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Israel won't hit Iran gas facility again: Trump

Trump distances U.S. from Israeli strike on South Pars gas field after Iran attacks on infrastructure

Tehran says it is ready to exercise restraint but warns of escalation if facilities are attacked again

The UAE's Habshan facility, Qatar's Ras Laffan, and Saudi Arabia's Samref refinery were hit

Stanly Johnny

Distancing himself from an Israeli strike on Iran's South Pars gas field, U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday said Tel Aviv would not target the "extremely important and valuable" site again and warned Tehran against attacking Qatar's energy facilities.

His remarks came after Iran launched missile attacks at energy facilities in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel, following Israeli air strikes that caused fire at South Pars in Iran's southern Bushehr province, one of the largest known gas fields in the world.

"Israel, out of anger for what has taken place in the Middle East, has violently lashed out at South Pars Gas Field in Iran. A relatively small section of the

United States knew nothing about this particular attack, and the country of Qatar was in no way, shape, or form, involved with it, nor did it have any idea that it was going to happen," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

"Unfortunately, Iran did not know this, or any of the pertinent facts pertaining to the South Pars attack, and unjustifiably and unfairly attacked a portion of Qatar's LNG Gas facility," he added. "No more attacks will be made by Israel pertaining to this extremely important and valuable South Pars Field unless Iran unwisely decides to attack a very innocent, in this case, Qatar - In which instance the United States will massively blow up the entirety of the South Pars Gas Field."

American media quoted Israeli officials as saying that the U.S. was informed



Qatar's state-run energy firm said Ras Laffan Industrial City, one of the most critical energy hubs in the world which handles roughly 20% of the global LNG exports, came under attack. FILE PHOTO

Pars strike. South Pars is part of an offshore gas reservoir in the Persian Gulf shared by Qatar and Iran. The Qatari side calls it the North Field.

Iran on Wednesday evening said it targeted energy facilities in Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and

at South Pars came under attack.

Qatar's state-run energy firm Qatar Energy said on Wednesday its Ras Laffan Industrial City, one of the most critical energy hubs in the world which handles roughly 20% of the global LNG exports, came under

several of the company's LNG facilities were hit by Iranian missiles, causing "extensive damage".

The UAE suspended operations at Abu Dhabi's Habshan gas facility after authorities said debris of intercepted missiles fell on the site. The Bab oil field in

near the Saudi capital Riyadh were also targeted by Iranian projectiles. Saudi Arabia's Defence Ministry said a drone crashed into the Samref refinery in the Red Sea port of Yanbu. In Kuwait, drone attacks sparked fire Mina Abdullah and Mina Al-Ahmadi refineries.

Israeli media reported on Thursday that an oil refinery in the northern port city of Haifa was hit. Images of a thick plume of dark smoke rising from the area of the refinery also emerged on the social media.

Oil prices surged on Thursday, with the benchmark Brent crude topping \$115.

The Iranian attacks "constitute a dangerous escalation and a violation of international law", the UAE's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "The UAE reserves its full right to take

protect its sovereignty and national security, and to safeguard its national interests." The Foreign Ministry of Qatar declared "the military attaché and the security attaché at the [Iranian] embassy [in Doha], in addition to the staff of the two attaché offices 'persona non grata'," and asked them to leave the country within 24 hours.

Later in the day, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi signalled that Iran was ready for restraint but threatened to escalate if its energy facilities were attacked again.

"Our response to Israel's attack on our infrastructure employed fraction of our power. The only reason for restraint was respect for requested de-escalation," he wrote in a social media post. "Zero restraint if our infrastructures are struck again. Any end to this war must address dam-



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **South Pars/North Dome Field:** The world's largest natural gas field, located in the Persian Gulf. It is shared between Iran (South Pars) and Qatar (North Dome).
- **LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas):** Natural gas cooled to -161°C for ease of non-pressurized storage and transport.
- **Persona Non Grata:** A Latin term used in diplomacy meaning an "unacceptable person." It is the most serious form of censure a country can apply to foreign diplomats.
- **Energy Infrastructure War:** A conflict strategy targeting the economic "circulatory system" (refineries, pipelines, ports) of an adversary to force political submission.
- **Brent Crude:** A major trading classification of sweet light crude oil that serves as a major benchmark price for oil purchases worldwide.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Chain of Escalation:** The conflict moved from direct Israel-Iran strikes to a broader regional "energy contagion." Iran's strikes on neutral third parties (UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia) mark a departure from traditional "rules of engagement."
- **The "Unintentional" Trigger:** A core argument is the misinterpretation of intelligence. Iran allegedly struck Qatari facilities believing Qatar was complicit in or used as a base for the Israeli strike on South Pars.
- **The U.S. Security Umbrella:** President Trump's statements attempt to draw a "red line." By distancing the U.S. from the initial Israeli strike, the administration seeks to prevent a total regional war while simultaneously using "massive" retaliatory threats to protect global energy flow.
- **Global Economic Risk:** With 20% of global LNG and significant oil refining capacity under fire, the core thesis is that the Middle East conflict has evolved into a global "stagflation" threat.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1980s Tanker War:** During the Iran-Iraq war, both sides attacked commercial tankers in the Gulf. This serves as the historical precedent for targeting energy exports.
- **1971 Iranian Revolution/Algiers Accord:** The roots of Iran's strained relations with its Arab neighbors and its contested maritime boundaries in the Persian Gulf.
- **2015 JCPOA & 2018 Withdrawal:** The shift from diplomatic engagement to "Maximum Pressure" under the first Trump administration, which set the stage for current high-tension brinkmanship.
- **2020 Abraham Accords:** The normalization of ties between Israel and UAE/Bahrain, which changed the regional security architecture and increased Iran's sense of "encirclement."

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **2023 (GS-II):** "The expansion and strengthening of NATO and a stronger US-Europe strategic partnership as well as the Iran-Israel tension have changed the global security architecture."
- **2022 (GS-II):** "West Asian politics has been dominated by the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. How has this impacted India's interests?"
- **2017 (GS-II):** "The World is currently trapped in a 'New Cold War'. Discuss."

THE MIDDLE EAST ENERGY WAR: FROM KINETIC CONFLICT TO GLOBAL GEO-ECONOMIC CRISIS

The conflict in the Middle East has shifted from direct Israel-Iran military exchanges to a broader "energy contagion." By targeting the world's largest gas fields and refineries, the conflict now uses the global economy as a hostage, threatening stagflation and disrupting critical energy chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz.

THE CHAIN OF ESCALATION



FROM LOCALIZED STRIKES TO ENERGY CONTAGION

Conflict moved from military targets to the economic "circulatory system" of refineries and pipelines.



ENERGY AS A "GLOBAL HOSTAGE"

Targeting Qatari LNG facilities impacts heating and electricity supplies across Europe and Asia.



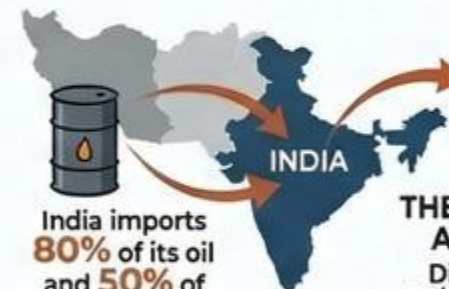
THE HOBBSIAN TRAP

Preemptive strikes born from mutual fear that the other side will strike first.

GLOBAL IMPACT & INDIA'S STRATEGIC RESPONSE



GLOBAL STAGFLATION RISK
Sustained **\$115+** oil prices and disruption of **20%** of global LNG supplies.



India imports **80%** of its oil and **50%** of its gas through these corridors.



THE PATH TO "ENERGY ATMANIRBHARTA"
Diversifying imports to US/Russia and accelerating the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) program.

