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# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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# 1. India's crude supply secure, no fuel shortage, Minister tells LS

## Why in the News?

The issue is in the news due to a confluence of factors:

- **West Asian Crisis:** An ongoing conflict in West Asia has raised global concerns about energy security, as the region is a major supplier of crude oil and LPG.
- **Domestic Panic:** Rumours of a fuel shortage triggered massive panic-buying in parts of the country, leading to long queues at fuel stations and fears of scarcity.
- **Political Flashpoint:** The situation sparked a heated debate in the Lok Sabha, with the Opposition, led by Rahul Gandhi, accusing the government of compromising India's energy sovereignty, and the government, led by Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, asserting that supplies are secure and dismissing the rumours as a "fake narrative."



## Background

- **Global Dependence:** A significant portion of the world's oil and gas passes through the Strait of Hormuz. The article notes that for 13 days, this route has been closed to commercial shipping, disrupting a key global energy artery.
- **India's Import Profile:** Historically, India has relied heavily on Gulf countries (Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait) for its energy needs, particularly for the 60% of LPG it imports.
- **Domestic LPG Market:** Commercial LPG in India is sold in a fully deregulated market without any purchase limits, which in times of crisis can lead to hoarding and diversion of cylinders to the grey market.

## Feature

- **Government Assurance:** The Petroleum Minister assured the Lok Sabha that there is no shortage of petrol, diesel, kerosene, or ATF. He stated that India's crude supply is secure and that refineries are operating at high capacity (sometimes exceeding 100%).

- **Priority on Households:** The government's "foremost priority" is to ensure that over 33 crore families, especially the poor, do not face any shortage of cooking gas.
- **Anti-Hoarding Measure:** To prevent hoarding and black marketing of commercial LPG, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) will now allocate only 20% of the average monthly commercial LPG requirement in coordination with state governments.

## Challenge

- **Managing Public Perception:** The primary immediate challenge is not a supply failure but a "demand distortion" caused by "consumer anxiety," panic-buying, and hoarding triggered by rumours.
- **Geopolitical Risk:** The ongoing West Asia crisis and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz pose a real and significant threat to global energy supplies, requiring constant management.
- **Political Fallout:** The government faces the challenge of countering allegations from the Opposition, such as Mr. Gandhi's claim that the government has "bartered" away its sovereign right to decide its oil partnerships by compromising with the U.S. over Russian oil imports.

## Way Forward

- **Supply Diversification:** India is actively reducing its dependence on the volatile Gulf region. The government has diversified its supply chains to include "non-Hormuz" sources like the U.S., Norway, Canada, Algeria, and Russia. The share of these sources in crude imports has risen to about 70%.
- **Strategic Allocation:** The government will manage demand by prioritising critical sectors. While households and essential services (piped gas, CNG) will receive full supply, industrial consumers will get up to 80%, and fertiliser plants up to 70% of their average consumption to protect agricultural supply chains.
- **Regulatory Intervention:** Implementing the 20% cap on commercial LPG allocation is a direct step to curb hoarding and ensure equitable distribution.

## Conclusion

The central government, through Minister Puri's statement, concludes that India is capable of navigating the global energy disruption. It asserts that the issue is one of panic-induced demand rather than a genuine supply shortage. By diversifying its import sources away from conflict zones and implementing targeted measures to prevent hoarding, the government aims to protect household consumers and maintain national energy security. The message is one of reassurance, urging national unity against "rumour-mongering".

## 2. SC to study what constitutes 'personal data' in DPDP laws

### Why in the News?

The Supreme Court of India has agreed to examine a key challenge to the country's new data protection framework. The core issue is whether the DPDP Act, 2023, and its associated Rules, 2025, are using privacy protections as a shield to block the public's right to information (RTI), particularly regarding individuals in public office. This marks the first major legal scrutiny of the law since its implementation.

## Background

- **The New Law:** The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, was enacted to create a framework for protecting individuals' "personal data" and establishing penalties for its misuse.
- **The Conflict:** The law has created a tension between two fundamental rights: the Right to Privacy (upheld as a fundamental right in the K.S. Puttaswamy case) and the Right to Information (under the RTI Act, 2005).
- **The Petitioners:** A petition has been filed by journalist Geeta Seshu and the Software Freedom Law Centre, arguing that the new law has tilted the balance too far in favour of privacy, effectively gutting the RTI Act.



## Feature

- **Blanket Ban on Information:** The petition specifically challenges Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, which imposes a "blanket ban" on RTI applications seeking the disclosure of 'personal information'. The petitioners argue this is too broad.
- **Deletion of 'Public Interest':** A critical point raised is that the term 'public interest' has been deleted from the new Act. This prevents journalists and citizens from accessing data about public officials that would be in the public's right to know, even if it is technically "personal" to the official.
- **Lack of Compensation for Victims:** While the Act imposes massive fines (running into hundreds of crores) for data breaches, these penalties are paid directly to the government's Consolidated Fund of India.
- **Regulator's Independence:** The petition also alleges that the new Data Protection Board is not independent, but "structurally dependent upon the Executive."

