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What the Meta-YouTube ruling means for social media

THE HINDU :
31-03-2026 : Page 8



Elections 2026: Strengthening Democratic Integrity Amid Evolving Challenges

THE HINDU :
31-03-2026 : Page 6



Why a Ground Invasion of Iran Could Become a Strategic Disaster for the United States

THE HINDU :
31-03-2026 : Page 6



U.S.-Israel-Iran war puts India's EV gap in focus

THE HINDU :
30-03-2026 : Page 13

NATIONAL Page 2



MHA's AI vision: Predictive policing, dark web monitoring, ending mule accounts

THE INDIAN EXPRESS :
31-03-2026 : Page 8

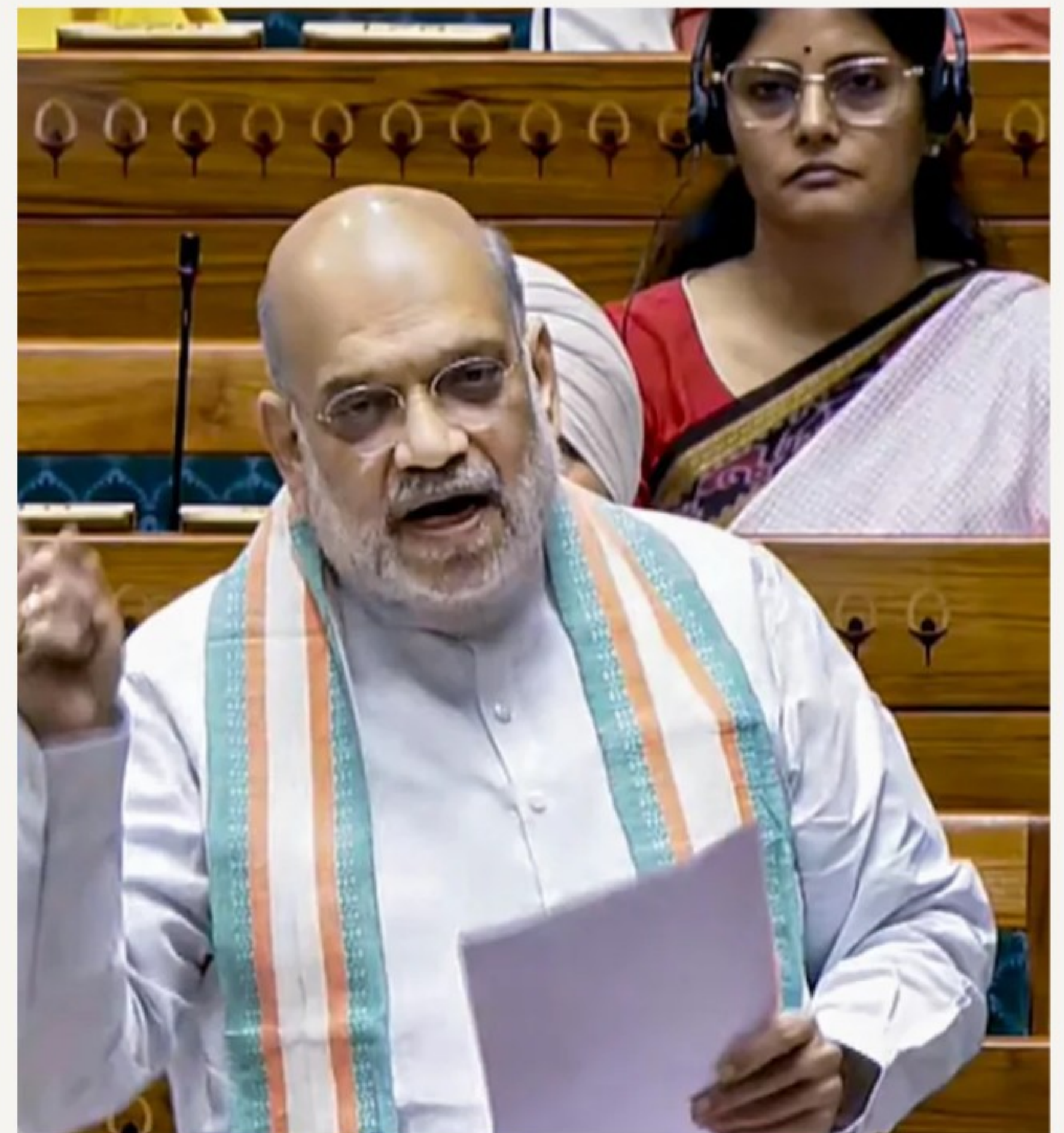
MAOIST TOP LEADERSHIP NEARLY ELIMINATED, SAYS SHAH

