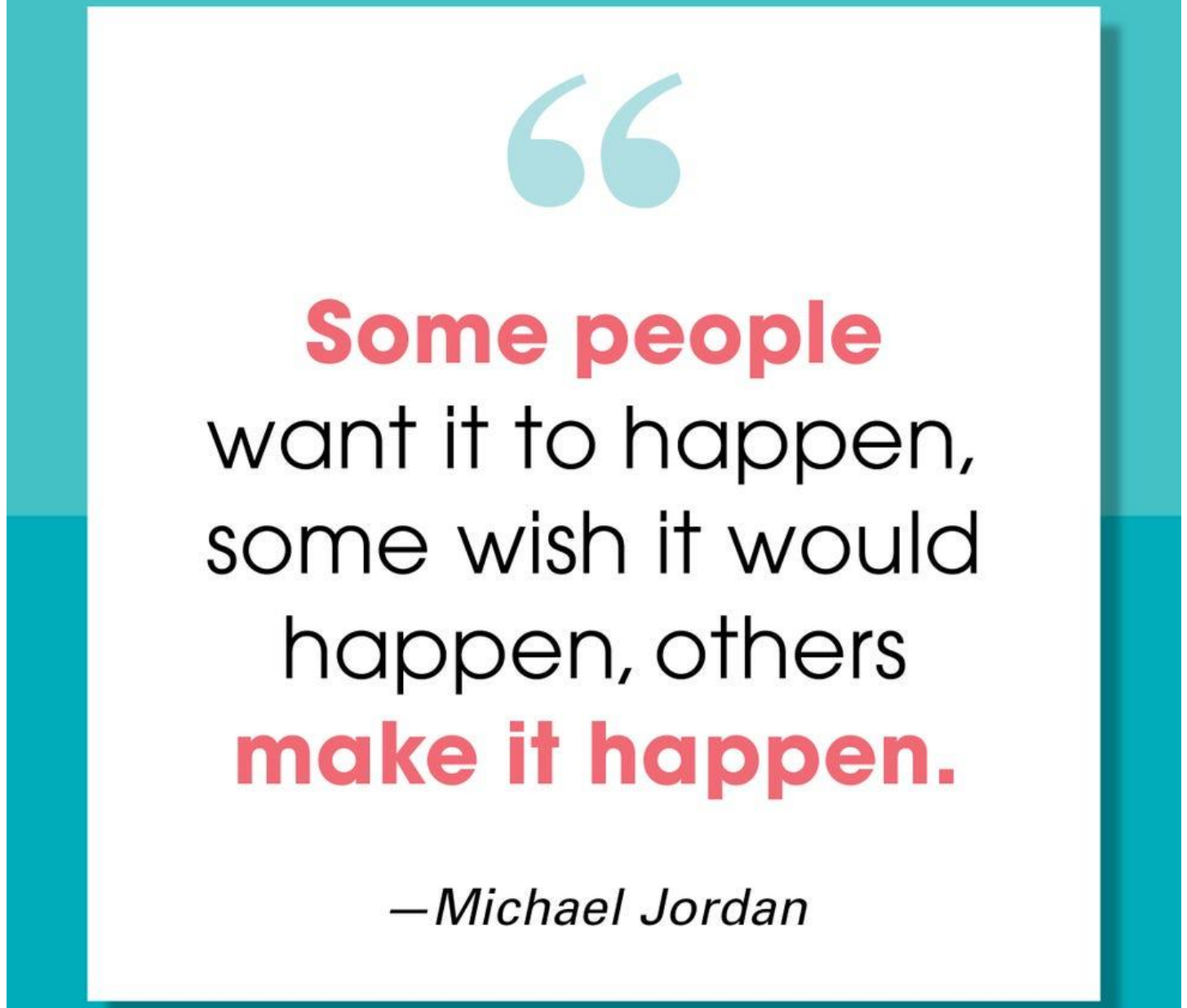