STRATEGIC COMPARISON: CONFLICT ERAS

Feature	1980s Tanker War	Current Energy War
Primary Target	Commercial Tankers	Critical Infrastructure (Refineries/Gas Fields)
Global Impact	Regional Trade Disruption	Global Stagflation & Supply Chain Collapse
Strategy	Traditional Attrition	Multi-Directional Kinetic & Drone Attacks

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
 - *Example:* If the Suez Canal is a shortcut, Hormuz is the "jugular vein"—there is no immediate alternative for the volume of oil exiting the Gulf.
- **Chokepoint:** A strategic narrow passage that can be easily blocked to disrupt traffic. In geopolitics, controlling a chokepoint equals immense leverage.
- **Shale Oil:** Unconventional oil produced from oil shale rock fragments. The "Shale Revolution" turned the U.S. from a net importer to a top producer.
- **Energy Geopolitics:** The influence of geographical factors on the production, distribution, and consumption of energy, and how this affects international relations.
- **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** Emergency fuel storage maintained by countries (like India's underground caverns in Visakhapatnam and Mangaluru) to guard against supply shocks.
- **Sanctioned Oil:** Oil from countries (like Russia or Iran) that is restricted from international trade by major powers to achieve political goals.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of the current situation is that **maritime chokepoints are the ultimate "veto" in the global economy.**
- **The Vulnerability of Global Arteries:** The closure of the Strait of Hormuz proves that despite the rise of renewables, the world remains tethered to fossil fuels. A disruption at a 33km-wide point can destabilize the GDP of nations thousands of miles away.
- **The Paradox of Sanctions:** The analysis suggests a "hypocrisy of necessity." While Western powers sanction Russian oil for political reasons, they silently rely on India and China to buy and refine that same oil to keep global prices from hitting \$150+ per barrel.
- **Russia as an Involuntary Stabilizer:** Ironically, the conflict in West Asia has transformed Russia from a "pariah" state back into a "critical supplier." When Middle Eastern supply is blocked, the world has no choice but to look toward the Siberian fields.
- **India's Strategic Autonomy:** India's shift from 2.5% to 39% Russian oil imports is presented not just as an economic move, but as a masterclass in "Realpolitik"—prioritizing domestic energy security and inflation control over Western diplomatic pressure.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1950s - 1960s (The Era of Nationalization):** Control of oil shifted from "The Seven Sisters" (Western private firms) to state-owned entities like Saudi Aramco, giving West Asian states sovereign power over their resources.
- **1973 (The First Oil Shock):** The OPEC embargo proved that oil could be used as a weapon, leading to the creation of the IEA (International Energy Agency) and a global push for energy efficiency.
- **2000s (The Shale Revolution):** Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) in the U.S. fundamentally altered the balance of power, reducing American dependence on the Middle East.
- **2022 - Present (The Great Realignment):** The Russia-Ukraine war and subsequent West Asian tensions (2026) have forced a decoupling of energy markets. The world is moving from a single global market to "fragmented blocs" (Western-aligned vs. Eurasian-aligned).

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**

- **UPSC 2017 (GS II):** "The question of India's Energy Security constitutes the most important part of India's economic progress. Analyze."
- **UPSC 2022 (GS II):** "The Russia-Ukraine war has asked many questions regarding the global order. Discuss."
- **UPSC 2018 (GS I):** "Why is the world today confronted with a crisis of availability of and access to freshwater resources? (Can be adapted for Oil/Energy resources)."

The Geopolitics of Energy: Chokepoints, Sanctions, and India's Strategic Autonomy

Global Arteries & The Great Realignment



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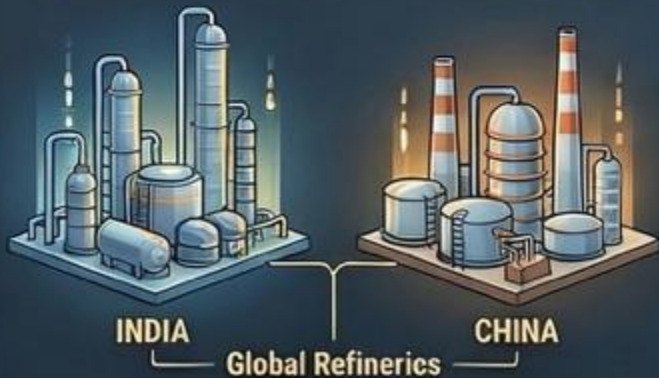
India's Strategic Response & Way Forward

THE "GREAT REALIGNMENT" OF ENERGY



Markets shifting from single system to fragmented geopolitical blocs

REFINING AS A GEOPOLITICAL BUFFER



Processing sanctioned crude to maintain global market liquidity

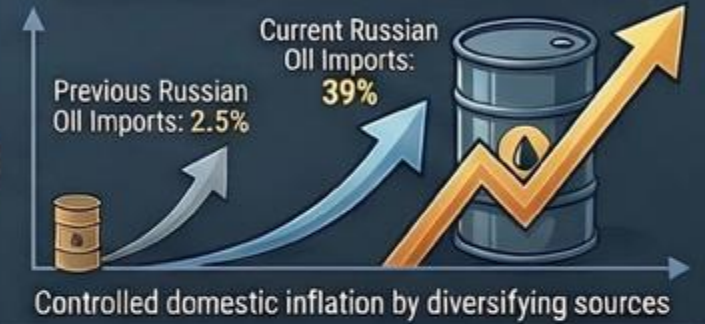
THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ The "Jugular Vein"

33km-wide chokepoint
20% global oil trade
No immediate alternative

ERA & DOMINANT FORCE: Historical Shifts



MASTERCLASS IN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY



STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVES (SPR)



THE "WAY FORWARD" FOR ENERGY SECURITY



Before salt, there was water: why Mahad Satyagraha deserves its centenary

The republic must mark the centenary of the Mahad Satyagraha with the seriousness it deserves: it calls for a year of honest reckoning to ask whether the constitutional promise of dignity and freedom from unaccountability has become a lived reality for all

Sanjay Basu

Think of school in a school. In a story, there is water in the classroom. But he cannot drink it. Not because the water is dirty. Not because there is a rule against drinking in class. He cannot drink because the person who is supposed to pour the water into the cupped hands, from a height, so that the vessel is not polluted by his touch, happens to be absent that day.

No guests, no water
That was the rule that governed the childhood of Bhanusaheb Jadhav. He wrote about it with gusto, deconstructing government in his autobiographical memoir *Waiting for a Visa*, and in the fragment known as *No-Hosts, No Water*. He and his siblings, travelling to meet their father, arrived at a railway station parched with thirst. No one would give them water. They were Mahads. They were "untouchables". The public tap was not for them.

Let that image stay with you for a moment. Small children, thirsty, surrounded by water, unable to drink. Not too thirsty, but in a world, not in a time of famine, but in a time of plenty.

That boy grew up. He went to Columbia, the next to the London School of Economics. He read law at Gray's Inn, and then he came home and walked to a water tank.

What happened at Mahad
On March 20, 1927, untouchable led a procession of thousands through the streets of Mahad, a small town in the Konkan, in the Bombay Presidency. Their destination was the Chaudhari Tank, a public water tank. The Bombay Legislative Council passed the Public Resolutions in 1925, and the Mahad Municipality opened the tank to the depressed classes in 1926. But resolution, on paper and water in the street are different things. The upper caste ensured that the resolution remained a dead letter. Jadhav walked to the tank, the tank closed. He drank.

Thousands followed him – men, women, children. They drank. For perhaps the first time in their lives, they drank water from a public source as a matter of right, not as an act of wealth or charity.

And then the violence came. Riotous crowds opposed that the satyagrahis intended to enter the "untouchable temple". Returning satyagrahis were attacked in the streets, in their Indian carts, in their villages. The tank was "polluted" with cow dung and urine, as though human dignity were a contaminant that could be washed away.