ECONOMICS - Page 7



U.S.-Israel-Iran war puts India's EV gap in focus

THE HINDU :
31-03-2026 : Page 7



PRELIMS CORNER Page 8



Languages of India Union - State relations

UPSC PYQ analysis - Indian Polity

EDITORIALS DECODED Page 5



Spirit of the law



Bond Blues



Sex test in sports takes toll on right to equality

Union Home Minister Amit Shah stated that the leadership structure of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) has been largely dismantled over the past two years, with most senior members either arrested, surrendered, or killed. He highlighted that between 2023 and 2026, 706 Maoists were killed, over 2,200 arrested, and more than 4,800 surrendered. The government has pursued a strategy combining dialogue, security measures, and coordination among agencies, with the objective of eliminating Left-Wing Extremism in India.

MHA's AI vision: Predictive policing, dark web monitoring, ending mule accounts

A recent report by a Parliamentary Standing Committee highlights how the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is increasingly leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to strengthen India's internal security framework. The report emphasises AI as a "critical enabler" in improving decision-making across police forces, paramilitary units, and investigative agencies, particularly in areas such as surveillance, behavioural analysis, and crime pattern recognition.

Modernising Cybercrime Reporting Systems

A recent report by a Parliamentary Standing Committee highlights how the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is increasingly leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to strengthen India's internal security framework. The report emphasises AI as a "critical enabler" in improving decision-making across police forces, paramilitary units, and investigative agencies, particularly in areas such as surveillance, behavioural analysis, and crime pattern recognition.

Strengthening Financial Fraud Detection

The MHA is also working with the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub to develop real-time AI-based monitoring of financial transactions. This system aims to detect suspicious patterns and enable banks to flag or prevent fraudulent transactions proactively. Integration with tools like the MuleHunter application is expected to enhance fraud detection and response efficiency across the banking ecosystem.



Overall, the report underscores a significant shift towards data-driven and technology-enabled policing in India. While AI offers substantial benefits in efficiency and predictive capability, challenges remain in terms of technological maturity, ethical concerns, and the need for robust validation mechanisms. The ongoing initiatives reflect a balanced approach towards modernising internal security while recognising the limitations of emerging technologies.



AI Tools for Monitoring and Content Regulation

AI-based tools are being deployed for proactive monitoring of cyber threats, including tracking activities on the dark web, scam websites, and phishing networks. Another significant development is the use of AI by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing to detect and verify Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material (CSEAM). These tools are being refined to extend their capabilities to scanning the open web for harmful content.

Surakshini and Preventive Content Moderation

The proposed "Surakshini" initiative represents a shift from reactive to preventive digital governance. It aims to create a comprehensive database (hashbank) of harmful content such as CSEAM and non-consensual intimate imagery. This will allow social media platforms to automatically detect and block such content before it is uploaded, enhancing online safety, especially for women and children.

Forensic and Investigative Applications

AI is also being integrated into forensic investigations under the MHA. While advanced technologies and instruments are already in use for digital and cybercrime analysis, the application of AI in areas such as document forgery detection is still at a nascent stage and requires further validation before widespread adoption.