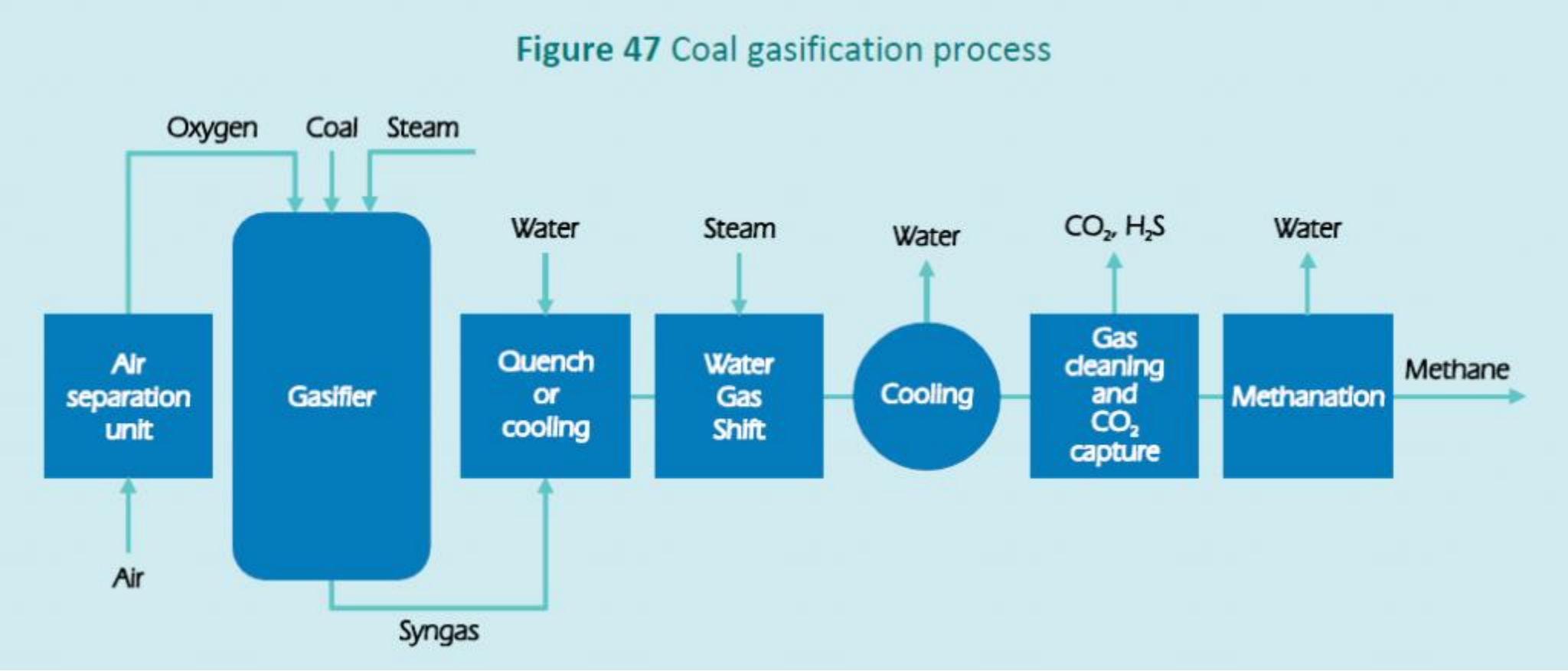

