

Govt: India maintains uninterrupted energy supplies as Strait of Hormuz remains closed

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The Government of India on Saturday issued a detailed statement outlining its preparedness measures in response to the evolving situation in West Asia and the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The Centre said that energy supplies remain stable, maritime operations are functioning normally, and evacuation and assistance efforts for Indian nationals in the region are progressing without interruption.

According to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, all domestic refineries are operating at high capacity, supported by adequate crude inventories and increased LPG production to meet heightened demand.



Retail fuel outlets continue to function normally across the country, the Ministry said, adding that despite isolated incidents of panic buying triggered by rumours, petrol and diesel stocks remain sufficient at all petrol pumps nationwide.

The government reported that natural gas supplies for domestic PNG and CNG transport have been prioritised at 100 per cent, while industrial and commercial consumers connected to the grid are

receiving 80 per cent of their average consumption.

To reduce pressure on commercial LPG, city gas distribution companies have been advised to fast-track PNG connections for restaurants, hotels, canteens and other commercial establishments. Major CGD operators, including IGL, MGL, GAIL Gas and BPCL, have rolled out incentives to encourage PNG adoption.

The statement highlighted that states are being offered an additional 10 per cent

commercial LPG allocation linked to reforms that promote PNG expansion, with several states simplifying Right of User/Right of Way permissions and extending working hours to accelerate CGD rollout.

Despite global constraints, domestic LPG supply remains steady, with no dry-outs reported at distributorships.

Commercial LPG allocation has been progressively restored to 70 per cent of pre-crisis levels, with priority supply for sectors such as restaurants, hotels, industrial canteens, steel, textiles, chemicals and plastics. Since 14 March, commercial entities have lifted 33,781 metric tonnes of non-domestic LPG, while over 46,000 five-kilogram FTL cylinders were sold on Friday to support migrant labourers and small consumers.

Centre pushes for faster expansion of PNG, targets 50 lakh new connections

NARESH BISWANI

NEW DELHI: A key meeting on expanding Piped Natural Gas (PNG) services in urban areas took place at Vigyan Bhavan on Saturday. It brought together important groups from the Centre, States, and industry to speed up access to clean energy and ensure steady essential services.

The meeting included Union Ministers, senior officials, state representatives, municipal commissioners, and leaders from major public sector companies like GAIL and Indian Oil Corporation, as well as City Gas Distribution (CGD) entities.

Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar called for a focused approach to expanding PNG networks. He pointed out that cities drive economic growth. He discussed priorities such



Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar

as streamlined approvals, integrating gas infrastructure into urban planning, and improving last-mile connectivity. He also set a bold target of adding 50 lakh new PNG connections.

Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri highlighted the need to strengthen PNG infrastructure due to changing global energy trends.

He urged states to encourage its use, especially in areas with existing networks.

Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi stressed the importance of ensuring continuous essential supplies and stopping black marketing. He supported a gradual transition from LPG to PNG, especially in public institutions.

Officials remarked that PNG has benefits like safety, cost-effectiveness, and environmental sustainability. However, issues such as delays in municipal permissions, Right of Way (RoW) approvals, and high restoration charges still block expansion.

States and urban local bodies agreed to simplify approval processes, reduce charges, and appoint nodal officers for better coordination.

A follow-up breakout session addressed specific city issues, with stakeholders committing to time-bound action plans and ongoing monitoring.

'LEFT APPEASED MINORITIES IN LS POLLS... NOW APPEASING THE MAJORITY'

'CPI(M) is set to meet Bengal fate, BJP won't win a single seat'

SENIOR CONGRESS leader **V D SATHEESAN**, 61, is spearheading the party-led UDF's campaign for the April 9 Kerala Assembly polls. A five-term MLA from Paravur, he is also the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the state Assembly. One of the front-runners in the chief ministerial race in the Congress, Satheesan speaks to **SHAJU PHILIP** on a range of issues, including the UDF's poll prospects, perceived "anti-incumbency" against the Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF government, and the BJP's chances. *Excerpts:*



EXPRESS interview **V D SATHEESAN**
KERALA LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

What are the factors that you see are in favour of the UDF in this election?

Anti-government sentiments are very strong. We have presented before voters a charge sheet against the government. CPI(M) did not act against its three leaders who were arrested in Sabarimala gold theft case. This scandal is a serious issue. The state health sector is on a ventilator with hospitals not having adequate supplies of medicines. The farm sector has collapsed. The government has failed to mitigate wildlife attacks, which have affected around 30 lakh people across the state. Kerala has the highest inflation rate in the country. The arrears to employees, pensioners and teachers would amount to Rs 1 lakh crore.

But the Vijayan government has been highlighting its development record?

The government's claims are false. In the recent local body elections too, they highlighted development, but we exposed them and they lost. Can they point out a single project that they brought to the state? When the previous Congress government awarded the Vizhinjam seaport project to Adani group, CPI(M) had alleged that it was a Rs 6,000 crore land scam. When our government tried to lay GAIL pipelines, the current Industries Minister (P Raveesh, a CPI(M) leader) said it was a bomb ticking under the earth. On the national highway development issue, people were not ready to hand over their land because of meagre compensation. The UPA government's legislation in 2013 (Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act) provided much higher compensation for land owners. That is why people had stopped protesting and handed over the land for national highway development in the state.

Why do you claim there is anti-incumbency against the LDF government?

I have travelled across the state's 140 constituencies and

saw people turning up in large numbers, especially youths. We have exposed the government's failures. That apart, UDF has proposed alternative models and projects for all sectors. We conducted health and education conclaves to address the prevailing issues in the health care and higher education sectors.