Elections 2026: Strengthening Democratic Integrity Amid Evolving Challenges

The upcoming Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal mark a crucial phase in India's democratic cycle. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has reiterated its commitment to ensuring elections that are violence-free and devoid of inducements. These regions are known for high political awareness and voter turnout, often ranging between 70% and 80%, making them vital indicators of India's electoral health.

The '4M' Challenge in Electoral Politics

A central concern for the ECI remains the persistent challenge of the "4Ms" — **Money, Muscle, Misinformation, and Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations**. While the influence of muscle power has declined due to robust security arrangements and technological safeguards like EVMs, the role of money power and inducements has intensified. The seizure of over ₹10,000 crore worth of inducements in the 2024 general elections highlights the scale of the issue, with cash, liquor, drugs, and digital transfers being key tools of influence.

Misinformation and Polarisation Risks

Misinformation and polarised campaigning pose growing threats to free and fair elections. In response, the ECI has tightened regulations, including mandatory pre-certification of political advertisements and efforts to hold candidates accountable for digital content. However, balancing regulation with free speech remains a complex challenge.

Money and Freebies: Distorting Electoral Competition

Despite judicial observations and regulatory efforts, manifesto promises and "freebie politics" frequently stretch fiscal prudence. States like Tamil Nadu have historically seen high levels of such practices, making enforcement efforts critical. The ECI has deployed extensive surveillance teams and flying squads to curb these activities, signalling a more proactive enforcement approach.

Strengthening Electoral Processes and Innovations

The ECI has introduced several reforms to improve transparency and voter convenience. Measures such as 100% webcasting of polling stations, improved voter information slips, and facilities for depositing mobile phones enhance trust in the process. Additionally, initiatives like home voting for senior citizens (85+) and persons with disabilities, along with the cleaning of electoral rolls through the SIR process, aim to make participation more inclusive and accurate.

Role of Voter Awareness and Civic Responsibility

Programmes like SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) have significantly enhanced voter engagement over the years. Increased awareness has empowered citizens to resist inducements and misinformation. Ultimately, the integrity of elections depends not just on institutions but also on the ethical choices of voters, who must navigate through competing narratives and make informed decisions.



India's electoral culture is undergoing a gradual transformation. While challenges such as inducements and misinformation persist, stronger enforcement, technological integration, and rising civic awareness are reshaping the landscape. If sustained, these efforts can lead to a more transparent, participatory, and accountable democratic process—ensuring that elections remain a true reflection of the people's will.

What the Meta-YouTube ruling means for social media

On March 25, a jury at the Los Angeles Superior Court found Meta Platforms and YouTube liable for designing platforms that foster addiction and harm users' mental health. The case involved a 20-year-old woman, Kaley, who had been exposed to these platforms from a young age. The jury awarded \$3 million in compensatory damages—70% to Meta and 30% to YouTube—and proposed punitive damages of up to \$3 million, pending judicial confirmation.

Nature of the Case and Key Allegations

The petitioner testified that her use of YouTube began at age six and Instagram at age nine, attributing her prolonged engagement to attention-grabbing design features. Her legal team argued that elements such as infinite scroll, autoplay, and algorithm-driven notifications were deliberately engineered to maximise user retention. These features were linked to worsening **mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, and body dysmorphia.**



Focus on Platform Design over Content

A defining aspect of the case was its focus on platform design rather than user-generated content. By characterising social media platforms as “defective products,” the case sought to bypass protections under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. This legal strategy shifted attention to algorithmic amplification and engagement-driven features, making it more difficult for companies to avoid liability. Notably, Snapchat and TikTok were initially defendants but settled with the plaintiff before the trial.

Evidence Presented Before the Jury

The verdict relied on a combination of internal corporate documents, expert testimony, and behavioural data. Evidence included findings from the “Facebook Files,” reported by The Wall Street Journal in 2021, which indicated that Instagram could negatively impact teenage users' body image, with 32% of teen girls reporting adverse effects. Testimony from whistleblower Frances Haugen further supported claims that platform design contributed to compulsive use and anxiety. Concerns about YouTube's recommendation system promoting increasingly engaging content were also highlighted.