Some people
want it to happen,
some wish it would
happen, others
make it happen.
—Michael Jordan
Prevention

Important Issues of the Day

- India’s nuclear power – Page No. 6, GS 3
- India’s plastic waste – Page No. 6, GS 3
- World Trade Organization – Page No. 6, GS 3
- Religious conversion – Page No.7 , GS 2
- Coal Gasification – Prelims

Coal Gasification



- **Coal gasification is a process in which coal is partially oxidised with air, oxygen, steam or carbon dioxide to form a fuel gas.**
- **This gas is then used instead of piped natural gas, methane and others for deriving energy.**

- **Production of Syngas: It produces Syngas which is a mixture consisting primarily of methane (CH_4), carbon monoxide (CO), hydrogen (H_2), carbon dioxide (CO_2) and water vapour (H_2O).**

- **Syngas can be used to produce a wide range of fertilizers, fuels, solvent and synthetic materials.**

Coal gasification is a thermo-chemical process that converts solid coal into a pressurized gas mixture called syngas (synthesis gas). This process is considered a cleaner alternative to traditional coal burning because it allows for the removal of impurities like sulfur and nitrogen before the gas is used for energy or chemical production.

- **Reaction: Coal is reacted with steam and controlled amounts of oxygen or air under high pressure and temperatures.**
- **Partial Oxidation: Unlike traditional combustion, the coal is not burned but undergoes partial oxidation to break down its molecular structure.**
- **Syngas Formation: The primary result is a mixture consisting mainly of carbon monoxide (CO), hydrogen (H2), and sometimes methane (CH4).**
- **Cleaning: The raw syngas is cleaned to remove particulate matter, sulfur, and mercury.**
- **Utilization: The refined syngas can be used to produce electricity in gas turbines or as a feedstock to create chemicals, fertilizers (like urea), and liquid fuels.**

Which of the statements about the Strait of Hormuz is not correct?

(a) It is a critical region for international oil and gas supplies.

(b) It is a narrow waterway between Bahrain and Qatar.

(c) It connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

(d) Disruption of shipping in this strait can significantly affect global energy prices.

Page No. 6, GS 3

Transforming India's nuclear power landscape

Rakesh Sood

A former diplomat and currently Distinguished Fellow at the Council for Strategic and Defence Research

In the 2025-26 Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that India's installed nuclear power generation capacity would rise from 8,180 MW to 1,00,000 MW (100 GW) by 2047. She also signalled transformative legislative changes, leading to the introduction and rapid passage of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill in December 2025.

The scope of change envisaged is dramatic. All nuclear activity had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE). The SHANTI Act promises a transformation of India's nuclear energy landscape by bringing in private companies to build, own and operate nuclear power plants, provides statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), and revises the liability framework to encourage private and even foreign investment. The 1962 Atomic Energy Act and the 2010 Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) stand repealed and replaced by the SHANTI Act (2025).

However, to realise the promise of 100 GW will need putting the nuts and bolts of implementation in place, the notification of supportive rules and regulations, consonant with the transformative spirit underlying the SHANTI Act.

Driving the reforms

Two key pronouncements drive the reform: achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047 and net-zero emissions by 2070. As society moves up the development ladder, the nature of energy consumption shifts to electricity from traditional modes of energy such as firewood, fossil fuels for transport and heating, and coal for industry. Consequently, the "net zero" target also imposes a parallel shift away from fossil fuel-based power generation towards renewables and other low carbon options. In 2024, India's per capita electricity generation was 1,418 kWh (kilo-watt-hour) compared to 7,097 kWh for China and 12,701 kWh for the United States. The OECD average is a little above 8,000 kWh. This indicates the distance that India needs to travel to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat. The second goal of "net zero" imposes its own conditionalities. In 2024, India's per capita energy consumption was 7,893 kWh, indicating that only one-fifth of the energy consumption is from electricity.

In June 2025, India's electricity generating capacity reached 476 GW (giga-watt) and approximately 50% was non-fossil fuel sources. Renewable sources made up 227 GW, consisting of solar power 111 GW, wind power 51 GW, and hydropower 48 GW, with an additional 5GW from micro-hydel projects and bioenergy 12 GW. In addition, nuclear power – which is seen as low carbon and not strictly renewable as it consumes fissile material as fuel – was 8.8 GW. Thermal power, primarily based on coal accounted for 240 GW. India has committed to increasing the installed capacity of renewables to 500 GW by 2030. However, the installed capacity does not reveal the full picture. Renewable sources generation depends on the time of day, climatic and seasonal conditions and geography. India generated a total of 1,824 TWh (tera-watt-hours) during 2024-25. Renewable sources accounted for 403 TWh (solar 144 TWh, wind 83 TWh, hydro power 160 TWh and bioenergy 16 TWh). Nuclear power accounted for 57 TWh while thermal power generation was 1,363 TWh. Thermal power, therefore, accounted for 75% of the electricity generated with 50% of the generating capacity compared to 50% renewables capacity providing 22%, while nuclear power contributed 3% with 1.8% of generating capacity. The reason is that thermal and nuclear sources provide for steady baseload power. For renewables to provide at scale, large investments in energy storage become essential. This is why renewables capacity growth is now facing headwinds with projects of 40 GW languishing without power-purchase contracts.

Realising the 100 GW target requires SHANTI Act implementation alongside transparent resolution of tariffs, fuel ownership, waste management, insurance, dispute settlement, and regulatory autonomy

India's nuclear power journey and options

Conservative estimates indicate that India will need to grow its electricity generating capacity to over 2,000 GW to reach Viksit Bharat levels. Even with more efficient and cheaper battery storage, renewables such as solar and wind farms are about 10 times more land intensive when compared to thermal power plants; since coal is inconsistent with "net zero", nuclear power remains the preferred baseload means to achieve "net-zero".

