



# CURRENT AFFAIRS FOR UPSC

6TH TO 12TH JULY 2025

DREAMIAS





## INTERNATIONAL

### WHAT WILL BE EFFECT OF RISING MILITARY SPENDING?

#### The story so far:

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in June pledged to increase military spending to 5% of the member nations' GDP (specifically "core defence requirements as well as defence and security-related spending by 2035"). The previous spending target was 2%. Such a move is symptomatic of the sharp increase in global military spending in the last few years.

#### What has been the historical trajectory of military expenditures?

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which produces the most comprehensive database on military spending, global military spending was \$2,718 billion in 2024. The year saw a 9.4% increase, which was the highest year-on-year increase since 1988, with the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Gaza conflict contributing to it. In 2025, the world saw two big additional conflicts, between India and Pakistan, and Israel and Iran. This, combined with the NATO pledge, will see further increases in global military spending in the coming years.

Historically, the Cold War period saw the highest amounts of global military spending. It was 6.1% of the world's GDP in 1960. In the last year of the Cold War, it was at 3%. It reached its lowest levels in 1998 at 2.1% (a total expenditure of around \$1,100 billion). In 2024, it reached 2.5% (from 2.3% in 2015).

#### Who are the biggest military spenders?

The United States is the biggest military spender in the world with \$997 billion, followed by China at \$314 billion, Russia at \$149 billion, Germany at \$88.5 billion and India at \$86.1 billion — these nations are the top five military spenders. Almost 80% of the total worldwide military spending is spent by the top 15 military spenders. All of the NATO members (32) combined spent \$1,506 billion, which makes it around 55% of global military spending. Thus, there is a concentration of spending in a few countries.

In terms of GDP percentage, among the top 20 spenders (excluding countries at war such as Russia, Ukraine and Israel), the highest spenders include Saudi Arabia (7.3%), Poland (4.2%) and the U.S. (3.4%). The rest fall in the range of 2.6% to 1.3%.

#### What about the expenditure on other public goods?

The present wave of remilitarisation threatens to eliminate the gains made from declining military expenditures after the end of the Cold War.

According to the Global Peace Index, in 2023, militarisation increased in 108 countries and the year saw the highest number of conflicts since World War II. Of course, military spending, driven by the military-industrial complex, can benefit certain sectors of the economy. Yet, as studies show (for example, by Masako Ikegami and Zijian Wang, based on 116 countries), there is a significant crowding-out effect that increased military spending has on domestic government health spending, the effects of which are borne more by middle- and low-income countries. But even high-income countries are not immune. Spain, which spends only 1.24% of GDP on defence, asserted its sovereignty and opted out of the new NATO target citing that it is "unreasonable" and



that the extra burden of 300 billion euros will cut welfare spending. It should be noted that nine NATO members failed to meet even the 2% target by 2024 despite it being proposed first in 2002.

#### **What about the UN?**

The present military spending of \$2.7 trillion and its scale can be understood only by placing it in the context of other critical global expenditures. The latest budget of the United Nations is only \$44 billion — with which it should fund development, humanitarian aid, and peacekeeping operations. But the UN, in six months, has only received \$6 billion, and as a result, is seeking to reduce the budget to \$29 billion. In the 12-day Israel-Iran war, the U.S. is estimated to have spent nearly \$1 billion on missile interceptors alone.

The U.S., under President Donald Trump, seeking to cut foreign aid is the major cause of the UN funding crisis. While Mr. Trump wants to be known as a peace-making President, he has pushed NATO to adopt the 5% military spending target and has closed down the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which provided annual assistance to the tune of \$50-60 billion worldwide in the few years until the Russian-Ukraine war. A Lancet study found that USAID assistance in healthcare, nutrition, etc., prevented 91 million deaths in low- and middle-income countries in the past two decades, and that Mr. Trump's decision could potentially cause a staggering 14 million additional deaths by 2030, a third of them being children. It demonstrates that peace is not just the absence of war, but also the material conditions for the healthy sustenance of life.

Additionally, increased defence spending is upending the progress of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is estimated that ending extreme poverty and absolute monetary poverty globally by 2030 would need \$70 billion and \$325 billion respectively per year. It constitutes only 0.1% and 0.6% of the gross national income of high-income countries. The UN estimates that in 2021, around 4.5 billion people did not have full coverage of essential health services, and, that even spending just \$1 per person yearly on preventing non-communicable diseases could save nearly seven million lives by 2030.

Increased military spending has deleterious effects on another SDG as well — combating climate change.

According to a study by the Conflict and Environment Observatory, if NATO's defence spending reached 3.5% of GDP, greenhouse gas emissions would increase 200 million tonnes annually. When the world is seeing unprecedented heatwaves, and with 2024 being the hottest year on record, increased military spending will only divert scarce resources from climate mitigation, and other pressing public goods.

#### **How is India affected by increased military spending?**

Close to home, after Operation Sindoor, ₹50,000 crore was additionally sanctioned (to supplement the annual budget of ₹6.81 lakh crore) for emergency defence purchases to replenish used weaponry.

To put it in perspective, funds allocated by the centre for Ayushman Bharat health insurance which covers 58 crore people was ₹7,200 crore for 2023-24. India spends 2.3% of GDP on the military whereas the public expenditure on health, despite increasing in recent years, is very low. It is 1.84% of the GDP, less than the 2.5% target of the National Health Policy, and much less than the 10% mark of most developed countries. In the light of heightened tensions and public



sentiment being in favour of militarisation, spending on other public goods might suffer. Military conflicts and spending can be ruinous for middle- and low-income countries. Lebanon spent 29% of its GDP, and Ukraine 34%, on military spending last year.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte stated that “We must spend more, to prevent war.” The present proposed increase is, according to NATO, mainly to counter Russia. Scholars note of the huge disparity between Russia and NATO: Russia’s economy is 25 times smaller and military spending, 10 times lesser. This shows how fear-mongering can be used by leadership to militarise society further.

If the NATO pledge does indeed become a reality, the consequences for human well-being will be enormous.

### ELON MUSK’S BREAK UP ROUTINE: A BRAND NEW POLITICAL PARTY

After the breakup comes the glow-up. Two people have a falling-out, harsh words are exchanged, and at least one of the parties sets out to show that they can do better. In the case of two rich and powerful men duking it out in public, following one of the most predictable separations in recent history — the White House can simultaneously accommodate only so many egos above a certain size, after all — the stakes are that much bigger. The others can keep their post-breakup revenge dresses and bright red sports cars: Bolstered by the response to a Fourth of July poll on his social media platform X, Elon Musk has minted himself a whole new political party as a challenge to former BFF Donald Trump and his Republican Party.

Musk has a history of using polls on X to make major decisions, whether it was buying Twitter or reinstating Trump’s account on the platform. Politics, however, requires more than just an online constituency of bots and fans. But there is another reason Musk’s chosen form of payback is surprising. Just before relinquishing his position as head of the Department of Government Efficiency, the billionaire had been candid in his appraisal of politics in Washington, DC, describing it as a “pain” in interviews. That his companies, especially Tesla, apparently paid the price for his political preoccupations didn’t help either.

Already, the announcement of Musk’s new America Party has seen Tesla stocks tumble, threatening to wipe nearly \$70 billion off the firm’s value. As he resumes his hostile exchanges with the US President — who has dismissed the formation of the new party as “ridiculous” — Musk’s decision seems less a well-considered attempt to disrupt politics as usual, and more the kind of angry riposte more frequently seen on a school playground.

### THE NUCLEAR POLICEMAN

On July 2, Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian ordered his country to suspend cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN’s nuclear watchdog. He explained this decision as “a natural response to the unjustified, unconstructive, and destructive conduct” of the IAEA’s Director General Rafael Grossi.

Tehran believes Mr. Grossi cleared the ground for Israel’s unprovoked strikes on its nuclear facilities by preparing a “misleading” report on Iran’s compliance with non-proliferation obligations. On the basis of this report, the IAEA’s Board of Governors on June 12, one day before Israel’s attack, adopted a resolution stating that Iran had “failed to cooperate fully” with the Agency and accused it of “repeatedly failing to provide the Agency with technically credible



explanations” to its various queries. Israel and the U.S. used this resolution to push forward the narrative that Iran was on the verge of making a nuclear bomb and the only way to stop it was to destroy its nuclear installations through “pre-emptive” military strikes.

Subsequently, after Israel struck Iran’s nuclear sites, Mr. Grossi made a clarification that seemed to walk back the impression created by the June 12 resolution. In an interview with CNN, he said, “We did not have any proof of a systematic effort by Iran to make a nuclear weapon.” A spokesperson of Iran’s Ministry of External Affairs shared the video clip of Mr. Grossi’s interview on social media with the comment, “This is too late, Mr. Grossi: you obscured this truth in your absolutely biased report...Do you know how many innocent Iranians have been killed/maimed as a result of this criminal war? You’ve made IAEA a partner to this unjust war of aggression.”

## STOP THE SLAUGHTER

In his third White House visit in six months, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on Monday, heaped praise on U.S. President Donald Trump for his “pursuit of peace and security... in the Middle East” and even nominated him for a Nobel Peace Prize but stopped short of making any commitment on the most pressing issue in West Asia today — a ceasefire in Gaza. While indirect talks between Hamas representatives and Israel continue in Doha, Israel appears to be readying the forcible relocation of Palestinians to the south of Gaza. Defence Minister Israel Katz says he has instructed the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to come up with a plan to relocate the entire population of Gaza, of 2.3 million people, to the ruins of Rafah, which the Israelis call a “new humanitarian city”. There were reports in the Israeli media about the IDF chief, Eyal Zamir, opposing the plan, saying that “the hungry and angry” Palestinians “could turn on the IDF”. The IDF killing dozens of Palestinians, including children, in Gaza is a daily occurrence; starving civilians are shot down in aid centres. Doctors who served in Gaza in the past 20 months have horror stories of babies being starved to death or bodies of children being brought to hospitals with sniper wounds in their heads. None of this moves Mr. Netanyahu and his backers in the West, including Mr. Trump, who calls himself “a man of peace”.

Mr. Trump had said before the meeting that he would be “very firm” with Mr. Netanyahu on the need for a ceasefire. But words alone are not enough. Mr. Trump has the leverage to compel Israel to accept a ceasefire in Gaza. He demonstrated his influence in the final hours of the Iran-Israel war, publicly demanding that Tel Aviv turn back its fighter jets that had taken off to bomb Iran. Israel complied, after carrying out only a symbolic strike. Today’s Israel is dependent on the U.S. as ever before. During the war on Iran, Israel had to rely on America for offensive and defensive support. Israel needs American weapons to continue its devastating war in Gaza. And Mr. Netanyahu, who is facing an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity, needs American political and diplomatic backing to continue his wars across West Asia with impunity. If the U.S. continues to support Israel and refuses to use its leverage to end the Gaza war, it will be condemned by future historians and fact-finders as a country that was complicit in Israel’s crimes against Palestinians. There are no excuses for Israel to prolong this brutal war, which has killed an estimated 70,000 people in 20 months. The slaughter must stop, and Israel must be held accountable for its crimes.

## STIFLING A SANE VOICE

The U.S. decision to impose sanctions on a United Nations Special Rapporteur for her criticism of Israel’s war in Gaza has been called a “dangerous precedent” by the UN and top UN Human Rights



Council officials. The comments followed U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's announcement that Francesca Albanese, a "Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in occupied Palestinian Territories since 1967", would face restrictions as a result of her engagement with the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC has already been sanctioned by U.S. President Donald Trump in an executive order, shortly after he took office. While the scope of the sanctions are still unclear, they are understood to include travel and visa bans, and possible asset freezes for Ms. Albanese, who has drawn American ire with a report in June that urged international organisations to prosecute corporate entities and multinationals whose work helps fund the war. Ms. Albanese has frequently accused Israel of conducting the "cruellest genocide" in Gaza, as well as its takeover of the Gaza Strip. She has also been calling for scrutiny of the "Gaza Humanitarian Foundation", a U.S.-Israeli NGO. The U.S. actions have no doubt been spurred by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's latest visit to Washington, where he announced that his government would nominate Mr. Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Amidst the rising death toll in Gaza and no ceasefire or deal for the return of Israeli hostages in sight, Washington's focus on a UN official is absurd and outrageous. Ms. Albanese's work is mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, and the U.S. actions undermine the global multilateral world order by calling those actions criminal. It is irrational to hold her responsible for the warrants and orders issued by the ICC and the International Court of Justice, which have heard testimonies from representatives of at least 40 states and international organisations on petitions calling for action against Israel. Mr. Rubio's contention, that Ms. Albanese should be sanctioned for engaging with the ICC to prosecute U.S. and Israeli nationals "without the consent of those two countries", is not legally valid. Further, his allegations that she "has spewed unabashed antisemitism [and] expressed support for terrorism" are not borne out by facts. As global outrage over Israel's killing of Palestinians, and the U.S. support for those actions, grows louder, as well as the BRICS summit condemnation this week, that India too joined, it is time for the U.S. to look in the mirror. The need is to effect an immediate ceasefire, and not in bringing the considerable might of the most powerful country to bear over one individual, in order to silence her voice.

# DreamIAS



## NATIONAL

### BUILDING RESILIENCE

The 17th Summit of BRICS emerging economies, which ended on Monday, came at a time when the organisation was in the global spotlight. This was the first such meeting that included all the newly inducted members (Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, Iran and Indonesia; Saudi Arabia has not joined so far). It also followed the U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran's nuclear programme, and the escalation in Israel's bombardment of Gaza. This was the first summit since the four-day India-Pakistan conflict in May and also after the G-7 summit in Canada. The BRICS grouping, seen as the next challenger to the global financial order, is in U.S. President Donald Trump's cross-hairs, as he sees it mounting an alternative to the dollar in international trade. In addition, the group has several internal rivalries that have brought its sustainability into question. In April, the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting ended without a joint statement, as the African members held up the wording on the expansion of the UN Security Council. Meanwhile, despite India's clarification in March that it is not considering de-dollarisation of trade in any form, and that there is no "unified BRICS position" on the issue, Brazil's President Lula da Silva doubled down on rhetoric against the U.S., saying that BRICS proves the world "doesn't need an emperor". Mr. Trump has since repeated threats that BRICS countries would face an extra 10% tariffs due to the grouping's "anti-American stance" — an awkward moment for New Delhi as it attempts to conclude a trade agreement with Washington.

Despite all the challenges, the Rio declaration underlined the basic cohesion and consensus within BRICS members on a range of issues. In the joint statement, there was strong language against the attacks on Gaza and condemnation of the strikes on Iran, given the risks to nuclear safety. India was able to ensure a paragraph with tough language condemning the Pahalgam terror attack and references to terror financing and "cross-border movement of terrorists". India and Brazil won endorsements of the whole grouping on playing a larger role at the UN, "including the Security Council". The absence of the Chinese and Russian Presidents allowed more space for the non-P5 countries to promote a common vision for the Global South, adding several important resolutions on energy security, climate change and re-ordering the WTO. The Rio declaration also took a stern view of the U.S.'s moves on tariffs. As India prepares for its leadership of the BRICS grouping next year, that now represents about half the global population, around 40% of the global GDP and a quarter of global trade, it can move forward with this consensus, fulfilling the vision for the grouping's acronym that Mr. Modi recast as "Building Resilience and Innovation for Cooperation and Sustainability".

### COMMON GOALS

On his way to Brazil to attend the ongoing BRICS summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made back-to-back bilateral visits to Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Argentina. Each stop was with a view to enhancing bilateral cooperation in fields which included some common themes on pharmaceuticals and vaccines, digital technology, food security and critical minerals. In Accra, India-Ghana ties were upgraded to a comprehensive partnership, with discussions on helping Ghana become a "vaccine hub" for West Africa. In the Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, there was a major MoU on "Indian pharmacopeia", to improve access to quality and affordable generic medicines from India. In Buenos Aires, President Javier Milei agreed to enhance cooperation on critical minerals as well as Argentina's vast reserves of shale gas and oil, while India pitched its pharma to Argentina. The three stops were in countries of the "developing world" or the Global

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South, and the onward journey to Brazil, and then to Namibia, also highlight India's commitment to building alternative economic mechanisms to the "developed world" or Global North. India's offer of cooperation for low-cost solutions to global challenges includes the promotion of India-led international organisations such as the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) to these countries. Mr. Modi also made his signature pitch to the Indian diaspora — his speech in the Port of Spain, where Indian labour was brought by British colonial ventures since 1845, is one to note. Referring to the Indian ancestry of President Christine Carla Kangaloo and Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Mr. Modi said that the 35 million Indian diaspora worldwide were India's "pride".

It is also impossible to escape the deep connections between India and the five nations in terms of political history. Each country shares a bond — colonies that suffered under British, Spanish, Portuguese and German forces — and why some of them joined the Non-Aligned Movement. They have all, at various points, committed to building South-South cooperation, and India and Brazil's role in founding the BRIC mechanism, along with Russia and China, and IBSA with South Africa, was an outcome, strongly pitching the interests of the Global South. None of the countries on the tour can be called "anti-West", and New Delhi has had some differences with them over specific conflicts (Ukraine and Gaza). The motivating force behind the ties, however, and consequently Mr. Modi's nine-day itinerary, is more about a common desire to look beyond the present global order to one that is more equal, representative, and sensitive to the needs of developing and under-developed nations.

#### IN INDIA'S GLOBAL SOUTH OUTREACH, GIVE-AND-TAKE, AND A DELICATE BALANCE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Brazil for the BRICS leaders' summit was one of the longest he has made in the last 11 years.

- India has taken a much more pronounced pro-Israel position especially since the war in Gaza started after the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas. This has been noticed by the developing countries, now collectively referred to as the Global South.
- One of the first impacts was felt at the election for the UNESCO Executive Board vice chair in November 2023, in which Pakistan defeated India with the support of Global South countries.
- Days later, the Second Voice of the Global South summit hosted by India witnessed a lesser participation of top leaders than at the First Voice of the Global South summit in January that year.
- Several developing countries perceived India as positioning itself in the major powers' club, taking a position in favour of Israel, and not criticising its actions in Gaza.
- At the BRICS foreign ministers' meeting in Russia in June 2024, India joined in grouping in expressing "grave concern at the deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular the unprecedented escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip as a result of the Israeli military operation that led to mass civilian displacement, death and casualties, and destruction of civilian infrastructure".

#### Do You Know:

- The term 'Global South' has since been used multiple times, such as when Jaishankar said of ongoing global conflicts, "polarisation may occur elsewhere, the people who suffer most are the Global South".



- ‘Global North’ refers loosely to countries like the US, Canada, Europe, Russia, Australia and New Zealand, while ‘Global South’ includes countries in Asia, Africa and South America.
- For a long time in the study of international political systems, the method of categorising countries into broad categories for easier analysis has existed. The concepts of ‘East’ and ‘West’ is one example of this, with the Western countries generally signifying greater levels of economic development and prosperity among their people, and Eastern countries considered as being in the process of that transition. Another similar categorisation is of First World, Second World and Third World countries, referring to countries associated with the Cold war-era alliances of the US, the USSR, and non-aligned countries, respectively.
- At the centre of these concepts is the World Systems approach introduced by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein in 1974, emphasising an interconnected perspective of looking at world politics.
- In the post-Cold War world, the First World/Third World classification was no longer feasible, because when the Communist USSR disintegrated in 1991, most countries had no choice but to ally at some level with the capitalist US – the only remaining global superpower.
- What sets the terms Global North and South apart are that first, they are arguably more accurate in grouping like countries together, measuring similarly in terms of wealth, indicators of education and healthcare, etc. Another commonality between the South countries is that most have a history of colonisation, largely at the hands of European powers.

#### FATF: ONLINE SITES USED FOR TERROR ATTACKS IN PULWAMA, GORAKHNATH

The FATF report, without naming any country, noted it had received reports from its delegations about the use of state sponsorship for terrorist financing, as fundraising technique or as part of the financial management strategy of certain organisations engaging in terrorist acts.

