CATMOCK DAILY

March 12, 2026

GLOBAL ENERGY CONCERNS MOUNT AS IRAN HITS SHIPS ***- The Hindu***

Iran attacked commercial ships across the Persian Gulf, including one headed for India, and targeted Dubai International Airport in the UAE on Wednesday, escalating a campaign of squeezing the oil-rich region as global energy concerns mounted and American and Israeli airstrikes pounded the Islamic Republic.

Three crew members from the Gujarat-bound Thai cargo ship Mayuree Naree are still missing, after it was set ablaze by a projectile strike in the Strait of Hormuz. Twenty others were rescued by the Omani Navy. A U.K. maritime agency reported an attack on a container ship off the UAE, saying the “extent of the damage is currently unknown but under investigation by the crew.”

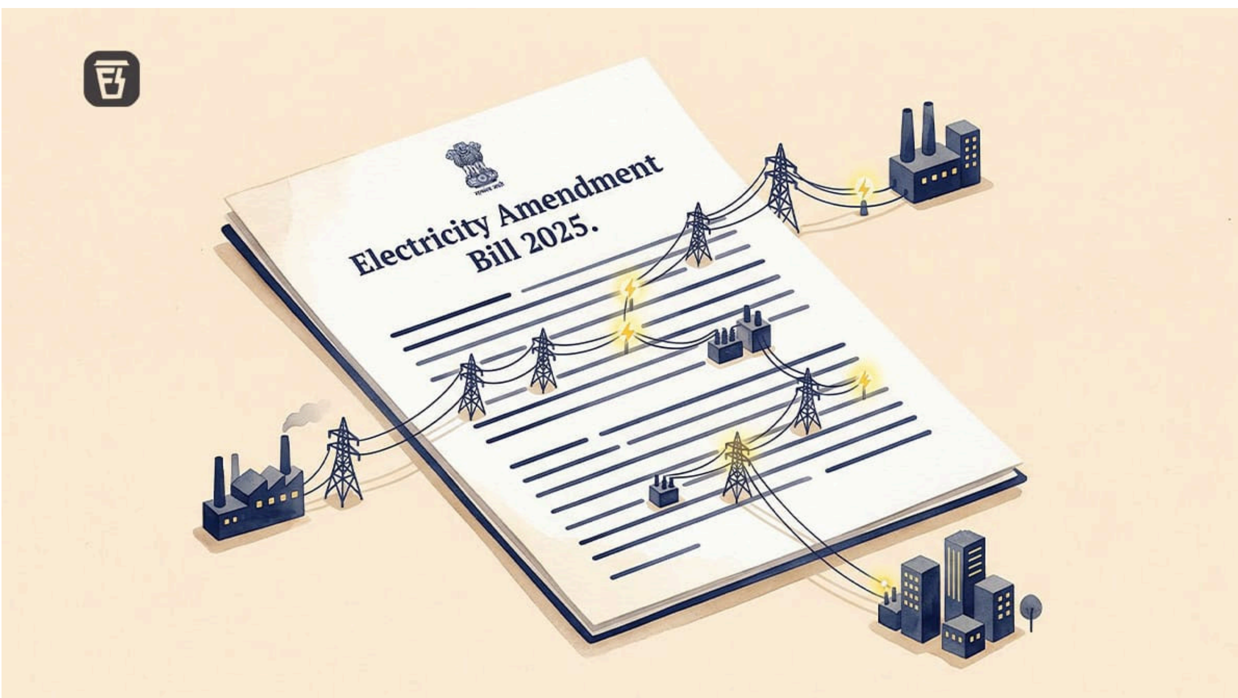
“These attacks on commercial shipping are worrying not only because of the civilian lives lost -- especially given that Indians crew many merchant ships -- but also because of the wider economic consequences, ensuring that this story stays on our front page. Iran’s joint military command now says it will also target financial institutions in West Asia, global crude prices are up 20%, and International Energy Agency members have been forced to open their strategic reserves of oil,” says Suresh Nambath, Editor, The Hindu. “In India, production of LPG has gone up 25%, but sales of electric cookers have skyrocketed as consumers worry about running out of cylinders. The Prime Minister has finally weighed in personally, saying there is no need to panic, as our editorial slams the government’s handling of the fuel crisis.”