Departure from Established Legal Precedents

This ruling marks a departure from earlier judicial trends that upheld platform immunity under Section 230. Cases such as *Gonzalez v. Google* (2023) and *Twitter v. Taamneh* (2023) had reinforced that platforms are generally not liable for third-party content, even when amplified by algorithms. By shifting liability to design features, the present case introduces a new dimension to platform accountability.

Implications for Technology Companies

If upheld, the verdict could have far-reaching implications for social media companies. It may compel firms to reassess engagement-driven design strategies and increase transparency in algorithmic functioning. A related jury decision in New Mexico, which held Meta liable for exposing children to harmful content, further underscores growing legal scrutiny. The ruling aligns with broader regulatory momentum.

In the United States, proposals such as the Algorithmic Accountability Act seek to mandate transparency and strengthen child safety protections. At least half of American teenagers use platforms like YouTube and Instagram daily, according to the Pew Research Center. Globally, countries such as Australia have introduced restrictions on children's social media use, while the United Kingdom is piloting a potential ban for users under 16.

The Indian EXPRESS

Sex test in sports takes toll on right to equality

The International Olympic Committee has introduced new rules restricting transgender women and certain athletes with differences in sex development from competing in women's categories, alongside mandating a one-time SRY gene test. The move aims to standardise eligibility criteria and address concerns about fairness in elite sports. However, the scientific reliability of such testing remains debated, as biological sex is influenced by multiple factors beyond a single gene, and evidence on performance advantage remains inconclusive.

Critics argue that mandatory testing may raise concerns around accuracy, privacy, and equal treatment, particularly as similar requirements are not applied to male athletes. There are also concerns that such frameworks may inadvertently increase participation barriers and shift focus away from broader structural challenges faced by women in sports. The debate highlights the need to balance fairness in competition with scientific validity and individual rights.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

Sports governance frameworks often attempt to standardise competition while ensuring inclusivity. Evaluate the challenges in achieving this balance with reference to recent rules on gender participation in elite sports.



Spirit of the law

Recent anti-conversion laws in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh introduce measures such as prior permission, public disclosure, and mandatory registration to regulate religious conversions. These provisions are intended to prevent conversions through force or fraud, aligning with the state's duty to safeguard freedom of religion. Similar laws in multiple states reflect a broader regulatory trend. Their constitutional validity is currently under examination by the Supreme Court of India. However, concerns arise over their intrusive nature and practical enforcement. Requirements like advance notice, public scrutiny, and possible police inquiries may affect privacy and individual autonomy in matters of faith. The shifting of the burden of proof and scope for third-party objections could risk administrative overreach.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

Do anti-conversion laws in India strike an appropriate balance between protecting individuals from coercion and safeguarding the constitutional right to freedom of religion? Critically examine.

thehindu**businessline**.

TUESDAY - MARCH 31, 2026

Bond Blues

India's government bond (G-sec) yields, which had remained stable due to controlled inflation, steady currency conditions, and supportive liquidity measures by the Reserve Bank of India, are now rising amid global uncertainties. Higher crude oil prices, currency depreciation, and foreign investor outflows have increased concerns over imported inflation, reversing earlier gains. This shift reflects the sensitivity of domestic bond markets to external shocks despite earlier policy support.

Rising yields increase borrowing costs for governments and influence broader interest rates across the economy, affecting banks and borrowers alike. While central banks globally are adopting a cautious stance, the situation tests the effectiveness of existing monetary frameworks in balancing inflation control with growth stability. It highlights the challenge of managing debt sustainability and market expectations in a volatile global environment.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

"Domestic financial markets are increasingly sensitive to global developments." Discuss this statement in the context of recent trends in India's government bond yields.