- Citing the use of online payment services, virtual private networks (VPNs) and e-commerce platforms in the terror attacks in Pulwama in February 2019 and Gorakhnath Temple in April 2022, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), in a report released Tuesday, said digital platforms such as social media, messaging applications and crowdfunding sites are increasingly being abused for terror financing.
- The FATF report, without naming any country, noted it had received reports from its delegations about the use of state sponsorship for terrorist financing (TF), either as fundraising technique or as part of the financial management strategy of certain organisations engaging in terrorist acts.
- A variety of publicly available sources of information and delegations’ inputs to the report indicate that “certain terrorist organisations have been and continue to receive financial and other forms of support from several national governments,” it said.
- Schemes involving several commodities have also been reported, for instance, oil shipped to an intermediary country to be sold in gold, with gold later converted to cash in another jurisdiction, the report said.
- The FATF flagged the decentralisation of terror operations, with regional financial hubs and self-financed cells, adapting to local contexts, and involving a range of funding sources – from criminal proceeds to investments in business activities.



#### Do You Know:

- In an earlier statement released in June this year, the FATF had condemned the “brutal terrorist attack” in Pahalgam on April 22, noting that such attacks cannot occur “without money and the means to move funds between terrorist supporters”. The FATF had then stated it planned to come out with an analysis of terrorist financing, compiling cases by its global network.
- The FATF also detailed the use of online payment service and VPNs to fund lone-actor terrorist acts in the instance of the attack on security personnel at Gorakhnath Temple in April 2022.
- An individual influenced by ISIL’s ideology attacked security personnel, and the financial investigation revealed that the individual had transferred Rs 6,69,841 (\$7,685) via PayPal to foreign countries in support of ISIL, using international third-party transactions and using VPN services to obscure the IP address. He had also received Rs 10,323.35 (\$188) from a foreign source, the report said.
- The forensic report revealed that the accused had been using a VPN for calling, chatting and downloading to evade detection. “Further financial scrutiny uncovered that the accused had made a payment to a VPN provider through his bank account to secure these services.
- The FATF also flagged decentralisation as one of the most reported trends for worldwide terrorism activities in recent years. For instance, Al-Qaeda over the past years used a centralised consultation council, known as Majlis al-Shura, to manage key strategic decisions, including financial management. Now it has shifted to a decentralised model, with regional bodies such as Al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS) conducting operations and generating funds locally.

#### ESCAPE FROM TIBET: HOW NEHRU, DESPITE CONCERNS, GRANTED THE DALAI LAMA ASYLUM

Varinder Bhatia writes- “In the history of Tibet and Indo-China relationship, April 26, 1959, was a turning point. Having fled his homeland following China’s invasion, the Dalai Lama met Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who declared that the spiritual and political leader of Tibetan Buddhists “should be allowed to live in peace” in India.”

- “On Wednesday, the Dalai Lama, who turns 90 on July 6, reiterated that the institution would continue and only his Gaden Phodrang Foundation would have the authority to recognise the reincarnation, ending uncertainty on whether he will have a successor or not after his death.”
- The Dalai Lama, who is the 14th to hold the title, made the announcement from Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh, where all those decades ago he set up the Tibetan government-in-exile. At the time, following his arrival in the country, Nehru had told the public that the Tibetan spiritual leader “had to undertake a very big and difficult journey” before meeting him.
- “The journey up to that point was long and arduous. Following China’s occupation of Tibet and the violent repression that followed, the Dalai Lama and several other Tibetans left for India. The Dalai Lama, his family members, bodyguards, and fellow Tibetans were received by Indian border guards at the Khenzimane Pass in Arunachal Pradesh on March 31, 1959. On April 2, Indian government officials formally welcomed him at the Chutangmu outpost on April 2, 1959, and took him to the Tawang monastery. The following day, the Nehru government announced it had granted the Dalai Lama political asylum.”



- “The Dalai Lama eventually moved to Tezpur in Assam, where he released his first statement from Indian soil. On April 18, 1959, he criticised China for shelling the Norbulingka Palace, one of his residences in Lhasa, the month before. He expressed his deep gratitude to the Government of India and thanked the Indian public for their “spontaneous and generous welcome”. In the same statement, the Dalai Lama mentioned he came to India “of my own free will and not under duress”.”
- “For Nehru, too, it was not all smooth sailing when it came to granting the Dalai Lama asylum. The PM faced immense criticism, with many warning him of the consequences of “antagonising China”.”
- “The day the Dalai Lama released the statement from Tezpur, China officially lodged its protest, accusing India of meddling in its internal affairs. Beijing insisted that the Dalai Lama “be returned”. That laid the foundation of a future deterioration of Indo-China relations and eventually led to the 1962 Sino-Indian war.”
- “Nehru, however, cited “moral and humanitarian” grounds to allow the Dalai Lama entry into India and also the decision to grant him political asylum.”
- “After Tezpur, the Dalai Lama lived in Mussoorie (now in Uttarakhand) for several months. In 1960, upon the invitation of the government, he moved to McLeodganj in Dharamshala and has been there since then, with the town becoming the centre for Tibetan cultural and political activities in exile.”

**Do You Know:**

- Despite effortless integration of cultures and communities, the Tibetan issue has always been a sensitive one for India, Tibet and China since the early 1950s. While then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru welcomed waves of embattled Tibetans and granted the Dalai Lama asylum in 1959, even in the face of immense criticism and fears of “antagonising China”, after the India-China war in 1962, Delhi has been cautious about its public pronouncements on the Dalai Lama.
- Since then, the Indian government has adopted a more nuanced position. While maintaining that the Dalai Lama is a “revered religious leader and is deeply respected by the people of India” and that he has “all the freedom to carry out his religious activities in India”, Delhi doesn’t officially support the Tibetan community’s political activism in India.
- More so now, when India and China are working towards normalising the bilateral relationship after a tense border standoff since 2020. On July 4, the Ministry of External Affairs released a carefully worded statement saying the government “does not take any position or speak on matters concerning beliefs and practices of faith and religion. The Government has always upheld freedom of religion for all in India and will continue to do so.”
- Panchsheel: The Panchsheel Agreement, formally known as The Agreement on Trade and Intercourse with Tibet Region, was signed on April 29, 1954, by N Raghavan, the Indian Ambassador to China, and Zhang Han-Fu, China’s Foreign Minister. The preamble of the Panchsheel Treaty lay down five guiding principles:

- 1) Mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- 2) Mutual non-aggression;



- 3) Mutual non-interference;
- 4) Equality and mutual benefit; and
- 5) Peaceful co-existence.

- The agreement aimed to enhance trade and cooperation between the two countries, establishing each country's trade centres in major cities of the other, and laid out a framework for trade. The agreement also listed important religious pilgrimages, provisions for pilgrims, and acceptable routes and passes available to them.

Importantly, India for the first time recognised Tibet as the Tibet Region of China.

Note:

China has protested Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's birthday greetings to the Dalai Lama and the participation of Indian ministers in his 90th birthday celebrations in Dharamshala. The Chinese Foreign Ministry criticized the gesture, calling the Dalai Lama a separatist and urging India to respect its commitments on Tibet (referred to as 'Xizang' by China). Although India's Ministry of External Affairs did not confirm receiving a formal protest, government sources noted that Indian PMs have historically extended birthday wishes to the Dalai Lama. This marks China's second objection in recent days over official recognition of the Dalai Lama's birthday.

## THE TRUST OF DALAI LAMA

The 14th Dalai Lama's announcement in Dharamshala this week, asserting for the first time that the line will continue after him, was welcomed by followers of Tibetan Buddhism and fans of its Spiritual leader worldwide. However, it was his statement that the succession would be decided by the Gaden Phodrang Trust, which would be the "sole authority" on the issue, that has sparked a sharp response from Beijing, which believes it must be given the right to "approve" the candidate.

In an ironic twist for the Communist Party-led Chinese government in Beijing, it cites a Qing dynasty tradition, used a few times, of picking the Dalai Lama successor through lots from a "Golden Urn", as the method it hopes to follow. For the Dalai Lama, who has lived in India since 1959, when he fled Lhasa years after the Chinese annexed Tibet in 1951, it will be the Gaden Phodrang trust he set up in 2011, which he heads, along with an alternate Chairperson, who is also one of the most respected lamas in the community, Samdhong Rimpoche, that will take the call.

While the trust was formally set up and registered in Dharamshala in the previous decade, the institution of Gaden Phodrang Labrang goes back hundreds of years, and refers to the office of the Dalai Lama as a continuing institution from the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. Gaden Phodrang was the name of the Tibetan government, established by the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso or 'the Great Fifth', as both the Spiritual and Political head of a unified Tibet. It was coined from the name of the historical estate of the Dalai Lamas at the Drepung Monastery.

### Separation of powers

In 2011, the 14th Dalai Lama set up the Gaden Phodrang Trust as he decided to separate the Spiritual and Political powers of his post. "I have now voluntarily brought this [unified power] to an end, proud and satisfied that we can pursue the kind of democratic system of government

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flourishing elsewhere in the world”, he said, handing over the responsibility for the welfare and governance of the Tibetan community worldwide to the Sikyong, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and the Tibetan Parliament in Exile that are elected every five years.

Within his own office, the Office of His Holiness The Dalai Lama (OHHDL), he set up the Gaden Phodrang Trust to ensure the continuity of spiritual and traditional issues, and the Dalai Lama Trust that undertakes charitable and welfare initiatives. Another branch, the Gaden Phodrang Foundation, was set up as a “non-profit, tax-exempt institution registered in the Canton of Zurich and under the supervision of the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs” to promote non-violence and increase synergies between religion and science. “There should be no confusion, the Gaden Phodrang Trust that His Holiness (Dalai Lama) referred to is an entity in India,” said Dhundup Gyampo, Secretary of the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New Delhi.

According to the Dalai Lama’s 2011 statement, which he has now reaffirmed, officers of the Gaden Phodrang Trust would bear the responsibility to recognise the 15th Dalai Lama — by a process he would leave written instructions about. This would include consulting various heads of Tibetan Buddhist traditions, seeking advice from them on the procedures required to search for the next Dalai Lama, believed to be reborn or reincarnated from the present one. In his latest book, Voice for the Voiceless, he has also said that given the role the next Dalai Lama must fill, it is necessary that his successor be born in the “free world”, meaning outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China.

At a press conference in Dharamshala ahead of the Dalai Lama’s 90th birthday (July 6), Prof. Rimpoche said that the announcement has clarified the task ahead of the Gaden Phodrang Trust. He added however that there may be some time before it needs to fulfil its mandate, particularly as the pontiff, who he said is in “good health”, himself has said he expects to live to 110 years.

#### LAW ON PHONE-TAPPING, AND TWO HC RULINGS

Both the Madras and Delhi High Court cases involved “preventing incitement to the commission of an offence”, which is one of the valid grounds in law for authorising phone tapping.

- Both courts separately examined the nature of economic offences to determine if they could be deemed as “public emergency” or “public safety.” While the Delhi High Court upheld the interception order, the Madras High Court quashed it.
- DELHI HC: On June 26, the Delhi High Court rejected the plea of an accused who challenged a trial court’s order accepting evidence gathered by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) through phone-tapping.
- Madras HC: The Madras High Court on July 2 quashed an interception order issued by the MHA in 2011 for intercepting the phone of an accused in a bribery case. The accused was allegedly attempting to pay a bribe of Rs 50 lakh to a senior Income Tax officer to help the accused hide undisclosed taxable income.

#### Do You Know:

- The government’s powers to intercept communication is laid down in and circumscribed by three pieces of legislation.

—The Indian Post Office Act, 1898 allows for the interception of communication through post;



—The Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 is used for tapping voice calls; and

—The Information Technology Act, 2000 governs the interception of WhatsApp messages, emails, etc.

- The 140-year-old Telegraph Act was originally meant for intercepting telegrams, but over the years it has been expanded to include telephonic conversations. Section 5(2) of the Act states that both state and central governments can, “on the occurrence of any public emergency, or in the interest of the public safety”, authorise interception.
- Given that the right to free speech and the right to privacy are fundamental rights, any encroachment on these rights through surveillance is only permissible on narrow constitutional grounds.
- These grounds — the interest of the sovereignty, and integrity of India; the security of the state; friendly relations with foreign states; public order; or preventing incitement to the commission of an offence — are enumerated as “reasonable restrictions” under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.
- Section 5(2) of the Act also mentions these grounds for authorising interception. For actions to be deemed a threat to “public emergency, or in the interest of the public safety” and allow for interception, they have to necessarily fall into one of the reasonable restrictions.

#### COURT STAYS RELEASE OF UDAIPUR FILES, REFERS PETITIONERS TO CENTRE

The controversy surrounding the yet-to-be-released film *Udaipur Files* has thrown up difficult but important questions about the limits of artistic freedom, the role of the state in regulating sensitive content, and the increasing polarization of public discourse in India.

Inspired by the gruesome 2022 murder of Kanhaiya Lal in Udaipur—an incident that deeply shook the nation—the film aims to reconstruct the event and its broader implications. However, its portrayal has triggered legal, political, and social debate. The Delhi High Court had earlier stayed its release, citing potential risks to communal harmony. The Supreme Court, too, refused to lift the stay, emphasizing the need for restraint in a sensitive atmosphere like the ongoing Kanwar Yatra.

At the core of this debate lies a constitutional balancing act. On the one hand is the filmmaker’s right to freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a); on the other is the state’s responsibility to maintain public order and uphold communal peace, as outlined in Article 19(2). The government’s recommendation of six modifications—including the removal of AI-generated execution visuals and character name changes—points to a recognition that artistic freedom cannot be absolute when public emotions are at stake.

Adding to the complexity is the political backdrop. Statements from leaders like Rajasthan Minister Jogaram Patel, who warned that the film could “shake the ground” beneath previous administrations, suggest the film may also be used as a political weapon. This politicization of cinema risks diverting attention from larger issues like radicalization, law and order failures, and rehabilitation of victims’ families.

India’s cultural space has always thrived on bold storytelling, including that which unsettles the comfortable. But when narratives are crafted around real, recent trauma—especially those with communal overtones—they must be handled with empathy, nuance, and a commitment to truth



rather than provocation. Films like *Udaipur Files* can serve as powerful reminders of justice and accountability—but only if they rise above propaganda and sensationalism.

As the Supreme Court prepares for its next hearing on July 24, the case presents an opportunity to set legal precedents not just for *Udaipur Files*, but for all future works that walk the tightrope between freedom and responsibility. In a democracy, both must coexist—not in conflict, but in careful calibration. The challenge is to ensure that neither truth is suppressed, nor peace endangered.

#### ROW OVER REUTERS ACCOUNTS POINTS TO UNREASONABLE RESTRICTIONS ON FREE SPEECH

On Saturday night, X (formerly Twitter) blocked the two official accounts of a global news wire service in India “in response to a legal demand”. Soon after, a Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology spokesperson insisted that the government had made no such demand, it had reportedly asked for some posts of Reuters to be taken down on May 7 and 8, during Operation Sindoor. The accounts were restored shortly after. X, however, insists that it was acting on a notice from the Centre, and Reuters handles were among the over 2,000 that it was instructed to block. The quarrel over who was responsible — the Government of India or the social media platform — for blocking Reuters accounts flags larger issues, not least the ease and frequency with which takedowns are being ordered. They raise questions about unreasonable restrictions on free speech and whether many such orders violate Supreme Court judgments, including in the landmark Shreya Singhal case.

There are occasions when posts and even accounts may be legitimately taken down. False information and images that incite violence, particularly when they risk making a precarious situation, such as a communal riot, worse. There can be circumstances when national security is at stake that may require intervention by the government on what is posted online. Examples of misinformation and disinformation in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack underscore that in every conflict, now, the digital sphere is a front. Having said that, takedown orders must be the exception and not the rule. And they must conform to the letter and spirit of Article 19. Section 73(b) of the IT Act is particularly problematic — central and state governments of various political hues have issued takedown orders under this provision. Whether or not it constitutes a violation of the Shreya Singhal judgment — which struck down Section 66A as unconstitutional — is currently being heard by the Karnataka High Court. However, by any reckoning, blanket orders that seek to censor thousands of accounts at a time constitute state overreach.

Governments must realise that “reasonable restrictions” on free speech must be infrequent, justifiable and narrowly defined. Blanket orders are blunt instruments — they will likely do little to curb bad actors, who have various means at their disposal, such as dummy accounts, bots, etc., while sending a chilling signal vis-à-vis a fundamental right in a constitutional democracy. Episodes such as the controversy over the Reuters handles dent the government’s credibility. Going forward, it should not issue orders that are so broad, and target so many accounts that it invites distrust about its intentions on free speech.

#### EXPRESS VIEW ON MAHARASHTRA SPECIAL PUBLIC SECURITY BILL: CALL IT BACK

There are salient differences between Left Wing Extremism (LWE) — which has been flagged by successive governments at the Centre and in the states as a grave internal security threat — and “urban Maoism”. The former, an insurgency against the state, has targeted security forces,

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government officials, civilians and politicians and invited a whole-of-government response that includes armed engagement, development work and a host of other policies and actions. The latter is a political term of relatively recent vintage that has been deployed controversially against activists, students and academics who have expressed dissent with the dominant ideology or political establishment. Disturbingly, the Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, passed by the lower House, conflates the two. Its loosely defined scope and stringent provisions raise spectres of state overreach and misuse. Armed with vague and opaque definitions, it invites the danger of blurring the lines between extremist violence and non-violent dissent.

The Bill fails the test established by the Supreme Court as far back as 1962 in *Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar*. Words and ideas, no matter how critical of the government, even the state itself, do not constitute sedition or a crime unless they can be directly linked to an incitement to violence. The Bill provides for a jail term of up to seven years for “any action” that is “spoken or written” or “by visual representation” that can be construed as a “danger to peace and tranquillity” or interferes with “maintenance of public order”, and it allows for attaching the property of an accused. In this respect, it is more stringent than the most controversial sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Democracy, in practice, is the right to speak and write, to draw and debate, to disagree and criticise. The Constitution recognises this in its guarantees of the fundamental rights to speech and expression. The Special Public Security Act violates that promise in letter and spirit.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who tabled the Bill, said that it was needed to counter organisations that are “brainwashing the youth”. He should have more faith in the maturity of the young. He spoke of how LWE influence is waning in the state, as in much of the “red corridor”, which, he said, is down from four districts to two blocks. Why, then, raise the bogey of “urban Maoism”? It is difficult not to see the Bill as an attempt to arrogate more powers to the state and to help it to criminalise political-ideological opponents. The Maharashtra government must rethink the law.

#### WHAT MAHARASHTRA'S 'URBAN MAOISM' BILL SAYS

The stringent Maharashtra Special Public Security (MSPS) Bill, which seeks “to provide for effective prevention of certain unlawful activities of left wing extremist organisations or similar organisations”, was passed by the state Assembly by a voice vote on Thursday.

- The Bill will now be introduced in the Legislative Council where it is expected to pass as well. It will then be sent to the Governor for his assent, following which it will become law.
- The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill says the “menace of Naxalism is not only limited to remote areas of the Naxal affected states, but its presence is increasing in the urban areas also through the Naxal front organisations”.
- According to the government, these “frontal organisations” provide logistics and safe refuge to armed Naxal cadres, and “existing laws are ineffective and inadequate to tackle this menace of Naxalism”.
- To address this situation, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha have enacted Public Security Acts and banned 48 Naxal frontal organisations, the Bill says.
- The Bill gives the government the power to declare any suspect “organisation” as an “unlawful organisation”. It prescribes four offences for which an individual can be punished:

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1. for being a member of an unlawful organisation,
  2. when not a member, for raising funds for an unlawful organisation,
  3. for managing or assisting in managing an unlawful organisation and,
  4. for committing an “unlawful activity”.
- These offences carry jail terms of two years to seven years, along with fines ranging from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 5 lakh. The offence relating to committing an unlawful activity carries the toughest punishment: imprisonment of seven years and a fine of Rs 5 lakh.
  - Offences under the proposed law are cognizable, which means arrests can be made without a warrant, and are non-bailable.
  - The Bill was first brought at the fag end of the 2024 Monsoon Session of the Assembly. The day after the Bill was tabled, the Assembly was prorogued and the Bill was not passed.

