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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 15.03.2026

GS Paper II: Current Affairs

1. Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and Its Role in Energy Security during a Gas Crisis

a. Introduction

The Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955 is a key legislative tool used by the Indian state to manage crises involving critical goods. Its primary aim is to ensure that essential commodities remain available at reasonable prices, especially during disruptions.

In the context of a gas crisis, the Act becomes highly relevant as it allows the government to temporarily override market forces to protect public welfare, ensure equitable distribution, and maintain economic stability.

b. Conceptual Foundation of the Act

The Act is based on the understanding that markets may fail during emergencies.

Why State Intervention is Needed

- Supply shocks (war, sanctions, disruptions) can reduce availability
- Panic buying can create artificial shortages
- Prices may rise sharply, hurting consumers
- Therefore, the state intervenes to restore balance and prevent exploitation

Powers under Section 3

- Regulate production, supply, and distribution
- Fix or control prices
- Impose stock limits
- Control storage and transport
- Act against hoarding and black marketing

Coverage of Energy Commodities

- Includes LPG, natural gas, petroleum products
- Directly links the Act with energy security

With this legal framework in place, its real importance becomes visible during crises—especially when gas supply disruptions threaten national stability.

c. Relevance in the Context of a Gas Crisis

India's energy system has a high dependence on imports, especially for gas.

Structural Vulnerability

- Large share of LPG and natural gas is imported
- Supply routes pass through geopolitically sensitive regions e.g., Persian Gulf
- Critical chokepoints like Strait of Hormuz

Crisis Trigger Mechanisms

- War or geopolitical tensions
- Sanctions or trade restrictions
- Logistics disruptions — shipping, ports

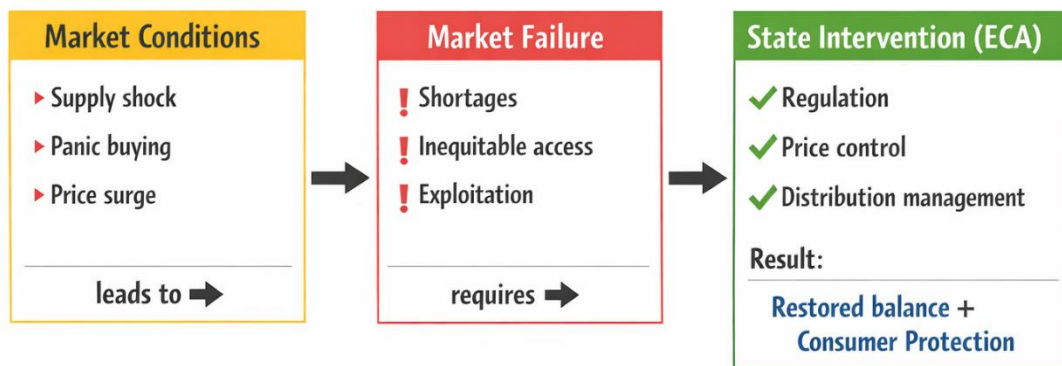
Resulting Impacts

- Sudden fall in supply
- Price spikes
- Panic buying and hoarding
- Risk of widespread shortages

Without intervention, such a situation can quickly turn into a social and economic crisis.

At this stage, the Essential Commodities Act becomes an operational tool, enabling the government to actively manage the crisis.

Market Failure During Gas Crisis and Need for State Intervention



d. Mechanism of State Intervention during a Gas Crisis

When invoked, the Act enables coordinated and targeted government action.

Increasing Production

- Direct refineries to boost LPG output
- Divert resources from non-essential products

Prioritisation of End-Use

- Households given priority over industries
- Ensures basic cooking needs are met

Regulation of Distribution

- Ensure balanced supply across regions
- Prevent urban bias and rural shortages

Prevention of Hoarding

- Impose stock limits
- Monitor dealers and distributors
- Control black marketing

Targeted Allocation (Natural Gas)

- Supply directed to priority sectors
- Ensures efficient use of limited resources

Outcome:

- Stabilised supply
- Controlled prices
- Restored public confidence

However, while stabilisation is achieved, the intervention has varying effects across sectors.

e. Impact across Different Sectors

Petrochemical Industry

- Reduced feedstock availability
- Lower output of plastics and chemicals

Industrial Sector

- Supply restrictions
- Short-term decline in production

Oil Refineries

- Reduced operational autonomy
- Must follow government directives

Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

- May lose regulatory exemptions
- Come under stricter control

Households (Primary Beneficiaries)

- Assured LPG supply
- Supports schemes like PM Ujjwala Yojana
- Protects vulnerable sections

These sectoral impacts highlight that while the Act ensures welfare, it also involves trade-offs that must be carefully managed.

f. Analytical Assessment

Strengths of the Act

- Enables quick government response
- Prevents price exploitation
- Controls hoarding and black markets
- Provides short-term energy security resilience

Limitations

- Does not solve import dependence
- May distort market signals
- Discourages private investment if overused
- Causes industrial disruption

The Act is a crisis-management tool, not a long-term solution.

Therefore, it must be complemented by structural reforms and long-term planning.

g. Way Forward

Diversification of Energy Sources

- Reduce reliance on limited regions
- Expand global partnerships

Strengthening Domestic Production

- Enhance exploration and refining capacity
- Promote indigenous energy resources

Strategic Reserves

- Build buffer stocks of gas and fuels
- Reduce need for emergency intervention

Promotion of Alternatives

- Electric cooking
- Biogas and renewable energy

Infrastructure Development

- Improve storage and pipeline networks
- Enhance distribution efficiency

Such measures ensure that emergency laws like the ECA are used sparingly and effectively.