When Jadhav returned to Mahad in December 1927 for a second conference, he brought with him not just the resolve to drink water again but a dozen symbolic items. On December 28, 1927, the conference publicly burned a copy of the Manuscript. That fire was not a mere gesture. It was a declaration that the Indian republic, if it was to mean anything at all, would not sit idly by, not on gender inequality codified in ancient texts.

You want to know
What followed the satyagraha was an instructive as the satyagraha itself. The upper caste of Mahad did not merely resist to violence. They also went to court.



On March 20, 1927, Jadhav led a procession of thousands through the streets of Mahad on a protest

On December 12, 1925, even before the second conference began, Hindu residents filed a civil suit in the British District Court seeking a temporary injunction to prevent the depressed classes from using the Chaudhari tank. The injunction was granted on December 14, 1925.

Jadhav, true to his belief in constitutional methods, chose to respect the court's order while continuing his conference. He burned the Manuscript, but he did not go to the tank.

The litigation dragged on for a decade. It passed through the trial court at Mahad and then the court of the Assistant Judge at Thane. At every stage, the courts held that the plaintiffs had failed to establish any momentous custom creating caste Hindu's inalienable unaccountability from the tank.

The case finally reached the Bombay High Court, where it was decided on March 17, 1927. Its justices Broomfield and S.J. Mukherjee (hereafter referred to as *Justice Broomfield*) found *Justice Broomfield* in a passage that deserves to be remembered, held that the appellants had not established the momentous custom they had alleged. The tank belonged to the municipality. It was public property. The municipality had every right to use it.

It may feel a grievance to drink water from a public tank in 1927. It took until 1957 for the courts to confirm that he was entitled to do so.

The law restricted Jadhav, but the fact that constitutional took a decade with its own story about the depth of the resistance he faced.

Salt versus water
Three years after Mahad, on March 12, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi set out from Sabarmati ashram on his march to Dandi. The salt satyagraha was a moment of political mobilisation. It challenged the economic apparatus of the colonial state and captured the imagination of the world press. It gave us the national narrative to receive, and rightly so, that consider what each satyagrahi actually demanded, and of whom.

The salt March demanded freedom from the British. The Mahad Satyagraha demanded freedom from fellow Indians. Dandi identified an external oppressor and asked him to leave. Mahad identified an internal sickness and asked a criticism to heal itself. One evoked courage against a foreign rule. The other evoked a confidence border the willingness to look one's own neighbours, one's own co-religionists, one's own countrymen in the eye and say, "You have treated me at least their human, and we will not accept it any longer."

There is no alternative to the salt March in saying this. But there is a historical indifference that needs correction.

The salt tax was an imposition of an empire. Once the empire left, the tax could be abolished by a stroke of the legislative pen. I mean, holding, by contrast, did not arrive with the British and did not leave with them. It was woven into the social fabric of Indian life for millennia. It required not a change of government, but a change of heart, of custom, of the very conception of who counts as human.

It is no accident that the man who drank water at Chaudhari went on to draft

the Constitution. The architect of Part III bears the watermark of Mahad.

Article 15, which prohibits discrimination on grounds of caste and specifically addresses access to wells, tanks, bathing ghats, and places of public resort, reads as though Jadhav had the Chaudhari tank before his eyes.

Article 17, which abolishes untouchability and makes its practice a punishable offence, is the Mahad law that has transformed into constitutional text.

The Dandi March gave India the aspiration for being. Mahad gave India the grammar of equality. Being could have been written by many hands. The grammar of equality could only have been written by one who had been denied water as a child.

The case for a centenary
The 100th anniversary of the Mahad Satyagraha falls on March 20, 2027. We are now in the 100th year of this republic. In any sense of its origin, any honest memory of the struggle that gave it a Constitution, it must mark this centenary with the seriousness and grandeur it deserves.

I would propose a year-long commemoration beginning on March 20, 2026, and culminating on March 20, 2027, with a great gathering at the Chaudhari tank. Let citizens of every caste, creed, and class come to Mahad and drink together. Let it be a constitutional baptism, a re-assertion in the founding promise that no Indian shall be diminished by the accident of birth. But let us not begin with only ceremonies.

Let the centenary year become a year of honest reckoning. Let us ask whether the child to a government as good as equal India today, the Dalit girl, the Adivasi girl, the daughter of the sanitation worker, truly live free of the "no-guest, no-water" principle, or whether that principle has merely found new vocabularies while retaining its venom.

Let us ask whether the stained sewerage pipe cleans out misery with bare hands occupies a fundamentally different position from the Mahad tank. Let us ask whether the constitutional text has become the reality of the republic.

The centenary must be a call for true equality for all, for the last, the least, and the first. For every Indian whose letter of birth still consigns to a life of diminished citizenship, of material labour, of social suffering that is too familiar to even register as separate and mere. The waters of the Chaudhari tank must flow again, not as historical memory but as living commitment.

Jadhav did not merely draft a Constitution. He first had to prove, by walking to a tank in a small town and drinking water from it, that those the whom he would one day write that Constitution were human enough to drink. That act, radical and simple and shattering, remains the foundational moment of Indian constitutionalism. It came before Dandi, in what it demanded, and of whom it demanded it, it was deeper than Dandi.

India is the unbroken business of Indian equality. It will arrive by full redemption, the centenary approaches. Let the republic remember, but it begins. Clarity begins in a Justice Adeshan presiding in the Supreme Court.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Mahad Satyagraha (1927):** A non-violent struggle led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to assert the right of "untouchables" to use water from the Chavdar Tank in Mahad, Maharashtra.
- **Chavdar Tale (Tasty Lake):** The specific public water tank in Mahad that became the site of the struggle.
- **Bole Resolution (1923):** A legislative move by S.K. Bole in the Bombay Legislative Council that allowed the "Depressed Classes" to use public places like wells and schools. Mahad was an attempt to turn this "paper right" into a "lived reality."
- **Graded Inequality:** A term coined by Ambedkar to describe the Hindu caste system, where castes are arranged in a vertical hierarchy, ensuring that every caste (except the very bottom) has someone to look down upon, preventing a unified revolt.
- **Manusmriti Dahan:** The ceremonial burning of the *Manusmriti* on December 25, 1927, signaling a rejection of religious texts that sanctified caste-based discrimination.
- **Constitutional Methods:** Ambedkar's preference for legal and democratic means over chaotic rebellion. This is seen in his decision to wait for a court verdict on the Chavdar Tank rather than forcing entry during a legal injunction.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of the discourse is that **Mahad is the spiritual ancestor of the Indian Constitution.**
- **The Primacy of Water over Salt:** The Salt Satyagraha was a fight for economic sovereignty against a foreign ruler. Mahad was a fight for human dignity against one's own society. The article argues that Mahad was "deeper" because it required confronting neighbors and co-religionists.
- **The Failure of Law without Social Sanction:** Despite the 1923 Bole Resolution, Dalits could not drink water. This highlights that law on paper is toothless unless accompanied by social agitation and a "change of heart."
- **Litigation as a Tool of Empowerment:** The ten-year legal battle (1927–1937) showed Ambedkar's faith in the judiciary. The victory in the Bombay High Court proved that public resources cannot be claimed as private property based on "immemorial custom."
- **The "No Peon, No Water" Principle:** This serves as a metaphor for structural exclusion. It isn't just about the absence of water; it's about the dependency of the marginalized on the "grace" of the privileged to access basic survival needs.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-1923:** Public spaces were strictly segregated. Customary law (*Dharmashastras*) trumped any sense of natural rights.
- **1923–1924:** The Bole Resolution is passed and adopted by the Mahad Municipality. However, caste Hindus physically block access.
- **March 20, 1927:** The first Satyagraha. Ambedkar and thousands drink from the tank. The tank is later "purified" by locals with cow urine and dung.
- **December 1927:** The second conference. The *Manusmriti* is burned. A legal injunction is filed by caste Hindus.
- **1937:** The Bombay High Court rules in favor of Ambedkar, establishing the tank as public property.
- **1950:** Adoption of the Constitution. Articles 15 and 17 effectively nationalize the spirit of Mahad.
- **Present Day:** While legal untouchability is abolished, structural issues like manual scavenging and rural segregation (separate pots in schools) suggest the "internal sickness" persists.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**
- **UPSC Mains (2020):** "Has caste lost its relevance in understanding the multi-cultural Indian Society? Elaborate with illustrations."
- **UPSC Mains (2016):** "To what extent did the role of the Moderate politicians as self-appointed interpreters of Indian nations-mockery help to prepare the ideological socket of Indian National Movement?" (Contrast with Ambedkar's radicalism).
- **UPSC Mains (2021):** "Analyze the distinguish features of the Tribal communities in India and the challenges they face." (Themes of marginalization).
- **Prelims (Multiple Years):** Questions on the *Bole Resolution*, *All India Depressed Classes Association*, and the *Manusmriti* burning.



