EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

12-11-2026

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GS 3: ENVIRONMENT AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Tamil Nadu's growing industrial water challenge



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Tamil Nadu is one of India's leading investment destinations, thanks to its skilled workforce, strong manufacturing base and enterprise-friendly policies. Reflecting its investment-friendly credentials, NITI Aayog's Investment Friendliness Index (IFI), released in July 2026, ranks the State third, behind Gujarat and Maharashtra. The first-of-its-kind report assesses States' readiness to attract and sustain investments. For Tamil Nadu it identifies limited international air connectivity, Chennai Port infrastructure constraints and inadequate industrial water supply in landlocked and rain-shadow districts as key lacunae.

Without compromising on water security, can Tamil Nadu expand its industrial base, albeit with a high MoU conversion rate, 22% better-than-average Air Quality Index score and strong disaster preparedness perception scores?

With its robust and decentralised industrial economy, the State houses 130 Global Fortune 500 companies across 110 industrial parks, flanked by 42 plus operational Special Economic Zones. Even as the genesis of industrialisation and mechanisation can be traced to colonial times, with a benign business climate, the State owes a lot to its skilled human and natural resources that continued to draw investors.

Notwithstanding global uncertainties, the State continued attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) even as overall investment at the national level slackened. While India's total FDI declined between 2022-23 and 2023-24 from $46.03 billion to $44.42 billion, the State's inflows accelerated to peak at $3.681 billion in 2024-25, amongst the country's subnational economies.

This performance in absolute numbers not only marks economic development that is poised to create employment, expand manufacturing and fortify the State economy, but also remains congruent to the relative utilisation of the State's water resource.

A State with limited water

Tamil Nadu's economy has long since outgrown its water reserves. Geography further complicates the balance between industrial developments and sustainable water management. Much of Tamil Nadu is located in the rain shadow region of the Western Ghats. With an average annual rainfall of 960mm, the State accounts for only 3% of India's water resources. Unevenly distributed across reservoirs, tanks, and upstream riparian contributions, the State's surface water potential is estimated at 853 TMC (thousand million cubic feet). The average runoff to the sea is computed as 177.12 TMC from all 17 major river basins. The Cauvery's decadal discharge was 4.352 billion cubic metres (BMC) between 2011 and 2021.

Weak water security threatens to undermine the State's investment appeal and industrial growth prospects

The groundwater buffer is showing signs of strains. A 2025 joint assessment by the Central Ground Water Board and the State's Water Resources Department indicates that while overall groundwater extraction remains below the State's annual extractable resource, the picture varies significantly across districts. In 2025, annual groundwater recharge was estimated at 22.61 BCM against an annual extractable resource of 20.46 BCM. Groundwater extraction stood at 15.04 BCM, or about 73.5% of the extractable resource.

However, the State-wide average conceals serious localised stress. Industrial districts such as Salem, Vellore and Chennai are classified as over-exploited, while Krishnagiri and Coimbatore fall under the critical category, with extraction approaching 90%-100%. Meanwhile, industrial water demand, estimated at 1,555 MCM in 2001, is projected to rise to 1,985 MCM by 2050, which cannot be trivialised given the current circumstances of water governance.

For the State's textile manufacturing, automobile, power generation and other water-intensive units – already beset by complications – the implications extend beyond what is anticipated. Water paucity can immensely disrupt production, inflate operational costs and make sewage and wastewater management difficult, particularly in drought-prone and landlocked regions. And, if industries continue to expand amid existing shortcomings, without corresponding strengthening of water infrastructure, recycling, wastewater treatment and groundwater management, water as a resource could deter new investments while the State's economic growth may ramp up in absolute toughness.

Managing water better

John Sullivan, a Member of the Governor's Council overseeing irrigation in the erstwhile Madras Presidency, warned: "So long as one drop of water is allowed to run waste ... we must take the blame to ourselves for not taking our best efforts to prevent the evils of scarcity and famine." Two centuries later, his warning remains relevant. Tamil Nadu does not need to find more water as much as it needs to manage the water it already has better. One practical step is to price industrial water according to local water availability – not as a punitive cost to industry but as an investment in long-term water security.

Pollution is imperilling the health of water bodies and also shaping investment decisions. Western Tamil Nadu is both an industrial powerhouse and a centre of river pollution. In June 2026 alone, 28 industries in the State were issued closure orders under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. While industries must be held accountable for preventing the discharge of harmful effluents into rivers, the responsibility is bilateral. Polluted water bodies can heavily undermine the very industrial investments the State seeks to attract.