Conclusion

The Essential Commodities Act, 1955 plays a crucial role as a crisis-management instrument in ensuring the availability and affordability of essential goods, including LPG and natural gas. During a gas crisis, it helps stabilise supply, control prices, and protect consumers.

However, its role is inherently short-term. True energy security depends on diversification, domestic capacity, and technological innovation. Effective policy lies in combining immediate crisis response with long-term strategic planning, ensuring resilience without compromising efficiency.

GS Paper IV: Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude

2. Passive Euthanasia and the Right to Die with Dignity

a. Introduction

The issue of euthanasia in India lies at the intersection of law, ethics, and human dignity. It raises a fundamental question: does the right to life include the right to die with dignity?

On one side is the principle of sanctity of life, which obligates the State to preserve life. On the other is the idea that life must be meaningful and dignified, not merely prolonged biological existence.

The Supreme Court, through landmark judgments — including recent cases like *Harish Rana*, has clarified that Article 21 protects not just life, but also dignity in death under certain conditions.

Distinction between Passive and Active Euthanasia

Aspect	Passive Euthanasia	Active Euthanasia
Nature	Withdrawal of treatment	Direct act causing death
Cause of death	Underlying illness	External intervention
Example	Removing ventilator	Lethal injection
Legal status (India)	Permitted (with safeguards)	Illegal
Supreme Court view	Constitutionally allowed	Not permitted

Key Insight: Difference lies in cause of death, not action vs inaction

b. Understanding Passive Euthanasia

Meaning and Nature

- Passive euthanasia means withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining treatment
- It allows a person to die naturally from the underlying illness
- No direct action is taken to cause death

Examples

- Removing ventilator support in irreversible conditions
- Stopping artificial feeding in a permanent vegetative state

Difference from Active Euthanasia

- Passive euthanasia — death due to natural illness progression
- Active euthanasia — death caused by external intervention e.g., injection
- Active euthanasia is illegal in India

Key Clarification by Supreme Court

- Withdrawal of treatment is still a conscious decision
- Real distinction lies in cause of death, not action vs inaction

Understanding this distinction is essential to grasp why passive euthanasia has been constitutionally permitted while active euthanasia remains prohibited.

c. Constitutional Basis: Right to Die with Dignity

Expanded Meaning of Article 21

- Right to life includes right to live with dignity
- This dignity extends to the process of dying

When Dignity is Compromised

- Life prolonged in irreversible suffering
- Complete loss of consciousness
- No meaningful recovery possible

Role of Personal Autonomy

- Individuals have the right to refuse medical treatment
- State cannot force painful or futile treatment

Allowing natural death in such cases is not against life—it is a continuation of dignity under Article 21.

To operationalise this principle, the judiciary developed a structured approach known as the “best interests test.”

d. The Best Interests Test

Basic Principle

- Start with a presumption in favour of preserving life
- This presumption is not absolute

When It Can Be Overridden

- Treatment has no therapeutic benefit
- Only prolongs suffering or unconsciousness

Key Question

- Not whether death is better than life
- But whether treatment is beneficial to the patient

Factors Considered

- Medical: recovery chances, brain activity, pain level
- Non-medical: dignity, patient’s wishes, quality of life

Judicial Application

- In *Harish Rana*, withdrawal allowed due to no recovery possibility
- Decision based on medical opinion and family consent

This test evolved through a series of judicial decisions, reflecting a gradual shift in India’s legal position.

e. Evolution of Judicial Position in India

Gian Kaur Case (1996)

- Rejected general right to die
- Recognised limited idea of dignified death in terminal illness

Law Commission Recommendations

- Supported withdrawal of treatment in best interest cases
- Suggested protection from criminal liability

Aruna Shanbaug Case (2011)

- Allowed passive euthanasia

- Introduced medical boards and court approval

Common Cause Judgment (2018)

- Recognised living wills — advance directives
- Strengthened patient autonomy

Recent Developments

- Simplified procedures for directives
- Reinforced dignity at end of life

While the legal framework has evolved, the issue remains deeply rooted in ethical dilemmas.

f. Ethical Dimensions

Sanctity vs Quality of Life

- Life is inherently valuable
- But existence without awareness or dignity raises concerns

Autonomy vs State Responsibility

- State must protect life
- But must respect individual choice and bodily autonomy

Medical Ethics

- “Do no harm” includes:
 - Avoiding unnecessary suffering
 - Respecting patient dignity

Compassion in Governance

- Laws must reflect empathy and humanity
- Not just rigid application

Euthanasia is not just a legal issue—it is a moral and human question about dignity and suffering.

Given these complexities, India needs a structured and balanced policy approach.

g. Way Forward

Comprehensive Legislation

- Clear legal framework for euthanasia
- Uniform safeguards across the country

Strengthening Safeguards

- Ensure decisions are transparent and unbiased
- Prevent misuse or coercion

Awareness of Living Wills

- Promote advance medical directives
- Enable informed decision-making

Expansion of Palliative Care

- Improve pain management systems
- Reduce unnecessary suffering

These measures can ensure that the right to die with dignity is exercised responsibly and ethically.

Conclusion

India's approach to passive euthanasia reflects a careful balance between law, ethics, and compassion. The Supreme Court has made it clear that Article 21 includes not just the right to live, but also the right to die with dignity in specific circumstances.

By allowing passive euthanasia under strict safeguards, the Court recognises that prolonging life at all costs may not always be humane. The essence of constitutional protection lies in preserving both life and dignity, ensuring that the end of life is guided by autonomy, compassion, and respect for human worth.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.

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