and the injured.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav visited Jabalpur on Friday evening to supervise the rescue efforts. Mr. Yadav said a high-level committee had been formed to conduct a probe.

He said that the services of cruise pilot Mahesh Patel, helper Chhotelal Gond, and ticket counter in-charge Brijendra had been terminated with immediate effect due to negligence in the incident. "Sunil Maravi, manager of Hotel Maikal Resort and Boat Club Bargi, has been suspended for negligence in the discharge of his duties. Regional Manager Sanjay Malhotra has been attached to the headquarters, and a departmental inquiry has been initiated against him," Mr. Yadav said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the tragedy and announced an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh from the PM National Relief Fund (PMNRF) for the next of kin of the deceased and ₹50,000 for the injured.

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- **The death toll has now reached nine, while four people, including three children, remain missing.**
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and two crew members.

- **The design of the vessel appears to have compounded the problem. As water entered the lower deck, escape routes narrowed.**
- **Preliminary assessments suggested that those on the upper deck or outside had better chances of survival, while those inside the enclosed section were trapped as the boat tilted.**
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- **PMNRF was instituted in 1948 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to assist displaced persons from Pakistan. The fund is currently used to provide support to people affected by natural and man-made disasters.**
- **This includes natural disasters like floods, cyclones, and earthquakes, and man-made disasters like major accidents, acid attacks, and riots.**
- **The fund consists entirely of public contributions and does not get any budgetary support.**
- **The corpus of the fund is invested with banks in fixed deposits. Disbursements are made with the approval of the Prime Minister.**
- **All donations towards the PMNRF are notified for 100% deduction from taxable income under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961.**

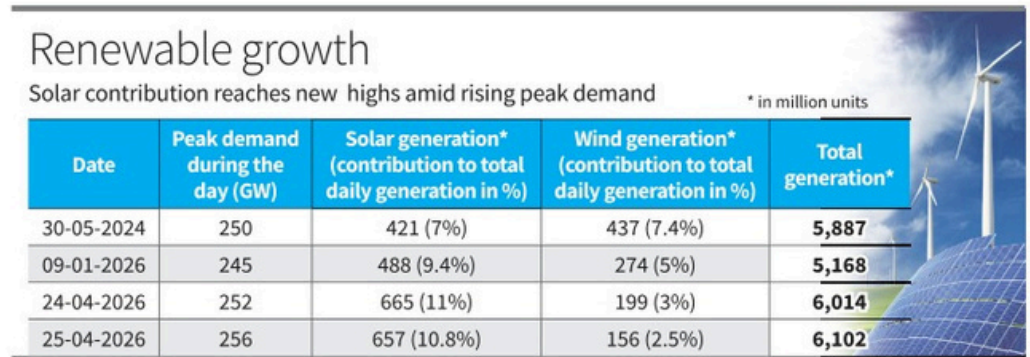
India to tap augmented solar capacity, coal to weather El Nino, summer power demand

Saptaparno Ghosh
Jacob Koshy
 NEW DELHI

Amidst expectations of further increase in energy demand with peak summers approaching and an El Nino in sight, India could be looking at meeting its increased power requirements from the traditional coal-powered thermal plants and augmented solar plants.

In fact, when the country scaled its peak demand of 256.1 gigawatts on April 25, thermal plants nearly retained its dominant position accounting for 66.9% of the generation, while solar augmented its position to account for 21.5% of the power generated.

The augmented solar capacity and traditional thermal plants are of pivotal importance in the dual paradigm of peak summers and El Nino effects.



Although, speaking to *The Hindu*, highly placed government officials said the country was in a stable position with adequate supplies of coal to meet a potential increase in power demand.

While the historical data assessing contribution of each of the power sources could not be traced, for context, an average contribution of each of the sources through the day indicates solar energy accounted for about 8.9% of power generated on the

day of peak power demand in 2025, 7.3% in 2024, about 6% in 2023 and 5.63% in 2022. Though solar power makes up about 30% of India's installed power capacity at present, it cannot be fully utilised due to limited battery storage. In fact, solar power is frequently curtailed to keep the grid stable.

Manoj Kumar, India Analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) says: "With stronger transmission networks, more flexi-

ble grid operations, and faster battery deployment, a larger share of evening and night-time demand can also be met through non-fossil sources."

Essential to note here that India added a record 44.61 gigawatts of solar capacity in the fiscal year 2025-26, which was more than the double it had added in the preceding fiscal.