The zero liquid discharge (ZLD) system helps recover up to 90% of the water required, and the textile clusters in Tiruppur are a case in point. However, they still face freshwater shortages, while the associated costs can be difficult for smaller players to bear. A concerted effort to integrate green energy and water security could be a game changer, making ZLD, desalination and sewage treatment more affordable and sustainable for industrial use. Water, therefore, should become an integral part of investment planning.

Modern day capitalists consider environmental risks when zeroing in on the avenues of investments. Royal Enfield's first expansion into the Rayalaseema (also a rain-shadow area of the Deccan Plateau) region in Andhra Pradesh, the first outside Tamil Nadu since 1955, moved into the spotlight. The drought-prone area has undergone a palpable transformation in the last decade, becoming a massive investment destination, showing that industrial competitiveness and its water resources cannot be planned in fragments.

Growth needs water security

Paradoxically, as Tamil Nadu's industrial future becomes increasingly tied to its water economy, the Water Resources Department faces an 8.06% cut in its allocation this year, from ₹10,076 crore in the Interim Budget to ₹9,264 crore in the new government's maiden allotment.

Meanwhile, the legal framework for addressing water constraints has remained in limbo since 2013, when the Tamil Nadu Groundwater (Development and Management) Act was repealed. Although hopes are high for the recently passed comprehensive Tamil Nadu Water Resources (Regulation, Management and Augmentation) Bill, 2026, its enactment now awaits the Governor's assent.

Tamil Nadu's investments and effective industrialisation have translated into finer economic outcomes. The challenge is to sustain this growth for decades. Better pricing, stronger water governance and prudent consumption are essential for successful investments and industrial sustenance. With erratic hydrological cycles, along with El Niño and water pollution, it is high time to treat water as an infrastructure that must be built and paid for – to salvage what is often misread as an unlimited resource.

GS 3: ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY
THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Turning battery waste into strategic mineral wealth



Shyamasis Das

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In his concluding remarks at the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi on September 13, 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned against the "weaponisation of technology and critical minerals". His remarks assume significance amid rising global demand for critical minerals such as lithium, nickel and cobalt. As transport and other energy-intensive sectors increasingly shift towards electrification, the demand for electricity, lithium-ion batteries and electrical conductors is also growing.

Their ores are either scarce or their supply chains geographically concentrated, leaving these critical minerals vulnerable to geopolitical tensions, resource nationalism, trade restrictions and other disruptions. China currently dominates critical mineral processing. For India, which is heavily dependent on imports, securing reliable supplies has therefore become a strategic priority.

A resource closer to home

The Government of India is pursuing international partnerships and domestic exploration to secure critical mineral supplies. It must also tap a growing resource available in its backyard: minerals recovered through recycling. End-of-life (EoL) lithium-ion batteries, which contain economically valuable minerals, can be treated either as waste or as a "waste-to-wealth" resource. The opportunity is considerable if a proper recycling system is put in place.

India already uses lithium-ion batteries extensively in mobile phones and other electronic devices. Yet, when these products reach EoL, their batteries often end up in landfills or informal recycling channels run by *kabadiwalas*. While the informal sector plays an important role in waste management, its manual methods are often inefficient and unsafe. Material recovery rates are reportedly just 10%-20%, compared with over 90% in formal recycling facilities. Consequently, significant quantities of critical-mineral-bearing e-waste continue to flow through informal channels. As India shifts towards electric vehicles (EVs), can it afford to lose the economic value locked in these waste streams?

A circular battery economy can help secure India's critical mineral supplies

With more than 8.7 million EVs running on Indian roads by FY 2025-26, the volume of spent batteries is expected to rise as numbers grow. This should be viewed as a waste-management challenge and resource security opportunity.

Analysis shows recycling could meet about 10% to 12% of India's lithium demand for EV battery manufacturing. While this will not make India self-sufficient in minerals, recycled materials can serve as a strategic secondary source alongside mining and overseas sourcing. Recycling can also help build India's critical minerals processing capability, which the country currently lacks, while China has a stranglehold over critical mineral processing.

India's Battery Waste Management Rules, 2022, provide an important foundation through extended producer responsibility, but the ecosystem needs to mature. The current low volume of EoL batteries should not create complacency. "Just in time" investment in recycling facilities and logistics may not be realistic; capacity needs to be planned ahead of the expected surge in spent batteries. This creates a business risk, as plants may operate below optimal utilisation initially and face uncertainty in generating enough revenue to cover financing costs.