**Do You Know:**

- While often conflated, Maoism, Naxalism, and Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) have distinct origins. Maoism is based on Mao Zedong’s doctrine of agrarian revolution and guerrilla warfare. Its Indian variant emerged with the 1967 Naxalbari uprising, leading to the broader Naxalite movement.
- Over decades, this transformed itself into factions, with the CPI (Maoist) becoming the dominant group in 2004 through the merger of the People’s War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). LWE is the term used by the Indian state to categorise such insurgencies within a national security framework.
- By contrast, ‘Urban Naxal’ is often used to refer to supporters of Naxalism, including intellectual and financial support.
- The Maoist insurgency traces its roots to the CPI(Marxist-Leninist) founded by Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal. The movement fractured during the 1970s–90s into numerous groups, many of which operated in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.

**WIDEN THE NET**

The Supreme Court of India’s pointed observations on Thursday regarding Bihar’s ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls are a crucial course correction for the Election Commission of India (ECI), which it must heed immediately. By urging the ECI to consider including the Aadhaar, the Elector Photo Identity Card, and the ration card among the acceptable documents for identity verification, the Court has acknowledged the critique of the SIR that the 11 documents listed for verification are a restrictive and unnecessary barrier to voter registration. The Court has nudged the ECI toward inclusivity in a way that could help resolve the core issues with the SIR. The Court rightly observed that “the entire exercise of SIR is about identity only”, that none of the 11 documents currently listed are “telltale ones for citizenship”, and that they are all meant to prove identity. It also rightly went on to question why Aadhaar, which is “considered basic for getting other documents”, is excluded while dependent documents such as caste certificates are accepted, exposing the inconsistency in the ECI’s position. The ECI’s objection to Aadhaar as merely proving residence rather than citizenship reveals a misunderstanding of the practical realities of Bihar, besides legal precedents. For example, data show that while 87% of



Bihar's population have an Aadhaar card, only 45%-50% are matriculates and close to just 2% have passports.

The Court's earlier judgments remain relevant too, having decisively rejected putting the "onus of proof of citizenship" on voters already enrolled in previous elections. This precedent contradicts the SIR's approach of treating every voter as a potential non-citizen unless proven otherwise and which risks significant disenfranchisement of electors despite their having valid identification. While not staying the SIR, the Court also listed the judicial review of the whole process, including its timing and nature, which "goes to the very roots of our democracy [and] is about the right to vote". The Court has reminded the ECI that its mandate, under Article 324, is to facilitate democratic participation, and not to create obstacles. There has been enough confusion on the ground following a more liberal reading of the ECI's SIR rules on document submission and verification by the Chief Electoral Officer, which was overruled by the Chief Election Commissioner. With its suggestion on expanding the list of verifiable documents, the Court has provided the ECI an opportunity to transform the SIR from a dangerously exclusionary exercise — one that could affect marginalised citizens — into a genuinely inclusive process.

## THE NEED TO SAFEGUARD THE RIGHT TO VOTE

### The story so far:

On July 10, the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission (EC) to consider Aadhaar cards, voter ID cards, and ration cards as acceptable documents for the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar. It has listed the batch of petitions challenging the EC's decision for further hearing on July 28. The court's remark — that the question of 'right to vote' goes to the very root of the functioning of our republic — has cast a spotlight on the foundational processes of India's electoral machinery and the genesis of India's 'universal adult suffrage' (UAS). India's constitutional promise of the 'right to vote' differs significantly from that of many Western democracies. Reflecting the flawed belief, espoused by thinkers like J.S. Mill, that voting should be reserved for the "enlightened" and denied to the "ignorant," countries like the U.K. initially restricted the franchise to male property owners. Universal male suffrage emerged only in 1918, and women were granted the right to vote a decade later in 1928. In the U.S., although the 15th and 19th Amendments extended voting rights to African Americans (1870) and women (1920), systemic barriers such as poll taxes and literacy tests continued to disenfranchise many for decades thereafter.

### How was universal adult suffrage made real in India?

In sharp contrast, far from gradualism and the 'privileged class' criteria, India's choice of immediate, universal inclusion ensured 'democratic equality' from the outset, bypassing the prolonged and often violent struggles seen elsewhere. Article 326 of the Constitution granted every adult citizen the right to vote, regardless of gender, caste, religion, education, or property, at a time when most of the world moved cautiously. Initially set at 21 years of age, this threshold was lowered to 18 by the 61st Constitutional Amendment in 1989. This commitment to a robust, inclusive democracy found further constitutional reinforcement in a series of Supreme Court judgments, notably starting with *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), which established democracy as part of the 'basic structure' doctrine. For this ideal to function meaningfully, people should be able to freely decide the fate of their government, an unassailable right that shapes governance and must never be compromised.



This inclusive vision was operationalised through two key laws: the Representation of the People Act, 1950, which governs the preparation and revision of electoral rolls; and the 1951 Act, which regulates election conduct, candidature, and electoral offences. The EC has repeatedly introduced administrative innovations to realise this ‘constitutional promise’. Notably, the then Chief Election Commissioner Sukumar Sen, faced with the task of enrolling 173 million largely illiterate voters, turned a logistical hurdle into a democratic breakthrough by introducing election symbols, making UAS practically accessible.

In India, EC has a great responsibility to reach the last citizen, wherever they may be, to actualise their ‘right to elect’. As Winston Churchill once said, “At the bottom of all tributes paid to democracy is the little man, walking into a little booth, with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper...” His words remain a timeless reminder that the health of any democracy ultimately rests on the sanctity of the ‘right to vote’.

#### **Is voting a fundamental right in India?**

The legal status of the ‘right to vote’ in India has long been debated. Although Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and K.T. Shah proposed including it in the Constitution’s fundamental rights part, the Constituent Assembly’s Advisory Committee ultimately rejected the idea. Importantly, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in *Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India* (2006) held that the ‘right to elect’ is a statutory right under Section 62 of the RPA, 1951, and not a fundamental or constitutional right.

Later in 2016, though a two-judge bench in *Rajbala v. State of Haryana* described the ‘right to vote’ as a constitutional right, the larger bench ruling in *Kuldip Nayar* prevails. Again, in *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India* (2023), the top court declined to pronounce on the issue, noting that it had already been settled by the five-judge Bench in the *Kuldip Nayar* judgment. However, in his dissent, Justice Ajay Rastogi asserted that the ‘right to vote’ is an expression of Article 19(1)(a) and reflects the essence of Article 21. Yet, as this view remains a minority opinion, the ‘right to elect’ continues to be recognised as a statutory right under prevailing law.

Nevertheless, even though it is not a fundamental right, courts have regarded the right to vote as an inseparable part of democracy, anchoring their reasoning in the idea that it enables citizens to shape governance, making it a “democratic imperative” vital to the Indian republic’s survival. As philosopher John Dewey said, democracy is not just a form of government, but a social and personal ideal.

#### **Why does electoral roll accuracy matter?**

Free and fair elections rest on accurate electoral rolls, under the RPA, 1950. Inaccuracies — such as mass omissions, ineligible inclusions, duplicates, or incorrect entries — undermine the “one person, one vote” principle by enabling impersonation, disenfranchisement, or dilution of votes, ultimately distorting the people’s mandate. Therefore, the EC is empowered under Section 21 of the 1950 Act to prepare and revise these rolls to ensure integrity.

While discrepancies may arise, courts have consistently held that only substantial and systemic errors that demonstrably “materially affected” the election outcome can compromise the sanctity of the electoral roll. Minor mistakes or isolated disenfranchisement are insufficient. Allegations like those in Bihar warrant scrutiny, but it must also be noted that purification of rolls is necessary because just as the exclusion of an eligible voter undermines democracy, so does the inclusion of an ineligible name. Therefore, rather than disrupting or delaying the exercise, efforts should focus



on helping improve the process. The Supreme Court's suggestion to include more accepted documents helps safeguard every genuine elector's right to be represented.

While the right to inclusion or objection in electoral rolls is conferred on individuals, not political parties, the court in *Lakshmi Charan Sen v. A.K.M. Hassan Uzzaman* (1985) observed that in a largely illiterate and politically unaware electorate, parties should take steps to ensure eligible voters are included and ineligible ones are removed. Given India's party-based Parliamentary system, such vigilance will help to preserve 'electoral integrity'.

#### **Who qualifies as an ordinary resident?**

The EC under Article 324 serves as the constitutional guardian of elections, with powers of superintendence, direction, and control. A key duty is preparing accurate electoral rolls, guided by Section 19 of the RPA, 1950, which mandates that any citizen aged 18 or above, "ordinarily resident" in a constituency and not disqualified, is entitled to be registered. "Ordinary resident" implies a genuine, continuous presence, not a temporary stay. For example, a student living in a hostel may not qualify if their permanent home and intent to return lie elsewhere. Mere temporary absence from one's place of ordinary residence does not negate one's status as an ordinary resident of that location. This criterion prevents fraudulent registrations and ensures voters maintain real ties to their constituencies, preserving representative accountability.

Interestingly, the *Manmohan Singh* case (1991) exemplifies judicial scrutiny on this front. His election from Assam was challenged for lack of "ordinary residence," leading the court to clarify that ordinary residence means habitual, regular, and genuine presence, not a temporary or casual stay or a nominal address. Beyond ordinary voters, India's electoral system accommodates those unable to vote conventionally. Under Rule 18 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, 'postal ballots' are available to service voters like armed forces personnel, paramilitary, armed State police posted outside, and government staff abroad, and voters on election duty. Overseas electors — Indian citizens living abroad without foreign citizenship — can register under Section 20A of the RPA, 1950. However, they must vote in person, as they are currently ineligible for postal or proxy voting.

One of the most contentious issues regarding the SIR exercise in Bihar is the debate on 'citizenship verification'. In *Lal Babu Hussein v. ERO* (1995), the court quashed two EC directives (1992 and 1994) allowing District Collectors and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to identify and delete alleged foreigners from voter rolls. The Supreme Court noted that the poll body guidelines put the "onus of proof of citizenship" on the person involved, even disregarding that several persons were voters in previous elections.

The court ruled that EROs must give due weight to past electoral rolls, conduct full inquiries, and follow quasi-judicial procedures, ensuring natural justice and adherence to the Citizenship Act and Constitution. These safeguards must guide the current exercise as well. Moreover, allegations or vague suspicions cannot justify the exclusion of individuals from citizenship or voter lists without credible evidence and due process, according to the judgments in *Lal Babu* and *Md. Rahim Ali* (2024).

#### **What is next?**

The Bihar SIR controversy and broader electoral reform debates highlight a core democratic truth: India's democracy depends on electoral rolls that are accurate, inclusive, and accessible. As the



Supreme Court prepares to resume hearings on July 28, the EC must complete the exercise with a careful balance between genuine vigilance and inclusion to uphold the fairness of the process.

Public awareness should empower voters to verify and update their entries, making them active custodians of electoral integrity. Safeguarding the vote is not merely a statutory obligation; it is a shared democratic responsibility, requiring vigilant institutions, informed citizens, and forward-looking legal reforms.

## WHY ARE BIHAR'S ELECTORAL ROLLS BEING REVISED?

### The story so far:

The Election Commission of India (EC) has initiated a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in Bihar before the general elections for its Legislative Assembly.

### What is an electoral roll?

Article 324 of the Constitution provides that the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for the conduct of elections to Parliament and State legislature shall vest with the EC. Article 326 provides that every citizen who is not less than 18 years of age shall be entitled to be registered as a voter (elector).

The electoral rolls are prepared by the EC as per the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RP Act). Section 16 of the RP Act disqualifies a non-citizen from being enrolled in the electoral roll. Section 19 requires that the person is not less than 18 years of age on the qualifying date and is ordinarily resident in the constituency.

Section 20 of the RP Act provides the meaning of the term 'ordinarily resident'. It specifies that a person shall not be deemed to be 'ordinarily resident' in a constituency simply because he/she owns or possesses a dwelling house in such constituency. However, at the same time, a person 'temporarily absent' from his/her place of residence shall continue to be 'ordinarily resident' therein.

### Why has an SIR been initiated?

Section 21 of the RP Act deals with the preparation and revision of electoral rolls. It authorises the EC to carry out a special revision of the electoral roll at any time for reasons to be recorded.

The Election Commission has noted that there have been large scale additions and deletions to the electoral rolls over the last 20 years due to rapid urbanisation and migration. This has increased the possibility of duplicate entries in the roll. The Commission is constitutionally obligated to ensure that only citizens are enrolled in the electoral rolls. Accordingly, the EC has decided to carry out an SIR for the entire country, starting with Bihar.

The last such SIR was carried out for Bihar in the year 2003. Since the Bihar Assembly elections are due in November, the EC has presently laid down the guidelines for an SIR of the Bihar electoral roll with the qualifying date as July 1, 2025.

During the last SIR, enumerators were sent for house-to-house verification with a copy of the details of the existing voters. However, in the present SIR, every elector will have to submit an enumeration form to their respective Booth Level Officers (BLOs). For electors registered in the electoral roll as of January 2003 (on the basis of the last SIR), no further documents are required



to be submitted except the extract of the 2003 electoral roll. However, electors registered after January 2003, have to additionally submit documents for establishing the date and place of birth for themselves and their parent(s) as required. The schedule for the current SIR is provided in Table 1.

### **What are the pros and cons?**

There have been arguments for and against the SIR made by various stakeholders. The key issues of contention are summarised below.

The process and time required for the entire exercise: Proponents in support of the SIR in its present form argue that the SIR in 2003 was carried out in 31 days without technological support. This time also the same amount of time will be taken for the exercise with technology. Moreover, there are more than one lakh BLOs, nearly 4 lakh volunteers and more than 1.5 lakh Booth Level Agents (BLAs), appointed by political parties, to ensure the smooth implementation of this exercise.

Counter arguments against the SIR in its present form state that it is a humungous task which involves the submission of forms by all eight crore voters that has never been done before. Furthermore, close to three crore voters would be required to submit documents establishing their date and place of birth for themselves and their parents. Migrant labourers and students may not be able to submit their enumeration forms within the deadline. Despite the presence of so many field level workers, there can be potential errors in inclusion and exclusion.

The exclusion of Aadhaar as a document for registration: Proponents of the SIR in its present form say that the Aadhaar is neither a proof of date of birth nor of citizenship. The Aadhaar card itself carries a disclaimer stating that it can't be used as proof of citizenship. Hence, in line with constitutional and legal requirements, the Aadhaar has been excluded as a valid document. The list of valid documents include caste certificates, family registers and land allotment certificates.

Proponents against the SIR in its present form argue that the Aadhaar has become an omnibus identity card for all sections of society, especially the under privileged who may not possess any other document. Form 6 for the inclusion of new voters as per the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 (RER) requires that Aadhaar be provided compulsorily unless the person doesn't have one. It is mentioned as a proof of date of birth and place of residence as per Form 6. These rules were made by the Central government as per the RP Act. It is only in the SIR guidelines that the EC has added a declaration form to be submitted along with Form 6, with additional documents other than Aadhaar for the purposes of establishing date and place of birth.

Exclusion of migrants from the electoral roll: Arguments for the SIR in its present form state that the RP Act provides that only citizens who are 'ordinarily resident' should be included in the electoral roll of a constituency. Migrants who have moved away for long periods of time on account of education or employment would be included in the electoral roll of the constituency of their current residence as per provisions of the RP Act and the RER.

However, counter arguments posit that the RP Act provides that 'persons temporarily absent' do not cease to be 'ordinarily resident'. Many migrant workers shift to other places within the State or outside the State but return at regular intervals to their place of birth/ upbringing. The families and properties of such migrants may continue in the same location where they would want to retain their right to vote. The EC, as recently as January 2023, had indicated its intention of



providing a remote voting facility for such migrant workers subject to technical feasibility and acceptance by all stakeholders.

#### **What can be the way forward?**

To provide an analogy, the inclusion of an ineligible name in the electoral roll is like a guilty person going scot-free, while the exclusion of an eligible voter is akin to one innocent person suffering. Both these prospects would be a blight on democracy. Therefore, electoral rolls should be thoroughly checked and verified.

First, the proposed timelines for the completion of such a mammoth exercise are stretched. The EC should ensure that adequate safeguards are put in place for the completion of the exercise without errors. The BLAs should actively participate to prevent errors of omission or addition.

Secondly, the exclusion of Aadhaar from the list of valid documents can create issues for many, especially the underprivileged. After considering the ground realities during the first phase of the enumeration, the EC should adequately tailor the process, during the claims and objections phase, to ensure that no eligible citizen is excluded due to their inability to produce any document from the list of valid documents.

Finally, migrant workers should not be removed from the rolls as that can result in significant deletions. Many such migrants have exercised their right to vote in the place of their birth/upbringing as per their choice and should continue to do so. It is pertinent to note that as per the amendment of the RP Act in 2010, non-resident Indians who have shifted out of India, even for the long term on account of employment, education or otherwise, are entitled to register and vote in the constituency in which their address as per passport is located. The issue of duplicate voter IDs for the same person in different constituencies should be addressed through Aadhaar seeding for which the EC had begun its consultative process in March 2025.

### WHAT THE 'NEUTRAL CLEAN-UP' OF BIHAR'S POLL ROLLS REALLY IS

In recent years, India has experienced a subtle, yet significant, shift in how citizenship and national belonging are defined, and, increasingly, how voting rights are determined. This transformation is most evident in the ongoing electoral roll revision by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in Bihar, just months before the State Assembly elections later this year. The hurried and opaque nature of this process risks the wrongful exclusion of lakhs of eligible voters, posing a serious threat not only to the integrity of the electoral system but also to the constitutional values of equality, fraternity and justice.

#### **Anything but a routine update**

On the surface, the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar appears to be a routine update. But in practice, it is anything but. Nearly 4.74 crore voters — close to 60% of Bihar's electorate — are now required to prove their eligibility through a new set of documents. The threshold for inclusion has shifted dramatically. Under the SIR guidelines, any voter not listed in the 2003 rolls must now provide documentary proof of citizenship. This includes birth certificate, school-leaving documents, land deeds, or official citizenship papers, which are records that are difficult to produce even in urban centres, let alone in the rural stretches of Bihar. Crucially, many of these documents, particularly birth certificate, are the responsibility of the state to issue. However, the state has historically failed to do so at scale, placing the burden on individuals to obtain and provide them.



What is being presented as a neutral “clean-up” of electoral rolls carries a serious risk of disenfranchising millions. The poor, Muslims and migrant workers, who make up a significant portion of Bihar’s population, with migrants alone constituting around 20% are likely to be disproportionately affected. There is a significant risk that large numbers of migrant workers, predominantly men, could be removed from electoral rolls.

This represents a sharp break from previous practices, where self-declaration was deemed sufficient for enrolment, a principle supported by electoral regulations and the Supreme Court of India. The shift suggests a deeper reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and its citizens.

The ECI claims that the revision is aimed at eliminating duplicate entries, removing deceased voters and filtering out ineligible electors, while also including newly eligible ones. Legally, the ECI is empowered to do this. But the scale, the timing and the method of the current exercise are deeply problematic. It is neither practical to execute such a massive overhaul within a few weeks, nor reasonable to demand documentation that many voters, particularly from marginalised communities, simply do not possess. Media reports suggest that many such voters do have widely held government-issued IDs such as Aadhaar, voter ID card, labour cards, and MGNREGA cards, none of which is being accepted as sufficient proof of eligibility.

There is a Kafkaesque irony at the heart of this: the very voter ID cards issued by the ECI are now deemed inadequate. By refusing to recognise its own identification document, the ECI is not only disenfranchising citizens but also eroding its institutional credibility. If its own ID cards are no longer considered trustworthy for verification, what does that imply about the integrity of the electoral process and the legitimacy of past elections?

#### **An encroachment**

Electoral integrity is not just about removing duplicates; it is about ensuring that every citizen has an opportunity to vote. The ECI’s mandate is to facilitate participation, not put up bureaucratic hurdles. By shifting into the terrain of citizenship verification, the ECI is encroaching upon a domain that lies with the judiciary and designated tribunals. There is an apprehension that Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) could be given the authority to refer individuals suspected of being foreign nationals to citizenship authorities — a task previously outside the ECI’s remit.

