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In An Unstable World, Energy Sovereignty is the New Oil

Context

- **India's dependence on imported hydrocarbons** represents not merely an **economic challenge but a national security vulnerability**.
- With over 85% of crude oil and more than 50% of natural gas imported, **the country's energy lifelines are at the mercy of geopolitical volatility, fragile supply chains**, and sudden market shocks.
- The **reliance on discounted Russian barrels since 2022 has provided temporary fiscal relief**, yet it underscores the perils of overdependence on a single source.
- The **pursuit of energy sovereignty, therefore, is not a policy preference** but a survival strategy for India in a turbulent global order.

Lessons from Global Energy Flashpoints

- The fragility of global energy security is not hypothetical; it is a historical fact.
- Five pivotal events highlight **how crises have repeatedly forced nations to rethink energy strategy**:
- **The 1973 Oil Embargo** exposed Western vulnerability to OPEC's leverage but also triggered innovations in strategic reserves and diversification.
- **The Fukushima Disaster (2011)** undermined nuclear confidence, forcing Japan and others toward coal and gas, only to rediscover the necessity of zero-carbon baseloads.
- **The Texas Freeze (2021)** demonstrated the inadequacy of infrastructure built for cost efficiency rather than resilience.
- **The Russia-Ukraine War (2022)** showed the dangers of single-sourced energy, as Europe scrambled to replace Russian gas at exorbitant costs.
- **The Iberian Peninsula Blackout (2025)** revealed the risks of excessive reliance on intermittent renewables without sufficient dispatchable backup.
- Each **shock has redefined global energy thinking**, proving that resilience must precede ambition.
- **Energy transitions are not instant switches** but pathways requiring foresight, balance, and redundancy.

India's Current Vulnerability

- **In 2023-24, crude oil and natural gas imports accounted for \$170 billion**, or more than a quarter of India's merchandise import bill.
- Such **outflows depress the rupee, inflate the trade deficit**, and constrain macroeconomic stability.

- The **June 2025 Israel-Iran confrontation, narrowly avoiding disruption of 20 million barrels per day of global oil flows**, served as a stark reminder of how external crises can instantly destabilise energy-dependent economies like India.

Towards an Energy Sovereignty Doctrine

• Coal Gasification and Indigenous Energy

- With 150 billion tonnes of coal reserves, **India can no longer dismiss domestic coal** due to high ash content.
- **Modern gasification and carbon capture can unlock syngas**, hydrogen, methanol, and fertilizers, converting a liability into an asset.

• Biofuels and Rural Empowerment

- Ethanol blending has already reduced crude dependence and transferred over ₹92,000 crore to farmers.
- **Scaling bio-CNG through the SATAT scheme not only diversifies energy sources but restores soil health** in North India, integrating sustainability with rural economic revival.

• Nuclear Power as a Dispatchable Backbone

- India's stagnant **8.8 GW nuclear capacity must be expanded through thorium research**, uranium partnerships, and Small Modular Reactors.
- **Nuclear power provides the reliable baseload necessary** in a renewable-dominated grid.

• Green Hydrogen and Technology Sovereignty

- The **ambition of producing 5 million metric tonnes by 2030 requires indigenous electrolyser** and catalyst industries.
- True **sovereignty will come not from imports of green hydrogen** but from mastering the technology chain itself.

• Pumped Hydro for Grid Inertia

- As renewable penetration deepens, pumped hydro offers proven large-scale storage and grid stability.
- India's diverse topography can be harnessed to ensure resilience against intermittency.

The Age of Sovereignty

- India has **already reduced its dependence on West Asian oil from 60% to below 45%**, a deliberate strategy of diversification.
- Yet the **future cannot rest solely on shifting suppliers**. The defining competition of the 21st century will not be over oil reserves but over which nations can secure uninterrupted, affordable, and indigenous energy.
- The **Israel-Iran ceasefire represents a narrow escape**, a chance to act before the next shock.

- **India must seize this window not with short-term fixes but with structural reforms** that blend ambition with realism.
- **Sovereignty lies not in slogans but in the patient construction of capacity across coal, biofuels, nuclear, hydrogen, and pumped hydro.**

Conclusion

- **India stands at an inflection point;** Every past global energy pivot has been forged in crisis. Today, India has the rare opportunity to pivot by foresight rather than force.
- The **five foundational pillars of energy sovereignty are not peripheral to the global energy transition; they are its sovereign spine.**
- In an uncertain century, **the most precious resource will not be crude oil but uninterrupted, indigenous, and resilient energy.**
- Building that future is no longer optional. **It is the essence of sovereignty itself.**

In An Unstable World, Energy Sovereignty is the New Oil FAQs

Q1. Why is India's dependence on imported crude oil considered a national security risk?

Ans. India's dependence on imported crude oil is a national security risk because disruptions in global supply chains or conflicts can immediately threaten its economy and energy security.

Q2. What lesson did the 1973 oil embargo teach the world?

Ans. The 1973 oil embargo taught the world the dangers of overdependence on OPEC and led to the creation of strategic reserves and diversified energy sourcing.

Q3. How does nuclear energy support India's energy sovereignty?

Ans. Nuclear energy supports India's energy sovereignty by providing a reliable zero-carbon baseload that ensures stability in a renewable-heavy grid.