The strategy to adopt

India therefore needs a holistic strategy. First, recycled critical minerals should be incorporated into strategic resource planning. The proposed national critical mineral stockpile should include a mandated share of recycled minerals, creating predictable demand for domestic secondary resources and encouraging recyclers to recover minerals rather than produce only the intermediate product known as black mass.

Second, industry and research labs should intensify research and development in mineral recycling technologies. Diverse battery chemistries make recovery challenging and recycling economics can be unattractive. Technologies delivering higher mineral recovery and purity with no environmental impact will be critical.

Third, India needs standards for battery characterisation, recycled mineral quality and second-life applications, supported by testing infrastructure and a "design for repurposing and recycling" approach at the manufacturing stage.

Fourth, retired-battery collection must become easier for EV users. EV manufacturers and their dealer and service networks should offer remunerating take-back or buy-back options. Without active *aam aadmi* participation, scaling a circular economy will be difficult.

Finally, battery recyclers need patient capital to establish facilities with long gestation periods. The opportunity is significant, but battery recycling is not an immediate windfall for businesses.

Preparing for the battery surge

India should not wait for millions of retired EV batteries to accumulate before deciding what to do with them. The country is still early enough in its EV transition to build circularity into the system. Done well, battery recycling can turn an EoL liability into a domestic resource, create a new industrial ecosystem and provide a modest but meaningful buffer against critical mineral supply shocks. The EV revolution should not end when a battery leaves a vehicle. That is where India's circular-economy opportunity begins.

The views expressed are personal

GS 3: ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE
THE HINDU PAGE: 09

Across India, 70% of stations reported 'severe' PM2.5 readings

Apart from Delhi, at least seven States reported peak PM2.5 levels during Deepavali

DATA POINT

Pon Vasanth B.A

While Delhi and a few other major cities have been the key focus of the alarming spike in air pollution during Deepavali, analyses of data from all the 634 Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) in the Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) network showed that nearly 70% of the stations across the country recorded peak PM2.5 readings in the 'severe' category of 250 micrograms per cubic metre or above.

Moreover, data showed that many stations partially or fully stopped reporting PM2.5 values during Deepavali even before they were recording values closer to 1,000 micrograms per cubic metre in the preceding hour. This raises questions on whether CPCB's clarification fully explains why some of the stations went silent during Deepavali. In its statement on Tuesday, CPCB had said that the particulate matter analysers were calibrated for a measurement range of 1,000 micrograms per cubic metre. As its system of automated data validation ignores values outside this range, the same "may appear as a data gap" during "extreme episodes" when the values exceed 1,000 micrograms per cubic metre. To begin with, only 571 of the 634 stations were live and reporting data during Deepavali, as per the CPCB's data portal.

Widespread increase

Chart 1 shows the stations that reported peak PM2.5 readings in different bands during the pre-Deepavali and Deepavali window. The period from 5 p.m. on November 1 to 5 a.m. on November 5 was considered for the pre-Deepavali window, while 5 p.m. on November 7 to 5 a.m. on November 9 was considered for the Deepavali window.

Only 551 stations that reported PM2.5 at least once in the hourly window during Deepavali were shown in the chart. Of these 551 stations, 375, which is nearly 70%, recorded PM2.5 value of 250 micrograms per cubic metre or more at least once during Deepavali. Only 96 had recorded PM2.5 in this range in the pre-Deepavali window. This, expectedly, included all the 59 stations in Delhi. Among other States with at least 20 stations, more than two-thirds of the stations in the following States were reporting peak PM2.5 levels in the 'severe' category : Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. Tamil Nadu stood out, not for reduced pollution levels, but absence of data. Despite having 37 stations, only nine reported PM2.5 levels at least once during the hourly windows during Deepavali.

Chart 2 shows tier-2 cities, excluding State capitals and cities in the National Capital Region, which saw the highest PM2.5 readings during Deepavali, when the median value reported during the hourly window was considered.

Chart 3 shows the SO2 readings measured by stations in Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai during Deepavali. The push towards 'green crackers' was expected to bring down the particulate matter emissions, especially pollutants such as SO2. However, as the chart shows, Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata have not shown any drop in SO2 values in the last five years. Though Chennai has shown a sharp decline this year, it is unclear whether it is due to the absence of accurate readings as mentioned above.

