



“Women challenge the status quo because we are never it.”

—Cindy Gallop



# A telling contrast

Jammu and Kashmir is not just a piece of land on the map of India. It is history, heritage, sacrifice and resilience woven together. It is also a symbol of India's commitment to democracy and development, even in the face of persistent hostility. At the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, India last week firmly rejected Pakistan's repeated attempts to raise the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. The response was sharp, but it was rooted in facts. Pakistan may continue its rhetoric, but ground realities tell a very different story. One fact stands out clearly. Jammu and Kashmir's developmental budget today is more than double the recent bailout package that Pakistan sought from the International Monetary Fund. While Pakistan looks outward for financial rescue, Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing unprecedented public investment in infrastructure, connectivity and welfare. That contrast is telling. Over the past few years, the region has seen record voter turnout in general and assembly elections. People have chosen ballots over bullets. They have rejected the ideology of violence and terrorism that Pakistan has long tried to export. Roads, railways, bridges, health institutions and schools are expanding across the Union Territory. The Chenab Rail Bridge, now the world's highest railway bridge, stands as a symbol of that transformation. It is not propaganda. It is steel and concrete reality. Jammu and Kashmir holds deep emotional and strategic significance for India. The accession of the region to India in 1947 was completely legal and irrevocable, in accordance with the Indian Independence Act and international law. That fact cannot be rewritten through speeches or repeated assertions at international forums. No amount of wishful rhetoric or audacious propaganda can alter that immutable truth. Pakistan continues to speak of disputes. But the only outstanding issue is the illegal occupation of Indian territories by Pakistan. Instead of engaging in grandstanding on global platforms, Pakistan would do well to reflect on its own internal challenges and the damage caused by decades of state-sponsored terrorism. For decades, terrorism sought to disrupt peace in Jammu and Kashmir. Schools were shut. Markets were silenced. Families lived under constant fear. Yet the people endured. Today, development is steadily replacing disruption. Investment is replacing instability. The government's actions reflect the importance it attaches to the region. Increased budgetary allocations, improved connectivity projects, tourism revival, expansion of educational institutions and health infrastructure are not abstract promises. They are measurable steps. They signal intent. Development is the strongest answer to propaganda. When young people find opportunities at home, when pilgrims travel safely, when businesses reopen and when democratic participation rises, it becomes clear which narrative holds strength. Jammu and Kashmir's journey is not without challenges. Security concerns remain. Vigilance remains essential. But the direction is unmistakable. The region is moving forward. India's message at the UN was not merely a rebuttal. It was a reminder. Jammu and Kashmir is, and will always remain an integral and inalienable part of India. That is not a slogan. It is a constitutional and historical reality. The world can see the difference between rhetoric and results. And in Jammu and Kashmir, results are beginning to speak louder than ever before.

## West-IEA Can't Dictate Energy Policy

# DIESEL STILL VITAL FOR INDIA

SHIVAJI SARKAR

India's energy policy cannot be dictated by Euro-centric carbon targets designed for wealthy, post-industrial economies.

The recent conflict involving Iran and US-Israel has already exposed India's energy vulnerability. Anticipating possible supply disruptions, the government advised petroleum companies to halt exports of refined fuels, cut supplies to industry and ensure LPG availability for households. The move highlights an uncomfortable question: how long can India keep its kitchens burning and its trucks moving if global supplies are disrupted?

The answer is sobering. India has barely 21 days of LPG storage and roughly 74 days of crude oil cover. Nearly 90 per cent of crude requirements are imported, leaving the economy exposed to geopolitical shocks. Thin strategic reserves make energy security fragile.

This vulnerability reflects a broader policy drift — partly driven by copying Western energy prescriptions that do not suit India's economic realities. The International Energy Agency has been ignoring the vulnerabilities of countries like India struggling to progress. Or is it a Western weapon?

Countries such as Germany and France industrialised for two centuries using coal, oil and gas. Their per-capita incomes are high, their energy demand largely saturated and their grids stable. Having already built wealth, they can now afford costly transitions to electric vehicles, battery storage and carbon taxes. India cannot.

More Efficient Diesel vehicles have been found to have longer life and have better fuel efficiency than petrol as also the new diesel is far less pollutant. In practical terms, today's diesel engines emit far fewer pollutants than older petrol vehicles.

India needs to scrap the impractical policy of junking of diesel vehicles as per age and not efficiency. It's an unpragmatic decision that harasses India's poor and the middle class the most. It diverts the policing powers in criminalising property or fuel issues. Diesel vehicles have been found to have longer and have better fuel efficiency than petrol as also the new diesel is far less pollutant. In practical terms, today's diesel engines emit far fewer pollutants than older petrol vehicles.