Mahad Satyagraha (1927): The Grammar of Indian Equality



1923: The Bole Resolution

A legislative move allowing "Depressed Classes" to use public places like wells and schools.



March 20, 1927: The First Satyagraha

Ambedkar and thousands drank from Chavdar Tank to perform an act of human equality.



Dec 25, 1927: Manusmriti Dahan

The ceremonial burning of texts that sanctified caste-based discrimination and graded inequality.

The "Grammar of Equality" & Constitutional Legacy



Water

Challenged internal social exclusion and restored human dignity.



Salt

Challenged colonial extraction.



From "Paper Right" to "Lived Reality"

Mahad bridged the gap between legal resolutions (1923) and actual social access.

Article 15 (Access)

Guarantees access to public places, wells, and schools.



Article 17 (Abolition of Untouchability)

Outlaws the practice of 'untouchability' in any form.

Constitutional Fruition (1950)

The spirit of Mahad was "nationalized" through Articles 15 and 17 of the Indian Constitution.

• WAR IN WEST ASIA

Ras Laffan attack deepens India's worries over LNG

The Ras Laffan hit is of particular significance, not just for global LNG flows but also for India, which is grappling with an LPG supply crisis



SUKALP SHARMA & ANIL SAXI

HOURS AFTER Israel hit South Pars, the world's largest natural gas field located in the Persian Gulf and shared between Iran and Qatar, Iranian missiles Thursday struck the world's biggest liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility in Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City.

While this is not the first time energy infrastructure has been targeted in the West Asia war by either side, the scale of the recent attacks marks a major escalation and increases the risk of a prolonged supply disruption. Consequently, the price of international oil benchmark Brent, which was already at a little over \$100 per barrel this week, briefly touched the \$119 level on Thursday before dropping to around \$102 by evening. The price is now around 50% higher than pre-war levels. Natural gas prices also shot up significantly.

After the South Pars attack, Iran warned that it would target facilities in the region. True enough, it struck Saudi Arabia's Yanbu refinery in the Red Sea port city of Yanbu and energy infrastructure in Kuwait, besides Qatar's Ras Laffan.

While the extent of damage to Ras Laffan is not yet known, the strikes have significant escalation implications. One, it is now unclear how much time it will take for gas output from these facilities to return to normal, even if the war stops. Two, the concerns have moved upstream from the transport pathway to the production and supply side.

Notably, US President Donald Trump said that Washington did not have advance knowledge of the Israeli attack on the South Pars gas field, and Qatar was not involved either. Trump even declared that Israel will no longer attack South Pars unless Iran attacks "a very innocent" Qatar. But he also warned Iran that if it attacked Qatar's LNG facilities, the US would "show up the entirety" of the South Pars gas field.

Why Ras Laffan strike matters

The Ras Laffan hit is of particular significance, not just for global LNG flows but also for India. QatarEnergy's primary LNG

ENERGY FACILITIES IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Some of the energy facilities in the region that have come under attack during the war



production units, liquefaction plants, and export infrastructure are all concentrated in Ras Laffan, accounting for roughly a fifth of global LNG supply.

Qatar had already suspended LNG production at the facility following an attack — evidently smaller in scale than the recent strikes — earlier this month. Experts had expected LNG flows from Ras Laffan to be reinstated swiftly once the war ended. Still, with extensive damage from the latest strikes now being reported, it remains unclear how long it will take for LNG supplies to normalise.

A statement from QatarEnergy said Ras Laffan was targeted with missiles, "causing sizeable fires" and "extensive" damage. There have been no reports of any injuries, given that the facility was evacuated after Iran's retaliation threat.

In addition to the previous attack on Ras Laffan Industrial City on Wednesday 18 March 2024 that resulted in extensive damage to the Pearl GTL, gas-to-liquids facility, QatarEnergy confirms that in the early hours of Thursday 19 March 2024, several of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities were the subject of missile attacks, causing sizeable fires and extensive further damage. Emergency response teams were deployed immediately to contain the re-

sulting damage with no reported casualties," QatarEnergy said on Thursday.

India's LNG dependency

Qatar is India's largest source of LNG. India depends on LNG imports to meet roughly half of its natural gas demand. More than two-fifths of the country's LNG comes from Qatar — almost all of it from Ras Laffan.

According to Commerce Ministry data, India imported 27 million tonnes of LNG in 2024-25, of which 15.2 million tonnes, or 44.4%, come from Qatar. QatarEnergy has an LNG production capacity of 77 million tonnes per annum, which is under expansion. In 2023, QatarEnergy exported around 81 million tonnes of LNG.

With LNG from Qatar and other sources in West Asia unable to reach India due to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz and a production suspension by QatarEnergy, India had already cut natural gas supplies to certain industries.

Beyond LNG, India, like many other countries that rely on West Asia for a large share of their energy imports, would be extremely worried about the prospect of an escalation in attacks on critical energy infrastructure.

So far, the disruption from the conflict

has largely been a supply chain problem, stemming from the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, as numerous tankers carrying energy supplies are stuck in the Persian Gulf, with only a few managing to trickle out.

But if major oil production and export infrastructure get heavily hit in the next phase of this conflict, it will become a real supply crisis.

Overall, India depends on imports to meet over 80% of its crude oil requirement, 40% of its LPG needs, and around 50% of its natural gas requirement.

For a large share of these energy imports, India depends on West Asia, from which they primarily come to India through the Strait of Hormuz. Around 2.5-2.7 million bpd of India's crude imports — accounting for about half of the country's total oil imports — have transited the Strait in recent months; the longer-term average is about 40%. This oil is mainly from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait. India doesn't buy Iranian oil due to American sanctions on Tehran.

India's dependence on the Strait for LNG and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies is greater than for crude. Roughly 60% of India's LNG imports come through the Strait of Hormuz; the figure is a staggering 90% for LPG, as evidenced by the LPG supply crisis the country is already grappling with.

Trump's statement

Following the attacks, Trump said in a seemingly passive-aggressive social media post that the US "knew nothing" about the Israeli attack. Qatar was not involved in it, and Iran "did not know this" and attacked a part of Qatar's LNG facility.

At least part of the post appeared escalatory on targeting of critical energy infrastructure in West Asia. But the extent of Trump's control over Israel's actions, this conflict, and how it proceeds remains in anybody's guess.

"I think the US has now lost the initiative — both offensively as well as toward peace; they're lagging with Israel and try and find an exit once they've hammered Iran some more. The Israelis will keep going, Iran, unfortunately, seems to be heading toward something like the worst-case scenario... It is difficult to see normalcy in the sense of what we had before 28 February" an energy sector analyst said.