Table 1 shows the number of CAAQMS stations in Delhi and across India that did not report any PM2.5 readings for at least one hour during Deepavali. While the number of stations that did not report clearly went up during Deepavali, the table also shows that the last reported reading of majority of the stations did not exceed 500 micrograms per cubic metre.

Difficult to breathe

The data were sourced from the Central Pollution Control Board's official portal. The different slabs shown in Chart 1 are as per the classification used by the CPCB. While CPCB classifies values beyond 250 micro grams / cubic metre as 'severe', the chart shows values in three different slabs beyond 250 to show the magnitude of the increase during Deepavali



Chart 1: This shows the number of air quality monitoring stations based on the peak PM2.5 reading they recorded before and during Deepavali

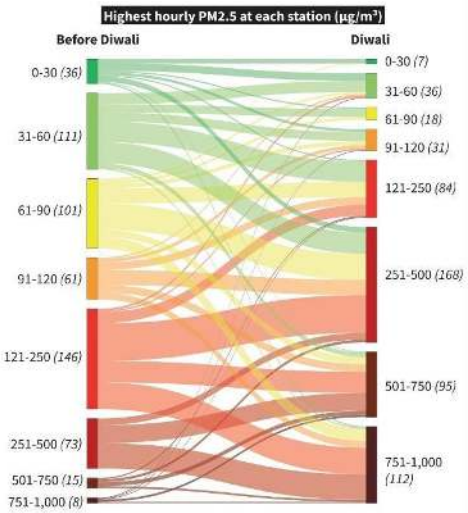

Chart 2: 10 cities, excluding State capitals, that saw highest PM2.5 readings

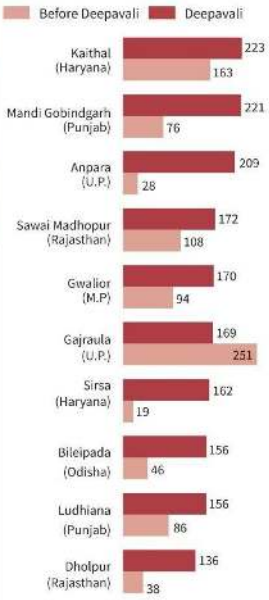

Chart 3: SO2 readings during Deepavali in the last five years. Values in µg/m³

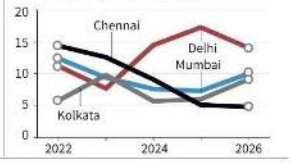

Table 1: Stations not reporting at least one hour of PM2.5 ahead and on Deepavali. Last recorded PM2.5 was well within the maximum calibrated value of 1,000, mentioned by CPCB

Day	India (571 stations)		Delhi (59 stations)	
	Stations missing at least one hour of PM2.5	Of these, last reading before going silent was 500 µg/m³ or less	Stations missing at least one hour of PM2.5	Of these, last reading before going silent was 500 µg/m³ or less
Nov 4 (Wed)	160	159	4	4
Nov 5 (Thu)	179	178	6	4
Nov 6 (Fri)	159	155	9	8
Nov 7 (Sat)	146	144	8	7
Nov 8 (Sun)	202	160	30	8

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

SC and the OBC creamy layer test

What did the Supreme Court rule on OBC creamy layer status? Why can parental salary alone not determine creamy layer exclusion? What did the 1993 Office Memorandum stipulate? Why did the Centre seek clarification on the March ruling? How will the ruling affect CSE 2025 service allocation?

EXPLAINER

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

The Supreme Court on November 6 reaffirmed its March 11, 2026 judgment, upholding a 1993 Office Memorandum which excluded parental salary and agricultural income from the income/wealth test for determining OBC non-creamy layer status. The Centre has sought clarifications and appropriate directions from the Supreme Court on the liability of its March 11 judgment on the considerations of claims by OBC candidates who were selected for the Civil Services Examination (CSE).

A Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and R. Mahadevan, in its order, said the Union government, represented by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, had erred in assuming that a "retrospective implementation of the March 11 judgment would have far-reaching consequences for recruitment, service and cadre allocation, seniority and admissions to Higher Educational Institutions".

What was the March 11 Judgment?

On March 11, the Supreme Court upheld a 1993 Office Memorandum which excluded parental salary and agricultural income from the income/wealth test for determining OBC non-creamy layer status. It clarified the years-long confusion over how to calculate wealth or income to determine the creamy layer status of OBC candidates for reservation purposes. Justice Narasimha and Justice Mahadevan were hearing an appeal by the Union government against lower court rulings in favour of such OBC candidates.