This shift, and the resistance to it, both have precedent. In the past, the judiciary has expressed concern over attempts to place the burden of proving citizenship on individuals, including those who had already participated in the electoral process. It has held that prior inclusion on an electoral roll implies that verification had already taken place. Again, in 2005, during the Assam roll revision, the Court stressed that anyone facing deletion from the rolls must be given notice and an opportunity to respond, and that questions of citizenship must be resolved by the appropriate authority.

The current process in Bihar, with its heavy documentation demands and compressed timelines, is beginning to resemble a de facto National Register of Citizens (NRC) but without any legislative basis or judicial oversight. It imports the logic of citizenship audits into electoral administration, turning a democratic procedure into an exclusionary instrument.

There is a deeper political logic behind the timing of this voter roll revision exercise. Its launch is particularly significant in the context of fiercely contested State elections, where every vote matters. The political motivations are hard to ignore: estimates suggest that as many as two crore



voters could be removed from the rolls if the current process continues unchecked. In States such as Bihar, the deletion of even a few hundred thousand names could decisively influence outcomes in tightly contested constituencies. Already facing strong anti-incumbency sentiment and a growing challenge from the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc, the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) stands to gain from such revisions. With the outcome still uncertain, voter roll revisions take on clear political significance.

Compounding matters is the logistical challenge. The ECI has launched this document-heavy exercise during the monsoon season, when large parts of Bihar are flood-prone. It has imposed a 30-day deadline — a window in which many migrant workers are still away from home. This confluence of administrative rigidity and ecological vulnerability has created a perfect storm for disenfranchisement. An institution entrusted with ensuring free and fair elections, risks becoming a gatekeeper to democratic participation.

### **The larger implications**

Critics rightly see the revision as a form of demographic manipulation — a subtler version of gerrymandering by exclusion. The implications go well beyond Bihar, carrying national significance.

This new process is part of a broader political project aimed at weakening pluralism, even as substantive political participation and contestation are systematically constrained. It aligns with majoritarian narratives that cast a doubt on the loyalty and belonging of certain communities, particularly Muslims, and seeks to diminish their political influence by undermining both their representation and their right to vote.

What is unfolding in Bihar may well serve as a template for other States. ECI officials have indicated plans for similar special revisions in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. If this model is replicated, it may institutionalise a more document-intensive approach to voter verification — one that risks undoing decades of progress in empowering historically marginalised communities by offering them meaningful opportunities to participate in the democratic process.

The Bihar voter roll revision is now under challenge in the Supreme Court for violating fundamental rights including the right to vote, equality before law, non-discrimination, and dignity. If it is not struck down, it could strip lakhs of citizens of their right to vote, distorting electoral outcomes and eroding faith in democratic institutions. What is at risk is not just participation, but the very credibility of free and fair elections, an inviolable part of the Constitution's basic structure.

## **MAHARASHTRA HOUSE PANEL MOVES AGAINST KAMRA AND ANDHARE**

The Privileges Committee of the Maharashtra Legislative Council has decided to issue a show-cause notice to stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra and Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sushama Andhare. The 11-member committee has approved the proposal with a full majority, Prasad Lad, BJP MLC and the chairperson of the committee, told The Hindu on Monday.

“The proposal has been accepted by everyone. It has now gone for legal opinion. Soon thereafter, the show-cause notice will be sent to both of them by the police,” he said.



The grounds of the showcause notice are — insult to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and the State of Maharashtra, and the usage of expressions insulting the State Legislature. “Sushama Andhare issued comments in support of Kamra and made similar comments,” Mr. Lad said.

Once the notice is issued, the respondent is asked to give a written reply within 15 days. Failure to do so leads to a second show-cause notice. In case the respondent does not respond to three notices, the committee can ask the police to arrest them, Mr. Lad said. Thereafter, their statement is recorded in front of the committee.

“The respondent can choose to apologise, or be represented by a lawyer if we give them the permission to, or put forth their side by themselves. Whatever decision the committee takes thereafter, is the final decision. Even the courts have no jurisdiction in the matter,” he said.

The motion was proposed against Mr. Kamra for his stand-up comedy in March 2025, in which he sang a parody song about Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Shiv Sena workers had thereafter ransacked the comedy club where the show was performed.

## ENGLISH DREAMS

English medium education is an aspiration for many Indians, but state policy regarding the medium of instruction has been uneven across time and regions. The ongoing language debate in India, which stems from the renewed efforts of the Bharatiya Janata Party to enforce a three-language policy, has many components, the medium of instruction being one. Educationists generally argue that instruction in the mother tongue helps children achieve better learning goals in their early stages of development. This view is supported by pedagogical research, but it cannot, and does not, operate in isolation from other factors such as constitutional rights and ground realities. India’s linguistic diversity and distribution is such that even the question of what is a child’s mother tongue can often be a contested one. There is also the constitutional question of freedom of expression and choice. In 2014, after a protracted legal tussle, the Supreme Court of India held that a Karnataka government order of 1994 that made instruction in Kannada mandatory until Class four was not valid under the Constitution. For, children have a right to choose, and the state cannot enforce its view on what is good for them. The rights of private educational institutions to offer education as per market demand is another related issue.

The National Education Policy that is being aggressively pushed by the Centre has a particularly anti-English edge, which is not in line with popular aspiration. Many States that want to promote their local language and culture also want to promote English education and English as a medium of instruction. In Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, there are aided English medium schools. The demand for English medium education is growing — this includes the Hindi-speaking regions — which is met largely by substandard and expensive private institutions. English skills help individuals and the country in gaining a place in the global services sector. India’s subaltern caste groups in particular seek to empower themselves through English education, which remains a currency for upward mobility. If state schools do not offer English medium instruction, relatively richer families could still access it through private schools. In this context, education becomes a continuing reproduction and even aggravation of social inequalities, which is the exact opposite of its purpose. The fact is that knowledge of English is empowering and convertible for other outcomes. There can be a debate on whether it should be the medium of instruction at the primary level, but a basic test of any policy is in how it advances the ambitions of the most disadvantaged sections.



## WHY IS MAHARASHTRA DEBATING OVER HINDI?

### The story so far:

The linguistic debate in Maharashtra continues days after the Maharashtra government withdrew two orders introducing Hindi as the third language in primary education across Marathi and English medium State Board schools. The government has appointed a committee under renowned economist Dr. Narendra Jadhav to study the three-language policy.

### What is the language debate in Maharashtra?

On April 16, the Maharashtra government issued an order making Hindi mandatory as the third language in all English and Marathi medium schools of the State Board in Maharashtra. The government said that it was as per the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. "At present, two languages are being taught from Grade 1 to Grade 4 in all the English and Marathi medium schools in the State. As per the State Education Framework, 2024, Hindi will be mandatory as the third language in all the English and Marathi medium schools from Grade 1 to Grade 5," the order stated. Till now, third language was introduced only in Grade 5 in English and Marathi medium State Board schools. The other medium schools already have a three-language policy in primary education.

### What was the reaction?

There was widespread opposition to the government's decision on two grounds — first, that a third language should not be imposed in primary school from Grade 1 to Grade 5. The second ground was about the imposition of Hindi. Regional linguistic groups, academics, civil society members, and prominent literary figures raised their voice against the move which was dubbed as an effort to 'force Hindi', and a move towards 'cultural hegemony'. The Maharashtra government's own language committee wrote to the government seeking its immediate revocation.

Experts argued that the NEP, 2020 focussed on R1 and R2, which is the mother-tongue, and an additional second language for primary education. They said that children should not be burdened with learning three languages in primary school. "Why should there be an imposition of Hindi? This is a concerted effort for cultural hegemony. This is in line with the RSS' plan of 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan'. In Maharashtra, the Marathi mannos will stand for his linguistic, cultural identity. This is a historic moment since the movement for the reorganisation of States on linguistic basis. The entire State has stood against the government's imposition of Hindi," Deepak Pawar of Marathi Abhyas Kendra said.

### How did the government respond?

After a severe backlash, Maharashtra education minister Dada Bhuse promised to revise the government resolution (GR). "Hindi will not be mandatory," he announced. On June 17, the government revised the GR, making Hindi a 'general' third language in schools. It stated that the students had the option to learn any other Indian language as the third language, but that it was mandatory for at least 20 students to come together to make the demand. "The government will make a teacher available or will make provision for online learning if at least 20 students come together to learn any other Indian language apart from Hindi," the revised GR stated.



However, this drew further backlash as academics and regional linguistic political parties called it an effort to impose Hindi through the backdoor. “The whole exercise of the meeting of the steering committee was carried out in secrecy by the government. The language committee of the government itself was never consulted on the move. The decision is illogical. It has no scientific backing by educationists, child psychologists. It has been taken without any consultation with the stakeholders and experts. At a time when the Marathi culture and language is not being respected by its own government, this is an assault on the linguistic identity of the State,” said Laxmikant Deshmukh, head of Maharashtra’s language committee.

#### **What about political realignments?**

The issue provided a fillip to Raj Thackeray’s Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, which counts ‘Marathi asmita’ or linguistic chauvinism as its core ideology. “We are Hindus, not Hindis,” he said. It paved the path for the reunification of the Thackeray cousins after two decades. Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray joined hands against the government’s move, even holding a joint rally. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar too openly expressed his displeasure with the government’s decision and said that Hindi should not be imposed till Grade 4. This has led to an unease within the Mahayuti with Eknath Shinde not wanting to be seen as standing against the cause. In the face of upcoming local body elections, the language debate has led to changed political dynamics.

#### **What is the way ahead?**

The government has announced the scrapping of the two controversial GRs issued on April 16 and June 17. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced the formation of a committee under Dr. Narendra Jadhav to look into the three-language policy, and said the government will accept his report. Academics have raised questions on Dr. Jadhav’s expertise in school education, and have demanded the scrapping of the committee as well as the decision to impose the three-language policy in primary education. Opposition parties have said the government should scrap the three-language policy altogether. “We will not accept the three-language policy,” Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena UBT leader, said.

### **IN PATNA UNIVERSITY APPOINTMENTS, A WELCOME EXPERIMENT**

Patna University’s appointment of five college principals through a lottery, supervised by a Raj Bhawan panel and conducted under videographic surveillance, is a welcome departure from established procedure. On the surface, it appears at odds with the gravity of higher education frameworks and their structures of evaluation. But it is also a well-deserved indictment of the status quo, and it could become an act of institutional truth-telling — in a system corroded by nepotism, caste and political patronage, randomisation may be an impartial arbiter.

All criticism of the procedure, though, may not be without merit. Assigning a home science professor to head a science college, for instance, could raise legitimate concerns about subject expertise and institutional fit. Leadership in academia demands vision, domain knowledge, and the capacity to foster intellectual growth — qualities not easily left to chance. BSP leader Mayawati has decried the lottery as a “distorted experiment”; others have echoed the discomfort. But this indignation obscures a larger reality. For decades, government appointments in Bihar, including in its university system, have been hostage to cronyism, and its administration treated as an extension of the political machinery. Last month, Bihar’s LoP Tejashwi Prasad Yadav accused the ruling NDA government of “blatant favouritism”, questioning government appointments. In 2015, the Patna High Court quashed the appointment of 12 college principals under Magadh University



for procedural irregularities. In 2017, an FIR was filed against JD(U) leader Mewalal Choudhary for manipulating faculty recruitments as vice-chancellor of Bihar Agriculture University in Bhagalpur between 2010 and 2015. As reported in this newspaper, shortlisted candidates in Bihar State University Service Commission this year include several well-connected individuals. The decision to conduct a lottery could mean a radical reset, disrupting entrenched power networks and infusing a form of neutrality into a deeply flawed system.

Higher education in Bihar, however, needs more. The lottery should be viewed as a short-term experiment, not a long-term prescription. Focus on transparent, specialised selection panels, independent oversight bodies, public appointment records and rotational leadership — many colleges have been under interim principals for almost 15 years in the absence of timely appointments — must bolster the roadmap for the future. By acknowledging that fairness must be deliberately engineered, Bihar has taken a difficult but necessary first step. It must convert this unconventional gambit into the groundwork for governance.

## COUNTRYWIDE SURVEY REVEALS DEFICITS IN STUDENT LEARNING

The results of the Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development Rashtriya Sarvekshen (PARAKH RS), formerly known as the National Achievement Survey (NAS), have revealed that Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Dadra Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu and Chandigarh are the best performing States and Union Territories in school education.

PARAKH RS assessed the performance of 21,15,022 children in Grades 3, 6 and 9 from 74,229 schools in 781 districts of the country in the following subjects: language and mathematics (for Grades 3, 6, and 9), the world around us (for Grades 3 and 6), and science and social science (for Grade 9). As many as 2,70,424 teachers and school leaders responded through questionnaires.

Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala emerged as the top performing States in Grade 3. Kerala, Punjab and Dadra Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu were the top performers for Grade 6. Punjab, Kerala and Chandigarh were the best performing States for Grade 9. The Kendriya Vidyalayas, run by the Union government, recorded the lowest performance in mathematics in Grade 3. In Grade 6, government-aided and State government schools showed weak performance in mathematics. For Grade 9, students from Kendriya Vidyalayas performed the best across all subjects, particularly in language.

The results found that in Grade 3, 67% students know and use enough words to carry out day-to-day interactions effectively and could guess the meaning of new words by using existing vocabulary.

### Figuring it out

In mathematics, 68% students in Grade 3 could sort objects into groups and sub-groups based on more than one property, while 69% could identify and extend simple patterns in their surroundings, shapes, and numbers. Only 55% could arrange numbers up to 99 in ascending and descending order.

In Grade 6, only 54% could represent numbers using the place value structure of the Indian number system, and knew and could read the names of very large numbers. Only 38% students could solve puzzles and daily-life problems involving one or more operations on whole numbers.



Only 38% of Grade 6 students asked questions and made predictions about simple patterns (season change, food chain, phases of the moon, movement of stars and planets, shapes of trees, plants, leaves, and flowers, rituals, celebrations) observed in the immediate environment.

In Grade 9, 45% of students could explain how the Constitution came to be and understood the ideas and ideals of the Indian national movement enshrined in it as well as those drawn from India's civilisational heritage. About 54% of students could identify the main points in a text from careful listening or reading of news articles, reports or editorials.

Only 31% could explore and understand sets of numbers, such as whole numbers, fractions, integers, rational numbers, and real numbers, and their properties, the survey results said.

## HOW DID HIMACHAL ACHIEVE A HIGH RANK ON THE NAS?

### The story so far:

When the National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2025 results were released on July 2, few expected Himachal Pradesh — which ranked at a modest 21st place in 2021 — to leap into the top five. While Punjab and Kerala retained their leading positions, it was Himachal's 16-rank jump that garnered headlines.

### What is the NAS?

The NAS is a nationwide assessment conducted every three years by the Ministry of Education, measuring the learning outcomes of students in government and government-aided schools in Classes 3, 5, 8, and 10. It tests core subjects such as language, mathematics, and science, providing States with data to inform policy.

While it serves as an important diagnostic tool, the NAS has its limitations. It measures what is easily testable— not necessarily what is most meaningful. The broader aims of education such as critical thinking, emotional growth, civic awareness, and equity, are not captured. So, while Himachal's success in NAS is laudable, it should not become the sole benchmark for educational excellence.

### Why is Himachal's rise significant?

Himachal's rise on the list is still significant because it signals a reversal of decline. For years, Himachal's public education system — once a model for all hill States — has struggled. Despite the foundational work done under Y.S. Parmar, the State's first Chief Minister, who spearheaded a massive expansion of schools in the post-Independence period, where serving society meant going back to the villages and teaching the young ones, the post-liberalisation era saw the erosion of public schooling.

Contractual hiring of teachers, inadequate recruitment, and compromised academic standards led to an exodus of students to private schools. Even in remote villages, private institutions mushroomed as public confidence in government schools waned.

### What changed in recent years?

Since taking office, the Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu-led government has pursued a mix of rational restructuring and renewed commitment to public education. Faced with demographic shifts — most notably, the declining fertility rate highlighted in the NFHS-5 — the administration acted to



consolidate resources. More than a 1,000 under-enrolled schools were merged, allowing for the better deployment of teachers and infrastructure. The school education system was unified under a single directorate from pre-primary to Class 12, enhancing focus and accountability.

School-level decision-making was encouraged, boosting students' sense of ownership and identity. Teachers and meritorious students were given opportunities for exposure visits, both national and international, to learn from innovative practices. A cluster-based model of school management was adopted to encourage peer learning, share resources, and community participation.

#### **Does the NAS reflect these efforts?**

Not entirely. The NAS gives us an important signal — that Himachal is back on track. But it tells us little about the socio-emotional well-being of students, the quality of teaching-learning relationships, or community engagement. The danger lies in mistaking performance in standardised tests for education itself. Himachal's achievement lies in rekindling faith in the idea of public education.

#### **What lies ahead?**

As Himachal rides this wave of reform, it must now deepen its commitment by regularising teacher appointments, expanding holistic assessments, and ensuring that rural and marginalised students are not left behind.

### FOSTERING INNOVATION FROM BUSINESS MODELS TO DEEPTech

Without a culture of experimentation and long-term thinking, no amount of funding can build DeepTech. For R&D culture to flourish, founders need to dirty their hands in technicality. Great DeepTech companies are built by founders with hands-on technical expertise

Few months back, the Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal sparked a debate by drawing comparisons between Indian startups and their Chinese counterparts. While his comments stirred some discontent within the startup ecosystem, they also raised a crucial point — India must now shift its gaze from surface-level innovation to DeepTech.

#### **The journey so far**

If we look at our startup ecosystem journey so far, it has flourished largely on the back of business model innovation. From food delivery apps and e-commerce to fintech and gig economy platforms, startups have created new value by reimagining how services are delivered. While this has driven revenue and encouraged entrepreneurship, it's time to aim higher. As Mr. Goyal emphasised, the next frontier is DeepTech — technology grounded in scientific discovery, engineering excellence, and fundamental research.

But what is DeepTech? One will get different answers depending on who you ask. Ask around in VC circles or among founders, and the usual buzzwords emerge — AI, robotics, Internet of Things (IoT), drones etc. While these are important, DeepTech is far broader.

Material science, power electronics, advanced manufacturing, and molecular drug research are the fields which underpin critical advances in everything from energy systems and robotics to next-generation healthcare and AI hardware. For example, what makes drones both lightweight



and durable? Material science. Why is China ahead in battery tech? Because companies like BYD invested early in core chemistry and engineering, and not just assembly.

DeepTech isn't about repackaging existing components. It's about bold and original work. It's about building from scratch, failing repeatedly, and pushing the boundaries of what is possible.

### **Building DeepTech**

Understanding DeepTech is like peeling an onion with each layer revealing new dependencies and challenges. There are five core pillars which must align — a product mindset; R&D culture; technical depth; the educational ecosystem; and supportive government policies.

Product mindset is a big missing link. Let's start with a simple question. Which globally recognised product, across sectors — consumer, industrial, medical, telecom, mobility etc — have been conceived and built in India? Even in software, our supposed strength, we haven't produced tools like TensorFlow, Android, QNX, or SAP. While Indian talent leads some of the world's top companies, the DNA of product creation remains weak at home. China began by reverse engineering global products, steadily moving up the value chain, and eventually creating new products with original R&D.

#### **A product mindset and R&D go hand in hand.**

Without a culture of experimentation and long-term thinking, no amount of funding can build DeepTech. For R&D culture to flourish, founders need to dirty their hands in technicality. Great DeepTech companies are built by founders with hands-on technical expertise. Think of Google, Tesla, NVIDIA, and Microsoft. Their founders were engineers, builders, and coders. Larry Page and Sergey Brin wrote the algorithm that became Google while Bill Gates wrote software as a teenager.

To create such companies from scratch, we need founders with deep domain knowledge and an urge to solve complex problems, and not just manage teams.

Moreover, to promote technical depth, our education system needs to change its focus from tools to fundamentals. The journey towards DeepTech starts in the classroom. But how many Indian colleges teach AI or robotics from first principles, the mathematical derivation of AI or close loop control systems fundamentals? Beyond a few IITs, most focus on tool-based training, not foundational understanding. As a result, our engineers often become tool users, not tool creators.