## Challenge

- **Defining the Undefined:** The core legal challenge is the lack of clear definitions. The Act does not clearly define what constitutes "information" versus "personal data," and where the line between them lies.
- **Balancing Two Rights:** As the Chief Justice noted, the court must find a balance where the right to privacy does not completely override the right to information. The key question is: "At what point should data regarding a respectable person holding public office be treated as public and when should it be seen as personal?"

- **Data as Wealth:** The court also acknowledged the broader global challenge of protecting citizens' data from being exploited as "wealth" by large private entities, adding another layer of complexity to the case.

## Way Forward

- **Framing the Questions:** The Supreme Court has asked the petitioners to formally frame the specific questions of law to be argued.
- **Government's Response:** The court has issued a formal notice to the Union government, which will now have to file its response and justify the provisions of the Act.
- **Scheduled Hearing:** The case has been scheduled for a detailed hearing on March 23, where the court will begin the process of interpreting the law and attempting to strike the necessary balance between privacy and transparency.

## Conclusion

The Supreme Court's decision to scrutinise the DPDP Act signifies a pivotal moment for digital rights and democratic transparency in India. The core question is whether the new law, designed to protect personal data, has inadvertently created a system that enables state surveillance, denies citizens recourse when their data is stolen, and shields public officials from accountability by hiding behind a broad definition of "personal data." The court's eventual ruling will define the future of the right to information in the digital age.

## 3. Every MP can speak but only as per rules: Speaker

### Why in the News?

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla addressed the House for the first time since an Opposition motion seeking his removal was defeated. His speech was significant as it reaffirmed the authority of the Speaker's chair and laid down the rules of conduct for MPs following a major political confrontation.

### Background

- **The Motion:** On the previous day (Wednesday), Opposition parties, backed by more than 100 MPs, moved a motion for the Speaker's removal, accusing him of failing to ensure the impartial functioning of the House.
- **The Outcome:** The motion was defeated by a voice vote amid protests.
- **Context of Debate:** The debate surrounding the motion involved references to Article 105 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech in Parliament.

### Feature

- **Right to Speak, But With Limits:** Speaker Birla emphasised that every MP, whether from the Treasury or Opposition benches, has the right to speak, but this right is subject to the Constitution and the established Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business.
- **No Special Privileges:** He directly addressed a perception he attributed to some members that the Leader of the Opposition has a special privilege to "stand at any time and speak on any subject." He firmly stated that no member possesses any privilege to speak outside the framework of the rules.
- **Essence of Democracy:** He framed the preceding two days of debate, totalling over 12 hours, as the essence of democracy, where "every voice is heard," regardless of whether the views were in support of the government or critical of it.

- **Call for Unity:** The Speaker concluded by appealing to all MPs to work together and "begin a new, positive and constructive chapter," signalling a desire to move past the contentious motion.

## Challenge

- **Restoring Order and Trust:** The primary challenge is to restore a sense of orderly functioning in the House after a highly confrontational episode. The Speaker must balance enforcing the rules (which the Opposition may see as suppression) while ensuring all voices feel genuinely heard.
- **Defining the Boundaries:** The speech sets a clear boundary, but enforcing it without further inflaming tensions will be difficult. The challenge lies in the day-to-day application of these rules, determining what constitutes a subject being out of order or a member speaking at an inappropriate time.



## Way Forward

- **Adherence to Rules:** The path forward, according to the Speaker, is for all members to strictly adhere to the parliamentary rules and standing orders.
- **Constructive Engagement:** The Speaker's call for a "positive and constructive chapter" invites the Opposition and Treasury benches to engage in legislative business within the established framework.
- **Potential for Clarification:** The issues raised may lead to a more detailed examination or clarification of the rules regarding the Leader of the Opposition's speaking rights and the scope of "freedom of speech" within the House.

## Conclusion

Speaker Om Birla's address was a firm reassertion of parliamentary discipline and the Speaker's authority to enforce it. He clarified that while democracy guarantees a voice to all, it does not grant any member, including the Leader of the Opposition, an unrestricted right to speak without regard to the rules. His message served as both a defence of his office's impartiality and a roadmap for

future proceedings, urging members to channel their energies into constructive work within the bounds of the Constitution.

## 4. India co-sponsors resolution passed by UNSC against Iran

### Why in the News?

India co-sponsored and voted in favour of a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-led resolution at the UN Security Council (UNSC) that demands Iran cease its attacks on GCC countries. The move has drawn attention because it highlights a perceived imbalance in India's responses to the ongoing conflict in West Asia, condemning Iran's actions while remaining silent on those by the U.S. and Israel.