The March 11 judgment concerned the manner in which creamy-layer status is determined for candidates belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC). The case arose after candidates who had cleared the Civil Services Examination were denied consideration under the OBC-NCL category because the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) had taken into account the salary earned by their parents, who were employed in public sector undertakings and other organisations.



The November 6 judgment was delivered on applications filed by the Union government seeking clarification of the March 11 ruling. FILE PHOTO

The court rejected the mechanical exclusion of candidates based solely on their parents' salary income. It examined the 1993 Office Memorandum governing the creamy-layer criteria and the subsequent clarification issued in 2004. The court held that parental salary cannot, by itself, determine whether an OBC candidate falls within the creamy layer. The status and category of the post held by the parent are also relevant to the determination.

The court therefore dismissed the appeals filed by the Union government and directed it to reconsider the claims of the respondent candidates and intervenors in accordance with the principles laid down in the judgment. It also directed that the exercise be implemented within six months. The judgment recorded the government's assurance that supernumerary posts could be created to accommodate candidates who satisfied the non-creamy-layer criteria.

At the heart of the judgment was the interpretation of the 1993 Office Memorandum and the 2004 clarification. The court held that the 2004 clarification could not be used to introduce a substantive condition that was absent from the original 1993 framework. It also cautioned against treating employees of public sector undertakings differently merely by using their salary income as the basis for exclusion.

The court noted that the creamy layer exclusion criteria are "status-based rather than purely income-based, reflecting the policy understanding that advancement within the governmental service hierarchy denotes social progression independent of fluctuating salary levels".

On the 1993 Office Memorandum of the DoPT, the Supreme Court said, "The plain language of these explanations makes it clear that salary income and agricultural income are consciously kept outside the common pool while determining exclusion under the Income / Wealth Test." Further, with regard to the 2004 clarificatory letter, the court said, "Determination of creamy layer status solely on the basis of income brackets, without reference to the categories of posts and status parameters enunciated in the 1993 OM is clearly unsustainable in law."

What did the court say now?

The November 6 judgment was delivered on applications filed by the Union government seeking clarification of the March 11 ruling.

The Centre had argued that applying the March judgment retrospectively could reopen completed selections, appointments, service and cadre allocations, promotions, seniority and admissions. It also sought two years to establish equivalence between posts in PSUs and other organisations and government posts.

The Supreme Court clarified that the March judgment does not require completed selections, appointments, promotions or service allocations to be reopened. It said the March judgment determined the rights of the candidates who were parties to the case and the intervenors whose claims were pending. Its six-month implementation direction was not a direction to undertake a general revision of all past selections.

At the same time, the legal principle laid down in March remains binding. Pending claims of similarly placed candidates can be considered by the relevant court, tribunal or authority on their own merits, taking into account the Supreme Court's interpretation of the 1993 Office Memorandum and 2004 clarification.

The court further said that selections and appointments made after March 11 in relation to OBC reservation and creamy-layer exclusion must follow the 1993 Office Memorandum as interpreted in the March judgment.

A significant consequence is that the March ruling will apply to the service allocation of OBC candidates selected through the CSE 2025. Although the results had been declared on March 6, five days before the March judgment, service allocation had not yet been finalised. The court found no justification to defer implementation in this case.

The court declined to give the Centre two years to establish equivalence of posts, holding that formulation of such policy falls within the domain of the executive and legislature. It ultimately extended the time for compliance with the March judgment by two months.

THE GIST

- The Supreme Court reaffirmed that parental salary and agricultural income cannot, by themselves, determine OBC creamy layer status; the status and category of the parent's post must also be considered
- The March 11 ruling does not require completed selections, appointments, promotions, or service allocations to be reopened, but pending claims can be assessed under the principles laid down by the court
- The ruling will apply to CSE 2025 service allocation. The court rejected the Centre's request for a two-year extension and extended the compliance deadline by two months

GS 02: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

Why has the ANC suffered its worst electoral result?

Why are South Africans turning away from Mandela's party? What is ahead for the African National Congress?

Vighnesh P. Venkitesh

The story so far:

Two years after it was forced to lead a coalition government for the first time since the end of apartheid, the African National Congress (ANC) has suffered its worst election result ever, winning just above 30% of the vote in local body polls held across South Africa this week. The party that led the anti-apartheid struggle, took charge of a new society under Nelson Mandela, and dominated national politics for nearly three decades is now in freefall, hobbled by corruption allegations, factionalism, and losing supporters at every election. It remains the most popular party by vote share and leads the coalition government under President Cyril Ramaphosa. But the party is undoubtedly facing an existential crisis.