India's first nuclear power reactor went operational in 1969 in Tarapur. Today, the Nuclear Power Corporation (NPCIL) is managing 24 nuclear power plants with an installed capacity of 8,780 MW (one reactor in Rawatbhata has been shut down). The two oldest are Boiling Water Reactors (BWR), two at Kudankulam are Russian design VVERs (pressurised water reactor or PWR) and the balance are Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR). The original design was 220 MW; this has been successfully indigenised and adapted to 540 MW and 700 MW designs.

The DAE budget has averaged between ₹24,000 crore and ₹26,000 crore during the last three years. India's 700 MW PHWR construction cost is $2 million per MW, among the lowest globally for nuclear power. To add 90 GW over the next two decades would need an outlay of over $200 billion (₹18 lakh crore), only feasible with private investment; both domestic and foreign.

In 2017, the government gave administrative and financial approval for building 10 reactors of 700 MW each in fleet mode but work has not begun. The logic of fleet mode was to streamline production to gain economies of scale. Three other locations – Jaitapur (Maharashtra), which is planned to have six reactors of 1,650 MW each based on a French (EDF) design, and Mithi Virdi (Gujarat) and Kovvada (Andhra Pradesh), each slated to have six reactors of 1,000 MW capacity using Westinghouse-Toshiba and GE-Hitachi designs – have been under consideration for over a decade. The likely power generation costs from these unproven designs is likely to be over $5 million per MW.

Many industries have captive power plants, ranging from 10 MW to 200 MW; most of these are fossil fuel-based. Current estimates for the installed capacity are 90 GW with plants of 100 MW and above accounting for two-thirds capacity. The government has allocated ₹20,000 crore to research and develop five indigenous models of Small Modular Reactors (SMR) of 5 MW, 55 MW and 200 MW capacity by 2033. Meanwhile, the indigenised 220 MW PHWR model (15 are currently operational), can be a reliable workhorse. With efficient project management, some amount of modularisation, and economies of scale, the time from first pour-of-concrete to going-on-stream can be reduced to 40 months. Steel, primary metals, cement, petrochemicals and paper industries, and now, the data centres, have shown interest.

Three-front nuclear strategy

To achieve the 100 GW target requires careful planning across three fronts. The EdF and Westinghouse designs are comparatively new and will need to be indigenised to bring down costs. China has demonstrated this by building a supporting industry base and plans to build 33 reactors of 1,000 MW each at below $2 million per MW over 10 years. Second, the DAE should identify institutions to accelerate research and development for indigenous SMRs, especially of the molten-salt reactor design. Another research area is in the use of Thorium cladding with HALEU (High Assay Low Enriched Uranium) that can provide an alternative to the Breeder Reactor route in order to permit early exploitation of India's thorium reserves. Third, the indigenised 220 MW PHWR model is ready to be modularised as an economically viable replacement for a number of captive power plants; some Indian private sector companies have the requisite design, fabrication and construction experience. Since nuclear power generation requires high upfront capital costs but low operating costs over a long (60 years) operating life, an appropriate financing model will need to be worked out. Existing exclusion zone regulations, intended for multiple reactors at one site will need to be modified for captive single unit reactors.

Conceptually, the SHANTI Act attempts a division between strategic- and defence-related nuclear activities and the civilian power generation; now, the rules and regulations to be issued must make this clear. Issues of nuclear power tariffs, ownership of nuclear fuel, waste management, insurance and liability, dispute settlement mechanism, and an autonomous regulator will need to be dealt with in a transparent manner. Only then will the SHANTI Act deliver on its promise.

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- She also signalled transformative legislative changes, leading to the introduction and rapid passage of the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill in December 2025.
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- The 1962 Atomic Energy Act and the 2010 Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA) stand repealed and replaced by the SHANTI Act (2025).