### Background

- **The Resolution:** The UNSC resolution, co-sponsored by India and 134 other countries, demands the "immediate cessation of all attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran" on GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Jordan). It also condemns Iranian interference with navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. The resolution passed 13-0, with Russia and China abstaining.
- **India's Strategic Ties:** India has deep strategic and economic ties with the Gulf region. Approximately 10 million Indians live and work in GCC countries, and the region supplies India with about 50% of its crude oil and 90% of its LPG imports.
- **Diminishing Ties with Iran:** In contrast, India's ties with Iran have weakened. There are only about 9,000 Indians in Iran, and India halted energy imports from Tehran in 2019 due to U.S. sanctions.

### Feature

- **Protecting the Diaspora:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) justified the vote by emphasising the "utmost importance" of the welfare and well-being of the large Indian diaspora in the Gulf.

- **Energy Security:** The Gulf region is critical for India's energy security, making stability in the area a direct national interest.
- **Consistent Position:** The MEA spokesperson argued that the resolution "reflects several of our positions" and that India has consistently "underlined the need for prioritising the safety of all civilians" in its statements on the conflict.

## Challenge

- **Accusations of a Double Standard:** India faces significant criticism for its seemingly "unbalanced" responses. While it has condemned specific Iranian actions, it has not condemned attacks by the U.S. and Israel on Iran.
  - This includes the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his advisors, the sinking of the Iranian ship IRIS Dena (which had previously participated in exercises with India) near Indian shores, and the bombing of a school in Mubin, reportedly killing 150 schoolgirls.
- **Criticism from Former Diplomats:** India's stance has been publicly questioned by senior former diplomats.
  - Nirupama Menon Rao suggested the vote endorses a narrative that begins with Iranian retaliation, ignoring the preceding escalations.
  - Kanwal Sibal argued India should have condoled the death of Iran's head of state, as his assassination contravenes international law.
  - Shyam Saran warned that "tactical subservience" to the U.S. could lead to India's "strategic irrelevance."



## Way Forward

- **Maintaining a Balancing Act:** India must navigate the complex geopolitics of West Asia, balancing its robust strategic partnership with the U.S. and its deep economic ties with the Gulf Arabs against its historical relationship with Iran.
- **Clearer Communication:** To deflect criticism, India may need to articulate a more comprehensive framework for its West Asia policy that explains its seemingly disparate responses, perhaps by differentiating between state-on-state conflict and actions targeting specific leaders or civilians.
- **Engaging All Sides:** India is likely to continue engaging with all players—Iran, Israel, the U.S., and the GCC states—to protect its interests, but will need to calibrate its public statements more carefully to avoid appearing partisan.

## Conclusion

India's co-sponsorship of the UNSC resolution against Iran reflects the clear strategic prioritisation of its ties with the Gulf Arab states and the U.S., driven by critical energy and diaspora interests. However, this move has exposed the government to criticism that it is applying a selective moral compass, condemning violations by one side while overlooking those by its strategic partners. The

challenge for Indian diplomacy is to defend its national interests without being seen as complicit in a narrative that overlooks the full complexity of the conflict.

## 5. Preparing India for a true innovation-led economy

### Why in the News?

This article is a timely analysis published against the backdrop of significant government initiatives announced in 2025 and 2026, including a massive ₹1,00,000 crore R&D fund, a ₹20,000 crore corpus for deep-tech startups, and key regulatory reforms. It examines whether these ambitious policy moves are enough to transform India's innovation landscape, questioning if the intent will translate into tangible outcomes.

### Background

- **The Paradox:** India presents a conflicting picture. On one hand, there is unprecedented government ambition, improved Global Innovation Index ranking (38th in 2025), and a near-doubling of patent filings (to over 1,10,000).
- **The Reality:** Despite these headline-grabbing metrics, India continues to underperform on fundamental drivers of innovation: low R&D intensity, weak global technological influence, and a poor research-to-market translation.



### Recent Policy Moves:

- **RDI Fund:** A ₹1,00,000 crore Research, Development, and Innovation fund announced.
- **Budget 2026:** A ₹20,000 crore corpus for deep-tech startups and a six-fold increase in Atal Tinkering Labs funding (from ₹500 crore to ₹3,200 crore).
- **Regulatory Reforms:** Lifting the blanket ban on patenting in atomic energy (SHANTI Act, 2025) and easing eligibility for deep-tech startup schemes.