Why is the party losing support?

For decades, the ANC enjoyed comfortable majorities, with vote shares at times topping 70%, and governed South Africa as a dominant-party system after universal suffrage ended apartheid in 1994. Its rule did lift a significant section of the historically persecuted Black community into better living conditions and education. In recent years, however, poverty and unemployment have risen sharply. The 2023 census put the poverty rate at 63%, while unemployment has climbed to an agonising 41% (counting discouraged job seekers who have given up looking), a level rarely seen outside war zones.

The past decade also saw vicious infighting between former President Jacob Zuma, whose nine-year tenure was riddled with accusations of State capture, and Mr. Ramaphosa. It ended with Mr. Ramaphosa's elevation in 2018 and Mr. Zuma's expulsion in 2024 for campaigning for a rival party, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), ahead of the national election.

According to former Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, more than 4.8 billion rand (over ₹2,700 crore) was lost through irregular contracts at State-owned enterprises under Mr. Zuma. Mr. Ramaphosa came to power promising a "new dawn". He instead presided over the party's first coalition government.

Why did Ramaphosa fail to improve the ANC's prospects?

Mr. Ramaphosa's career has been a rollercoaster. Tipped by Mandela to lead a free South Africa, he was passed over for key positions and made a fortune in business, then returned to politics to unseat the heavyweight Mr. Zuma and take power. He promised to correct the wrongs of a "corrupt" predecessor but soon found himself at the centre of his own scandal, "Farmgate", which deepened public distrust of, and anger at, the ruling party. The scandal involves a burglary at his private farm in 2020, in which more than $5,00,000 was reportedly stolen. The President is said to have kept it quiet to avoid questions about the source of the cash. A parliamentary committee found possible grounds for impeachment in 2022, but the party used its then majority to shelve the report.

The case has since been reopened: earlier this year the Constitutional Court overturned the rejection of the report and referred it to a multi-party committee for detailed investigation. It was a major blow to the President and to the party's efforts to distance itself from corruption allegations.

The ANC first fell below 50% in the 2021 local council elections, finishing with 45.59%. It has now sunk to 30%.

Farmgate undermined Mr. Ramaphosa's image as the party's saviour from corruption, while opposition from Zuma loyalists widened the internal rift. The ANC fell from 230 seats and 57% of the vote in the 400-member National Assembly in 2019 to 159 seats and 40% in 2024. Analysts say distrust of the system has kept voters away from the polls, and that low turnout, below 60% in 2024, has helped keep the ANC in power.

To form the Government of National Unity, the ANC had to strike a deal with the second-largest party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), often labelled a "whites' party". Joining hands with a party from which it is separated by fundamental ideological differences alienated ANC supporters further, and the local election result reflects that.

How does the ANC view the setbacks?

The ANC has long held a place in the public imagination, especially among the Black majority, and it has often addressed public dissatisfaction and corruption claims. Its 2024 election manifesto acknowledged that the "hardship and suffering" of many had led them to believe ANC leaders "care only about themselves". Two years on, the tone has barely changed. "Where we have fallen short, this movement does not dispute it. Communities have gone without water. Refuse has not been collected. Roads have not been maintained. Accounts have been wrong and have gone unanswered. In some places, money that belonged to the people was not spent on the people, and the consequences were borne by households that could least afford them," the party said in a statement on November 7, as the trend became apparent.

The ANC still emerged with the largest vote share, followed by its coalition partner, the DA, with 24.64%. But several councils, including high-profile urban ones, failed to produce a clear winner, and parties have 14 days to negotiate combinations to run them.

For a ruling party to admit fault, rather than double down on nationalist sentiment or turn on the opposition, is a rare sight. That the ANC has had to do so in two elections running suggests it is still some way from fixing what it concedes is broken.

GS 3: ENVIRONEMNT
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 08

We need to turn COP commitments into capital



HARSH PATI SINGHANIA

AFTER A decade of negotiating targets, frameworks, and commitments, the question before governments at COP31 is how quickly and effectively they can deliver action. COP31 has been billed as the "implementation COP". Its success will be judged by the investment, trade and projects that follow it.

