

Editorial of the Day – 03.11.2025

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1. Cruising ahead – On the India Maritime Week event(TH)

General Studies 3 – Economy

Topic – Infrastructure – Ports & Shipping sector, Government policies and interventions, Liberalization, and 'Make in India' (Shipbuilding).

Introduction – A New Strategic Vision for Indian Shipping

The Core Shift – The India Maritime Week (IMW) signals a fundamental change in India's shipping policy. Shipping is no longer viewed merely as a business or commercial service; it is now recognized as a "national asset" and a critical tool of national power.

Strategic Goals – This new approach emphasizes the need to rebuild the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), strengthen the port infrastructure, and significantly expand the national fleet capacity.

Addressing Past Neglect – The event also brought to light the "occlusion" (gap or blockage) created by past neglect, where liberalization policies weakened state control and diminished the strategic importance of the sector.

A. The Policy Shift During India Maritime Week

From Trade to Strategy – The IMW, led by the Prime Minister, has formally marked a policy change. Shipping is now integrated into India's national strategy as a tool for projecting power and ensuring economic sovereignty, rather than just facilitating trade.

The LPG Era Decline – The sector's decline is traced back to the Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) era. During this period, the national policy focus shifted away from building India's own fleet. The primary objective became training Indian seafarers to serve on foreign-flagged ships.

Weakening the SCI – The Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), the national carrier, lost its strategic edge after its special rights to carry Indian oil were withdrawn, exposing it to market forces it was ill-equipped to handle.

B. The COVID-19 Pandemic – A Critical Wake-Up Call

Dependence Exposed – The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting global supply chain chaos starkly exposed India's heavy dependence on foreign-owned vessels for its critical imports and exports.

Loss of Control – During the disruptions, India discovered it could not control or influence its own trade routes, leaving it vulnerable to the decisions of foreign shipping lines and nations.

Inadequate Private Fleet – The private Indian shipping sector was too small and lacked the capacity to handle the scale of the crisis, proving incapable of substituting for foreign carriers.

The Strategic Realization – The government recognized that a strong national shipping fleet is not a commercial luxury but a strategic necessity, especially during times of war, global instability, or health crises.

Post-Pandemic Focus – The policy has now shifted decisively toward a strategic revival, prioritizing the strengthening of the SCI fleet and expanding overall national shipping capacity.

C. New Investments and Policy Reforms

Focus on Ports and Logistics – Most of the new investments announced during Maritime Week were targeted at **ports and logistics infrastructure**, forming the backbone of the maritime ecosystem.

The "Landlord Port Model" – India follows this model, where the port authority (government) acts as the landlord. It leases out terminals and operations to private or foreign firms, which then share revenue. This

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system has proven effective, providing ports with sufficient funds for new projects and expansion without relying solely on public exchequer.

Key Projects and Initiatives

Transshipment Hub – Chennai and Kolkata ports have begun foundational work on a new transshipment hub in the Andamans.

Sagarmala – Projects under the Sagarmala initiative (focused on port-led development) have gained new momentum.

Seafarer Training – Skill development for seafarers remains a priority, now balanced with fleet expansion.

Encouraging Foreign Registration – A key policy reform is to encourage foreign shipping companies to register their ships in India through local subsidiaries.

Expected Outcome – This move gives India more policy leverage and control over a larger pool of vessels operating in its waters.

Allied Benefits – It also strengthens linked services, particularly the marine insurance sector.

D. The Missing Link – Domestic Shipbuilding Power

The Remaining Challenge – Despite progress in ports and policy, India's merchant shipbuilding sector shows very slow growth. This remains the most significant "occlusion" or capability gap.

Technological Lag – There is little progress in the construction of high-value, modern vessels, such as LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) carriers or ships designed to run on green fuels (like methanol or ammonia).

A Test of Industrial Strength – Building such state-of-the-art vessels is a testament to a nation's industrial and engineering prowess.

The True Goal – The nation will only be "truly cruising ahead" when Indian shipyards can independently design and roll out these complex, modern vessels.

E. Conclusion – From Strategic Inroad to Lasting Power

A Balanced Revival – India's new maritime policy reflects a blend of economic vision and strategic foresight, driven by the hard lessons of the pandemic.

Self-Reliance – The focus has turned firmly toward self-reliance across the entire maritime chain – shipping, shipbuilding, and logistics.