Why a Ground Invasion of Iran Could Become a Strategic Disaster for the United States

The ongoing confrontation involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has entered a prolonged and uncertain phase since the outbreak of hostilities in late February. Despite early expectations of a swift resolution, the conflict has persisted, with continued missile exchanges and strategic signalling from all sides. Diplomatic efforts remain inconclusive, even as military preparations suggest the possibility of further escalation, including a potential ground intervention.

Strategic Overstretch and Military Constraints

A ground-level combat operation would pose significant challenges for the United States due to the scale and complexity of Iran's geography and defence capabilities. Iran's vast terrain, combined with entrenched military infrastructure and asymmetric warfare strategies, makes conventional invasion difficult. Moreover, current troop deployments in the region appear insufficient for a sustained large-scale ground offensive, increasing the risk of operational overstretch.

Vulnerability of U.S. Assets in the Region

Recent developments indicate that U.S. military installations in the Gulf region have already come under sustained pressure. Iranian retaliatory strikes on key bases, including strategic assets such as surveillance and refuelling aircraft, highlight the vulnerability of American forces. A ground invasion would likely intensify these attacks, exposing troops and infrastructure to greater risks across multiple fronts.

Economic Repercussions and Energy Security

The conflict has already disrupted global energy markets, with crude oil prices rising sharply. The strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz—a critical chokepoint for global oil supply—adds to the stakes. Any escalation into ground combat could threaten the stability of this passage, triggering severe consequences for global trade and energy security, thereby amplifying economic costs for the U.S. and its allies.



Geopolitical and Nuclear Risks

A prolonged ground conflict may also push Iran toward more extreme strategic decisions. Signals such as reconsideration of commitments to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty indicate the possibility of nuclear escalation. Additionally, intensified conflict could further destabilise the broader West Asian region, drawing in non-state actors and complicating diplomatic resolution efforts.

Limited Strategic Gains and High Costs

From a cost-benefit perspective, a ground invasion offers uncertain strategic returns. Objectives such as reopening maritime routes or degrading Iran's capabilities may not justify the human, financial, and political costs involved. Military analysts have also warned that even limited operations, such as seizing strategic islands, would carry disproportionate risks relative to potential gains.

Given these constraints, escalation through ground combat appears counterproductive. Diplomatic engagement, despite its challenges, remains the more viable path to conflict resolution. Avoiding further militarisation could help preserve regional stability, reduce economic shocks, and prevent long-term strategic setbacks for all parties involved.

U.S.-Israel-Iran war puts India's EV gap in focus

The recent surge in global oil prices following the U.S.-Iran war February 2026 has highlighted differing levels of energy vulnerability between major Asian economies, particularly India and China. Between February 27 and March 27, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries basket price rose by nearly 67%, significantly increasing the cost of petrol, diesel, and LPG. This sharp rise has renewed focus on reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Strategic Risks and Supply Disruptions

The conflict has also heightened concerns about supply disruptions, especially through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for nearly one-fifth of global oil supply. In FY25Q1, China imported about 5.4 million barrels of crude oil per day through this route, compared to India's 2.1 million barrels. While both countries are import-dependent, their exposure to such disruptions differs due to structural variations in their energy systems.