Taking note of the attack on the Thai ship headed to Kandla port, the External Affairs Ministry said it “deplores the fact that commercial shipping is being made a target of military attacks”. Iran’s attacks followed intense American airstrikes targeting Iranian Navy assets and the port city of Bandar Abbas on Tuesday.Later on Wednesday, the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for Iran to immediately halt its attacks on Gulf states, saying they breach international law and pose a “serious threat to international peace and security.” Four people were wounded in Dubai when two Iranian drones hit near the airport, but flights continued, the Dubai Media Office said. Separately, Kuwait said its defences downed eight drones and Saudi Arabia said it intercepted five heading toward its Shaybah oil field.

Iran’s joint military command said it would target financial institutions in West Asia after the state-run IRNA news agency reported that the state-owned Bank Sepah in Tehran, sanctioned by the U.S. over funding armed forces, came under attack early on Wednesday, killing staffers. That would put at risk particularly Dubai which is home to many international financial institutions, as well as Saudi Arabia and the island kingdom of Bahrain.

Though the U.S. President Donald Trump claimed that the war has already been “won”, there has been no pause in the strikes and counter-strikes in the region.

THE DRAFT ELECTRICITY AMENDMENT BILL 2025 EXPLAINED ***- Finshot***



A couple of days ago, employees from state-run electricity utilities walked off their desks during lunch hour and gathered outside offices, power plants, and district headquarters, holding placards and chanting slogans.

They were protesting the Centre’s proposed Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025, a reform that aims to overhaul how electricity distribution works in India.

In Hyderabad, protests erupted outside *Vidyut Soudha*, the headquarters of Telangana's power utilities. In Haryana, it happened at the *Nuh* Substation, and in Delhi, the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees & Engineers (NCCOEEE) organised a meeting against the bill.

But why?

You see, India's electricity sector lives with a curious contradiction. Demand for power is rising steadily as the economy grows, electric vehicles expand, and data centres multiply. And even electricity production from renewable energy is increasing year by year. India is even exporting record amounts of electricity to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Nepal. All of this needs a network of grids that's capable of handling all this demand.

And maintaining such a vast and expanding network isn't cheap. Electricity has to be generated, transmitted across high-voltage lines to substations, and finally distributed to homes, farms, and factories. And in this last step of the chain is where financial stress tends to show up most.

Many of India's state-run electricity distribution companies, known as DISCOMs, remain financially fragile. Years of politically driven tariffs, delayed subsidy payments, and losses from electricity transmission have left the sector with losses in the lakhs of crores. While reforms in recent years have improved their profitability, the underlying structural weaknesses have not fully disappeared.

This persistent imbalance between rising demand and fragile distribution finances is what the government is trying to address through the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2025.

The idea itself is not new. Earlier versions of the bill appeared in 2020 and again in 2022, but faced resistance from unions, as it paves the way for privatisation and potential job losses.

To understand why this matters, it helps to look at how the electricity system actually works. Power first flows through generation companies (GenCos) that produce electricity at power plants. It is then carried across long-distance transmission networks before finally reaching consumers through distribution companies, or DISCOMs.

While generation and transmission have fared well over the past two decades, the distribution segment has not. Most of the financial stress in India's power sector sits with DISCOMs, which are responsible for supplying electricity to homes, farms, and businesses. These companies often buy power from generators but struggle to recover the full cost from consumers due to subsidised tariffs and delayed government payments. And at the end of the day, it is the humble taxpayer who foots the bill.

The proposed reforms include allowing multiple electricity distributors to operate within the same geographic area. In theory, this means consumers could choose their electricity provider in much the same way they choose telecom operators today. The bill also proposes stricter payment mechanisms for power purchases, ensuring that electricity-generating companies such as NTPC, NHPC, JSW Energy, and Adani Energy are paid on time.

In addition to this, they propose to increase regulatory oversight so that tariffs (electricity tariffs, not the other kind) more transparently reflect the actual cost of supplying electricity rather than political considerations alone.

One could argue that these changes could help address one of the biggest inefficiencies in the power sector. Even after years of reform, distribution companies continue to struggle with high losses, delayed payments, and inadequate investment in infrastructure. Structurally changing how DISCOMs operate and, more importantly, introducing competition could encourage greater efficiency and innovation. Because if multiple suppliers compete for consumers, it could eventually lead to better service quality, fewer outages, and potentially lower electricity prices.

However, the proposal has triggered protests from several groups, including farmer unions and the NCCOEEE. Their concerns revolve around how these reforms could reshape the economics and governance of electricity distribution.