The Final Hurdle – The "strategic inroad" made by policy changes will only be converted into lasting maritime power once India masters the industrial challenge of building its own green-fuel and LNG vessels.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cruising-ahead-on-india-maritime-week/article70232569.ece>

2. As global consensus against nuclear testing frays, India should re-evaluate its options(IE)

General Studies 2 – International Relations

Topic – Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Sub Topic – India's Nuclear Policy, Global Nuclear Order, Arms Control Regimes, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Introduction – Re-evaluating India's Nuclear Moratorium

The global consensus against nuclear testing, which has been a cornerstone of the post-Cold War era for nearly three decades, is now showing signs of weakening. This emerging shift, marked by the revitalization of nuclear programs by major powers, compels India to re-evaluate its long-standing voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing (in place since 1998). The challenge is to adapt its strategy to ensure its "credible minimum deterrence" remains robust and reliable in a changing global security landscape.

A. The Fraying Global Consensus on Nuclear Testing

A Shift from Restraint – For almost 30 years, nuclear restraint was maintained among major powers, anchored more in political prudence and a voluntary moratorium than in a legally binding framework.

Erosion of Consensus – This consensus is now eroding. Recent developments indicating this shift include – The United States signaling a possible resumption of nuclear testing, Russia and China actively revitalizing and expanding their nuclear programmes.

B. India's Post-1998 Policy of Restraint

Strategic and Moral Posture – India's decision to declare a voluntary moratorium after the 1998 Pokhran-II tests was a symbol of both strategic maturity and moral confidence.

Aimed at Reassurance – The policy was designed to reassure the global community that India's nuclear ambitions were guided by restraint, not defiance.

Significant Diplomatic Gains – This posture facilitated India's diplomatic acceptance into the global mainstream, leading to – The lifting of international sanctions, Landmark civil nuclear cooperation agreements, most notably the Indo-US nuclear deal of 2008.

The Risk of Inertia – The text warns that if this policy of restraint remains unchanged in a rapidly evolving security landscape, it risks transforming from a position of strength into strategic inertia.

C. A Transforming (and Fragile) Global Nuclear Order

Profound Transformation – The current global nuclear order is undergoing deep, destabilizing changes.

Destabilizing Actions by Major Powers –

1. **Russia** – Has withdrawn from critical arms control regimes.
2. **China** – Is undertaking a significant expansion of its nuclear arsenal, including the construction of new missile silos.
3. **United States** – Is openly questioning whether simulation-based verification (without physical tests) can be trusted indefinitely.

The Stalled CTBT – The **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)**, which India has not signed, remains stalled. Its ineffectiveness is highlighted by the fact that major powers themselves have refused to ratify it, making the supposed stability of the nuclear order appear increasingly fragile.

D. Reconciling Doctrine with Modern Capabilities

India's Doctrine – India's nuclear doctrine is built on two pillars – Credible Minimum Deterrence and a No First Use (NFU) policy.

The Reliability Challenge – Deterrence does not just depend on possessing weapons, but on the confidence in their reliability. India's nuclear designs were last validated by physical tests in 1998.

Technological Evolution – Since 1998, India's delivery systems and technologies have evolved significantly. This includes the induction of –

1. Agni-V (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile).
2. Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs).
3. Development of advanced capabilities like Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs).

Need for Assurance – As India moves toward these more complex and advanced capabilities, the assurance about weapon performance and reliability becomes absolutely essential for the "credible" aspect of its doctrine.

E. The Limits of Simulation

Incomplete Substitution – While computer simulations and subcritical tests are valuable tools for understanding nuclear physics, they cannot fully substitute for the empirical data gathered from an actual test.

Acknowledged Limitation – Even technologically advanced nuclear powers, like the United States, acknowledge this limitation, which is why they are reconsidering their own testing posture.

F. A New Framework – "Testing for Validation, Not Demonstration"

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Avoiding Recklessness – A reconsideration of the testing moratorium does not imply reckless action. Any potential future testing must be limited, scientific, and consistent with India's ethical framework.

A New Rationale – The guiding principle should be "Testing for Validation, not Demonstration." The aim would be to ensure the reliability of the deterrent. It would not be an attempt to provoke escalation or demonstrate new power.

Consistency with Doctrine – The text argues that this limited validation-focused testing can coexist with the core principles of NFU and credible minimum deterrence.

G. Way Forward – Balancing Restraint with Preparedness

Strategic Autonomy – India must preserve the moral and diplomatic capital earned from its restraint. However, strategic autonomy demands flexibility, not rigidity, in its policies.

Prudence as Readiness – In this evolving order, strategic prudence is not immobility; it is readiness—the capacity to adapt policy when circumstances demand.

The Final Balance – If major powers return to an era of verification through detonation, India must be prepared. The goal is to balance restraint with preparedness, ensuring that its nuclear posture remains a credible symbol of both peace and power.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/as-global-consensus-against-nuclear-testing-frays-india-should-re-evaluate-its-options-10342216/>

