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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

The Atom and the Liability Question: On India's Nuclear Expansion

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The Atom and the Liability Question: On India's Nuclear Expansion

 **Business Standard** 22 June 2026 **GS3**

Source: ujyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Should India dilute the supplier-liability clause in its nuclear law to attract investment, or does that compromise accountability for safety?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [Business Standard](#)

 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Progress at plants such as Kudankulam highlights nuclear power's role as clean baseload in India's energy transition. Yet the reactor pipeline has expanded slowly, and the chilling effect of the supplier-liability provision in the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, remains a major reason private and foreign investment has stayed away. As India targets net-zero, the question of scaling nuclear is urgent.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Nuclear power offers firm, low-carbon baseload that complements variable renewables on India's net-zero path. But the reactor pipeline is slow and the supplier-liability clause in the 2010 law deters vendors and foreign partners. Reform that bounds supplier risk while protecting safety, alongside opening the sector to private capital and small modular (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/modular/>) reactors, can unlock scale.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
CLNDA 2010	India's nuclear liability law	Allows recourse against suppliers, deterring vendors
Baseload power	Steady round-the-clock generation	Balances variable solar and wind
Supplier liability	Vendor exposure to damage claims	The key chilling factor for investment
Small modular reactors	Compact, scalable nuclear units	A faster route to added capacity

THE ANALYSIS: PROMISE VERSUS PIPELINE

- ❶ **Nuclear is firm clean power.** It provides the baseload that a renewables-heavy grid needs to stay reliable.
- ❷ **The pipeline has lagged targets.** Capacity has grown far slower than the ambitions set for the sector.
- ❸ **Supplier liability is the chokepoint** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/chokepoint/>). CLNDA 2010's departure from global norms made vendors and foreign partners wary of open-ended exposure.
- ❹ **Reform and opening go together.** Bounding liability and admitting private capital, plus small modular reactors, are needed to scale.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Law: *Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, with operator and supplier liability.* **Operator:** *Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL).* **Plant in focus:** *Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu (Indo-Russian cooperation).* **Regulator:** *Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/aerb-atomic-energy-regulatory-board/>)).* **Goal:** *Clean baseload toward India's net-zero by 2070 target.*

THE DEBATE

Argument for: Reforming supplier liability and opening the sector would attract investment and accelerate clean baseload essential for decarbonising the grid.

Argument against: Diluting supplier liability weakens safety accountability, and nuclear remains slower and costlier to build than renewables

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Balanced verdict: The right path bounds and clarifies supplier liability while preserving strong safety incentives, combined with a credible deployment roadmap including small modular reactors.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

When a sector underperforms its targets, trace the binding constraint rather than blaming intent. Here the constraint is legal risk, not technology or demand. Effective reform attacks the actual bottleneck while protecting the public interest the original rule was meant to serve. Identify the chokepoint before prescribing the fix.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Net-zero need for firm power -> nuclear as clean baseload -> reformed liability plus sector opening -> investment and scaled capacity

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① Reform the liability regime to bound and clarify supplier exposure in line with global conventions.
- ② Preserve robust safety accountability and operator responsibility within any reform.
- ③ Open the sector to private and foreign equity in a phased, regulated way.
- ④ Advance small modular reactors for faster, scalable deployment.
- ⑤ Publish a transparent capacity roadmap aligned with the net-zero pathway.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

Energy security (<https://ujivari.com/terms/energy-security/>), the clean-energy transition and the role of nuclear baseload. **Lift line:** “Nuclear power is too valuable to India’s clean-energy goals to leave stalled.” **Prelims hooks:** CLNDA 2010, NPCIL, AERB, Kudankulam, small modular reactors. **Ethics/Interview angle:** Balancing investment incentives against accountability for public safety. **PYQ linkage:** UPSC has asked on India’s nuclear energy programme and energy security. **Connects to:** Net-zero by 2070, energy mix, grid reliability, FDI in strategic sectors.

Sources: *Business Standard* (<https://www.business-standard.com/opinion/editorial>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in/>)

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● **KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

Nuclear power is vital clean baseload for India's net-zero path, but a stalled reactor pipeline and the supplier-liability provision of the 2010 law deter private and foreign investment.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- Nuclear offers stable low-carbon baseload that complements variable renewables.
- The supplier-liability clause in CLNDA 2010 has chilled vendor and foreign participation.
- Scaling nuclear needs both legal reform and opening the sector to private capital.

⚠ **COUNTER**

Critics argue that diluting supplier liability weakens accountability for safety and that nuclear remains slow and costly compared with renewables.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Reform the liability framework to align with global norms, open the sector to private and foreign investment, and pursue small modular reactors alongside large plants.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

'Nuclear power can provide clean baseload electricity for India's net-zero goal, yet investment remains limited. Examine the role of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, and the reforms needed to scale the sector. (250 words)'

INTRODUCTION

Milestones such as progress at Kudankulam underline nuclear power's role as clean baseload in India's energy transition. Yet the reactor pipeline has moved slowly, and a central reason is the liability regime created by the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010.

BODY

A net-zero electricity system needs firm, low-carbon power to balance variable solar and wind. Nuclear provides exactly that baseload, and India has long targeted a substantial expansion of capacity.

The obstacle is partly financial and partly legal. The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, departed from global practice by channelling liability not only to the operator but also allowing recourse against suppliers in defined cases.

This supplier-liability provision, intended to protect citizens after Bhopal-era anxieties, made equipment vendors and foreign partners wary of unlimited exposure, slowing deals and keeping private capital out of a state-dominated sector. Reform proposals include capping and clarifying supplier liability in line with international conventions and opening the sector to private and foreign equity, alongside interest in small modular reactors that promise faster, scalable deployment.

The counter-case is that diluting liability weakens accountability for safety and that nuclear remains slow and costly. The resolution lies in balance: a liability regime that protects victims and preserves safety incentives while giving investors predictable, bounded risk, paired with sectoral opening and a clear deployment roadmap.

CONCLUSION

Nuclear power is too valuable to India's clean-energy goals to leave stalled. A reformed, predictable liability framework and an opened sector can convert the atom's promise into actual low-carbon capacity.


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