We can emulate the likes of MIT and Stanford, where students master core theory before picking up tools. Multidisciplinary collaboration is another must. Most innovations especially in healthcare, mobility, or automation lie at the intersection of fields. Our college projects should involve multi-disciplinary student participation. We must move toward academia-industry collaboration, internships, and real-world problem-solving. In the U.S., the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency has funded challenges that have fostered innovation in robotics, leading to breakthroughs like Intuitive Surgical's Da Vinci robot.

And finally, smarter government support will always be a catalyst. India has institutions like the National Research Development Corporation (NRDC) to promote R&D, but many of the qualifying criteria are irrational. For example, why restrict funding to startups only inside incubators? Shouldn't we evaluate based on the technical depth of the founders, the R&D roadmap, and its potential impact?



DeepTech startups often need access to fabrication labs, pilot facilities, and test and certification centres, all of which are costly infrastructure the startups themselves can't build. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises often lack precision, and large corporations demand volumes that early-stage ventures can't deliver.

The government must create shared facilities, and affordable, high-quality spaces for low-volume, high-precision prototyping and testing. This is the only way to bridge the gap between idea and viable product.

### The road ahead

India's aspiration to lead in DeepTech is both timely and necessary. But to realise this vision, we must orchestrate a coordinated shift across the entire ecosystem.

Founders must deepen technical expertise and adopt a true product plus R&D mindset. Educational institutions must prioritise fundamentals and interdisciplinary learning, and the government must offer smarter, broader, and more agile support.

Only through this kind of systemic transformation can we build world-class DeepTech products which are driven by science, born in India, and built for the world.

### QUICK FIX

The Union Cabinet recently approved a ₹1-lakh crore Research Development and Innovation (RDI) scheme that aims to incentivise the private sector to invest in basic research. The scheme will primarily consist of a special purpose fund established within the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), which will act as the custodian of funds. The funds will be in the form of low-interest loans. The ANRF is conceived as an independent institutional body, with oversight by the Science Ministry, to allocate funds for basic research and to incentivise private sector participation in core research. The involvement of the ANRF here is a novel move as the newly created organisation is meant to be the equivalent of a single-window clearance mechanism for funding research and development for universities and academic institutions. It is also expected to get about 70% of its budget from private sources. In sum, through the RDI and the ANRF, the government is looking to stake the bold claim that it has played its part and that it is now up to the private sector to come forward and reverse the ratio from where the government today accounts for about 70% of India's R&D spend. However, already incipient in the government's tall ambitions are traces of what has caused previous such schemes to falter. The first of these is conservatism.

It turns out that a condition for availing funds is that only products that have reached a certain level of development and market potential or, what are called Technology Readiness Level-4 (TRL-4) projects, would be eligible. There are nine TRL levels, a hierarchy that was first conceived by the United States' National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the 1970s. TRL-1 represents a basic level of research and TRL-9 a state of advanced readiness. TRL-4 appears to be an arbitrary decision to support any promising research that has progressed halfway. Were there such a magic sauce, venture capital industries, premised on the fickleness of predicting the 'next big thing', would not exist. The scheme also seems to forget that technologically advanced countries have become what they are because of their military industrial complexes — where the spectre of war incentivises the development of technology that is risky and expensive but, over time, may prove to be of immense civilian value — examples are the Internet or the Global



Positioning System. India continues to haemorrhage scientists to the West due to the lack of opportunities commensurate with their training. Finally, it lacks a deeply skilled manufacturing sector that can make the products that scientists conceive of. Budgetary allowances cannot overnight fix that which requires major surgery.

#### INDIGENOUS HEAVY WATER REACTORS GET LICENCE

The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) has granted Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) licence to operate two indigenously developed 700 MWe pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs) at the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station (KAPS) in Gujarat.

“The AERB has concluded the design and commissioning safety reviews and issued the Licence for Operation of Units 3 and 4 of KAPS,” a statement from the regulator said.

The licence for a period of five years was handed over to the NPCIL on July 3, the statement added.

The KAPS-3 reactor had received permission to operate at full power in August 2023, while the KAPS-4 unit received it in August 2024, as part of Phase-C commissioning of the project.

##### Rigorous reviews

Since the 700 MWe reactor was the first of its kind, the licensing process involved rigorous multi-tiered safety reviews and assessment of the reactor design, covering the entire life cycle in multiple stages from siting and construction to commissioning at full-power.

Besides the AERB, several reactor safety experts from technical support organisations made significant contributions towards review of the design and commissioning results, which spanned almost 15 years.

The issuance of the licence is a shot in the arm for the NPCIL, which is spearheading efforts to build 10 PHWRs of 700 MWe each in fleet mode.

#### SCRAP OR MODIFY? DEBATE GROWS OVER NAGALAND INTERNAL ST QUOTA POLICY

With an agitation pushing for ending reservations for “backward tribes” on one side and a demand to increase the quantum of this quota on the other, Nagaland’s nearly five-decade old reservation policy has become the centre of a debate in the state.

- This week, the Committee on Review of Reservation Policy (CORRP), a grouping of five tribes in Nagaland, resumed its protest to push for a review of the reservation policy.

- It provides for an internal quota within the broader ST category for “Indigenous Scheduled Tribes of Nagaland” in government jobs and reserves 37% of posts for tribes identified as “backward tribes”.

- The CORRP comprises representatives from the apex bodies of five groups that have come to be called “advanced tribes”: Ao, Angami, Sumi, Lotha and Rengma.

- In response to pressure from the CORRP, which has been building up since September last year, the Nagaland government had in March convened a meeting with different stakeholders. Following this, Cabinet minister Neiba Kronu said the government has decided to review the policy.



- There are 14 recognized Naga tribes in Nagaland, and the Scheduled Tribes in the state also include “Indigenous” Garo, Mikir, Kuki and Kachari groups.
- The Nagaland government had first introduced reservation for STs of the state in the Nagaland State Services in 1967. The quantum for this was fixed at 80% of vacancies in the Nagaland State Services and 100% of non-technical Grade-III and IV posts.
- The element of internal reservations within this reservation was introduced in 1977. Through an order then, 25% of these reserved vacancies were reserved for seven tribes – Konyak, Chakhesang, Sangtam, Phom, Chang, Yimchunger and Khiamunuingan – citing economic backwardness and “insignificant representation in the services”.
- The 1977 order had laid down a timeline of 10 years for these additional reservations. However, in 1989, through another order, the Nagaland government directed that the reservation policy would continue “until further orders”.
- Now, the other tribes are saying that the reservation policy for backward tribes be entirely scrapped or that the remaining posts be reserved exclusively for them.
- There is also a demand from another quarter: organisations representing tribes from Eastern Nagaland, which have for years been demanding that the backward tribes reservation for the seven tribes from the region be increased to 45%.

**Do You Know:**

- The British annexed Assam in 1826, and in 1881, the Naga Hills too became part of British India. The first sign of Naga resistance was seen in the formation of the Naga Club in 1918, which told the Simon Commission in 1929 “to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times”.
- In 1946 came the Naga National Council (NNC), which, under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo, declared Nagaland an independent state on August 14, 1947. The NNC resolved to establish a “sovereign Naga state” and conducted a “referendum” in 1951, in which “99 per cent” supported an “independent” Nagaland.

#### FIVE OF BIHAR FAMILY BURNT TO DEATH ON WITCHCRAFT ALLEGATION

Five members of a family, three of them women, were burnt alive in Purnia district of Bihar over allegation of practising witchcraft, the police said. The incident took place on Sunday night at Tetgama village in the Muffasil police station limits.

Speaking to The Hindu, Purnia Deputy Inspector-General of Police Pramod Kumar Mandal said, “The child of a resident, Ramdev Mahto, fell ill and he had approached Babulal Oraon, 50, for treatment but the child did not survive. The death happened three days ago. Hence, Oraon and his family were beaten with sticks and then burnt alive. The bodies were stuffed into sacks and dumped.”

Mr. Mandal further said that three persons were arrested in connection with the incident and a tractor used to dump the bodies was seized.

The murders were witnessed by Oraon’s 16-year-old son, who managed to escape and inform his maternal grandparents. The deceased were identified as Oraon, Sita Devi, 48, Kato Devi, 65, Manjit Oraon, 25, and Rani Devi, 23.



The 16-year-old told the media that his mother was accused of performing witchcraft and a meeting was held under the leadership of Nakul Oraon. “About 200 people attended the meeting. My father and mother were called and the villagers decided to kill them. They were assaulted with sticks and then burnt alive. Their bodies were loaded on a tractor and dumped,” the boy said.

Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Tejashwi Yadav said “anarchy is at its peak in Bihar” and “law and order has collapsed”. He further said while “criminals are alert, the Chief Minister is unconscious”.

## BRIDGE TOO FAR

On July 9, a span of a 40-year-old bridge in Vadodara in Gujarat caved in, sending half-a-dozen vehicles into the Mahisagar river below. On Thursday, 18 people were confirmed dead. Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has ordered an investigation into the cause, which locals have alleged to be the long-standing neglect by local authorities. On June 15, an iron pedestrian bridge over the Indrayani river in Pune district collapsed due to overloading, leaving four dead. In May, a concrete slab being hoisted by a crane at the site of the construction of a bridge over the Kathajodi river in Cuttack fell on workers below, killing three. Similarly, in 2024, the Ghatkopar hoarding collapse in Mumbai resulted in 17 fatalities. And in 2023, there were more accidents — a girder failure at an under-construction railway bridge in Mizoram left 26 workers dead; a rooftop billboard collapse killed two women in Lucknow; and a pillar collapse at a metro construction site in Bengaluru killed a mother and her toddler. In 2022, the Morbi suspension bridge over the Machchhu river, again in Gujarat, failed, killing more than 140 people. These are only some of the hundreds of incidents involving the catastrophic failure of public infrastructure. They are accompanied by road accidents and deadly fires in crowded areas, both of which regularly claim many lives.

Even if they are isolated, they are not entirely accidental: they are symptoms of India’s ageing infrastructure that is being tested, especially in peri-urban areas, as industrial growth and urban populations expand. Facilities such as bridges, roads and hospitals that were designed for some number of users, are progressively giving way under the weight of more. So also are the departments responsible for their upkeep, many of which remain underfunded, understaffed or complacent. While the authorities have ordered investigations into these incidents, few have yielded failure analysis reports into the public domain. Some also prompted audits but they were restricted to infrastructure of the same type. Given the evident ubiquity of the problem, India must modify asset-creating initiatives such as the Urban Infrastructure Development Fund to have additional priorities and adjust the incentives of rehabilitative schemes such as the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation to help regularly maintain ageing urban assets in all centres, with greater frequency in those peopled by 10 lakh or more. Second, while baseline audit frameworks for municipal bridges exist, they must be enforced more uniformly and transparently. Finally, until then, accidents must trigger a probe by a statutory body plus a mandatory audit of all major infrastructure, and States must endeavour to publish the findings at the earliest.

## COSTLY LAPSES

Microcrystalline Cellulose (MCC) is chemically inert. The human body does not absorb it. The skin does not react to it. But it has several useful physical properties such as being a binder and texturiser, which is why it has varied applications in the pharmaceutical, food, cosmetics and other industries. MCC can add weight to a drug and facilitate the active ingredients to function



effectively while making the drug conform to weight specifications. On Monday, however, the pharma unit of Sigachi Industries in Hyderabad, which makes this benign substance, was the scene of a lethal accident, with the toll rising to 36 on Tuesday. The making of this safe substance does involve risky processes, which can, however, be safe if appropriate procedures are followed by trained personnel. Most of the dead are young, poor, migrant workers from northern and eastern India who often lack social support. The Telangana government has announced an ex gratia of ₹1 crore and efforts must be made to ensure it reaches the families. It does seem that the response of mitigation agencies was timely and is ongoing.

The blast, however, puts the spotlight back on the pharma manufacturing industry, which has been a foreign exchange earner for India. Such accidents have been frequent, sadly. In August last year, there was a major accident at a pharma unit in Anakapalli near Visakhapatnam. Months earlier, in April, there was another accident in Hyderabad. Officials suspect that Monday's accident happened due to equipment malfunction, likely due to poor maintenance. It could have led to an abnormal build-up of temperature, leading to the blast. Key aspects of operating such hazardous units safely are that HAZOP, or a form of process hazard analysis, should be carried out by competent and knowledgeable staff. The data that individual units generate, that would indicate any abnormality, should be seamlessly integrated into operation control, again manned by competent staff. Operators should be trained, constantly aware of safety issues and implement steps that can ensure safety. While these are recommended practices, what is crucial is that such plants should have a high level of safety culture. Operators, managers and workers should be conscious of the ever-present risks. In this era of heightened scrutiny of industrial accidents by proactive media, manufacturing units are expected to conform to global norms especially regarding safety. Major slip-ups, such as this accident in Hyderabad, are likely to have a negative bearing on this key source of trade for India.

## WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FROM TELANGANA BLAST?

### The story so far:

On the morning of June 30 at 9.10 a.m., an explosion tore through Sigachi Industries, a pharmaceutical factory, and flattened a three-storeyed building in Pashamylaram on the outskirts of Hyderabad. The stock market-listed entity estimated the death toll at 39 of the 143 workers who were on-site during the explosion.

### What happened?

A four-member committee is investigating the cause of the explosion. The committee is led by B. Venkateshwar Rao, emeritus scientist at CSIR-IICT, and includes T. Prathap Kumar, chief scientist at CSIR-IICT; Surya Narayana, retired scientist at CSIR-CLRI; and Santosh Ghuge, safety officer at CSIR-NCL, Pune. While the cause is being investigated, the pharmaceutical company has issued a statement, "The accident was not caused by the reactor explosion."

Sigachi Industries was incorporated in 1989 and was in the business of manufacturing microcrystalline cellulose. This is nothing more than refined wood pulp or powder. This powder is shaped into tablets and serves as an excipient or a non-reactive carrier of medicine. The wood pulp or slurry is processed in a spray dryer that strips it of moisture using hot air. Once processed like this, the wood pulp turns into a fine powder or microcrystalline cellulose. This fine powder is suspected to have blown up on that fateful Monday morning. One of the first such 'dust explosions' recorded was in Turin in Italy in 1785 when a boy working with flour in a bakery created a cloud



of flour that got lit by the lamplight. Two persons, including the boy, were injured. There is a long record of similar dust explosions in flour mills, coal mines, and grain silos killing dozens across the world. Fire forensic experts say the blast at Sigachi was a dust explosion considering the scale of damage, raw materials used and processes involved. Initially, the explosion was suspected to be a Boiling Liquid Expanding Vapour Explosion, a technical term regarding the pressure built up inside the reactor. But this has been ruled out by the company, as well as experts.

#### **Was there a regulatory failure?**

The laxity of the regulatory framework was stark on the day of the explosion. When fire department and emergency personnel rushed to the site they did not have any information about what they were up against. The State and central pollution control boards mandate a board outside factory premises listing details about the pollution potential of the institution and factory operations. The fire fighting and disaster rescue operations are guided by this information. The green board or environment display boards outside the Sigachi Industries did not have proforma environmental data leaving fire and disaster rescue workers clueless about the nature of material involved and how to douse the fire. A tough regulatory framework with periodic check-ups would have ensured that information was available for a faster emergency response. This incident comes close on the heels of other serious accidents in pharmaceutical firms in India. Six persons were killed in Sangareddy in the SB Organics factory in 2024, 17 were killed in August 2024 in Anakapalli in Andhra Pradesh, and two were killed in Parawada, Andhra Pradesh in June 2025.

#### **What are the implications for the sector?**

An American investments and real estate company in its April 2025 report said: "Telangana has emerged a pivotal contributor to India's life sciences landscape accounting for approximately one third of the country's pharmaceutical production, one fifth of pharmaceutical exports, and one third of global vaccine production. The State's position as a pharmaceutical manufacturing hub has attracted significant investments, with over \$1.49 billion channelled into the life sciences sector over the past four years." It also analysed the role of Hyderabad in this scheme of things. Over 20 life sciences and medical technology incubators are located in Hyderabad, which is the highest concentration in the country.

India, with Telangana as its hub, has emerged as a powerhouse in the pharmaceutical sector. But safety and quality concerns have dogged smaller pharmaceutical firms. The U.S. is one of the biggest markets for Indian medical exports that is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The United States Pharmacopeia-National Formulary has a set of standards that regulate identity, strength, quality, purity, and packaging and labelling through the chain of manufacture and use. To keep being plugged into this profitable market, the standards have to match.

Safety is one of the key aspects of branding for the pharmaceutical industry that helps build trust among customers. Any laxity in any aspect of the drug processing has a cascading effect for the company as well as the industry. At stake is not just the safety of one factory but the systems and workflow that are hallmarks of stable and safe drug production. Two books, *The Truth Pill - The Myth of Drug Regulation in India* and *Bottle of Lies: Ranbaxy and the Dark Side of Indian Pharma*, by Dinesh S. Thakur and Prashant Reddy T. and Katherine Eban respectively have chronicled the regulatory leeway, and documented the dangerous practices resorted to by Indian pharma firms to keep costs low and profit margins high.



### What about pollution control norms?

Hyderabad and Telangana's pharmaceutical industry growth has been aided by lax zoning and regulatory norms. Industrial areas have to be necessarily away from residential areas. The IDA Pashamylaram was established in the early 1980s drawing some of the biggest pharmaceutical firms to the area, away from Balanagar and Patancheru that led the initial growth of the industry in Hyderabad. The initially isolated industrial area is now surrounded by residential areas. In the absence of robust and reliable public transport, worker colonies have cropped up close to the factories and industrial area. This affects the livelihood and health of people in the industrial cluster and surrounding areas.

Environmentalists have documented how tonnes of toxic chemicals and effluents have been released into the ground and into water bodies around the region. The Musi River remains highly polluted with a study on 'Pharmaceutical pollution of the world's rivers' placing it in the 22nd position worldwide in terms of concentration of active pharmaceutical ingredients. This high pollution is linked to poor waste water management infrastructure, and pharmaceutical manufacturing processes. The chemicals in the water have also been linked to a rise in antimicrobial resistance.

### What next?

The pharmaceutical sector holds the potential to attract investments and create high employment opportunities in Hyderabad and other places in India. To capitalise on this potential, India must establish a robust regulatory framework. The explosions and accidents are loud warning signs for the industry and the country.

## DEATH BY NEGLIGENCE

Tragedy struck without warning recently when a van carrying children on their daily school commute collided with a train on the tracks. Three schoolchildren were killed on Tuesday when the Villupuram-Mayiladuthurai Passenger train, hurtling at 95 kmph, rammed into their school van at a manned railway gate at Semmankuppam in Tamil Nadu's Cuddalore district, dragging it for 50 metres. Despite conflicting claims about how the gate at the non-interlocked level crossing remained open as the train approached, preliminary evidence points to human error. Southern Railway has suspended the gatekeeper — now arrested for criminal negligence — alleging that he yielded to pressure from the van driver and opened the gate in violation of established protocols. However, accounts from a surviving student and eyewitnesses contradict this version. The survivor has stated that the gate was already wide open and the sound of the oncoming train was not heard. There are also claims that the gatekeeper had fallen asleep. Yet, some reports suggest that just minutes before the collision, he had exchanged the secret private number with the station master, indicating the train's approach to Alappakkam — a detail that may not go unverified in the inquiry. Even if this is true, this would only show partial adherence to protocol. He failed in the essential duty of keeping the gate closed until the train had passed — as clearly laid out in the Indian Railways Permanent Way Manual.

At the heart of this accident is the continued use of non-interlocked manned level crossings. Unlike interlocked gates — where train signals turn green only when gates are securely locked — non-interlocked systems rely solely on the alertness and judgment of the gatekeeper. As of October last year, 11,053 manned level crossing gates in India are interlocked. In the Southern Railway zone, over 300 gates remain non-interlocked. Railway unions have long flagged the pressure



gatekeepers face from impatient motorists. The only foolproof solution to prevent such fatal incidents is the construction of road overbridges or underpasses. However, these projects are often delayed due to administrative hurdles and land acquisition issues. In this case, Southern Railway has accused the Cuddalore Collector of not having cleared a railway-funded underpass for over a year — a serious charge that demands scrutiny. Until permanent solutions are in place, the Indian Railways must urgently prioritise the conversion of non-interlocked crossings to interlocked ones. Human lives depend on it.