Q4. What role do biofuels play in India's energy strategy?

Ans. Biofuels reduce crude oil imports, strengthen rural incomes, and improve soil health, linking national energy security with agricultural empowerment.

Q5. Why is "energy realism" important for India's transition?

Ans. Energy realism is important because it recognises that transitions are gradual pathways, not instant shifts, and ensures that India balances sustainability with resilience.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Detoxifying India's Entrance Examination System

Context

- Every year, nearly **70 lakh students in India vie for a limited number of undergraduate seats** through highly competitive entrance examinations such as JEE, NEET, CUET, and CLAT.
- The **scarcity of seats in premier institutions has not only fuelled a multibillion-rupee coaching industry** but also entrenched a culture of relentless pressure.
- Recent controversies, **from financial misconduct at coaching centres to tragic student suicides**, highlight the cracks in this system.
- It is time to **reimagine undergraduate admissions in India, shifting from a model of hyper-competition to one that prioritises fairness, equity, and student well-being**.

The Coaching Crisis and Its Toll

- The **rise of the coaching industry** is perhaps the **most visible symptom of the problem**.
- With **15 lakh aspirants for the JEE alone, centres charge exorbitant fees**, often ₹6–7 lakh for two years, pushing families into financial strain.
- Students as young as 14 are enrolled in rigorous programmes where they spend their adolescence solving **advanced problems from Irodov and Krotov**, far beyond the needs of an undergraduate curriculum.
- This **comes at a steep cost: stress, depression, social isolation**, and in tragic cases, loss of life.
- Governments have attempted to regulate coaching centres, but regulation misses the root issue: the entrance examination system itself.
- **By treating minuscule percentile differences as decisive**, the system sidelines capable students while favouring those with financial means.
- **What should matter a solid grasp of school-level physics, chemistry, and mathematics**, is overshadowed by the artificial hierarchy created by rankings.

The Illusion of Meritocracy

- At its core, **the system perpetuates an illusion of meritocracy**.
- Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel has argued that **societies become toxic when success is seen purely as a reflection of individual superiority**, ignoring the roles of privilege and chance.
- In India, **this illusion is intensified: a student from an affluent urban family with access to elite coaching is far more likely to secure a top rank** than a rural student with equal potential but fewer resources.
- What results is not true merit, but **stratified access disguised as fairness**.

Learning from Global Models

- India need not reinvent the wheel. **International experiences provide valuable lessons**.
- The **Netherlands, for instance, has implemented a weighted lottery** for medical school admissions, ensuring that all students above a minimum threshold have a fair chance, while higher grades only marginally improve odds.
- This **system reduces bias, promotes diversity, and eases pressure**, recognising that fine-grained distinctions in scores are both irrelevant and unjust.

- Similarly, **China's 2021 "double reduction" policy radically curtailed for-profit tutoring**, nationalising education support to reduce financial burdens and protect student well-being.
- **Both cases demonstrate that systemic reform is not only possible but also effective** in balancing excellence with equity.

The Path Forward: A Vision for India

- For India, the way forward lies in simplifying admissions and trusting the school system.
- **Class 12 board examinations already provide a rigorous curriculum sufficient to gauge readiness** for higher education.
- **A threshold, say, 80% in physics, chemistry, and mathematics, could serve as the eligibility bar.** Within this pool, seats could be allotted through a weighted lottery, with higher scores modestly improving chances but not monopolising opportunity.
- **Reservation policies could be integrated, with special emphasis on rural and government school students** to ensure mobility and social justice.
- **If entrance examinations are retained, they should be delinked from private profit.** Coaching could be banned or nationalised, with free online materials made universally available.
- To further dismantle the hierarchy among IITs, **an annual student exchange programme and inter-campus faculty transfers could create diversity, integration,** and uniform academic standards.

Conclusion

- Ultimately, **the question is whether India will continue a toxic rat race that scars its youth or embrace a system rooted in fairness, sanity, and egalitarianism.**
- **Moving to a lottery-based admissions process would free students from the treadmill of coaching,** restore adolescence as a time for learning and growth, and make elite education accessible to all qualified students, not just the privileged few.
- **India's education system stands at a crossroads** and the choice is between perpetuating a narrow definition of merit that privileges wealth and burns out its brightest, or adopting a model that balances excellence with compassion and equality.
- The **path forward is clear, one that allows young people to thrive as learners, citizens, and human beings,** not mere machines chasing percentiles.

Detoxifying India's Entrance Examination System FAQs

Q1. Why has the coaching industry grown so large in India?

Ans. The coaching industry has grown because of the limited number of seats in top institutions and the intense competition created by entrance examinations.

Q2. What psychological toll does the current admission system take on students?

Ans. The system causes immense stress, depression, and social isolation, and in some cases has even led to student suicides.

Q3. How does the current entrance exam system create inequality?

Ans. It favours wealthier families who can afford expensive coaching, while sidelining equally capable students from rural or less privileged backgrounds.

Q4. What global models are suggested as alternatives?

Ans. The Netherlands uses a weighted lottery system for admissions, and China implemented the “double reduction” policy to curb for-profit tutoring.

Q5. What is the main solution proposed for India’s admissions system?

Ans. Replacing entrance examinations with a threshold based on Class 12 marks and a weighted lottery, while reserving seats to promote equity.

Source: The Hindu

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