## Feature

- **R&D Expenditure:** India invests only 0.65% of its GDP in R&D, the lowest among BRICS nations (barring South Africa) and far behind innovation leaders. Critically, the private sector's share is disproportionately low; the state still carries the bulk of the burden.
- **Patent Quality vs. Quantity:** While domestic patent filings have grown and now constitute 62% of the total, India's global footprint is minuscule. It filed only 4,547 international (PCT) patent applications in 2024, compared to China's 70,000+, the U.S.'s 54,000+, and Japan's 48,000+.
- **Human Capital Gaps:** India ranks poorly on talent indicators:
  - 95th in employment in knowledge-intensive sectors.
  - 80th in the number of full-time equivalent researchers.
  - 101st in the employment of women with advanced degrees.
- **Nature of Enterprise:** Indian unicorns are often built on labour arbitrage (e.g., delivery platforms) rather than deep, defensible, R&D-led technological innovation. The article identifies this as a "faultline" stemming from a historical lack of large-scale, R&D-intensive industrialisation.

## Challenge

- **The Private Sector's Reluctance:** The core challenge is the sustained reluctance of Indian industry to invest in long-gestation, high-risk R&D. Innovation requires patient capital and a tolerance for failure, which is currently underdeveloped.
- **Weak Academia-Industry Bridge:** The "last mile" problem-moving ideas from the laboratory to the market-remains the weakest link. Mechanisms for technology transfer, venture creation, and risk-capital alignment are underdeveloped.
- **Moving from Intent to Execution:** The author argues that India's innovation challenge is "no longer one of intent but of execution." The real test is whether industry will decisively respond to the government's policy push with long-term capital commitment.

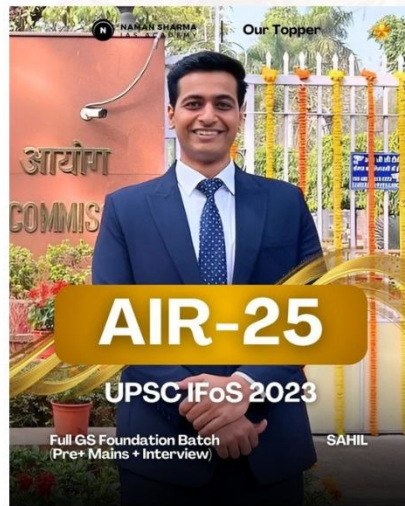
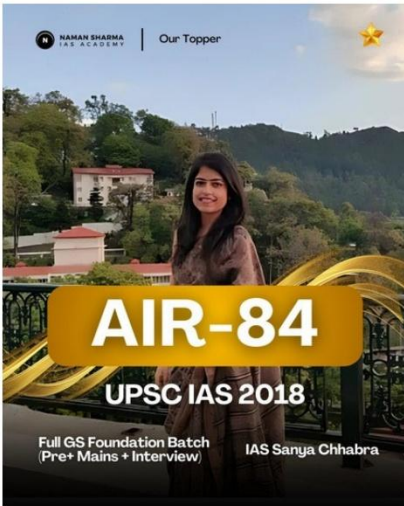
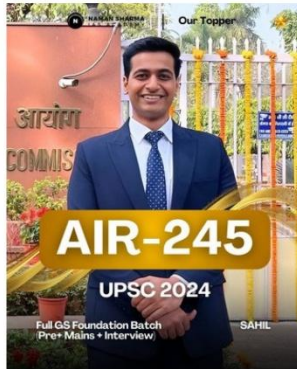
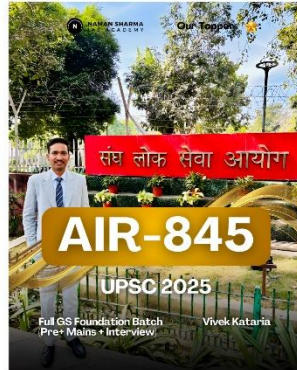
## Way Forward

- **Decisive Private Sector Participation:** The government has "paved the way." The onus is now on India's private sector to "take up the baton" and drive the R&D story by committing to long-term, high-risk investment.
- **Nurturing R&D-Driven Enterprises:** The focus must shift from simply increasing the number of startups to nurturing enterprises capable of creating globally competitive, defensible technologies.
- **Leveraging Green Shoots:** Early promise is visible in sectors like commercial space and deep tech. The new RDI fund can be a "game changer" if the industry actively embraces the opportunity it presents.
- **Improving Talent Inclusion:** Addressing the poor rankings on researcher numbers and gender diversity (through schemes like WIDUSHI and WISE-KIRAN) is critical, as diversity strongly correlates with better innovation outcomes.

## Conclusion

India stands at a critical juncture. The government has demonstrated clear intent through record funding and bold regulatory reforms, setting the stage for a Viksit Bharat powered by innovation. However, the path to a true innovation-led economy hinges on a fundamental shift in behaviour from the private sector. The headline numbers on patents and rankings are promising, but they mask a shallow innovation base. The ultimate measure of success will not be the funds allocated, but whether Indian industry steps up to build the deep-tech enterprises and globally influential patents that signal a genuine transition from policy ambition to R&D reality.

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