#### SHIP 'ARRESTED' AFTER KERALA CLAIMS DAMAGES: HOW DO ADMIRALTY SUITS WORK?

The Kerala High Court on Monday ordered the conditional “arrest” of Liberian container ship MSC Akiteta II, currently anchored at Thiruvananthapuram’s Vizhinjam port, over compensation claims arising from the sinking of the MSC Elsa III in May.

- The order came after the Kerala government filed an admiralty suit — a legal proceeding pertaining to maritime law and disputes — in the High Court. The suit named the Mediterranean Shipping Company, one of whose firms operates and manages the MSC Akiteta II. Another company of the same group operated the MSC Elsa III.
- The government has sought compensation of Rs 9,531 crore for the alleged pollution of Kerala’s marine ecosystem due to the sinking of MSC Elsa III on May 25, around 25 km southwest of Alappuzha.
- The ship went down with more than 600 containers, some of which carried plastic pellets, hazardous substances, and diesel.

#### Do You Know:

- The Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Act, 2017 governs maritime disputes in India. Under the Act, admiralty suits can be filed for maritime claims such as damage to ships, ownership and agreement disputes, loss of life, wage issues, and environmental damage.
- The 2017 law replaced the colonial-era Admiralty Court Act, 1861, and Colonial Courts of Admiralty Act, 1890.
- The previous laws gave jurisdiction only to the High Courts of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, as these were the only major ports in India earlier. Now, the HCs of Kerala, Karnataka, Odisha, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh also have jurisdiction over maritime disputes.
- The jurisdiction of the courts extends up to the territorial waters of their respective jurisdictions. The limit of territorial waters is up to 12 nautical miles from the nearest point of a low-water line along the coast. This also includes the seabed, subsoil (the layer of soil under the topsoil on the surface), and airspace above it.
- The Kerala government’s admiralty suit sought the arrest of the MSC Akiteta II until compensation was paid to the state. In maritime law, the arrest of a ship refers to a legal procedure where a court or other competent authority detains a vessel to secure a maritime claim against it or its owner.



## BEHIND RECORD-BREAKING HEAT IN KASHMIR: LONG DRY SPELLS, RISE IN URBANISATION

The Kashmir Valley witnessed its highest day temperature in over seven decades on Saturday (July 5), while the popular health resort of Pahalgam recorded its highest-ever daytime temperature. These record-breaking temperatures come on the heels of the valley experiencing its hottest June in nearly five decades.

- The Kashmir Valley generally has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. While spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November) are usually pleasant, winter (December to February) sees temperatures dropping well below freezing, with heavy snowfall in high-altitude areas and moderate snowfall in the plains.
- Summers (June to August) are mild, with daytime temperatures reaching up to 36 degree Celsius in urban areas and around 30 degree Celsius in resorts like Gulmarg and Pahalgam. Regular western disturbances bring intermittent rainfall, helping cool temperatures. July and August are typically the hottest months of the year.
- In recent years, Kashmir's weather has become increasingly erratic. The valley has seen extended dry spells, and temperatures have steadily risen. This year, it recorded the hottest June in nearly 50 years, with daytime temperatures hovering about three degrees above normal.

### Do You Know:

- Independent weather forecaster Faizan Arif said the worrisome part is that the Valley has seen consistently high mercury readings this year. "We have had higher temperatures in the past, but those were isolated incidents," Arif said. "This year, temperatures have consistently stayed above normal. Both maximum and minimum temperatures have remained elevated."
- Director of the India Meteorological Department in Srinagar, Mukhtar Ahmad, attributed the temperature rise to a combination of factors. "First, global warming is causing temperatures to rise worldwide," Ahmad said. "in Kashmir, in the past, whenever temperatures crossed 35 degree Celsius, rainfall would follow, bringing relief. But now we're seeing extended dry spells." He explained that one of the main reasons for this is the reduced availability of water vapour. "There's been very little snowfall in the mountains, and whatever snow falls melts by March, leaving the mountains bare." Ahmad also pointed to the role of Urban Heat Islands (UHIs), which intensify the heat.
- An urban heat island is a local and temporary phenomenon experienced when certain pockets within a city experience higher heat load than surrounding or neighbouring areas on the same day.

## PROJECTS IN GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND HAVE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE. GOVERNMENT MUST ADDRESS TRANSPARENCY CONCERNS

In the past five years, the government has taken steps to develop the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a bulwark of security to the east of the country's peninsular area and as a crucial node for safeguarding India's interests in the Indo-Pacific. The project involves revamping airfields and jetties and building logistics and storage facilities, a base for military personnel, and a robust surveillance infrastructure. It also involves a massive infrastructure upgrade on Great Nicobar Island — an International Container Transshipment Terminal, a greenfield international airport,



a township, and a gas and solar-based power plant spread. Given that the rapid enhancement of the capabilities of China's People's Liberation Army Navy has greatly increased the strategic importance of the Bay of Bengal in the past two decades, Delhi's infrastructure push and the building of a strong military deterrence at Great Nicobar hasn't come a day too late. However, the island's ecological sensitivity has made the challenge more complex. Civil society activists and wildlife conservationists have alleged that the infrastructure upgrade will harm the region's indigenous communities, including the largely uncontacted Shompen people, it will have negative spinoffs for coral reefs and marine systems and pose a threat to endangered species, including the terrestrial Nicobar megapode bird and leatherback turtles. In 2023, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed the Ministry of Environment to constitute a high-powered committee (HPC) to revisit the environmental clearances to the Great Nicobar project. On Monday, even as the ministry submitted the panel's report to an NGT bench, there was little indication that a resolution to the impasse was at hand.

The HPC has reportedly concluded that the environmental clearances accorded to the project "adhered to statutory provisions". The government has, however, not made the panel's report public. Keeping information classified is, of course, necessary at times in matters involving strategic affairs. But in an ecologically fragile region with a vulnerable local population, a project to create a formidable maritime bastion requires engagement with all sections of society. The government's insistence on secrecy will do more harm than good, especially because the lack of transparency around due procedures was a major sticking point with civil society activists. The government has reportedly also wielded the RTI Act's provisions on security and strategic concerns to deny right to information requests about environmental clearances. In March, it used an equally unconvincing argument — the matter is sub judice — to evade a Rajya Sabha question on the red flags raised by the NGT and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes about the project's impact on local communities. Two months later, Union Minister of Tribal Affairs Jual Oram said that the government was examining the concerns raised by tribal communities, but again refused to divulge details. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited, which is in charge of the infrastructure development activities, claims that its wildlife conservation plan (WCP) is derived from a framework developed by scientists at the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology. But the WCP, too, is not in the public domain.

Delhi has taken more than 70 years to recognise the strategic importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It now needs to set the record right on transparency — a project of national importance cannot be clouded with misgivings.

#### IS PALM OIL BAD FOR HEALTH? HERE'S WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

A food and beverage industry association has said that the use of labels such as "palm oil free" or "no palm oil" are misleading, and rooted more in marketing than science.

- The Indian Food and Beverage Association (IFBA) said in a statement issued on Tuesday that palm oil has been consumed by Indians since the the 19th century, and that the oil has a well-rounded fatty acid profile.
- Palm oil is among the most affordable and versatile edible oils globally, valued for its long shelf-life and neutral taste. Most packaged foods, including potato chips, biscuits, ice cream, and chocolates use palm oil.



- Of late, the oil has been getting a bad rap from online influencers, celebrities, and fitness gurus. For instance, actor-producer Jacky Bhagnani recently called palm oil “the most dangerous thing in life”. “It’s suicidal [to consume palm oil],” he said.
- All oils mainly contain three types of fatty acids: the “bad” saturated fatty acid (SFA) and the “good” mono-unsaturated fatty acid (MUFA) and poly-unsaturated fatty acid (PUFA).
- Consumption of oils with high SFAs is known to increase the levels of bad cholesterol (low density lipoproteins) which in turn increases inflammation in the body, decreases insulin sensitivity, and enhances the tendency of clot formation. Therefore, consuming such oils can increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes, as well as the onset of type-2 diabetes.
- Fats that remain solid or semi-solid at room temperatures — including palm oil, coconut oil, ghee, butter, and lard — are high in saturated fatty acids.

**Do You Know:**

- According to the Indian Dietary Guidelines, prepared by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), coconut oil and ghee have the highest SFA content, around 90 grams and 70 grams respectively per 100 grams of oil. Palmolein, the liquid part of palm oil, contains around 40 grams of SFA and 40 grams of MUFA, with the rest being PUFA. Mustard, safflower, and sunflower have the lowest SFA content, less than 10 grams per 100 gram of oil.
- Apart from these three fatty acids, trans fatty acids (TFA) are produced during the hydrogenation of liquid vegetable oils. The addition of hydrogen atoms into such oils converts liquid oil to semi-solid, and increases their shelf-life.
- According to the ICMR’s guidelines, a mix of oils that are low in SFA and high in PUFA should ideally be used. This would mean avoiding palm oil as much as possible.
- The ICMR’s guidelines suggest that consumption of oil should be limited to between 20 and 50 grams (four to 10 teaspoons) per person per day. Those living sedentary lifestyles should stick to the lower end of this range (20-30 grams).

**BATTING FOR PREVENTION**

With two cases of Nipah virus detected in Kerala — including one fatality owing to the infection — the attention is rightfully, once again, on a preventable infectious disease that could leave havoc in its trail. An adolescent girl from Malappuram succumbed to the virus on July 1, and a 38-year-old woman from Palakkad is battling for life in the hospital. In the big picture, as many as 425 people who are in the contact lists of the two Nipah-infected persons in three districts in Kerala have been identified and are under surveillance. Of these, 228 are from Malappuram district, where Patient Zero was identified this time, 110 in Palakkad and 87 in Kozhikode. In Palakkad, one contact is being treated in isolation, while 12 people are currently undergoing treatment in Malappuram — five of them are in the intensive care unit. One of them tested negative for the infection, and the results for the others are awaited. Over 140 of those on the contact list are said to be health workers. While the health machinery in Kerala is engaged in tracing the original source of the infection, it is also tasked, particularly in the three districts of Malappuram, Palakkad and Kozhikode, to trace contacts, isolate them to prevent further spread, contain infection and treat all those who show symptoms. India has recorded several outbreaks of the virus since 2001, a year when 45 of the 66 people infected died in West Bengal. In 2018, it surged in Kerala, with 17



of the 19 cases with laboratory-confirmed Nipah infection dying without responding to treatment. Kerala continues to report outbreaks regularly since then.

What renders even a single case of significant concern to get the entire health-care machinery in a tizzy? Nipah is a transmissible viral infection with a high mortality rate, ranging between 40% and 75%, which implies that if the infection spreads, then, a number of people are likely to die. Future research might add an effective tool to the armamentarium to effectively treat Nipah infections without mortality, but as of now, the course of action is vested only in prevention and awareness generation. Nipah is transmitted by fruit bats which are the natural reservoirs of the virus. It is suspected that consuming contaminated fruits, bitten or licked by bats, may play a role in spreading the virus. It is also equally important to cast a watchful eye on climate change-related factors, particularly anthropogenic activity that is destroying natural habitats, and initiate a robust One Health programme that will weigh not just Nipah but also other pathogens that are capable of zoonotic spillover, transitioning from animals to humans and causing great harm.

### WITH USAID SHUT, NORMAN BORLAUG'S INSTITUTE KNOCKS ON INDIA'S DOORS

Six decades ago, the legendary agricultural scientist Norman Borlaug ushered in India's Green Revolution through his high-yielding, semi-dwarf wheat varieties such as Lerma Rojo 64A, Sonora 63, Sonora 64 and Mayo 64.

- Today, his organisation – the Mexico-headquartered International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center or CIMMYT – is reaching out to the Indian government and the private sector, seeking financial support for its breeding research and development programme in the two cereals that cover over a quarter of the world's cropped area.
- The reason: A funding crunch brought about by global factors, including the shutting down of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) by the Donald Trump administration, officially from July 1.
- The agency, which administered civilian foreign aid and development assistance for the US government, accounted for about \$83 million out of CIMMYT's total grant revenue of \$211 million in 2024. That made it CIMMYT's largest funder, followed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (now Gates Foundation), which gave \$42 million.
- CIMMYT's current research and field trials are aimed at raising yields as much as breeding varieties with improved heat tolerance, disease resistance and biological nitrification inhibition (BNI) traits.
- Wheat is increasingly prone to yield losses from mercury spikes in March, at the crop's final grain formation and filling stage. Studies show that every one-degree Celsius rise in night temperatures lowers yields by an average of 6%. By identifying traits in wheat plants that promote heat tolerance, scientists are able to develop varieties better adapted to hotter days as well as warmer nights.

#### Do You Know:

- CIMMYT's advanced breeding lines are present as parent or grandparent in wheat varieties planted on more than 60 million hectares (mh) globally. The early Green Revolution blockbuster varieties that Indian scientists developed were all through selections from CIMMYT materials.



That included Kalyan Sona (released in 1967), Sonalika (1968) and PBW 343 (1995), which, at their peak, were grown on 5-6 mh, 14 mh and 7-8 mh respectively.

- In October 2011, CIMMYT established the Borlaug Institute for South Asia (BISA) as a joint venture with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). BISA has three research stations at Ludhiana (Punjab), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) and Samastipur (Bihar).
- CIMMYT has also opened a “doubled haploid” facility for maize at Kunigal (Karnataka), jointly with the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore. This first-of-its-kind facility in Asia produces genetically pure inbred lines of maize that can be used as parents for further crossing and breeding of hybrids by both public sector institutions and private seed companies.
- CIMMYT’s India office has 19 international and 144 national staff. Besides, some 25 scientists from India work at CIMMYT offices all over the world. “A tenth of our 1,800-plus global staff are Indians,” Govaerts noted.
- India’s contribution to CIMMYT’s budget was just \$0.8 million in 2024. While CIMMYT began as a pilot programme of the Mexican government and the Rockefeller Foundation in the 1940s and 50s, over time it became more reliant on funding from USAID and newer non-profits like the Gates Foundation.

#### JANAKI V/S STATE OF KERALA: CBFC MUST REMEMBER ITS JOB IS TO CLASSIFY CINEMA, NOT CENSOR

It is a real-life courtroom drama that the makers of Malayalam film Janaki v/s State of Kerala did not account for: Centred on a rape survivor’s pursuit of legal justice, the Suresh Gopi-Anupama Parameswaran movie, which was slated for a June 27 release, found itself ranged against the overreaching arm of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The Board refused its certification on the ground that it was inappropriate and inflammatory for a character portrayed as a sexual-violence survivor to bear a name with mythological associations, and to be cross-examined in court by a character of another faith. After legal intervention, a compromise has been reached. The filmmakers have agreed to insert an initial before the protagonist’s name in exchange for only two of the 96 cuts demanded. But the episode is troubling. It signals a dangerous narrowing of artistic spaces. It is also a reminder of how the CBFC, whose remit is to classify films, not censor them, repeatedly strays into moral and political gatekeeping.

Janaki vs State of Kerala joins a long list of films — Lipstick Under My Burkha (2016), Padmaavat (2018), and more recently, L2: Empuraan — that have faced similar interference under the pretext of preserving public order or avoiding offence. Sitaare Zameen Par was released after five changes, including the addition of a quote by the Prime Minister in the opening disclaimer. The CBFC’s entanglement with identity politics — religious, regional, or patriarchal — points to a deeper institutional malaise. Over the years, the Board’s role has mutated to control, often wielding its power to appease real and imagined fringe sensitivities rather than upholding and expanding spaces for artistic liberty. In trying to pre-empt hypothetical offence, it reinforces a culture where free expression is contingent on the veto of the most easily outraged. This poses a dual threat: Not only are filmmakers forced into a regressive self-censorship, as was the case with the makers of L2: Empuraan, but audiences, too, are denied mature engagement with difficult ideas. The Kerala High Court, while hearing the case, asked pertinent questions: “Has anyone complained about the name Janaki? Whose sentiments are being hurt? Has anyone actually raised an objection?” and



“Now you will dictate to directors and artists which names they should use and which stories they should tell...”

A defining feature of a mature democracy is a cultural framework that trusts people to engage with complexity. Art thrives in discomfort, dissent, provocation and debate. The CBFC must remember its job is to classify cinema — and then get out of the way.

## KAILASH-MANSAROVAR YATRA RESUMES AFTER FIVE YEARS: HISTORY OF A STORIED PILGRIMAGE

After a five-year hiatus triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and extended due to tensions between India and China, the Kailash-Mansarovar yatra has resumed in 2025.

- This year, the Ministry of External Affairs chose 750 pilgrims who would be making the storied pilgrimage.
- With an elevation of 6,638 metres, Mount Kailash (Gang Rinpoche in Tibetan) is located in the Ngari Prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region, near the tri-junction of India, Tibet and Nepal.
- To its south on the Tibetan plateau are two lakes: the freshwater Mansarovar (Mapam Yumtso) and saltwater Rakshastal (Lhanag Tso).
- Both lakes and the towering mountain in their background are significant in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Tibetan Bon traditions.
- Four major rivers — the Yarlung Tsangpo (which later becomes the Brahmaputra), the Indus, the Sutlej, and the Karnali (later known as Ghaghra, a major tributary of the Ganga) — trace their origins “the watershed of this iconic mass of rock,” Alice Albinia wrote in her award-winning book *Empires of the Indus: The Story of a River* (2008).
- Despite its age-old sacredness, however, the Kailash-Mansarovar complex was not a popular pilgrimage site till “as recently as the early 1900s...,” wrote Tibetologist Alex McKay in his book *Kailas Histories: Renunciate Traditions and the Construction of Himalayan Sacred Geography* (2015).
- Pilgrims typically travel to and circumambulate Mansarovar, a 90-km walk that takes between three to five days to complete. Some then circumambulate Mount Kailash, a much more arduous 52-km trek that takes around three days to complete.
- The Kailash trek began on the southern side of the mountain, at Tarchen. Pilgrims typically travel clockwise around the mountain, always keeping Kailash to their right. The trek passes through Dirapuk, Dolma La, Zutul Puk, and finally culminates in Tarchen.
- On the Nathu La pass route, which first opened in 2015, the journey is even easier: pilgrims travel the entire 1,500 km from Nathu La to Mansarovar by car or bus.

### Do You Know:

- There are two primary routes to reach Lake Mansarovar from India.



- **LIPULEKH PASS ROUTE:** Lipulekh pass lies at an altitude of 5,115 metres, on the border between Uttarakhand and TAR, near the trijunction with Nepal. It is an ancient passageway between the Indian subcontinent and the Tibetan Plateau, frequented by traders and pilgrims alike.
- While the Lipulekh pass route is the most direct way to get to Mansarovar from India — as the crow flies, the lake is roughly 50 km from the border — the terrain makes the journey very challenging. Currently, this route entails roughly 200 km of hard trekking. Before 2020, it had been operational since 1981.
- **NATHU LA PASS ROUTE:** Nathu La pass lies at an altitude of 4,310 metres on the border between Sikkim and TAR. It is one of two mountain passes in the region — the other being Jelep La — that have connected Sikkim and Tibet since ancient times.
- The route to Mansarovar from Nathu La is much longer in terms of distance — close to 1,500 km. But it is fully motorable, meaning pilgrims can make it all the way to the lake without any trekking. (They would only need to trekk 35-40 km for the circumambulation of Mount Kailash). This route became operational in 2015.
- **NEPAL ROUTE:** No private operators function on the two official routes. There is, however, a third route through Nepal in which private companies do operate. In theory, this route has been accessible to Indians since 2023, when China reopened its border with Nepal. But visa and permit requirements, as well as high costs due to China-imposed fees, have meant that few have likely availed this option.