- **As society moves up the development ladder, the nature of energy consumption shifts to electricity from traditional modes of energy such as firewood, fossil fuels for transport and heating, and coal for industry.**

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- **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) is a Public Sector Enterprise under the administrative control of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), Government of India.**

- **The Company was registered as a Public Limited Company under the Companies Act, 1956 with the objectives of operating atomic power plants and implementing atomic power projects for generation of electricity in pursuance of the schemes and programmes of the Government of India under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962.**

Mains Question

Despite significant progress in renewable energy capacity, India's clean energy transition faces structural and financial challenges. Critically examine. (250 words)

नवीकरणीय ऊर्जा क्षमता में उल्लेखनीय प्रगति के बावजूद, भारत का स्वच्छ ऊर्जा संक्रमण संरचनात्मक एवं वित्तीय चुनौतियों का सामना कर रहा है। समालोचनात्मक विश्लेषण कीजिए। (250 शब्द)

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Elastic rules

India needs proper reckoning of plastic collection and reuse targets

The latest iterations of India's plastic waste management rules, announced on March 31, suggest that the government has hit a wall in its attempts to curb plastic waste collection and recycling. The Plastic Waste Management Rules, first introduced in 2016, have been amended periodically, reflecting a policy framework in constant evolution. The intent is to make companies that produce and use plastics invest in recycling plastic so that, ultimately, less plastic is wasted and dumped in landfills, rivers, oceans, and public spaces. The paradox is that the same qualities that have made plastic ubiquitous – adaptable to a near infinite range of consumer goods, easy to produce, accessible to the richest and the poorest, and flexible in a way that metal can never be – also make it near impossible to incentivise collection and reuse. This is why the Rules were necessary.

Since 2022, when the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regime came into force, producers, importers and brand owners – makers and users of plastic packaging and raw materials – were required to collect and process plastic waste equivalent to 35% of the plastic they introduced into the market in 2021-22, increasing to 70% in 2022-23 and 100% by 2024-25. The amendments of 2026 bring in new mandates. This time, com- their plastic packaging annually. For instance, producers, importers and brand owners must ensure that rigid plastic packaging (Category I) contains at least 30% recycled material, rising to 60% by 2028-29. There are also similar 'reuse' obligations. But, strangely, companies that fail to meet their targets in 2025-26, the gazette notification says, may carry forward the shortfall for up to three years, provided they make up at least a third of the deficit annually. In effect this means that the 2025-26 target can be met in 2028-29. Also, at present, there is no evidence or even a claim by the government that all companies are collecting 100% of their obligations. By the government's own responses to Parliament it hovers from 50%-60%, and yet there are no targets set for 2025 and beyond. This seems to suggest that the government has given up on pushing companies to collect or recycle plastic, or has shifted focus to having them use recycled plastic irrespective of how it is sourced. There are provisions on using 'trading certificates' that suggest the logic is to let market economics decide on what is an environmental problem. Without a proper reckoning of collection and recycling targets, the new targets on reuse, which are already elastic, risk being ignored, thus undermining the intent of the EPR regime.

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- **For instance, producers, importers and brand owners must ensure that rigid plastic packaging (Category I) contains at least 30% recycled material, rising to 60% by 2028-29. There are also similar 'reuse' obligations.**

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The World Trade Organization is flailing

Prabhash Ranjan

Professor and Vice Dean (Research), Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University

Trade multilateralism is facing its biggest stress test since the Second World War. The United States' coercive unilateralism and attempts to dilute foundational rules such as the most-favoured nation (MFN) treatment threaten to hollow out the entire system. At such a critical juncture in history, the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14), which recently concluded in Yaoundé, Cameroon (March 2026), was expected to reassure the global community about the importance of a rules-based global trading order, which limits hegemonic tendencies.

Regrettably, the MC14 failed to meet this challenge. While no one expected the MC14 to turn up trumps, the fact that the 166-member WTO failed to reach consensus on even issuing a ministerial declaration outlining future work is disconcerting. To paper over the cracks, the WTO's Director General declared that the MC14 had produced a Yaoundé package comprising certain draft decisions, that is, decisions yet to be finalised, which will be discussed at Geneva in the months ahead.

Tale of two moratoriums

The MC14 will go down in history as the one that broke the long-standing consensus on moratoriums for two things. First, customs duties on electronic commerce transactions. Since 1998, WTO member-countries agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic commerce transactions to keep digital trade flows free. The moratorium has been extended every two years since its inception. However, at MC14, countries were unable to reach an agreement on extending the moratorium, which, thus, lapsed on March 31.

Today, countries are free to impose tariffs on digital trade flows, though it is expected that the WTO's General Council will deliberate on this issue again in the months ahead. While this may provide developing countries with an opportunity to augment their revenue, it will burden consumers and businesses. A significant development that accompanied the end of the e-commerce moratorium was the signing of an e-commerce agreement (ECA) by 66 WTO members, which prohibits customs duties on digital trade.