We have alternative plans for all departments, which may be the first time in the country that the Opposition has done so. UDF has proposed projects capitalising on Kerala's port network, coastal belts and water bodies. UDF has a clear plan on the higher education system to prevent the migration of youths from Kerala for higher studies.

How do you see the BJP's prospects in the polls?

In the 2021 polls, the BJP's vote share had come down. In-fighting is going on within the BJP between its new and old teams. Many senior leaders have been sidelined. We have raised a serious allegation about the CPI(M)-BJP deal this time. BJP has handed over many key seats to its insignificant allies. Ranni seat, which is home to Sabarimala temple, was handed over to Twenty20, which has no presence in that district. On the other hand, CP(M) has fielded an Independent in Palakkad to help BJP. But it will not have any impact. I don't think BJP is going to win a single seat in Kerala.

Why have you spoken out against vote-bank politics?

We will oppose those who speak on communal lines. We are against hate campaigns aimed at dividing society. We will not bother if someone tries to threaten us by showing vote bank. Our candidates were not fixed by any communities or organisations. We are not against anyone and if they have any issues, we will meet them. We confidently spoke out against vote bank politics because Kerala is secular. This election will prove that Kerala is secular and people will appreciate our stand. CPI(M) appeased the minority community in the last Lok Sabha elec-

tions and after they lost it, they are now appeasing the majority. Both CP(M) and BJP are on the same path. Pinarayi speaks in a manner to promote majority communalism.

Could the rift within the Congress over seats may dent the UDF's prospects?

We have completed seat sharing among allies without any hiccups. Within 24 hours, Congress declared 55 candidates and in another day's time, the rest of the candidates will be declared. In Kerala, there has never been a time when candidate selection was completed so quickly. The issue of MPs contesting was entrusted to the party national leadership and they took a decision. All have complied with that.

Will the UDF back the CPI(M)'s rebels in the polls?

We are supporting four CPI(M) leaders as Independent candidates. Two others, including a former MLA, have joined Congress and contesting as our candidates. These rebels have the support of some senior CPI(M) leaders and cadre. CPI(M) in Kerala is going to meet the fate that it faced in Bengal.

What is your take on the CM race in Congress?

As per the AICC (All India Congress Committee) procedure, the chief minister will be declared only after the elections. That is the decision and the same process had been adopted in Karnataka and Telangana after the party won there. The AICC will decide who will be the CM. We never declare our CM face in advance.

But there is a buzz that the Congress may face trouble due to its CM race if it wins the elections?

That is only a CPI(M) narrative.

What will be your role after the polls?

My role will be decided by the party. Whatever decision the party takes, we will go by that.

87 strongholds since 2011: For Kerala polls, what the data holds for ruling LDF, Opp UDF

Anjishnu Das
New Delhi, March 28

IN AN indication of the entrenched nature of Kerala politics, an analysis of the last three Assembly polls shows that as many as 87 of the state's 140 seats have been won consecutively by the same party since 2011.

While the ruling LDF's CPI(M) and CPI have each held 39 and 12 seats respectively across the last three Assembly polls, the Opposition Congress has similarly held 12 seats and its ally IUML 14 seats. However, with the Congress-led UDF recording a comeback in the recent local body polls, Kerala's political landscape may be headed for a shake-up.

In 2011, the UDF had come to power after edging out the LDF. But the Left was able to return to power in 2016 and further extend its lead over the UDF in 2021.

Regional breakdown

Mapping out the regional spread of these stronghold seats shows the CPI(M)'s dominance has been concentrated in north Kerala, particularly in the Kannur, Kozhikode and Palakkad districts. The CPI has been a formidable force in central and south Kerala, around the Kollam, Thrissur and Alappuzha districts.

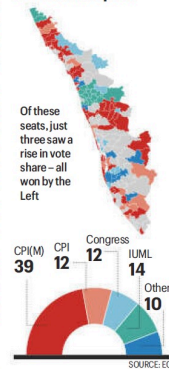
Among the Left's allies, the Kerala Congress (Mani)'s three dominant seats are all in central Kerala while the erstwhile undivided NCP won its seats in Kozhikode and Alappuzha.

On the Opposition front, while the Congress's consecutive wins came in central Kerala, largely in Ernakulam and Kottayam districts, the IUML was dominant in the Muslim-majority Malappuram district. The Congress's strong seats are not as clustered as other parties, coming in some urban areas and centred on veteran leaders' strongholds like late Oomen Chandy's Puthupally and Ramesh Chennithala's Haripad.

Vote shares

Across the 87 seats won consecutively by the same party since 2011, there are just six seats where the leading party saw its

• Seats won by the same party in three consecutive polls



vote share rise in each ensuing election – 5 won by the CPI(M) and 1 by the CPI. There are also 14 seats where the winning party has maintained its vote share above 50% – 8 won by the CPI(M), 4 by the IUML, and 1 each by the CPI and Congress.

However, 23 seats saw vote shares decline consistently – 10 were won by the CPI(M), 5 by the Congress, 4 by the IUML and 3 by the CPI.

A comparison of vote shares in 2011 and 2021 shows that 27 of the 87 seats won consecutively by the same party saw vote shares increase. The Left had the most such seats –

the CPI(M) won in 17, CPI in 4, and the Congress and IUML in 2 each. But in 60 seats, the vote shares fell between 2011 and 2021 – the CPI(M) had won 22 of these, followed by the IUML at 12, Congress at 10 and CPI at 8.

But a comparison of vote shares in the 2016 and 2021 polls – both won by the LDF – shows that the Left lost ground in 19 seats despite continuing to win them, while the Congress and IUML's vote shares declined in 8 and 4 seats, respectively. The Left will, however, be banking on 32 seats where its vote share rose between 2016 and 2021.