## STARVED FOR SALVATION

The death of three-year-old Viyana Jain on March 21, 2025, in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, just 40 minutes after initiating the Jain ritual of Santhara—a voluntary fast unto death—has sparked a heated controversy, reigniting debates over religious freedom, child protection, and ethical boundaries. Diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour, Viyana was guided into Santhara by her parents, Piyush and Varsha Jain, under the advice of Jain monk Rajesh Muni Maharaj. The case, now under review in the Madhya Pradesh High Court following a public interest litigation (PIL) filed on May 9, 2025, by social activist Pranshu Jain, highlights the complex interplay between spiritual tradition and modern legal standards, drawing parallels to global tensions over balancing tradition with human rights.

### The Incident and Public Outrage

Viyana's condition deteriorated after an unsuccessful brain surgery in Mumbai in December 2024. Her parents, devout Jains, opted for Santhara, believing it would grant her spiritual liberation. The ritual, conducted at the monk's ashram, was celebrated by the Jain community as Samadhi-maran (peaceful death). However, controversy erupted when the Golden Book of World Records certified Viyana in May 2025 as the "youngest person to vow Santhara," triggering widespread criticism. The PIL demands a ban on Santhara for minors and the mentally ill, arguing it violates child rights and could be misused. The Madhya Pradesh High Court issued notices on July 8, 2025, to the Union and State governments, the NHRC, and Viyana's parents, with a hearing expected soon.

### Santhara and Ethical Concerns

Santhara, a Jain practice of fasting to achieve moksha (liberation), is distinct from suicide, proponents argue, as it involves deliberate detachment in extreme circumstances like terminal



illness. Viyana's parents claimed she had exceptional spiritual understanding, a claim disputed by critics who assert a toddler cannot consent to such a decision. Medical experts, including Omkar Singh from the Madhya Pradesh Child Rights Commission, argue that palliative care was a viable alternative. The Golden Book's recognition has been slammed as irresponsible, potentially glorifying a practice that risks abuse, especially for vulnerable groups.

### Legal and Social Context

The legal status of Santhara remains ambiguous. In 2015, the Rajasthan High Court equated it to suicide under IPC Sections 306 and 309, but the Supreme Court stayed this ruling, affirming its religious significance under Article 25. Neither court addressed minors, making the Viyana case a potential landmark. India's secular framework allows religious freedom but permits intervention when practices harm public welfare, as seen in the Madras High Court's phone-tapping ruling.

### Path Forward

The Madhya Pradesh High Court must establish clear guidelines, requiring medical and judicial oversight for Santhara involving minors, akin to euthanasia protocols. Scrutiny of the Golden Book's role is needed to prevent glorification of such acts. Strengthening child protection mechanisms and fostering dialogue between religious leaders and policymakers are critical to prevent future tragedies.

### Conclusion

Viyana Jain's Santhara underscores a tragic clash between Jain spiritual ideals and child welfare. While Santhara reflects deep faith, its application to a three-year-old raises serious ethical and legal questions. The ongoing court case offers a chance to set boundaries, ensuring religious freedom does not override the rights of the vulnerable. As India balances tradition and modernity in its Viksit Bharat journey, resolving such controversies with compassion and clarity is essential to safeguard both faith and humanity.

## HOW FAST IS INDIA'S FASTEST MAN?

Last Saturday, Animesh Kujur became India's fastest man by breaking the national record in the men's 100 metres. He clocked 10.18 seconds in Greece, becoming the first Indian to run the 100 m event under 10.2 seconds.

Notably, two of India's fastest 100 m runs have come in quick succession in 2025. In March, Gurindervir Singh set a record of 10.2 seconds; he is now the second fastest. On a parallel lane, Manikanta Hoblidhar ran the 100 m race in 10.22 seconds; he is now the third fastest Indian.

Since 1968, 1,027 athletes from around 90 countries have run the 100m faster than Kujur. Kujur's effort is still a significant 0.6 seconds slower than Usain Bolt's world record of 9.58 seconds, set in 2009, which remains unbeaten. Bolt also holds the record for the second-fastest 100 m (9.63 seconds).

Kujur's national record is 0.02 seconds faster than the legendary sprinter Jesse Owens' best of 10.2 seconds, set in 1936. The current Indian national record is comparable to world records set in the 1930s to 1950s.

On Saturday, Kujur broke Singh's record of 10.20 seconds, set earlier this year. Singh had surpassed Hoblidhar's 2023 mark of 10.23 seconds, who in turn had broken Amiya Mallick's 10.26

**4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



seconds from 2016. Mallick had bettered Abdul Najeib Qureshi's 10.30 seconds, set in 2010, which had equalled Anil Kumar's record from 2005. In essence, over the past 20 years, Indian sprinters have improved their 100 m time by 0.12 seconds.

## SHORT NEWS

### KEY TO THE CITY OF BUENOS AIRES

- Prime Minister Modi was conferred with the 'Key to the City of Buenos Aires' during his visit to Argentina.
- This ceremonial honour is in recognition of the PM's contributions in strengthening India-Argentina ties.

### INDIA-BRAZIL

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on Tuesday (8th July) conferred with Brazil's highest civilian award, the Grand Collar of the National Order of the Southern Cross.
- This is the 26th international honour bestowed upon PM Modi by a foreign government since he assumed office in May 2014.

### PM MODI IN NAMIBIA

- Namibia was the last stop of PM Modi during his 5-nation tour (Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, and Brazil) that started on July 2. This is the first visit of PM Modi to Namibia and the third-ever by an Indian PM to the country.
- PM Modi also paid tribute to Namibia's founding father Sam Nujoma at the Heroes' Acre memorial. Nujoma led Namibia to independence in 1990 and served as its first President for 15 years.
- India and Namibia inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on setting up an Entrepreneurship Development Center in Namibia and another pact on cooperation in areas of health and medicine.
- PM Modi was conferred with Namibia's highest civilian award, the 'Order of the Most Ancient Welwitschia Mirabilis'.
- Namibia has also joined the India-backed CDRI (Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure) and the Global Biofuels Alliance.

### YANGTZE STURGEON

- China has dismantled 300 dams and shut down most small hydropower stations on a major Yangtze River tributary to help restore fish habitats like Yangtze sturgeon and river health, the South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported.
- The move affects the Chishui He, also known as the Red River, a 400-kilometre waterway flowing through Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan provinces.



— The Yangtze sturgeon, sometimes called the river’s “last giant”, was declared extinct in the wild by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 2022. It permanently lives in freshwater and usually inhabits the upper and middle reaches of the river.

## SWIFT

— US President Donald Trump said in a social media post that any country aligning itself with the “anti-American policies” of BRICS would face an additional 10 per cent tariff.

— Ever since the US weaponised the global financial infrastructure by excluding Iran (in 2012) and Russia (in 2022) from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), countries around the world have sought to reduce their dependence on the US dollar and the US-led global financial system.

— SWIFT is a secure platform for financial institutions to exchange information about global monetary transactions such as money transfers.

— While SWIFT does not actually move money, it operates as a middleman to verify information of transactions by providing secure financial messaging services to more than 11,000 banks in over 200 countries.

— Based in Belgium, it is overseen by the central banks of eleven industrial countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, besides Belgium.

## A ROADMAP FOR STRENGTHENING STATE S&T COUNCILS

— NITI Aayog, in a step to strengthen decentralised innovation in India, has released a report titled “A Roadmap for Strengthening State S&T Councils.”

— It has been recommended that the Department of Science and Technology (DST) cut its ‘core grant support’ for State Science and Technology Councils and pare them down to ‘project-based support’.

— The initiative to establish State S&T Councils was first taken in the 1970s, which marked the beginning of a structured approach to regional scientific development.

— As a result, the process of impetus for State level planning and Promotion of Science & Technology began in the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) and continued through the subsequent Five Year Plans, primarily through this plan programme, formerly known as, “Assistance for development of State Councils for Science and Technology”.

## HOW A NOVEL INITIATIVE HELPED TAMIL NADU BRING DOWN TB DEATHS IN THE STATE

Tamil Nadu has witnessed a dip in the number of tuberculosis (TB) deaths in the state after the rollout of the Tamil Nadu Kasanoi Erappila Thittam (TN-KET), or TB death free initiative, in 2022.

One, it uses a quick, easy-to-use tool, which helps a doctor determine whether a patient is severely ill and needs to be hospitalised soon after being diagnosed with TB. The tool does not require any laboratory-based investigations.



Two, the initiative follows a differentiated care model which offers a patient-centred approach instead of a one-size-fits-all treatment.

#### ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY EXPERT PANEL RECOMMENDS GREEN NOD FOR PURI AIRPORT

The Union Environment Ministry's expert appraisal committee (EAC) for the infrastructure sector has recommended the grant of environmental clearance for the proposed greenfield Puri International Airport. The recommendation is subject to specific conditions, key among which is that the project should be granted Stage-I or in-principle forest clearance first, as per the minutes of the EAC meeting held on June 26.

#### DSV NISTAR

- The Indian Navy will commission its first indigenous Diving Support Vessel (DSV) Nistar at Naval Dockyard in Visakhapatnam on July 18. Nistar is the first ship of two-member class of DSVs, the second being Nipun.
- The ship has been indigenously designed and constructed by state-owned Hindustan Shipyard Limited and will join the Eastern Naval Command to support deep sea diving and submarine rescue operations.
- In her earlier avatar, INS Nistar was a submarine rescue vessel which was acquired by the Indian Navy from the erstwhile USSR in 1969 and was commissioned in 1971.
- In two decades of service, she had significantly contributed towards the Indian Navy's diving and submarine rescue operations. The erstwhile INS Nistar was decommissioned in 1989.
- With the commissioning of the new INS Nistar, the legacy of earlier INS Nistar continues, with her motto 'Surakshita Yatharthta Shauryam' translating to 'Deliverance with Precision and Bravery', reflecting the main roles of the ship.

#### LOTUS BLOOMS IN KASHMIR'S WULAR LAKE

- Wular lake is once again becoming home to lotuses, 30 years after a devastating flood completely wiped them out of the area. The credit for this goes to conservation efforts by the Wular Conservation and Management Authority.
- Wular is Asia's second-largest freshwater lake, located in Bandipora. It is located some 67 km from Srinagar and surrounded by the misty Harmukh mountains. The main source of water for Wular Lake is the River Jhelum. This lake also has a small island in its centre called the 'Zaina Lank'.
- The lotus stems, known locally as Nadru, are a delicacy in Kashmir, where it is cooked with fish or yoghurt to make a dish known as Nadru Yakhni.
- Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) is grown in damp soil, usually a combination of loam and clay soil. They require at least six hours of sunlight a day and should be sparingly fertilized in the first year. It is important to protect the lotus roots from freezing.



#### WORLD BIOPRODUCT DAY

- World Bioproduct Day is celebrated on July 7. This day is dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of bioproducts and their contribution to environmental sustainability and climate action.
- Union Minister of Science & Technology, Dr. Jitendra Singh, reaffirms India's aim of realising a \$300 billion bioeconomy by 2030.

#### WORLD POPULATION DAY 2025

- World Population Day (July 11) is a global observance marked annually to raise awareness about global population challenges and their implications for society. The theme for this year is "Empowering young people to create the families they want in a fair and hopeful world".
- Established by the United Nations in 1989, the idea of World Population Day arose from the recognition of the importance of population-related issues and the UNDP designated this day as an annual event to commemorate the world's population reaching 5 billion people on July 11, 1987.

#### DHAMMACAKKAPPAVATTANA DIVAS

- The International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with the Mahabodhi Society of India, commemorated Ashadha Purnima —Dhammacakkappavattana Divas—at Mulagandha Kuti Vihara, Sarnath, 10th July 2025.
- It is celebrated to commemorate Buddha's First Sermon or the First Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma, when he taught the Dhammacakka-pavattana Sutta (Pāli) or Dharmacakra pravartana Sūtra (Sanskrit).
- Seven weeks after his Enlightenment, he gave this discourse to pancavargiya – the first five ascetic disciples—at the 'Deer Park', at Sarnath, in Varanasi. It is here that the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Paths and the Middle Path.

#### FLOOD WITHOUT RAIN IN NEPAL RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURSTS

On July 8, 2025, a devastating flood struck Nepal's Rasuwa district along the Bhote Koshi River, killing at least nine people, leaving 19 missing, and destroying the Nepal-China Friendship Bridge, a critical trade link. Unlike typical monsoon floods, this disaster occurred without rainfall, with satellite imagery from the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) confirming it was triggered by a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) from a supraglacial lake in China's Tibet region. This event, coupled with a similar GLOF in Thame village on August 16, 2024, underscores the growing threat of climate-driven glacial lake outbursts in Nepal, a nation highly vulnerable to such disasters. As global warming accelerates Himalayan glacier melt, Nepal must prioritize advanced monitoring, cross-border cooperation, and community-based mitigation to avert catastrophic losses.



## UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

— During the 47th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) held in Paris, the ‘Maratha Military Landscapes’ was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. This is India’s 44th property to receive the recognition.

— The Maratha Military Landscapes include 12 forts of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, including forts of Salher, Shivneri, Lohgad, Khanderi, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala, Vijay Durg and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, and Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu. Out of these twelve forts, eight are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

— “In the Maratha Military Landscapes of India, Salher fort, Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Raigad, Rajgad and Gingee fort are hill forts, Pratapgad is hill-forest fort, Panhala is hill-plateau fort, Vijaydurg is coastal fort whereas Khanderi fort, Suvarnadurg and Sindhudurg are island forts,” the ministry said.

— The UNESCO World Heritage Committee meets at least once every year, generally in June/July, to deliberate the addition, removal, or modification of items on the list of World Heritage Sites. The Committee comprises of 21 members selected from amongst 196 States Parties of the 1972 World Heritage Convention.



# DreamIAS



## BUSINESS AND ECONOMY

### BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL ACT: US PULLS BACK ON SOLAR, WIND, EVS AS CHINA RACES AHEAD

US President Donald Trump has signed the Congress-approved 'One Big Beautiful Bill' Act (OBBBA), which marks a sharp break from his predecessor Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that drove billions into clean energy investments – from solar and wind to electric vehicles (EVs). Instead, the OBBBA accelerates the phaseout of federal incentives for these clean technologies, slashes royalty rates for domestic fossil fuel drilling, and expands oil and gas leasing through new provisions.

- The US House of Representatives passed the bill on July 3 without altering the Senate-approved version received earlier this week. While the final text modestly tones down the House's more aggressive cuts in support for hydrogen production and batteries, it still rolls back key benefits for solar and wind energy, as well as for both commercial and passenger EVs.
- Experts warn the legislation could drive up household energy bills over the next decade, slow the deployment of clean technologies on the US power grid, and – most importantly – cement China's dominance in the global clean energy race.
- The oil and gas industry – long a key backer of Trump's presidential campaigns – welcomed the OBBBA's push to expand fossil fuel production. But critics argue that US shale remains costlier than renewables, and that leaning on fossil fuels to meet rising electricity demand is both economically and practically unviable.
- The final OBBBA text, while broadly scaling back clean energy support, is still less severe than the House version originally sent to the Senate. It gives clean hydrogen projects until end-2027 to qualify for tax credits – two years more than earlier proposed – and retains incentives for carbon capture, nuclear power, and clean fuels. Energy storage systems tied to solar or wind can also access full investment benefits through 2032, avoiding a sharper phaseout of benefits.
- Across the Pacific, China has ramped up thermal power to meet rising industrial demand – but a steady pivot to clean technologies remains central to its energy strategy. For instance, in 2024, while it started construction to add around 100 GW of coal power capacity, it added a whopping 420 GW of solar and wind. In comparison, the US added less than 55 GW in 2024, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA).

### THANKS TO TRUMP, UNCERTAINTY IN THE GLOBAL TRADING SYSTEM IS LIKELY TO PERSIST

The 90-day pause granted earlier on Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs has come to an end. While Trump's team may have been hopeful of signing quick deals —in the initial days, there was talk of closing 90 deals in 90 days — the actual progress made by the administration has been considerably below expectations. Agreements have been struck only with the UK and Vietnam and a framework has been agreed upon with China. More deals are on the cards. Revenues, though, have surged. According to reports, US tariff revenues soared to \$22.8 billion in May. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is hopeful of revenues touching \$300 billion by the end of 2025. But, marked by unpredictability, Trump's tariff policy, on which questions of legality have also been raised, has only increased uncertainty in the global economy.



The last few days have seen a flurry of tariff announcements. On Monday, Washington sent letters to 14 countries detailing the tariffs imposed on them. These are now effective from August 1. According to reports, US imports from these countries stood at \$465 billion last year. The tariffs levied range from 25 to 40 per cent. Even US allies like Japan and South Korea have not been spared. Six of the 14 countries belong to ASEAN — Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar — a grouping that has deepened integration with China. As per reports, the letters, in line with the US-Vietnam agreement, which doubles the tariff for transshipped goods, also say that “good transshipped to evade a higher tariff will be subject to that higher tariff”. This seems to be aimed at China. A recent note from Nomura, an investment house, had pointed out that “Asia is experiencing a significant surge in imports from China, raising concerns about potential transshipment activities”. Countries such as Japan, Thailand and Malaysia have responded by saying that they’ll continue to hold discussions and negotiate with the US. Trump, however, has not stopped there. Following his levies on commodities like steel and aluminium on Tuesday, he announced 50 per cent tariffs on copper. The markets reacted immediately — copper futures soared around 9 per cent. That’s not all. The US President has also threatened to impose up to 200 per cent tariffs on pharmaceuticals. He has also warned that members of BRICS would face a 10 per cent tariff.

Trump’s tariff policies have upended the global trading architecture. The Global Trade and Research Initiative, a Delhi-based think tank, has underlined that these agreements do not meet WTO standards for FTAs. If Trump’s past approach is anything to go by, there is a possibility that the tariffs imposed today could be revised tomorrow. The uncertainty in the global trading system is, therefore, likely to persist.

#### BRICS NATIONS ‘CONDEMN AND REJECT’ EUROPE’S CARBON-BASED IMPORT DUTIES

In its strongest statement on the subject yet, the BRICS nations have “condemned and rejected” Europe’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms (CBAMs), and other similar restrictive trade measures taken under the pretext of climate concerns, saying these undermined their development and transition to cleaner economy.

- CBAM is an import duty imposed by the European Union (EU) on goods produced by processes that lead to more carbon emissions than domestic European manufacturers are allowed to emit. The ostensible reason is to check ‘carbon leakage’, but this has the effect of making items like steel or cement, from a country like India for example, more expensive, and thus less competitive, in the European markets.
- Developing countries including India and China have been strongly critical of CBAM, calling it a unilateral and unfair trade barrier. They maintain this violates international agreements on both trade and climate, and have raised this issue at multiple international forums, including the annual climate conferences. But EU has been unrelenting. The statement by the BRICS nations, a group of nine large developing economies whose annual two-day summit concluded in Brazil on Monday, is another reiteration of the stand of the developing countries, though in a much stronger language.
- The Leaders’ Framework Declaration on Climate Finance is the result of the discussions held by a new contact group of ministers on climate change and sustainable development that was formed last year under Russia’s chairmanship of BRICS.



**Do You Know:**

- The declaration said CBAMs, and other measures like restrictions on trade of forest goods, violated the provisions of the 1994 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and agreements reached at other climate meetings.

—For example, Article 3(5) of UNFCCC calls upon countries to “promote a supportive and open international economic system” that would lead to sustainable economic growth and development in all countries, particularly those in the developing world. —Importantly, it also says that “measures taken to combat climate change, including unilateral ones, should not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade”.

- The BRICS countries, in their latest statement said they want a full implementation of this provision in UNFCCC.

- The BRICS nations also asked the rich and developed world to fully deliver on their commitments under the UNFCCC and the 2015 Agreement, particularly those related to providing financial resources to the developing countries to take climate action. Developed countries are obligated to raise at least US\$ 100 billion a year in climate finance meant for developing countries. They have promised to raise this to at least US\$ 300 billion a year from 2035. But developing countries say this is too less and too late, considering that they already need at least US\$ 1.3 trillion a year.

- The BRICS nations called on the developed world to urgently increase their financial contribution to adaptation projects, at least doubling the amount in 2019 by 2025, as has been agreed in climate conferences.