Energy dependence

Qatar is India's largest source of LNG. India depends on LNG imports to meet roughly half of its natural gas demand.

More than two-fifths of the country's LNG comes from Qatar — almost all of it from Ras Laffan.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas):** Natural gas (predominantly methane) cooled to -162 degrees C (260 degrees F) to turn it into a liquid, reducing its volume by 600 times for easier overseas transport.

- **LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas):** A flammable mixture of hydrocarbon gases (propane and butane) used as fuel in heating appliances and vehicles.

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.

- **South Pars/North Dome Field:** The world's largest natural gas field, shared between Iran and Qatar.

- **Brent Crude:** A major trading classification of sweet light crude oil that serves as a major benchmark price for oil purchases worldwide.

- **Energy Security:** The uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price.

Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

- **Escalation of Conflict:** The shift from targeting military assets to critical energy infrastructure (Ras Laffan in Qatar, South Pars in Iran, and facilities in Saudi/Kuwait) represents a move toward "total economic warfare."

- **India's Vulnerability:** India is disproportionately affected due to its heavy reliance on Qatar. With 40% of LNG and nearly 90% of LPG imports passing through the Strait of Hormuz, any disruption creates an immediate domestic crisis.

- **Supply Chain Chokepoints:** The "effective closure" of the Strait of Hormuz is identified as the primary driver of the current crisis, rather than just the physical damage to plants.

- **Global Price Volatility:** The breach of the \$110-\$120 per barrel mark for Brent crude highlights how geopolitical instability in West Asia dictates global inflation.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
 - **Post-1973 Oil Shock:** India realized its extreme vulnerability to West Asian stability, leading to the creation of Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs).
 - **The 1990s Liberalization:** Increased industrialization led to a surge in natural gas demand, making Qatar a preferred long-term partner due to its proximity and vast reserves.
 - **The LNG Shift (2000s-Present):** Under the "Gas-based Economy" vision, India shifted toward LNG to meet climate goals, inadvertently increasing its reliance on the Persian Gulf.
 - **Present Day (2026):** The current conflict marks a departure from historical norms where energy infrastructure was generally spared from direct kinetic attacks during regional skirmishes.
-
- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**
 - **UPSC 2017 (GS-2):** "The local wars of today have a global impact." Discuss in the context of the Middle East.
 - **UPSC 2022 (GS-3):** "Cleaning up the energy sector is crucial for India's energy security." Examine the challenges involved.
 - **UPSC 2023 (GS-2):** "The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important chokepoint." Analyze its significance for India's maritime security.

THE VULNERABILITY (THE CRISIS)



THE "HORMUZ" DEPENDENCY

40% of India's LNG and 90% of LPG imports pass through this critical chokepoint.



TOTAL ECONOMIC WARFARE

Conflicts now target "innocent" infrastructure, treating energy lifelines as strategic battlefield weapons.



GLOBAL PRICE VOLATILITY

Geopolitical instability has pushed Brent Crude prices beyond the \$110-\$120 per barrel mark.



India's Reliance on West Asian Transit (Fuel Type vs. Source/Path Reliance)



THE WAY FORWARD (STRATEGIC MITIGATION)



STRATEGIC DIVERSIFICATION

Pivot energy ties toward the USA, Russia, and Africa to reduce Middle East reliance.



EXPAND STRATEGIC RESERVES (SPRs)

Increase Strategic Petroleum and Gas Reserves to cover at least 90 days of consumption.



THE GREEN HYDROGEN PIVOT

Fast-track the Green Hydrogen Mission to reduce long-term dependency on imported fossil fuels.



● POLICY

Why Punjab CM wants Rajasthan to pay for water used since 1960

Manraj Grewal Sharma
Chandigarh, March 19

PUNJAB CHIEF Minister Bhagwant Mann recently said his government would seek Rs 1.44 lakh crore from Rajasthan for drawing 18,000 cusecs of water since 1960 without payment. He argued that a pre-Independence agreement required Rajasthan to pay for this water, and called for its review.

What is the 1920 agreement the CM is referring to?

The reference is to an arrangement between the princely state of Bikaner and undivided Punjab under British rule. Maharaja Ganga Singh of Bikaner secured water from the Sutlej through what came to be known as the Gang (or Bikaner) Canal, originating at the Ferozepur headworks. Bikaner paid Punjab a royalty or usage charge, typically linked to irrigated acreage.

How did things change in 1960 with the Indus Waters Treaty?

The signing of the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan marked a structural shift. The treaty gave India full control over the eastern rivers, Sutlej, Beas

and Ravi, for "unrestricted use".

This allowed India to reallocate internal water distribution. Large post-Independence projects such as the Harike Barrage and the Rajasthan Canal (later the Indira Gandhi Canal) were developed to divert water to arid regions.

According to former chief engineer, canals, Punjab, Amarjit Singh Dullet, this also marked the point when the royalty-based system was discontinued. Water sharing began to be treated as an inter-state allocation within India, not a paid arrangement, and Rajasthan stopped making payments.

What changed in 1981?

In 1981, a tripartite agreement was signed between Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, all ruled by Congress governments, with the backing of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This agreement reallocated Ravi-Beas waters based on an estimated availability of 17.17 million acre feet (MAF). Rajasthan was allocated 8.6 MAF, the largest share, despite being a non-riparian state.

The allocation also supported the expansion of the Indira Gandhi Canal system, which carries water from the Harike Barrage in the Tarn Taran district of Punjab

Change in river water availability

● The original allocations were based on assumptions of 'surplus' water

● Estimates of available Ravi-Beas waters have since declined, while Punjab's groundwater has sharply depleted owing to intensive agriculture

● Also, canal systems within Punjab have not always operated at full capacity, while Rajasthan's canal network has expanded, drawing large volumes

deep into the Thar desert.

Did Punjab ever revoke these agreements?

In 2004, under then Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, Punjab enacted the Punjab Termination of Agreements Act. While the law appeared sweeping, it protected "existing utilisation". In practice, this meant that ongoing supplies, particularly to Rajasthan through established canal systems, were not disrupted. This Act was aimed largely at the Satluj-Yamuna Link canal (SYL), which has been stalled for decades due to the long-standing water-sharing dispute between Punjab and Haryana.

In 2016, the Supreme Court held that a state cannot unilaterally terminate inter-state agreements, effectively restoring the earlier legal framework.

What is Punjab's argument against Rajasthan?

Punjab's core argument rests on the riparian principle: that states through which rivers flow should have primary rights over their waters. Rajasthan does not lie in the basin of the Ravi, Beas or Sutlej. Punjab argues that allocating a larger share to such a

state, especially in a water-stressed scenario, is inequitable. The state is also now framing the issue in economic terms, suggesting that long-term diversion has imposed a measurable cost.

What explains the CM's statement?

The timing appears driven by multiple factors. Punjab is facing acute groundwater depletion and rising concerns over water sustainability. At the same time, there is renewed national focus on river management, including developments linked to the Indus system. Politically, quantifying the claim at Rs 1.44 lakh crore turns a historical grievance into a concrete demand, potentially strengthening Punjab's negotiating position with both Rajasthan and the Centre.

What is the way out?