The environmental trade-off is therefore more nuanced than the simple narrative of “dirty diesel” suggests. It diverts the policing powers in criminalising property or fuel issues.

India, by contrast, is still climbing the development ladder. With far lower per-capita income and rapidly rising energy demand, imposing identical carbon constraints raises costs for households and industry. LPG becomes costlier for kitchens, diesel for farmers and transporters, and electricity for small businesses. Such policies risk slowing growth while barely affecting global emissions.

Nowhere is this contradiction clearer than in the debate over diesel. Public discourse often portrays diesel as the villain of India's energy story. In reality, it remains the backbone of the economy. Diesel moves nearly 70 per cent of India's freight, powers

tractors and irrigation pumps in agriculture, runs buses and supports backup power for industries.

Modern diesel is also far cleaner than critics acknowledge. Since the shift to Bharat Stage-VI standards in 2020 — equivalent to Europe's Euro-6 norms — sulphur content has dropped from 50 parts per million to just 10 ppm, an 80 per cent reduction. Today's diesel engines emit far fewer pollutants than older petrol vehicles or small generators.

From an efficiency standpoint, diesel remains difficult to replace. A litre of diesel typically delivers 10 to 15 per cent more usable energy and better mileage than petrol. For

roughly 43 per cent of refinery output. With total refining capacity exceeding 250 million metric tonnes per year, the country has become a major exporter of petroleum products.

Major refiners such as Indian Oil Corporation, Reliance Industries and Bharat Petroleum Corporation operate a sophisticated refining network that supplies domestic demand while exporting surplus fuel — often more than 600,000 barrels of diesel per day to markets in Asia, Africa and Europe.

Replacing this infrastructure overnight with battery-based systems is neither economically nor technologically feasible. Electric

living.

Energy policy, in other words, must follow economic reality rather than moral signalling. For India, the immediate priorities are affordability, reliability and security. Decarbonisation can proceed through efficiency improvements and gradual diversification but forcing abrupt transitions before alternatives become viable is damaging both economic stability and social welfare.

Global crude prices remain volatile. When benchmarks like Brent crude cross \$80 per barrel, India's import bill rises sharply. With nearly 88 per cent of crude

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Forex and Re slide There is also a crucial foreign-exchange dimension to the diesel debate and rupee slide. India imports crude oil but refines it domestically at scale, extracting multiple petroleum products from each barrel. By maximising the use of diesel already produced in Indian refineries, the economy extracts greater value from the same import bill.

India also extracts significant economic value from refining crude domestically. Indian refineries produce over 100 million metric tonnes of diesel annually, accounting for

vehicles depend on imported lithium, cobalt and rare minerals. Large-scale electrification also requires massive investments. In effect, dependence on oil could simply be replaced with dependence on imported minerals.

Moreover, battery manufacturing and disposal carry their own environmental costs. Mining lithium and cobalt is resource-intensive, and recycling infrastructure remains limited worldwide.

Energy transitions succeed only when alternatives become genuinely affordable, reliable and scalable. Until that point, fossil fuels — particularly diesel — will remain central to India's development story.

India, by contrast, is still climbing the development ladder. With far lower per-capita income, rising energy demand and a large population dependent on affordable fuel, imposing identical carbon constraints risks slowing growth and raising the cost of

needs imported, replacing diesel with batteries, electric vehicles and rare minerals could prove equally costly. Environmental goals remain important, but transitions must be pragmatic. Electrification makes sense for railways, metros and short urban routes, while freight, agriculture and heavy industry still require high-energy fuels like diesel.

India feels its thaw in manufacturing and the US and western discrimination for accepting its steel, aluminium and other products making carbon as critical issue.

For India, the message is straightforward. Energy policy must be India-centric, grounded in economic realities rather than imported European templates or prescriptions from agencies like the International Energy Agency. Fossil fuels may not represent the distant future of global energy, but for a developing economy striving to sustain growth and mobility, they remain indispensable.---INFA

# Initiative to Protect Childhood in the Age of the Social Media

LALIT GARG

In the digital age, the pace and nature of human life are changing rapidly. Communication, education, entertainment, and social relationships are increasingly being conducted through virtual platforms. While this transformation has brought many conveniences, it has also created new challenges, especially for the mental, educational, social, and emotional development of children and adolescents. In this context, the technologically progressive Indian state of Karnataka has taken an important and exemplary initiative by deciding to keep children below sixteen years of age away from social media platforms. In its 2026–27 budget session, the state government announced that strict regulations would be introduced to restrict the use of social media by adolescents. This decision addresses the growing concerns of parents who are troubled by the risks arising from uncontrolled digital activities, including cyberbullying and cyber fraud. The objective of this initiative is to protect children from the harmful effects of the virtual world and to ensure their healthy mental development. It is indeed a commendable step, and other states should draw inspiration from it and take meaningful measures to safeguard childhood from the dangers of social media.