The WTO's fourteenth Ministerial Conference has showed up the cracks in the rules-based system

Although not yet part of the WTO rulebook and binding only for the signatories, this agreement will establish two separate legal frameworks: the WTO, which allows tariffs on digital trade, and the ECA, which does not.

The second moratorium, in force since 1995, barred non-violation complaints under the WTO's TRIPS Agreement. The WTO allows countries to file claims not only for legal violations but also when a country's measures nullify another country's anticipated benefits, even if those measures are legal.

This raises concerns for developing nations that their laws to promote public health could provoke complaints from developed countries alleging that they nullify the benefits of their intellectual property. Although such complaints are possible, history suggests they are unlikely to succeed, as evidenced by the failure of all 10 non-violation complaints related to trade in goods at the WTO.

Plurilateral innovation

A so-called low-hanging fruit at the MC14 was the incorporation of the plurilateral Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement into Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement, with support from 129 of 166 countries. However, it did not materialise due to India's opposition. New Delhi opposed the IFD's inclusion for multiple reasons, including the absence of legal safeguards to incorporate plurilateral agreements into the WTO acquis.

Plurilateral agreements to be incorporated into the WTO should be open and inclusive rather than exclusive. The failure to include the IFD Agreement has deepened the WTO's legislative crisis, as the organisation struggles to establish rules for 21st century challenges.

No road map for the future

The MC14 failed to provide a clear road map for WTO reforms. Critical issues such as reviving the stalled appellate function of the WTO's dispute settlement system have been postponed. Any attempts by the developed world, especially the U.S., to undermine key principles, such as MFN and the special and differential treatment, must be strongly resisted.

It is often said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The history of trade multilateralism demonstrates that whenever trade multilateralism slows, American unilateralism tends to rise. This occurred in the early 1970s when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations floundered, leading to the enactment of strict measures such as Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974. This provision empowers the U.S. President to take unilateral action against perceived unfair trade practices. We are currently witnessing a similar situation, but this time without Congressional approval and with far greater vengeance. A setback at the MC14 will exacerbate these trends.

Additionally, the failure of the MC14 will accelerate the trend of countries creating new trade rules outside the WTO. To keep the WTO relevant, innovative solutions must be found, such as plurilateralising the WTO. India should take the lead in developing the legal guardrails needed for the development and adoption of plurilateral agreements within the WTO. Achieving this will require a novel approach and unflinching political commitment to trade multilateralism.

The views expressed are personal

World Trade Organization (WTO):

- **About: WTO is an international institution formed to regulate the rules for global trade among nations.**
- **It was formed under the Marrakesh Agreement signed on 15th April 1994 by 123 countries after the Uruguay Round negotiations (1986-94) of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), leading to the birth of WTO in 1995.**
- **WTO succeeded the GATT which had regulated world trade since 1948.**
- **GATT focused on trade in goods, while WTO covers trade in goods, services, and intellectual property, including creations, designs, and inventions.**

- **Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland.**
- **Members: 166 countries, representing 98% of global trade.**

Key WTO Agreements:

- **TRIMS (Trade-Related Investment Measures): Prohibits measures that discriminate against foreign products, e.g., local content requirements.**

- **TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights): TRIPS resolves disputes over intellectual property rights.**

- **AoA (Agreement on Agriculture): AoA promotes agricultural trade liberalization, focusing on market access and domestic support.**

Other Agreements:

- **Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures**
- **General Agreement on Trade in Services**
- **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade**

Page No.7 , GS 2

Conversion politics, the challenge to secularism

Shaikh Mujibur Rehman

is the author of 'Shikwa-e- Hind: The Political Future of Indian Muslims' The views expressed are personal

There have been recurrent media reports of arrests of Muslims from diverse social and professional backgrounds on allegations of participating in organised networks that facilitate religious conversion from Hinduism to Islam. These reports have predominantly emerged from North India, particularly Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Most of the cases remain under investigation. If substantiated, such developments could indicate a new form of ideological churn within segments of Muslim society in India. Otherwise, they risk being perceived as manufactured narratives driven by an ideologically motivated state.