Former special chief secretary of Punjab, KBS Sidhu, said any claim for compensation or revision of allocations would have to be pursued through constitutional mechanisms. Punjab could move the Supreme Court under its original jurisdiction in inter-state disputes or press its case before the Ravi-Beas Tribunal, which has been pending for decades.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Riparian Principle:** The legal doctrine that gives those who own land along the bank of a river the right to use its water. Punjab uses this to argue that as the source state, it has primary rights.
- **Non-Riparian State:** A state through which the river in question does not flow. Rajasthan is considered non-riparian in the context of the Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej.
- **Cusecs (Cubic feet per second):** A unit of flow rate. **18,000 cusecs** represents a massive volume of water diverted for irrigation.
- **MAF (Million Acre Feet):** A unit of volume used for large-scale water resources. One MAF is the volume of water required to cover one acre to a depth of one foot.
- **Royalty/Usage Charge:** A payment made by one entity to another for the right to use an asset. Historically, the Bikaner princely state paid this to Punjab.
- **SYL Canal (Sutlej-Yamuna Link):** A proposed 214-km long canal to share waters of the Ravi and Beas rivers between Punjab and Haryana; it remains a point of intense legal and political deadlock.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Core Thesis**

- The Punjab government argues that the historical allocation of water to Rajasthan, particularly since the 1960s, has been economically and ecologically detrimental to Punjab. They contend that water should be treated as a paid commodity rather than a free inter-state allocation.

- **Supporting Evidence**

- **Pre-Independence Precedent:** The 1920 agreement between Punjab and the Bikaner state involved a royalty system, proving that water was historically viewed as a revenue-generating resource for the provider.
- **Resource Depletion:** Punjab's groundwater is at a critical level due to over-extraction for agriculture, while it continues to "export" surface water to Rajasthan.
- **Changed Hydrology:** The 1981 water sharing was based on "surplus" water assumptions that no longer hold true due to climate change and reduced river flow.

Year	Event/Milestone	Impact
1920	Bikaner-Punjab Agreement	Bikaner paid royalty to Punjab for Sutlej water via the Gang Canal.
1960	Indus Waters Treaty	India gained "unrestricted use" of Eastern Rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi), shifting the focus to internal reallocation.
1981	Tripartite Agreement	Reallocated Ravi-Beas waters; Rajasthan given the largest share (8.6 MAF) to support the Indira Gandhi Canal.
2004	Termination of Agreements Act	Punjab Assembly attempted to cancel all water sharing; later declared unconstitutional.
2016	SC Ruling	Supreme Court struck down Punjab's 2004 Act, reinforcing the sanctity of inter-state treaties.
Present	Monetary Claim	Shift from legal "stoppage" to an economic claim for compensation.

Historical Evolution of the Issue

Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)



UPSC Mains 2013 (GS2):
"Constitutional mechanisms to resolve the inter-state water disputes have failed to address and solve the problems. Is the failure due to structural or process inadequacy or both?"



UPSC Prelims 2021: Question regarding the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act and the powers of the Central Government.



UPSC Mains 2016 (GS3): "The concept of 'Equitable Utilization' of inter-state river waters is often at loggerheads with the 'Riparian Rights'. Discuss."

The ₹1.44 Lakh Crore Water Dispute: Punjab vs. Rajasthan

A Comprehensive Overview of Historical, Legal, and Economic Dimensions for Civil Services Exam Preparation

The Core Conflict & Historical Evolution

Riparian vs. Non-Riparian Rights



From Royalty to Deadlock



The Economic Shift & Future Path

Economic Compensation Framework
Punjab's shift toward treating water as a 'produced' commodity seeking retroactive compensation.

Ecological & Resource Crisis



The Way Forward: Value-Based Management



Bengal row: A look at poll panel's power to transfer officials during elections

Damini Nath

New Delhi, March 19

FOLLOWING THE announcement of the schedule for five Assembly polls on Sunday, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) has come into force. With that, the Election Commission (EC) has begun deploying security personnel and appointing officers for the smooth conduct of elections.

The MCC refers to the rules of conduct for parties and candidates, in effect until the poll results are declared on May 4. In the first three days of its operation, the EC has made a slew of appointments and transfers of top IAS and IPS officers in West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

With West Bengal seeing the most changes, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wrote to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, calling the move "unilateral" and "a matter of deep concern".

What action has the EC taken?

Starting Monday, the EC has been making appointments at various levels of state

governments and police. The first such move was on Monday morning, when the EC announced the transfer of the Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary, Home and Hill Affairs, in West Bengal. At least 21 IAS and IPS officers have been transferred by the Commission in West Bengal, including the state's DGP and Kolkata Police Commissioner.

While the reason for the transfers was not mentioned in the orders, CEC Gyanesh Kumar said that the poll panel is "committed to holding transparent, free of fear, violence-free and inducement-free elections," in a written comment provided along with the orders.

In Assam, the EC has changed 10 senior officers — five Superintendents of Police and five District Election Officers (that is, the District Magistrates). Similarly, five transfers in Kerala and four in Tamil Nadu were effected from Monday to Wednesday.

What are the legal provisions for transfers?

During an election and electoral roll revision, all officers concerned with related



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee called the transfers 'a matter of deep concern'. *RIL*

tasks are treated as though they are on deputation to the ECI. This is as per Section 13CC of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, which says, "Chief Electoral Officers, District Election Officers, etc., deemed to be on deputation to Election Commission."

• Deputing officers to EC

THE ELECTION COMMISSION often replaces officials in states during polls under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

USUALLY, IT SEEKS a panel of officers from the state government to choose from. However, there is no provision mandating it in law.

"The officers referred to in this part and any other officer or staff employed in connection with the preparation, revision and correction of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections shall be deemed to be on deputation to the Election Commission for the period during which they are so employed and such officers and staff shall, during that period, be subject to the control, superintendence and discipline of the Election Commission," it adds.

This section was added through an amendment in 1989, but there was disagreement between the EC and the govern-

ment on what "discipline" meant. In 1993, the TN Seshan-led EC moved the Supreme Court for clarification on this. The EC and government agreed to the terms of settlement in 2000, which made it clear that the EC could suspend and substitute officers for dereliction of duty. It is under these provisions that the EC continues to act during elections and revision processes to transfer officers.

What is Mamata Banerjee's charge?

Soon after the first orders were made public, the CM wrote to the CEC on Monday, saying the "sweeping" changes had been made without any cogent reason, allegation of misconduct, or lapse by the officials concerned in the conduct of elections.

While acknowledging the EC's powers to take action, the Chief Minister wrote that historically, the commission had consulted the state government before making such changes. Usually, the commission seeks a panel of officers from the state government to choose from when replacing an official. However, there is no provision

mandating it in law.

"It is therefore a matter of deep concern and surprise that the heads of the administrative machinery in the State of West Bengal have been removed within hours of the press release announcing the General Election to West Bengal Legislative Assembly, 2026. This has been done in an arbitrary manner, without seeking a panel of officers from the State Government..." she wrote.

What is the precedent?

The EC replacing officers during an election is not a new practice. EC sources say this is done to maintain a level playing field by removing officials perceived to be close to a political dispensation.

In fact, during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the EC removed then-West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar for the duration of the polls. Banerjee reinstated him afterwards. After retiring, Kumar recently joined the TMC and was elected to the Rajya Sabha on its ticket. Also, during the 2024 polls, the EC removed the Home Secretaries of six states, including Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Model Code of Conduct (MCC):** A set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to regulate the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections. It ensures a level playing field and prevents the misuse of official machinery by the party in power.
- **Article 324:** The constitutional provision that vests the power of "superintendence, direction, and control" of elections in the Election Commission.
- **Deputation:** A temporary transfer of a government official from their parent department to another organization or body. During elections, state officials are deemed to be on "deputation" to the ECI.
- **Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951:** The primary legislation that governs how elections are conducted in India, including the registration of voters and the conduct of officials.
- **Section 13CC (RPA 1950):** A specific legal provision stating that officers involved in electoral roll preparation or conduct are deemed to be on deputation to the ECI and subject to its discipline.



