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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# A Decentralised Solution for India's Waste Crisis

 **THE HINDU**

12 May 2026

**ENVIRONMENT****POLITY****GS3****GS2**

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# A Decentralised Solution for India's Waste Crisis

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Can a centralised waste-management framework succeed in a country where the constitutional design of urban governance is fundamentally federal?"*

## EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

The Hindu argues that the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026 – in force since 2026 (effective April 1, 2026) – are excessively centralised and technocratic, disregarding the federal and subsidiarity principles that the Constitution wrote into urban governance through the 74th Amendment. The result, the editorial warns, will be paper compliance rather than ecological outcomes. The path forward lies in empowering urban local bodies and building ward-level segregation and processing capacity.

## A NEW RULEBOOK, AN OLD PATHOLOGY

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026 replace the SWM Rules, 2016 with a more elaborate framework. The new Rules mandate four-stream segregation – wet, dry, sanitary and special-care waste – a sharper Extended Producer Responsibility regime for plastic and packaging, and tighter landfill-emission norms.

The intent is unimpeachable. India generates over 170,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste per day, with collection efficiency above 90% but scientific processing below 80%. Landfills in Indian metros are visible from satellite imagery; a 2024 UCLA atmospheric-methane study identified Kanjurmarg (Mumbai) and Jawaharnagar (Hyderabad) among the world's largest methane super-emitters.

The pathology, however, is not in the standards. It is in the centralisation.

## THE 74TH AMENDMENT ARGUMENT

The Constitution (Seventy-Fourth Amendment) Act, 1992 places “public health, sanitation, conservancy and solid waste management” squarely within the functional domain of urban local bodies under the Twelfth Schedule, read with Article 243W. Sanitation is not a Union subject. The SWM Rules, 2026 – framed by the Centre under the [Environment \(Protection\) Act, 1986](#) – prescribe in granular detail what every ULB must do, how it must be reported and what penalties apply.

The result is constitutionally awkward and operationally counter-productive: ULBs have responsibility without commensurate finance or autonomy, state pollution control boards have monitoring power without ground intelligence, and the Centre has design ambition without implementation reach.

## THE INDORE LESSON

Indore has topped the Swachh Survekshan rankings for seven consecutive years not because it followed centralised diktats but because it built a ward-level, citizen-anchored system: source segregation at 100% of households, six-stream collection at the kerbside, ward-level decentralised composting, and a working biogas plant that converts wet waste into fuel for municipal buses.

The Indore model rests on three propositions: segregation must happen at source; processing must happen close to source; and the ULB must own both ends. None of this is captured in the centralised rule-book; all of it is captured in the constitutional design.

## METHANE, EPR AND THE REAL TARGETS

Two design choices in the 2026 Rules deserve close watch:

- **EPR for plastics:** the framework continues to depend on producer credits and registry-based compliance. Without independent third-party audit and consumer-facing traceability, it will go the way of the 2016 EPR experiment – paper credits, unrecycled plastic.
- **Methane targets at landfills:** India’s nationally determined contributions under the Paris framework increasingly look at non-CO<sub>2</sub> gases. Methane capture from legacy landfills is achievable and finance-ready under the [Green Climate Fund](#), but only if ULBs have the contracting power to enter long-term operations contracts.

## WHAT DECENTRALISED REFORM LOOKS LIKE

The editorial sketches a four-point agenda:

- ❶ **Constitutional fidelity:** amend the 2026 Rules to specify outcome standards rather than process prescriptions, leaving ULBs the design latitude promised under Article 243W.
- ❷ **Fifteenth Finance Commission grants** for sanitation – already conditional on solid waste compliance – must be unlocked against decentralised processing capacity, not just collection.
- ❸ **Ward-level Material Recovery Facilities** as the default unit of planning, with private and informal-sector integration of waste-pickers.
- ❹ **Articles 48A and 51A(g)** – the Directive Principle on environment and the fundamental duty to protect it – give every citizen a stake; **statutory** recognition of ward committees should institutionalise that stake.

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### GS Paper 3 – Environmental conservation, pollution / GS Paper 2 – Urban local bodies, federalism

#### Key arguments:

- SWM Rules, 2026 prescribe sound technical standards but operate top-down, in tension with Article 243W and the Twelfth Schedule.
- Centralised rule-making in a constitutionally federal sanitation domain produces paper compliance rather than ecological outcomes.
- Indore's success rests on ward-level decentralisation, source segregation and ULB ownership – not on central direction.
- Landfill methane from Kanjurmarg and Jawaharnagar is now a globally identified climate risk; capture finance is available if contracting is decentralised.

#### Counterarguments:

- Centralised standards prevent a race to the bottom across states; uniform EPR rules give producers regulatory clarity.
- ULB capacity is uneven; without central baselines, weaker municipalities will under-deliver.
- Environment is a concurrent subject; the Centre has constitutional space to legislate under the Environment (Protection) Act.

**Keywords:** SWM Rules 2026, SWM Rules 2016, four-stream segregation, 74th Amendment, Article 243W, Twelfth Schedule, Indore model, EPR for plastics, Kanjurmarg, Jawaharnagar, methane super-emitters, Article 48A, Article 51A(g), Fifteenth Finance Commission.

*The Hindu's view is that the 2026 Rules will be judged not by their architecture but by their fit with India's constitutional grain. The Centre can set ambition; only urban local bodies can deliver it. Until the Rules are rewritten to respect the federalism the Constitution wrote into Indian sanitation in 1992, the country will keep generating both world-class regulations and world-class landfills.*

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