Soon after this initiative by Karnataka, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, N. Chandrababu Naidu, announced in the state assembly that a law would be introduced within the next ninety days to prohibit children below the age of thirteen from using social media. With this decision, Andhra Pradesh is set to become the second state after Karnataka to adopt such a policy. These initiatives are not merely administrative decisions; they are also part of a growing global debate on safeguarding children in an increasingly virtual world. Many countries around the world are

seriously deliberating this issue. For example, Australia has already implemented a ban on social media use for children under sixteen, while countries such as France have also introduced strict regulations to enhance children's digital safety.

Over the past few years, psychologists and child health experts have repeatedly warned that uncontrolled use of social media can have serious consequences for the mental and emotional development of adolescents. Problems such as lack of self-confidence, loneliness, anxiety, depression, reduced attention span, and aggressive behavior are increasing rapidly among young users. The constant culture of comparison and performance on virtual platforms often creates feelings of inferiority and dissatisfaction in children. This concern was also highlighted in the Economic Survey of India 2025–26, which pointed out the growing impact of excessive screen time on young minds. Various international studies indicate that the average daily screen time among adolescents is steadily increasing. Many surveys reveal that children in the 13–18 age group in several countries spend three to six hours each day on virtual platforms. This excessive engagement has a direct impact on their studies, sleep patterns, family interaction, and physical activities. Reduced attention and concentration affect the quality of learning. The natural childhood that should be enriched with outdoor play, friendships, and connection with nature is gradually shrinking into an artificial virtual space. Moreover, problems such as cyber harassment and online fraud are also increasing through digital platforms. Many children unknowingly fall into such traps, which can seriously affect both their mental well-being and personal safety. Exposure to inappropriate online content can also negatively influence their psychology. In view of these circumstances, it has become clear that awareness alone is not enough to address the growing influence of the virtual world;

strong policy measures are also necessary to ensure children's safety.

Although the initiatives taken by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are commendable, several practical challenges remain in their effective implementation. In today's world, smartphones and digital applications have become an integral part of education and daily life. Many schools use digital platforms for assignments, communication, and information sharing. Therefore, it may be difficult to determine whether a child's online activity is for educational purposes or for social networking. Another important challenge is related to the process of age verification. Ensuring that a user is genuinely under thirteen or sixteen years of age is technically complex. If technology companies do not cooperate in this effort, implementing such regulations effectively may become difficult. In many families, a single mobile phone is shared by several members, making it even harder to completely restrict children's access to social media. Despite these challenges, the initiative remains extremely significant because it draws society's attention to a serious and growing problem.

In reality, protecting children from the harmful effects of virtual platforms requires more than just restrictions; it calls for a balanced and comprehensive approach along with widespread awareness. Governments, schools, technology platforms, and parents all have equally important roles to play. Governments should formulate clear policies for children's digital safety and collaborate with technology companies to develop effective systems for age verification. Schools should educate students about digital discipline and responsible use of technology. However, the role of parents is the most crucial, because children's habits and behavior are shaped primarily within the family. If parents themselves demonstrate digital restraint and maintain open communication with their children, the negative effects of virtual media can be

greatly reduced. At the same time, it is essential to provide children with a creative and constructive environment. Activities such as sports, reading, music, art, and interaction with nature contribute significantly to the balanced development of a child's personality. When such positive habits are nurtured from an early age, children naturally develop a healthier relationship with technology and become less dependent on virtual platforms. Society must also take proactive steps to create a healthy and inspiring environment for children. It has now become clear that alongside the digital revolution, there is an equally pressing need for digital discipline. Technology should enrich human life rather than push it toward psychological and social crises. The initiatives taken by Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh serve both as a warning and as an inspiration in this direction. If other states also draw inspiration from these measures and take concrete steps to protect children, and if the central government considers introducing a national law on this issue, it could prove highly beneficial for future generations. Given the rapidly deteriorating situation, the central government may eventually be compelled to introduce a nationwide law to regulate children's exposure to social media. It would also be important for the government to consult subject experts and representatives from different sections of society before formulating such legislation. At a time when children's screen time is increasing to the level of addiction and their declining concentration is affecting their education, addressing this challenge must become a priority for both the central and state governments. Ultimately, childhood is not meant to be lost in the virtual world. It should be filled with imagination, play, learning, and creativity. If society and governance together can ensure that children grow up in a safe, balanced, and creative environment, only then can we truly envision a healthy, sensitive, and empowered future.

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