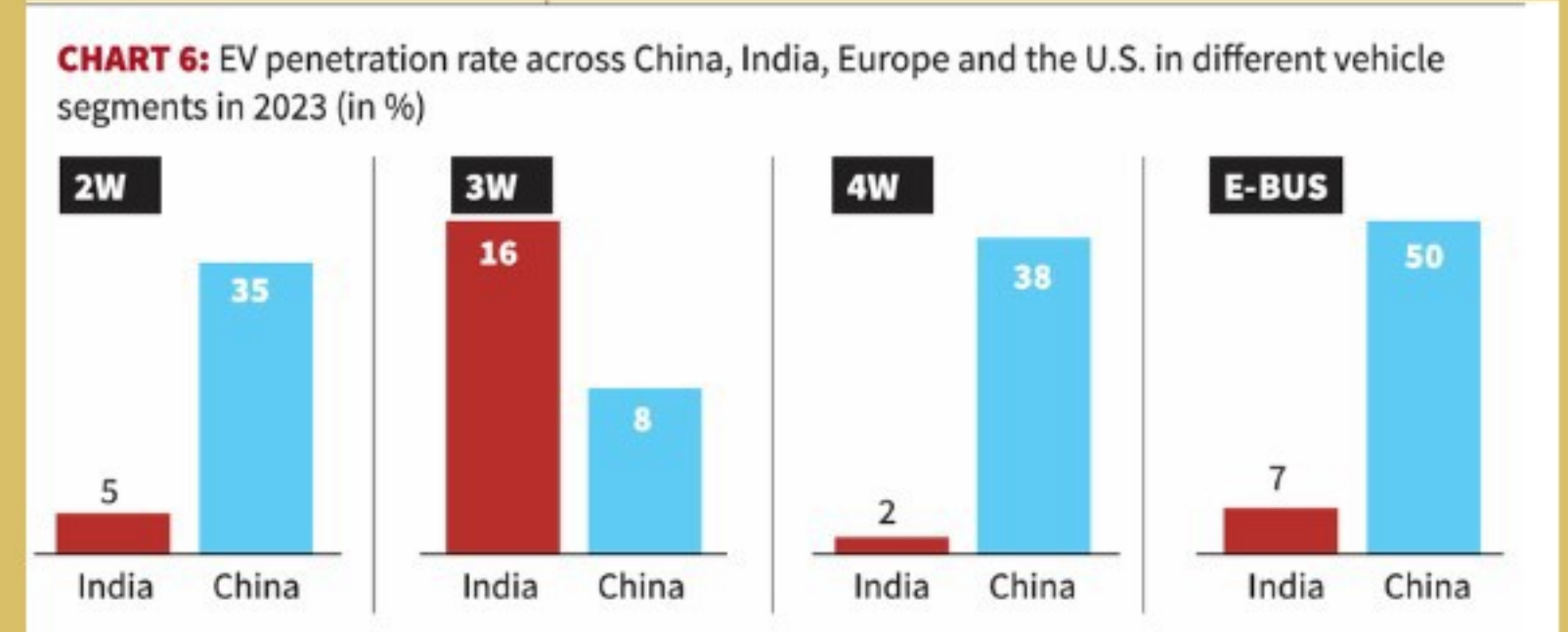
Electric Mobility as a Buffer

Electric vehicle (EV) adoption has emerged as a key factor in mitigating oil shocks. China's transport sector has reduced its reliance on fossil fuels through rapid electrification, whereas India continues to depend heavily on conventional fuels. As a result, China is relatively better insulated from sudden fuel price spikes, while India remains directly affected by global energy volatility.

Scale of EV Adoption: India vs China

The gap in EV penetration is substantial. In March 2026, new-energy vehicles accounted for approximately 52.9% of passenger car sales in China, compared to just about 6% of new car registrations in India. In absolute terms, China sold around 9 lakh new-energy passenger vehicles in March 2026 alone.

The current oil price shock has strengthened the case for accelerating EV adoption in India. Countries with higher EV penetration are less exposed to fuel price volatility, making electrification a strategic necessity. India has made notable progress in electric three-wheelers, but adoption in cars and buses remains limited. To bridge the gap, India must expand charging infrastructure, strengthen domestic manufacturing, and encourage consumer adoption through policy support. A faster transition to electric mobility would not only reduce vulnerability to geopolitical shocks but also enhance long-term energy security and economic resilience.



At the same time, India registered about 72,000 electric cars over the preceding three months. In the two- and three-wheeler segment, China sold over 72 lakh electric vehicles in 2024, whereas India's sales stood at about 4.27 lakh in 2026.