The gap between what countries have pledged and what the science requires is well documented. What deserves more attention is why that gap persists. In my conversations with business leaders across continents, the answer is rarely a lack of will. It is a lack of the conditions that turn commitment into capital: Stable policy, credible incentives, common standards, bankable projects and finance at a reasonable cost. That is the message ICC, as the official focal point for business in the UN climate process, has carried this year. Three areas will need focus.

One, the transition to clean energy will no longer be judged by capacity installed alone. The goal of 35 per cent electrification will depend on whether grids, connections, system design and regulation keep pace with the speed of deployment of renewable energy.

Two, adaptation must become an economic priority. Public money will remain essential where resilience does not earn a commercial return. But insurers, lenders and development banks can do far more if they can measure the return on resilience. The adaptation indicators agreed at COP30 must speak the language of the real economy, with robust methodologies and usable data.

The third area is finance. The New Collective Quantified Goal, adopted at COP29, commits to at least $300 billion a year by 2035, within a wider ambition of $1.3 trillion. The obstacles to drawing private capital for this purpose are fixable: Rules that make clean infrastructure lending unnecessarily expensive, multilateral development banks that crowd in too little private money for every dollar they deploy, and credit ratings that price perceived rather than actual risk in emerging markets. ICC's Trade Register, which pools performance data from leading banks, has shown that trade and supply-chain finance carries consistently low default rates. Such evidence would let regulators and rating agencies price actual risk. Better risk data and clear targets for catalytic lending would lower the cost of capital.

Carbon markets show the same pattern. Buyers and sellers need confidence that, if something goes wrong, a dispute can be resolved neutrally and the outcome enforced across borders. ICC's arbitration and mediation services were designed for such cross-border transition contracts.

International trade accounts for as much as 30 per cent of global emissions, yet there has been no common definition of sustainable trade. The ICC Principles for Sustainable Trade and Trade Finance give the market a standardised way to assess transactions and grade how sustainable they are. Their aim is to direct trade finance toward sustainable supply chains, and to make it easier for exporters to prove their credentials as carbon border measures spread.

Through the SME Climate Hub, which ICC helped establish, many small businesses have committed to halving emissions by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050. Most businesses worldwide are small; if the transition doesn't work for them, it will not work at all.

Coming from India, I am conscious that for most developing economies, the green transition will hold only if it builds manufacturing capability and widens market access. Standards and border measures designed without developing-economy producers in mind risk becoming new barriers to trade.

Technology alone will not deliver success. Healthy ecosystems, sustainable land use and responsible resource management must be integral to the effort, and nature-based solutions deserve a far larger share of climate finance than they receive today.

If governments set the conditions and business brings the capital, technology and execution, COP31 will be remembered as the moment when climate ambition finally moved to climate action.

The writer is chair, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Paris

Coming from India, I am conscious that for most developing economies, the green transition will hold only if it builds manufacturing capability and widens market access

GS 2: POLITY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 09

Let's allow dual citizenship — to align legal position with lived experiences of millions



THAROORTHINK

BY SHASHI THAROOR

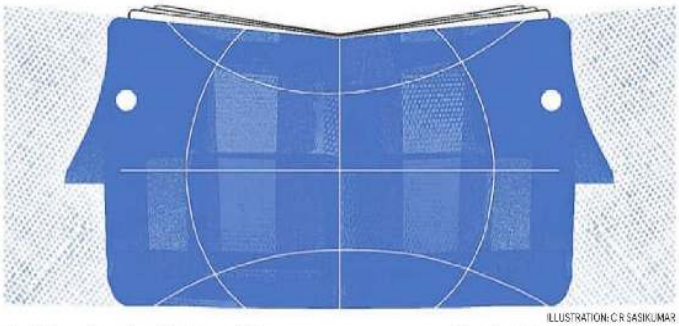

ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

THE CONTROVERSY surrounding Bollywood actor Imran Khan's participation in a public political protest in Mumbai, and the subsequent "Leave India" notice served on him, has had more ink expended on it than most news stories in recent weeks. Khan, who holds US citizenship by birth alongside an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card, was asked to leave the country on grounds that a foreign national cannot engage in political agitations or protests on Indian soil. Yet for anyone familiar with Khan's life, the irony is stark: He has lived in India for most of his life, having grown up here, built his career here, paid his taxes here, and maintained virtually all of his social, familial, and personal connections within this country rather than the United States.