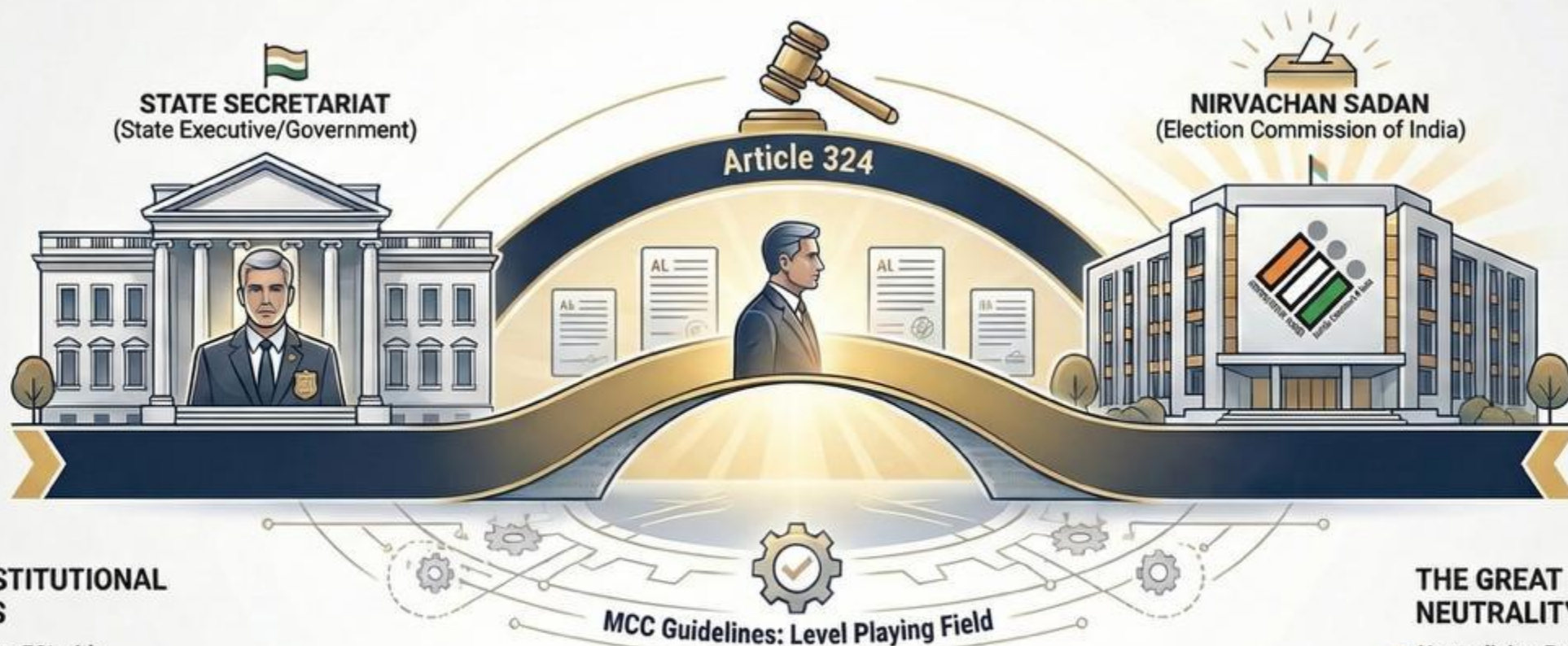
- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core debate centers on the **balance of power** between a constitutional body (ECI) and an elected state government.
- **The ECI's Prerogative:** The ECI argues that to ensure "free and fair" elections, it must have the power to remove officials who may be biased toward the ruling party. This is seen as a preventive measure to maintain neutrality.
- **State Sovereignty & Federalism:** State governments often argue that "unilateral" transfers without consultation undermine the state's administrative autonomy. The primary counter-argument is that the ECI should seek a panel of names rather than making arbitrary removals.
- **The "Level Playing Field":** The ECI's actions are supported by the logic that the incumbency advantage must be neutralized. Removing high-ranking officials like Director Generals of Police (DGP) or Home Secretaries is intended to signal that the administration is now under independent oversight.





- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
 - **Pre-1989 Era:** The ECI's role was relatively more passive regarding administrative transfers. The state governments held primary sway over their cadres during the poll process.
 - **1989 Amendment:** An amendment to the RPA (Section 13CC) was introduced, formalizing the concept that staff on election duty are on deputation to the Commission.
 - **The Seshan Era (1990s):** Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan rigorously enforced the ECI's powers, leading to frequent friction with governments. This era established the ECI as a "no-nonsense" regulator.
 - **2000 Supreme Court Clarification:** Following a dispute led by the Tamil Nadu government, a settlement was reached where it was clarified that the ECI has the authority to suspend or substitute officers for dereliction of duty or to ensure fair polls.
-
- **All Previous Years' UPSC Questions**
 - **UPSC 2017 (GS 2):** "The 'Election Commission of India' is a pivotal body for safeguarding the democratic fabric of India. Comment."
 - **UPSC 2020 (GS 2):** "In the light of the recent controversy regarding the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM), what are the challenges before the Election Commission of India to ensure the trustworthiness of elections in India?"
 - **UPSC 2022 (GS 2):** Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct.



LEGAL & CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS

- **Article 324:** Vests ECI with superintendence, direction, and control of all Indian elections.
- **Section 13CC (RPA 1950):** Legally deems state officers on deputation to ECI during election periods.
- **The Model Code of Conduct (MCC):** Guidelines ensuring a level playing field by preventing misuse of official machinery.

COMPARISON OF POWER: JURISDICTIONAL SHIFT DURING ELECTION CYCLE

FEATURE	DURING NORMAL GOVERNANCE	DURING ELECTION (MCC)
Controlling Authority	State Executive/Government	Election Commission of India
Officer Status	State Cadre Service	Statutory Deputation (Sec 13CC)
Primary Goal	Policy Implementation	Free and Fair Polls

THE GREAT DEBATE: NEUTRALITY VS. AUTONOMY

- **Neutralizing Political Bias:** Transfers decouple bureaucracy from ruling party to prevent incumbency advantage.
- **Federalism & State Sovereignty:** States argue unilateral transfers by ECI undermine administrative autonomy.
- **The Revolving Door Challenge:** Effectiveness is questioned when officers are reinstated immediately after election.

Citing equality, SC scraps age limit for maternity leave in adoptions

Amaal Sheikh
New Delhi, March 19

THE SUPREME Court on Tuesday struck down a rule that denied maternity leave to women adopting children older than three months.

The bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan held that the three-month age limit created an "artificial" distinction, and that women adopting older children are "similarly situated" in terms of their roles. Mothers who adopt a child "shall be entitled to maternity benefit for a period of twelve weeks from the date the child is handed over to her," the court said.

In doing so, the court addressed the broader question of what the law recognises as motherhood.

What the law said

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and its successor, the Code of Social Security, 2020, were both amended to include adoptive mothers within the scope of maternity leave.

However, petitioners argued that the three-month cap was "artificial and violative of Article 14", or the right to equality before the law. The government responded by saying that women adopting older children could use crèche facilities. Notably, the statutory obligation to provide such facilities arises only when there are 50 or more employees.

The bench noted that children raised in institutions often show higher stress levels, underlining the need for care. Going beyond biology, it relied on the meaning of "maternity" as the "state... of being a mother," not something tied to only childbirth. The bench also cited research to underline that early caregiving is crucial for a child's emotional development.

MATERNITY BENEFITS NOT OPTIONAL

• The Supreme Court recognised that early care was essential for both biological and adoptive children.

• It also noted the need for time off for parents and the tension between expecting women to be caregivers and workers.

Impossible criteria

Under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and the central adoption regulations, a child cannot be placed for adoption until they have been declared "legally free". That declaration takes time.

If biological parents surrender a child, the law gives them a mandatory two-month window to reconsider. For orphaned children below the age of two, authorities must first spend at least two months tracing biological parents.

The bench held that "by the time the child is legally placed with the adoptive mother, the statutory age limit would, in most cases, stand exhausted," calling the benefit "largely inaccessible in practice."