Hotter months ahead

On Friday, the India Meteorological Department said El Nino conditions –

which usually translate to weak monsoon rains and therefore longer dry spells – are likely to prevail during most of the monsoon months from June to September. Temperatures in May, broadly, would be less searing with more rain than what is usual for May expected over most parts except eastern India. Gujarat, Maharashtra, coastal Odisha, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh and Himalayan foothills are likely to see more than its usual share of 'heatwave' days.

Ample coal stocks

India has approximately 200 million tonnes of coal stocks as on date, thus, with approximately 2.3-2.4 million tonnes being utilised daily by thermal plants, the stocks would suffice for more than 83 days, a highly placed government official told *The Hindu*.

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Work in progress

India must strengthen public sector hospital capacity

The 80th, and latest, round of the household social consumption (health) survey conducted by the National Statistical Office is the first comprehensive survey of its kind in both the post-pandemic era and the period in which the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) scheme attained maturity. The previous two surveys of the same kind revealed that most Indians did not have any form of health insurance. Since PMJAY's launch in 2018, the 80th round shows that insurance coverage has expanded around threefold, accounting for an increasing share of health-care financing in hospitals. However, the hospitalisation rate has not recovered to the 2014 level, meaning that having an insurance card still does not guarantee access to a bed, and hidden costs continue to limit access. The reimbursement rates under PMJAY and State-funded insurance schemes are often below market rates, so private hospitals compensate by billing patients separately for diagnostics and ancillary services. In other words, while state-funded health insurance is subsidising private health-care providers' access to low-income markets without also enforcing regulated prices, the combined system provides a safety net where insurance covers hospitalisation and the public network has improved financial protection for households seeking primary care. Second, the Proportion of Population Reported Ailing has doubled, while infectious diseases have declined and non-communicable diseases have increased. Economists have interpreted this as a sign of more people seeking care, thus becoming 'visible' to the health-care sector.

Previous surveys singled out out-of-pocket expenses (OOPE) on health care as a leading cause of poverty. In the 80th round, while the mean OOPE has roughly doubled, the median OOPE has dropped, to ₹11,285 per hospitalisation and at nearly nothing for public outpatient care. Health-care expenses in India are a mix of many low-cost consultations and a few significant and expensive interactions, such as surgeries and chronic care. The two trends thus mean that while health care is becoming more affordable, thanks to the public sector absorbing the cost of primary and secondary care, health care's ability to inflict financial deprivation in a few cases remains high. Part of the problem is the AAM network, which provides free medicines and diagnostics, of Ayushman Bharat still being significantly underfunded relative to the needs of managing chronic diseases, and where the private sector dominates. Thus, overall, the poor have nominal coverage but are often excluded from the benefits of coverage in practice while the more insured middle class faces rising catastrophic costs. The next phase of health-care reform, after shielding care-seekers from poverty and achieving near-universal institutional delivery, will need to strengthen public sector hospital capacity to compete with the private sector for tertiary care.

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Abu Dhabi exits OPEC for an ascent of 'peak oil'

Although in recent years the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has frequently threatened to leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), its actual announcement, on April 28, took observers by surprise. It was also conspicuous in its context. It provided only three days' notice for exit from OPEC and OPEC+ on May 1, just five days before the next OPEC meeting. The decision was also counterintuitive to the ongoing double blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, staunching oil exports of the UAE and other Gulf states.

A subsequent Emirati official statement was elaborate but elliptical. It sought to both rationalise the decision aimed at pursuing national interest and reassure the stakeholders of its continued intention "to contribute to stability (of the oil market) in a measured and responsible manner", promising "to bring additional production to market in a gradual and measured manner".

These anodyne references prompt the analysts to look deeper to fathom the real reasons for the Emirati step and assess its impact on the global market.

The UAE's grouse

The UAE's oil and gas reserves, estimated at 113 billion barrels, are the world's sixth largest. These are almost exclusively in the Abu Dhabi emirate. The UAE has a \$150 billion investment plan (2023-27) to raise its oil production capacity to five million barrels per day (mbpd). However, its OPEC production quota is limited to 3.45 mbpd, leaving it with nearly 1.5 mbpd unutilised spare capacity. This has been a source of the UAE's grouse against OPEC, which is perceived to operate under Saudi hegemony. Riyadh, as OPEC's 'swing producer', often trims its oil



Mahesh Sachdev

Retired Indian Ambassador with an interest in West Asia and oil matters

The UAE's exit marks a potential turning point for global oil governance

production to absorb the global oil glut; it resists Abu Dhabi's pressure for a larger OPEC quota. The UAE's ambitious plans for a post-oil advanced technologies-based economy require mega-investments in Artificial Intelligence, and data centres, ironically, requiring higher oil revenues.