This episode highlights a broader phenomenon in Hindi cinema and globalised Indian society. The domestic film industry is filled with prominent figures who carry foreign passports while working, living, and identifying as Indian. Alia Bhatt holds a British passport through her mother, Soni Razdan, herself an Indian actress. Katrina Kaif, born in British Hong Kong, carries British citizenship. Jacqueline Fernandez is Sri Lankan; Manisha Koirala Nepali; Kalki Koechlin carries French citizenship despite growing up in India, and Shibani Dandekar holds an Australian passport. Punjabi icon Diljit Dosanjh reportedly acquired US citizenship in 2022, while stars like Nora Fatehi (Canadian), Nargis Fakhri (American), Sunny Leone (Canadian), and Alaya F (American by birth) navigate Indian public life on foreign documents. Add to this list Akshay Kumar, who held Canadian citizenship for years before relinquishing it — and was not an Indian citizen when he made some of his most patriotic films or interviewed the PM on television. These artists loom large in the Indian national consciousness, and are fully integrated into the cultural, economic and social fabric of our nation, yet their legal rights in the land they have invested so much in remain bound to the visas in their passports.

This situation collides with what nationality permits someone to do, and not do, in the country where they actually reside. It seems obvious that a foreigner cannot undertake a political protest, yet under standard election guidelines and administrative practices in India, a foreign national is even allowed to campaign for candidates during elections, though they cannot make monetary contributions to a candidate or a party. The fine line between supporting a candidate and criticising a government the candidate opposes has never clearly been drawn, yet while the former is permissible, the latter could lead to the foreigner's expulsion for violating visa terms. When the foreigner in question is a highly visible celebrity, of course, what they say and do acquires an extra dimension — and attracts much more attention.

Legally, it is clear that fundamental civil liberties, such as the rights guaranteed under Article 19 of the Indian Constitution (including freedom of speech, expression, and peaceful assembly) are rights constitutionally reserved here for Indian citizens. Thus, a foreigner can work, build an enterprise, endorse a brand, contribute to local communities, and express political preferences through campaign speech, but taking part in a formal public protest or casting a vote crosses a legal boundary. This distinction begs a fundamental question: Where does one draw the line when dealing with people who are, in every practical and emotional respect, Indian, yet hold a foreign passport primarily for historical, birthright, or travel convenience?

In today's interconnected, globalised world, millions of people find themselves eligible for more than one nationality through diverse circumstances. A child born in the US or Canada acquires citizenship by birthright (*jus soli*), regardless of their parents' nationality. Others gain dual eligibility through lineage (*jus sanguinis*), international marriages, long-term employment abroad, or other circumstances related to migration paths chosen by their families. For many in the 37-million-strong Indian diaspora, retaining or acquiring a foreign passport is a functional decision aimed at facilitating global mobility, avoiding cumbersome visa procedures, or securing family obligations, rather than a rejection of their primary cultural identity. I have written of the anguish my own sons went through in being obliged to relinquish their Indian passports, which they cherished, because when their personal circumstances obliged them to become American, their motherland did not allow them the right to also remain Indian. Most diaspora Indians are no less Indian in their hearts or in their sense of commitment to India than they were before they took on another country's citizenship. Indeed, the PM exploits this sentiment in his regular meetings abroad with enthusiastic members of the diaspora.

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Given these contemporary realities, wouldn't it be better for India to reconsider its strict prohibition on dual citizenship? Many briefly, and naively, assumed that carrying a document named Overseas Citizenship of India would allow them to claim they were still Indian citizens. But that nomenclature was fraudulent; the OCI was not a citizenship at all, but merely a lifetime visa, and as Aatish Taseer and a few others have discovered, can be withdrawn at any time. For a brief few years, OCIs were allowed to represent India at international sporting events, but that privilege was also withdrawn by a sports minister who truculently asked me, when I remonstrated on behalf of one player, "If both national anthems are played, which one will he stand up for?" Both, out of common courtesy, I responded, but he could not be persuaded. Of such visceral prejudices are national policies made.

Allowing dual citizenship would align the legal position with the lived experiences of millions of people. It would permit individuals who live, work, and identify deeply with India, as well as those, like the movie stars I have mentioned, who hold a genuine, long-term stake in our society, to carry Indian citizenship without being forced to repudiate the rights, inheritances, or passports they are entitled to by birth, marriage, or international mobility. Most importantly, it would add to the rich national treasury of human resources we can call upon — people of talent, ability and the capacity to contribute, who would be Indian in blood, culture, taste, and finally, again, in nationality.

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