Under Article 14, a classification between two groups is valid only if it rests on a real, meaningful distinction and if it has a rational connection to a law's objectives. The court found neither condition satisfied.

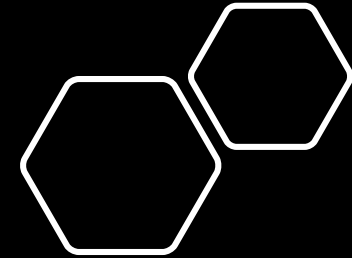
Under Article 21, which protects the right to life and personal liberty, the court read in a right to reproductive autonomy that extended beyond biological parenthood. "Reproductive autonomy... cannot be narrowly understood as being limited to biological reproduction alone," the court said, adding that the law "denudes such adoptive mothers of the ability to meaningfully exercise and enjoy their right to decisional autonomy, dignity, and bodily integrity."

Purpose of maternity benefits

The court broke down the purpose of maternity leave into physical recovery after birth, time to develop an emotional bond between mother and child and the process by which the child integrates into the family. For adoptive mothers, the first phase is absent, but the other two may require more effort.

The court pointed to "Wollstonecraft Disemmas", or the tension between expecting women to be caregivers and expecting them to participate equally in paid work. It also spoke at length about the need for paternity leave and why its absence is a problem for all — the mother, the father, and the child.

"Parenthood is not a solitary function performed by one parent but rather a shared responsibility," the court said. It urged "the Union [government] to come up with a provision recognizing paternity leave as a social security benefit".



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Article 14 (Right to Equality):** Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws. It prohibits "class legislation" but allows "reasonable classification."

- **Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty):** A fundamental right interpreted by courts to include the right to dignity, reproductive autonomy, and a meaningful life.

- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961:** The primary legislation providing for paid leave and medical bonus to women employees during pregnancy and childbirth.

- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** A code that seeks to universalize social security; it subsumed the 1961 Act but retained certain distinctions for adoptive mothers.

- **Wollstonecraft Dilemma:** A philosophical concept describing the tension women face between the demand for equality in the public sphere (workplace) and the recognition of their specific needs in the private sphere (caregiving).

- **Reproductive Autonomy:** The right of an individual to make their own choices regarding reproduction, which the court has now extended to include the choice of adoption.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Age Limit Barrier:** Previously, maternity leave was denied to women adopting children older than three months. The Court struck this down as "artificial" and "arbitrary."

- **Similarity of Situation:** The Court held that adoptive mothers of older children are "similarly situated" to those adopting infants or biological mothers, as the primary objective is child integration.

- **The Meaning of Motherhood:** The judgment defines maternity as a "state of being a mother," emphasizing the emotional and social bond over biological delivery.

- **Institutional Care vs. Family:** It noted that children from institutions (orphanages) often have higher stress levels and require more intensive caregiving to settle into a family, making leave even more critical for older children.

- **Government Counter-Argument:** The State argued that crèche facilities (mandatory for establishments with 50+ employees) were sufficient. The Court rejected this, noting that crèches cannot replace the initial bonding period.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1961:** The Maternity Benefit Act was enacted, focusing strictly on biological birth.
- **1990s–2000s:** Global shifts toward recognizing "care work" influenced Indian labor law discussions.
- **2015:** The Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act and Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) regulations streamlined the "legally free for adoption" process, which ironically made it harder to adopt infants under three months.
- **2017 Amendment:** The Maternity Benefit Act was amended to include a 12-week leave for adoptive mothers, but only if the child was less than three months old.
- **Present Day:** The Supreme Court removes the age cap, aligning the law with the reality of the adoption process in India.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**

- **UPSC Mains (2019, GS2):** "Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to absence of their awareness and active involvement at all stages of implementation process. Discuss."
- **UPSC Mains (2017, GS2):** "Examine the main provisions of the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 and explain how it helps in achieving the objectives of women empowerment."
- **UPSC Mains (2020, GS1):** "Explore and evaluate the impact of 'Ethical Narratives' on the Indian society with special reference to women."

Landmark SC Ruling: Redefining Maternity Benefits for Adoptive Mothers



THE LEGAL SHIFT: FROM BIOLOGICAL TO SOCIAL MOTHERHOOD



Removal of the "3-Month" Age Cap

Maternity leave now applies regardless of the child's age at adoption.



Motherhood as a "Status"

Motherhood is defined by care and bonding, not just physiological delivery.

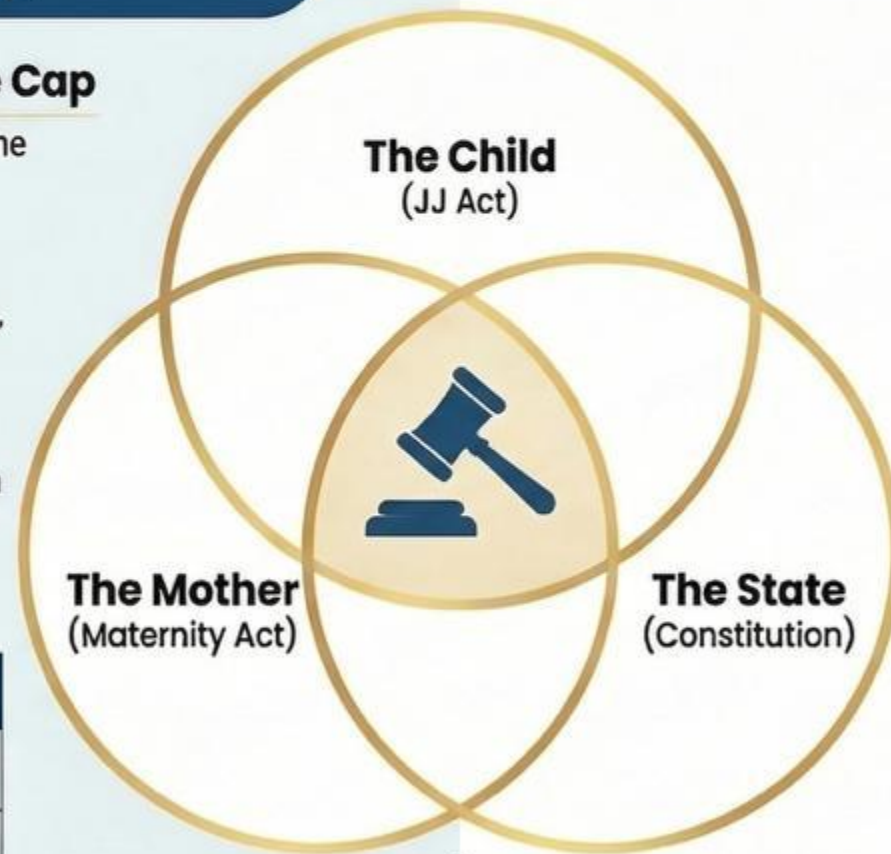


Needs of Older Children

Recognizes that institutionalized older children often require more intensive care to integrate.

COMPARISON OF RIGHTS: OLD VS. NEW JUDICIAL STANDARD

	Feature	Previous Rule (2017 Amendment)	New Judicial Standard
1.	Child's Age Limit	Only for children < 3 months old	Age limit struck down as "arbitrary"
2.	Legal Basis	Strictly Biological/ Infant focus	**Article 14 (Equality) & Article 21 (Dignity)
3.	Focus	Physical Recovery	Emotional Bonding & Integration



CONSTITUTIONAL & ETHICAL PILLARS

Substantive vs. Formal Equality

Recognizes different needs (adoption vs. birth) to achieve truly equal outcomes.

Expanded Reproductive Autonomy

The right to choose parenthood via adoption is now protected under **Article 21**.

Call for Paternity Leave

The Court urged the State to recognize parenthood as a shared responsibility.



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