Cumulative Stock and Ecosystem Differences

China's early start in electrification has led to a much larger EV base. By 2024, China had around 2.3 crore electric cars in use, compared to India's 3.96 lakh in 2026. Similarly, China's electric two- and three-wheeler stock reached about 6.8 crore, while India had around 23 lakh. Overall, India's total EV stock stood at approximately 27.3 lakh, significantly lower than China's levels, reflecting differences in long-term policy and adoption trends.

Infrastructure and Supply Chain Gaps

Infrastructure availability further explains the disparity. As of February 2026, India had roughly 14 electric cars per public charger, compared to about nine in China by the end of 2025. Greater charger availability in China has supported faster EV adoption, particularly in the passenger vehicle segment. Additionally, stronger domestic supply chains and manufacturing ecosystems have enabled China to scale production efficiently.

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) The Constitution (71st Amendment) Act, 1992 amends the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution to include which of the following languages? (2024)

1. Konkani
2. Manipuri
3. Nepali
4. Maithili

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- (a) 1, 2 and 3
- (b) 1, 2 and 4
- (c) 1, 3 and 4
- (d) 2, 3 and 4

2) The Parliament can make any law for whole or any part of India for implementing International Treaties (2013)

- (a) with the consent of all the States
- (b) with the consent of the majority of States
- (c) with the consent of the States concerned
- (d) without the consent of any State

**PRELIMS 2026
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Lessons from the Life of Vardhamana Mahavira



The teachings of Mahavira can be understood as a deeply ethical and introspective philosophical framework aimed at self-transformation and liberation. At the core of his thought lies the idea of continuous self-reflection through **pratikraman**—a disciplined practice of acknowledging one's mistakes, seeking inner correction, and resolving not to repeat them. This emphasis shifts moral responsibility inward, suggesting that wrongdoing lies not merely in error, but in the failure to recognise and rectify it. Equally central is the principle of **ahimsa** (non-violence), which Mahavira elevates beyond physical harm to include subtle forms of emotional and psychological injury. His philosophy thus calls for conscious restraint in thought, speech, and action, alongside the reduction of inner disturbances such as anger, pride, deceit, and greed (kashayas). The vow of brahmacharya is interpreted not just as celibacy, but as disciplined control over desires, rooted in the belief that lasting fulfilment comes from self-realisation rather than sensory indulgence.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) The correct answer is (a) 1, 2 and 3 — Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali. These three languages were added to the Eighth Schedule by the Constitution (71st Amendment) Act, 1992. The inclusion of Maithili came later, through the 92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 (enforced in 2004), and hence it is not part of the 1992 amendment.

The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India plays an important role in recognising and promoting India's linguistic diversity. Its provisions are linked to Article 344 and Article 351. Article 344 provides for a Commission to recommend measures for the progressive use of Hindi for official purposes, while Article 351 directs the Union to promote and develop Hindi by drawing upon other Indian languages listed in the Schedule.

Thus, the Eighth Schedule serves two key purposes: it recognises major languages of India, giving them official status and representation, and it facilitates the development of Hindi as a link language by allowing it to assimilate linguistic elements from other languages. Over time, the Schedule has expanded from 14 to 22 languages, reflecting India's evolving linguistic inclusivity and federal character.



2) The correct answer is (d)

Under Article 253, the Parliament has the power to make laws for the whole or any part of India to implement international treaties, agreements, or conventions.

This provision is significant because it overrides the normal federal distribution of powers between the Union and the States. Even if the subject matter of the treaty falls under the State List, Parliament can still legislate without requiring the consent of any State.

This ensures that India can effectively fulfil its international obligations without being hindered by internal federal constraints. It also reflects the principle that foreign affairs and treaty obligations are primarily the responsibility of the Union government.

Thus, Article 253 strengthens India's ability to act as a unified entity in global affairs while temporarily expanding Parliament's legislative competence beyond its usual domain.