One of the biggest fears relates to agricultural electricity subsidies. In many states, farmers receive heavily subsidised or even free electricity for irrigation. They worry that introducing private distributors could reduce or even eliminate these subsidies. Private firms, they argue, may be less willing to serve customers who pay low tariffs, especially when those tariffs are set for political reasons.

Another concern involves the autonomy of state governments. Currently, electricity distribution falls under state jurisdiction. Tamil Nadu has TANGEDCO, Karnataka has KTPCL, Maharashtra has MSEDCL, and so on. This lets state governments control electricity prices, which they use as a policy control measure. And subsidised tariffs often form part of broader political commitments. If the reform shifts more authority toward national regulators or private operators, states fear losing this influence over how electricity pricing and subsidies are managed.

Besides, electricity workers' unions view the proposal through yet another lens. From their perspective, the reform resembles a gradual pathway toward privatisation. Their concern is that private distributors will focus on profitable urban consumers while state-run DISCOMs remain responsible for rural areas and heavily subsidised users. If that happens, public utilities could be left with the most financially difficult segments of the market while losing the revenue streams that help cross-subsidise them.

These fears also extend to employment, where they worry that increased private participation could lead to outsourcing, restructuring of state utilities, and potential job losses across the sector.

Even from a consumer perspective, the effects of competition are not entirely straightforward. In many industries, competition drives better services and lower prices. Let's take telecom, for instance. The entry of multiple private players has dramatically reduced call and data prices over the past two decades.

But competition does not always produce perfectly competitive markets. In many cases, industries eventually consolidate into a handful of dominant firms, creating an oligopoly. The telecom sector itself illustrates this perfectly. After years of intense competition and price wars, the market has narrowed to a few major players today.

So, even if multiple electricity distributors are allowed to operate in the same area, the market could eventually settle around a small number of large companies. In such situations, competition may improve service quality and efficiency, but it does not always guarantee lower prices for consumers.

The outcome will depend heavily on how regulators design the market structure, ensure fair access to electricity networks, and prevent excessive concentration of power (pun intended.

Despite these concerns, the reform responds to a growing reality. India's electricity demand is expected to expand rapidly in the coming decades. Electric vehicles, increased industrial activity, and the growth of renewable energy are all adding pressure on the grid. Meeting that demand requires sustained investment in distribution infrastructure and better overall financial health across the sector.

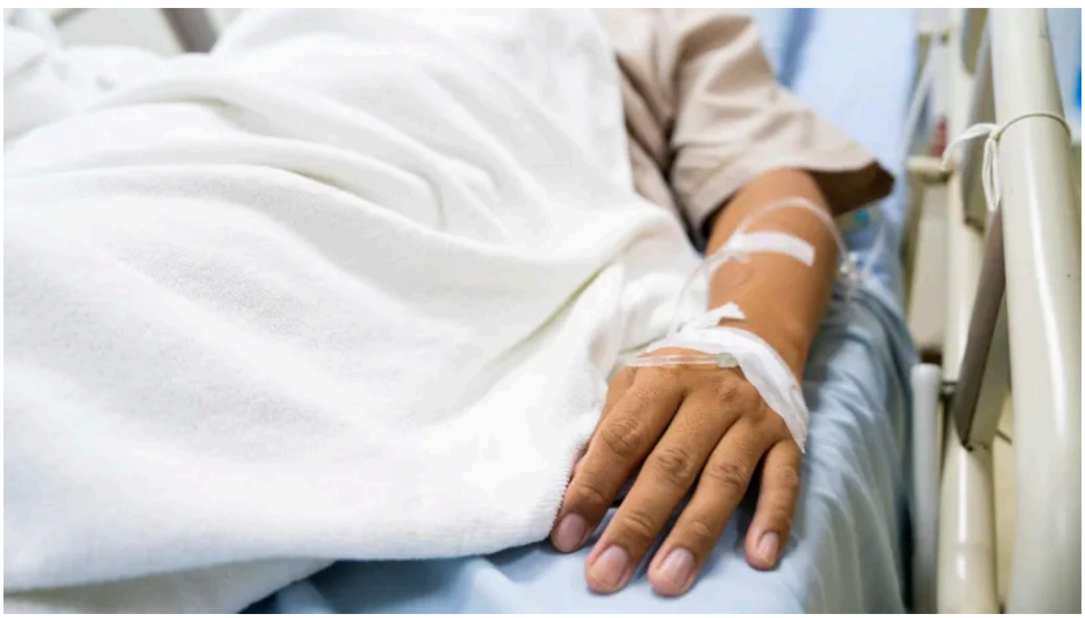
The Electricity Amendment Bill attempts to address this long-standing contradiction. India's power sector has become more capable of generating electricity, yet the companies responsible for delivering that electricity to consumers often struggle financially. Without addressing this imbalance, the system risks repeating cycles of debt accumulation and government bailouts.