War's impact

Over the long run, Emirati strategists believe that global oil demand is approaching a "Peak Oil" moment after which crude requirement and unit value would begin their decline. Consequently, they wish to sell as much oil as possible before the "Peak Oil". They contend that the Iran war brings "Peak Oil" even closer by causing an unsustainable surge in oil prices, destroying the demand and accelerating the shift towards alternative fuels. In the short run, the UAE wishes to take advantage of the current higher oil prices. With the 1.5 mbpd Abu Dhabi (Habshan)-Fujairah oil pipeline already operational outside the Strait of Hormuz, the UAE is well placed to do so. By quitting OPEC, Abu Dhabi has unfettered itself from any quota restrictions in anticipation of a scramble among the Gulf exporters for greater market share once the two blockades on the Strait of Hormuz are lifted.

The Emirati statement conspicuously omits the Gulf geopolitics, the 640-pound gorilla in the room. Iran hurled over 2,200 drones and missiles at the UAE during the war as retribution for its strategic ties with Israel. Separately, during the past decade, the barely concealed political and economic rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the UAE has reached a crescendo. It is hardly coincidental that the UAE's OPEC exit announcement was timed with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Consultative Summit,

in Jeddah, on the Iran war, where the UAE was under-represented by its Foreign Minister. The move was widely interpreted as Abu Dhabi flaunting its regional autonomy of action to the GCC states and Iran. By ditching OPEC, the UAE, apparently, aims to steal a march over Iran and Saudi Arabia, both OPEC members, for Asia's very large and thirsty crude markets. The move may also favour U.S. President Donald Trump, who desperately needs lower oil prices before the mid-term Congressional elections. At a wider ambit, this may be the opening overture of the UAE openly pursuing a more nationalistic foreign policy. Most observers believe that the exit of the UAE, OPEC's third-largest producer, would not derail the cartel, although its grip on the global market would slip further below that of independent producers, such as the U.S., Canada, Brazil, and Norway. For some, the departure of the UAE, the fifth member to leave OPEC since 2016 and the biggest producer so far, may even mark the beginning of the end for OPEC.

An opportunity for India

While the Emiratis have their reasons for quitting OPEC, consumers in India, the world's third-largest and fastest-growing crude importer, would see it with tentative hope for lower pump prices. India enjoys strategic ties with the UAE, its third-largest trading partner and fourth-largest crude supplier. To anchor the hydrocarbon relationship with the "OPEC-free" UAE, India may propose strategic joint investments in Indian downstream projects.

For the past half a century, the OPEC dictates often made Indians shudder and issue a "May Day!" call. Thanks to the UAE quitting the producer cartel, this May could have a different ring.

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Saudi Arabia



Iran



Iraq



Kuwait



UAE



Venezuela



Nigeria



Libya



Algeria



Republic of the Congo



Gabon



Equatorial Guinea

- **OPEC:** It is a permanent intergovernmental organization created at the Baghdad Conference in 1960 by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.
- **Mandate:** To coordinate and unify the petroleum policies of its Member Countries and ensure the stabilization of oil markets.
- The UAE (through Abu Dhabi) has been a highly influential member since joining in 1967, later representing the entire federation.
- Following the UAE's exit, OPEC is left with 11 active members: Algeria, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.
- **OPEC+:** Formed in 2016, as an alliance between OPEC and 10 other oil producers to address declining oil prices due to US shale oil growth.
- OPEC+ includes the OPEC members plus Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan, and Sudan.
- OPEC+ produced roughly 40% of the world's crude oil and accounts for about 60% of internationally traded petroleum.

- **The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established in 1981 by six Arab states with shared heritage.**
- **The member states include Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman in West Asia.**
- **Shared Vision and Objectives: The GCC's objective is to promote unity through political, economic, and cultural alignment among member nations.**
- **This unity is based on common Islamic values, tribal links, and mutual security and development goals.**
- **Institutional Framework: The GCC operates through its Supreme Council, Ministerial Council, and Secretariat headquartered in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.**
- **Strategic Location and Importance: GCC countries are located along the Persian Gulf, linking Europe, Asia, and Africa through maritime routes.**