The last widely acknowledged instance of mass conversion to Islam occurred in February 1981 in Meenakshipuram, Tamil Nadu, where 558 Dalits embraced Islam to escape entrenched caste oppression. Reflecting on the episode, Atal Bihari Vajpayee observed that Hindu society suffered from long-standing ills, particularly distinctions based on birth and caste. The conversions were thus rooted in inequalities internal to Hindu society.

Contentious issue

Religious conversion – particularly from Hinduism to Islam and Christianity – has long been a contentious issue. Mahatma Gandhi, in particular, according to Laura D. Jenkins, author of *Religious Freedom and Mass Conversion in India*, viewed mass conversions not only as a threat to the poor and the uneducated but also to anti-colonial unity.

The most symbolically powerful conversion in modern Indian history was that of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who embraced Buddhism in 1956. On October 13, 1935, Ambedkar had declared his intention to leave Hinduism at the Depressed Classes Conference in Yeola. For Ambedkar, conversion was an act of emancipation. In the intervening period, he repeatedly urged Dalits to leave Hinduism for any religion of their choice.

The most symbolically powerful conversion in modern Indian history was that of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who embraced Buddhism in 1956

He even took the initiative for Dalits to convert to Sikhism, which found unexpected support from Dr. B.S. Moonje, a prominent leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, who encouraged Hindu leaders to endorse the conversion. However, this met opposition from Mahatma, C. Rajagopalachari and Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. One of Gandhi's principal arguments against Ambedkar leaving Hinduism was the belief that Dalit followers would abandon him once he ceased to be a Hindu. Had Gandhi been alive today, he would have realised how profoundly mistaken this assessment was. The enduring reverence for Ambedkar among Dalits, despite, and indeed because of, his conversion, stands as a powerful rebuttal to that prognosis.

Concerns surrounding religious conversion and legislative attempts to regulate conversion began even under the colonial administration. For instance, the Raigarh State Conversion Act (1936) and the Patna Freedom of Religion Act (1942) sought to monitor conversions. The question of religious freedom and conversion was debated in the Constituent Assembly, culminating in the formulation of Article 25(1) of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise, and propagate religion. But constitutional recognition of religious freedom did not produce lasting political or social consensus.

In independent India, a series of anti-conversion laws have been enacted and periodically amended by various secular governments well before Hindu nationalists emerged as a dominant electoral force, primarily in response to concerns over Christian missionary activities. The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act (1967) and the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam (1968) are prominent examples. However, Hindutva right organisations argued that these laws are inadequate to effectively curb religious conversion.

Specific instances

Consequently, several States ruled by the BJP have amended existing legislation. The scope of these laws has expanded beyond concerns about Christian missionary activity to include conversions to Islam, particularly in the context of allegations framed as "love jihad". The Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018, for instance, illustrates this trajectory. The law was further tightened in 2022, with enhanced penalties. In 2025, the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2025 proposed increasing punishment from three to 10 years, extending up to 20 years or even life imprisonment in extreme cases. However, these have not yet been notified, as the Bill was returned by the Governor for reconsideration. The implementation of these laws has generated significant legal disputes.

Under the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Act, 2022, reports indicate that 20 cases were filed in 2023 and 18 more by September 2025. Of the cases brought to full trial under the 2018 Act, several have resulted in acquittal. Such legislation has not been confined to BJP-ruled States. The Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (2006), for example, was enacted under a Congress government, and the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act 2002, introduced by the J. Jayalalithaa-led AIADMK government and later modified in 2006 by the M. Karunanidhi-led DMK government. This underscores the broader political consensus across ideological lines on regulating religious conversion.

These acts, in practice, have often encouraged vigilantism, leading to instances of violence and disruptions to India's secular social fabric. Therefore, it is imperative that governments review these acts.

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- **Mahatma Gandhi, in particular, according to Laura D. Jenkins, author of Religious Freedom and Mass Conversion in India, viewed mass conversions not only as a threat to the poor and the uneducated but also to anti-colonial unity.**

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- **Article 25(1) of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise, and propagate religion.**

- **The Indian Constitution under Article 25 guarantees the freedom to profess, propagate, and practice religion, and allows all religious sections to manage their own affairs in matters of religion, subject to public order, morality, and health.**
- **However, no person shall force their religious beliefs and consequently, no person should be forced to practice any religion against their wishes.**
- **There has been no central legislation restricting or regulating religious conversions.**
- **Over the years, several states have enacted ‘Freedom of Religion’ legislation to restrict religious conversions carried out by force, fraud, or inducements.**


Thank You!