Whether the reform succeeds will depend less on the language of the legislation and more on how the competitive framework is implemented. If the rules ensure that private distributors cannot simply select profitable customers while leaving difficult segments to state utilities, the reform could strengthen the sector. If those safeguards are weak, the reform may deepen existing financial pressures.

Power sector reforms in India have always been complex because electricity sits at the intersection of economics and politics. Apart from influencing the electoral outcome, tariffs and subsidies also influence household budgets, farm incomes, and industrial competitiveness.

The Draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2025, therefore, represents an attempt to modernise a system that has struggled with structural inefficiencies. Whether it succeeds will depend on how carefully policymakers balance financial discipline and social obligations. Because they inevitably touch politics, livelihoods, and the price every household pays to keep the lights on.

INDIA'S TOP COURT ALLOWS REMOVAL OF LIFE SUPPORT OF MAN IN VEGETATIVE STATE - *BBC*



In a landmark ruling, India's Supreme Court has allowed the removal of life support of a 31-year-old man who has been in a vegetative state for more than a decade.

This is the first instance of court-approved passive euthanasia - the act of withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining treatment - in India. The man, Harish Rana, had not left a will specifying directives for his treatment before he had an accident.

India legalised passive euthanasia in 2018 but active euthanasia - any act that intentionally helps a person kill themselves - remains illegal.

Rana suffered serious head injuries after falling from a fourth-floor balcony in 2013. He has remained in a comatose state since then.

Over the years, his parents petitioned courts several times to allow their son's life support system to be removed.

They have said in interviews to local media that they had exhausted all their savings caring for Rana and were worried about what would happen to him after they died.

On Wednesday, Rana's father, Ashok Rana, said in a statement that his family was grateful to the Supreme Court for its "humanitarian" judgement.

"This is a difficult decision for our family but we are doing what's best for Harish," he added.

Rana's case had sparked a debate in India around the ethics of court-approved passive euthanasia, with some noting that it goes against the principle of self-determination, which is the foundation of a living will.

A living will is a legal document which allows a person over 18 years to choose the medical care they would like to receive if they develop a terminal illness or condition with no hope of recovery.

For example, they could specify that they don't want to be put on life-support machines or insist that they want to be given adequate pain-relieving medication.

In this case, Rana was not able to give his consent or expressly state that he wanted to be taken off life support as he was in a coma since the accident.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court noted that Rana has not been responding to treatment.

"He experiences sleep-wake cycles but exhibits no meaningful interaction and has been dependent on others for all activities of self-care," the judges said, according to legal news website Bar and Bench.

BBC/Rana Family Harish Rana's mother, wearing a pink tunic and a scarf over her head, pats her son who is lying in a bed, covered by blankets.BBC/Rana Family

Rana's mother with her son, who has been in a vegetative state since 2013

Rana was an engineering student at Punjab University in Chandigarh when he fell from the fourth-flour balcony of his paying guest accommodation.

Since then, he has been breathing with the help of a tracheostomy tube and is fed through a gastrostomy tube. He cannot speak, see, hear or recognise anyone, his parents have said.

Dying with dignity: Breaking the taboo around 'living wills' in India

In 2024, they approached the Delhi High Court seeking passive euthanasia for their son, but their plea was rejected on the grounds that Rana hadn't been placed on life-support machines and was hence "able to sustain himself without any external aid", the court noted.

They then went to the Supreme Court, which also declined their plea.

In 2025, they approached the Supreme Court again, saying that their son's condition had deteriorated and that he was being kept alive "artificially" through life support machines.

The Supreme Court agreed to consider their case after two medical boards assessed Rana's condition.

Both boards said that Rana had a negligible chance of recovering and living a normal life, and that he required external support for feeding, bladder and bowel movements.

The boards also noted that he had permanent brain damage and had suffered huge bed sores.

According to the law governing living wills in India, two medical boards must certify that a patient meets the necessary criteria before their life support can be withdrawn.

Wednesday's order paves the way for the medical boards to "exercise [their] clinical judgement regarding the withdrawal of treatment" for Rana.