**NAMIBIA SAYS WILL ROLL OUT UPI AFTER MODI, PRESIDENT HOLD TALKS**

Namibia will roll out Unified Payments Interface (UPI) later this year and will set up an Entrepreneurship Development Center, it was announced Wednesday after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Namibian President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah held talks that focused on imparting a new momentum to the bilateral ties.

- The Modi-Ndaitwah meeting in Windhoek primarily focused on bolstering bilateral cooperation in areas such as digital technology, defence, security, agriculture, healthcare, education and critical minerals.

- There was an announcement on the launch of a digital payments system in Namibia later this year as an outcome of the signing of the UPI technology licensing agreement between NPCI (National Payments Corporation of India) and Bank of Namibia in April last year.

- Following the talks between the two leaders, India and Namibia inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on setting up an Entrepreneurship Development Center in Namibia and another pact on cooperation in areas of health and medicine.

- Namibia has also joined the India-backed CDRI (Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure) and the Global Biofuels Alliance.

- CDRI is dedicated to enhancing the resilience of infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks. It includes national governments, international organizations, and the private sector.



**Do You Know:**

- This is the first visit of PM Modi to Namibia and the third-ever by an Indian PM to the country.
- Modi, who arrived from Brazil on the final leg of his five-nation tour, also paid tribute to Namibia's founding father Sam Nujoma at the Heroes' Acre memorial. Nujoma led Namibia to independence in 1990 and served as its first President for 15 years. The PM remembered Nujoma as a visionary leader who devoted his life to the struggle for Namibia's independence.
- PM Modi was also conferred with Namibia's highest civilian award, the 'Order of the Most Ancient Welwitschia Mirabilis'. Addressing a gathering, the PM said, "Namibia's Welwitschia, after which this award is named, is not an ordinary plant. It is like an elder in the household, one who has witnessed the passage of time. It symbolises Namibia's struggle, courage, and culture."

**MODI-MILEI TALKS EXPLORE VENTURES IN CRITICAL MINERALS, SHALE, DEFENCE**

India and Argentina are to strengthen collaboration in critical minerals, shale gas, defence manufacturing, space, telemedicine, digital health solutions and information technology following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Javier Milei in Buenos Aires Saturday night.

- Modi and Milei met last November on the sidelines of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Brazil. On Saturday, the two sides decided to work towards a preferential trade agreement and faster approval towards Indian medicines, and adoption of the UPI system after the bilateral meeting.
- This is the first Indian bilateral visit to Argentina at the level of the Prime Minister in 57 years. It is Modi's second visit to the country as Prime Minister – he was there in 2018 for the G20 Summit.
- Argentina has been a strategic partner of India since 2019 and the two countries celebrated 75 years of diplomatic relations last year.
- P Kumaran, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, said, "The Prime Minister's visit to Argentina comes at a particularly significant time as Argentina is undertaking major economic reforms similar to those India went through in the past."
- Argentina holds the world's second largest shale gas reserves and the fourth largest shale oil reserves along with substantial conventional oil and gas deposits, making it a potentially important energy partner for India in the future.
- Argentina's rich reserves of critical minerals such as lithium, copper and rare earth elements complement India's growing need for secure and sustainable supplies to these elements for its clean energy transition and industrial growth. India's public sector joint venture company KABIL has already won a few concessions in Argentina since 2024.
- "The visit will further strengthen the strategic partnership between India and Argentina and to explore new areas of cooperation across a wide range of sectors. These particularly include trade and investment, health and pharmaceuticals, defence and security, infrastructure, mining and mineral resources, agriculture and food security, green energy, information and communication technologies, digital innovation, disaster management, science and technology, education and people to people linkages," said P Kumaran, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs.



**Do You Know:**

- The last visit by an Indian PM to Argentina was by Indira Gandhi in 1968. As Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi visited Argentina as part of her tour of South American nations in 1968.
- The first recorded visit by an Argentine to India was in 1848. According to Indologist Gustavo Canzobre, Indo-Argentinean relations date back to 1848 when the 17-year-old Argentine Lucio V. Mansilla visited India. Mansilla's writings of his travels across India and East Asia were recorded in the book *Diario de viaje a Oriente (1850-51)* (Travel Journal to the Orient [1850-51]).

**AFTER CHINA'S RE MAGNET CLAMPDOWN, A RETHINK IN INDIA ON ITS EV POLICY PUSH**

In India's policy circles, a steadfast focus of driving vehicular electrification by largely incentivising a singular technological platform – battery electric vehicles or BEVs – at the cost of all other technologies, could be in for a change.

- The immediate trigger for this has come from China's newly imposed restrictions on rare earth magnet and related materials that kicked in from April 4, which are beginning to impact automakers across the world. This includes vehicle manufacturers in India.
- Beijing's move has set off an informed discussion within top levels of the Indian government that multiple geopolitical issues need to be considered afresh while picking vehicular technologies, and whether the choice of BEVs in the eventual goal of vehicular electrification could mean playing entirely into the hands of Chinese at the cost of India's own local ICE (internal combustion engine) auto value chain and ancillary ecosystem.
- India's electric mobility plan has, so far, largely focused on replacing internal combustion engines with BEVs powered by Lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries, which was positioned as the most viable energy storage option for the future.
- BEVs are essentially vehicles such as the Tata Nexon EV, BYD Atto3 or Mahindra BE6 in India, or the Nissan Leaf or the Tesla Model S sold abroad, which have no internal combustion engine or fuel tank, and run on a fully electric drivetrain powered by rechargeable batteries.
- Currently, government policy overtly favours BEVs, which are taxed at 5 per cent, with most other categories facing higher taxes over 43-48 per cent. The Centre has also been pursuing its target of EV30@2030 that aims to ensure that 30 per cent of all newly registered private cars, 40 per cent of buses, 70 per cent of commercial cars, and 80 per cent of two-wheelers and three-wheelers will be electric in less than five years. All this could all possibly see a review in the due course.

**Do You Know:**

- Rare earth magnets, especially neodymium-iron-boron (NdFeB) magnets, are crucial for EV manufacturing, particularly in electric motors. They provide the strong magnetic fields needed for efficient and powerful electric motors, including traction motors that drive EVs.
- Rare earths are needed for making what are called permanent magnet synchronous motors, which are used extensively in EVs. These magnets also play a major role in other vehicular components like power steering systems, wiper motors, and braking systems, which impact both EVs and ICE vehicles. China has a stranglehold over these rare earth magnets.



- While the availability of rare earth metals is not limited to China, it is in the efficient processing of these critical elements where Beijing has a substantial lead, which was once enjoyed by the US and Japan. In recent years, Japan has been able to restart some of its minerals' processing industry owing to government policies, but countries like the US and India are heavily dependent on Chinese exports of these metals.
- While China restricted exports of seven heavy rare earth metals including samarium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, lutetium, scandium, and yttrium, as well as rare earth magnets in May in response to the US administration's reciprocal tariff heat, these restrictions are still to be lifted in a meaningful way.
- Apart from China's restrictions on rare earth magnets, Beijing's virtual stranglehold in the EV battery ecosystem is yet another reason for concern here. The Indian government's strong EV push comes amid a struggle by New Delhi to make inroads into the global lithium value chain, which too has prompted a rethink on the need to diversify the country's dependency on Li-ion batteries in the overall EV mix. The demand for Li-ion batteries from India is projected to grow at a CAGR of over 30 per cent by volume up to 2030, translating into over 50,000 tonnes of lithium requirement for the country to manufacture only EV batteries.

#### 'INVISIBLE HAND' IN FOREIGN TRADE

International trade is normally associated with the movement of physical goods loaded onto ships, whether directly as bulk unpackaged cargo or in standard-sized containers.

- In India's case, the "invisibles" trade – export and import of services plus cross-border private individual money transfers – is today bigger than the "visible" merchandise trade account in its external balance of payments.
- In 2013-14, India's goods exports were about \$85 billion more than its receipts from invisibles. In 2024-25, it was the other way round, with invisible receipts roughly \$135 billion higher than merchandise exports. While trade deals – including the one now being negotiated with the United States – are mostly focused around seaborne and airborne material cargo, India's foreign trade story in recent times has had more to do with the exports of intangibles.
- A break-up of India's gross invisible receipts of \$576.5 billion in 2024-25 reveals \$387.5 billion coming from exports of services, which have soared from a mere \$26.9 billion in 2003-04 and \$151.8 billion in 2013-14.
- The other major source of invisible income has been private transfers or remittances (\$135.4 billion). This is money sent by Indians working and living abroad, be it temporarily or as permanent residents and even foreign citizens. The dollars, pounds and dirhams remitted by them is essentially receipts from export of human resources from India.
- The rise in private transfers – from \$22.2 billion in 2003-04 and \$69.6 billion in 2013-14 – is also huge, although not as steep as services exports. The latter has been powered primarily by the exports of software services – from \$12.8 billion in 2003-04 to \$69.5 billion in 2013-14 and \$180.6 billion in 2024-25. Equally important is the export of miscellaneous "business, financial and communication services" – from \$37.5 billion in 2013-14 to \$118 billion in 2024-25.
- All these "invisible" exports have seemingly been relatively immune to the vicissitudes of global business cycles, financial crises, pandemics, geopolitical conflicts or tariffs wars. And they have



grown with not much government efforts at sealing bilateral trade agreements or unveiling production-linked incentive schemes.

- The ongoing India-US trade talks are largely over the Narendra Modi-led government seeking lower tariffs for the country's exports of textiles, leather, auto components, steel and aluminium products and the Donald Trump administration pushing hard to gain market access for American genetically modified soybean and corn, ethanol, dairy and other farm produce.

#### **Do You Know:**

- India, on its part, can lay claim to being the “office of the world”. Its services trade surplus alone was \$188.8 billion in 2024-25, with exports at \$387.5 billion and imports at \$198.7 billion. The large net surplus of \$263.8 billion from all “invisible” transactions, including private remittances, is what helped contain its overall current account deficit to a manageable \$23.4 billion in 2024-25.
- A tangible asset is an asset that has a finite monetary value and usually a physical form. Tangible assets can typically always be transacted for some monetary value though the liquidity of different markets will vary. Tangible assets are the opposite of intangible assets which have a theorized value rather than a transactional exchange value.

## WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF THE ELI SCHEME?

### **The story so far:**

The Union Cabinet approved an Employment-Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme with an outlay of ₹99,446 crore. The scheme, a promise made in the 2024-25 budget, is aimed at creating employment, particularly in the manufacturing sector. It is a part of the Prime Minister's package of five schemes to facilitate employment such as internships with big companies and measures to improve skills of the youth.

### **What are the key provisions?**

The ELI scheme, according to the Labour Ministry, incentivises creation of more than 3.5 crore jobs over a period of two years. The Centre expects 1.92 crore newly employed people to get the benefit of the scheme, which comes into operation from August 1, 2025 and ends on July 31, 2027. The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will implement the scheme. Newly recruited employees, with salaries up to ₹1 lakh, will get a one-month EPF wage up to ₹15,000 in two installments. The EPFO will pay the first instalment after six months of service and the second instalment after 12 months of service — both as direct bank transfer. A portion of the incentive will be kept in “a savings instrument of deposit account for a fixed period and can be withdrawn by the employee at a later date”. The establishments, registered with EPFO, will get up to ₹3,000 per month, for two years, “for each additional employee with sustained employment for at least six months”. The Centre adds that for the manufacturing sector, incentives will be extended to third and fourth years as well.

### **How have employers responded?**

Employers have welcomed the scheme, with caveats. Former Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry president Subhrakant Panda said that ELI is a “laudable initiative”. It will drive employment, especially in the manufacturing sector, through an innovative approach which



combines support for those joining the workforce for the first time with incentives for creating sustained employment, he added. CII's office-bearer Sachit Jain said the ELI scheme has the potential to reshape India's employment landscape and boost labour-intensive sectors. The Sangh Parivar-backed Laghu Udyog Bharati pointed out that the focus of the scheme must be directed towards micro, small manufacturing units and allied service sectors. "We also urge that units with less than 20 employees, which form the majority, are not left behind. These units must be included under the scheme benefits," it demanded in a statement.

The founder of the Association of Indian Entrepreneurs, K.E. Raghunathan, told The Hindu that the scheme must be repositioned under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with a structured reimbursement model based on actual payroll data addition. "For every new employee a specific percentage of the salary must be paid to the employee and employer as a subsidy directly on a monthly basis, as long as the employee remains in service. Make it simple and ensure a wider coverage," he suggested.

#### **What about trade unions?**

Barring the RSS-backed Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), all 10 central trade unions have questioned the scheme. The BMS has welcomed the ELI scheme with a rider that the government must expand the social security base and improve the quality of employment. Other unions fear that workers' money will be used to incentivise employers. Citing the fate of the Production-Linked Incentive of 2020, wherein certain sectors were given sops by the Centre to create jobs, but the money had gone into the pockets of big companies. They argued that the EPFO had to conduct a probe and ban certain companies after finding the scheme was misused for employers' benefits.

#### **What are some of the concerns?**

There are concerns on the role of the EPFO in the scheme. As EPFO is only a custodian of savings of employees, unions are asking how it can act as an agency to implement the scheme. As the EPFO has no government funds in its books, there are doubts over the reimbursement of the money which could go to the employer or a newly recruited employee. As EPFO is not an agency with the responsibility of creating jobs, there are demands to create a separate agency to implement the scheme.

Industry experts are also questioning why the government is not addressing the slowdown in the economy, and not taking steps to improve the purchasing power of workers.

### **HOW CAN CAT BONDS PLAN FOR A NATURAL DISASTER?**

#### **The story so far:**

While life insurance is a ubiquitous term in India, disaster risk insurance is not. A low penetration of disaster risk insurance for individual property and livelihoods leaves much of the population exposed to irretrievable damage and loss. Most peoples' assets and means of income remain largely uninsured. Globally, after the hurricanes of the late-1990s in the U.S., when even re-insurers suffered losses, catastrophe risk was farmed out to financial markets through catastrophe bonds (cat bonds).



### **What is a cat bond?**

Cat bonds are a unique hybrid insurance-cum-debt financial product that transforms insurance cover into a tradable security. These bonds transfer hazard risk from the at-risk state to not just the limited stock of global re-insurers, but to deep-pocketed global financial markets through securitisation, opening up a much larger quantum of funds for post-disaster relief and reconstruction. Cat bonds are effective in transferring pre-defined risk to bond investors, ensuring quicker payouts and a much-reduced counter-party risk.

Players that create cat bonds are sovereign nations, which sponsor the bond and pay the premium, with the principal being the sum insured. The sponsor requires an intermediary to issue the bond to reduce counter-party risk. Intermediaries can include the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank or a reinsurance company. If a disaster does occur, the investor runs the risk of losing a part of the principal — a key reason for higher coupon rates of such bonds, compared to regular debt instruments. There is much variation in coupon rates for a cat bond depending on the risks — earthquakes garner lower premiums, as low as 1-2%, compared to hurricanes or cyclones.

### **Are cat bonds profitable?**

Nobel Prize-winner Harry Markowitz had famously stated that risk diversification is “truly the only free lunch in finance”. Risk-seeking investors find the disaster risk curve most attractive for diversification, since climate or geological hazards are historically not related to financial market movements, being mutually exclusive and independent of the financial risk curve. Probabilistic and deterministic financial risk curves move differently from cat-risk curves, in effect de-risking the entire portfolio of an investor. Leading the pack of cat bond investors are pension funds, with a minority share being occupied by hedge funds and family offices, seeking to de-risk their market-centric risk profiles for sovereign-sponsored cat bonds.

Observers assess that since the onset of cat bonds, there have been \$180 billion worth new issuances of cat bonds globally with about \$50 billion currently outstanding.

### **Does India need a cat bond?**

In these times of climate change, disaster risk can become unprofitable for insurers and re-insurers, as is increasingly evident in the U.S. with the rising intensity of hurricanes and forest fires. This causes premiums to rise and demand to fall, leading to risk ratcheting back to the harried victim of disasters. This is where governments can step-in, sponsoring instruments like cat bonds. The unpredictability and increase in frequency of extreme weather events like cyclones, floods, forest fires and devastating earthquakes in South Asia have increased India's exposure to disaster-risk. India needs to ring-fence its public finances for post-disaster reconstruction. Given the credit standing of the Indian sovereign and the scale of India's hazard risk profile, it could be cost-effective to sponsor such an instrument, through an intermediary like the World Bank, utilising its established bond curves. Apart from assessing the existing risk curve, insurance companies typically build clauses requiring disaster mitigation into contracts with countries, in the absence of which coupon rates rise. On that count, the Indian government is far ahead, having already demonstrated pro-active risk reduction by allocating mitigation and capacity building funds worth \$1.8 billion per annum since FY21-22.

Given India's size and financial stability, India could be lead-sponsor for a South Asian cat bond, given that most such regional risks remain unhedged. In addition, the regional hazard matrix reveals an interesting variety of hazards, each with their own risk curve and a different flavour of



history, vulnerability, and exposure. Imagine a regional cat bond for high-impact hazards like an earthquake in Bhutan, Nepal and India; or for a supra-cyclone or tsunami in India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. A South Asian cat bond would spread risk, reduce premium costs and over time, make the region financially stronger to face disasters.

#### **What are the disadvantages?**

A defectively designed cat bond could lead to no payout despite a significant disaster. For example, an earthquake cat bond designed for a magnitude threshold of 6.6M for a certain grid may fail if a 6.5M event occurs and causes extensive damage. In addition, despite a contract if a disaster doesn't occur, it could lead to questions on the desirability of such expense. Hence, comparison of premium to be paid discovered through transparent government procedure, with historical annual costs of post-disaster reconstruction could be the best way forward.

### **EXPRESS VIEW ON JANE STREET EPISODE: RAISE THE RED FLAGS**

In recent years, alongside the dramatic increase in the number of Indian households entering the stock markets, the derivatives segment has also witnessed a huge spurt in trading. Within derivatives, index options account for a sizeable share of trade. An earlier study by Sebi, the stock market regulator, noted that while 91.1 per cent of individual traders had lost money in the futures and options segment, it was the foreign portfolio investors and proprietary traders who had earned the profits, most of which were made by "algo entities". In April last year, reports mentioned a legal dispute involving the US-based Jane Street Group, which belongs to the algorithmic trading community, "for alleged unauthorised use of their proprietary trading strategies in India". Sebi followed up these reports with a preliminary inquiry to determine if there was any market abuse. Following its investigation, on July 3, the stock market regulator banned the Jane Street Group for manipulative trading practices and ordered the impounding of its unlawful gains, which it estimated at Rs 4,843 crore.

In its interim order, the stock market regulator has detailed the modus operandi of the Group, the strategies it drew on in its trading. It notes that the Group operated an "intra day index manipulation pattern". This involves dealing in segments across equities, futures and options simultaneously. The interim order notes that the "intensity and sheer scale of their intervention" and the "reversal of these large and aggressive trading..." was "without any economic rationale, other than the concurrent activity in and impact on their positions in the Bank Nifty index options markets". The Group also engaged in an extended "marking the close" strategy, an approach where large buy or sell orders are placed in "the final moments of a trading session, with the specific intent of influencing the closing price of a security or index to its advantage". As per the order, on at least 21 days, the Group has "prima facie engaged in illegal manipulation". In February, the National Stock Exchange cautioned the Group, saying that it had been "consistently engaging in trading patterns that raised serious concerns over market integrity". Sebi notes that the Group ignored the "regulatory red flags", and continued with its strategies.

At a time when millions are entering the stock markets, the regulator must ensure that the integrity of markets is maintained. That its surveillance and monitoring systems are able to effectively track transactions at all levels and raise red flags. Regulatory action must be swiftly taken to protect the sanctity of markets.



## FEAR AND FUMING WHEN TALENT MOVES TO COMPETITION

When your top performer resigns and discloses she is joining the competition, will you be gutted that a rockstar is leaving, or feel betrayed that she is joining the competition? It's likely to be the latter more often. But the opposite is true as well: We also believe the best place to hire from is the competition.

Just recently, Meta's new division — with an eye on developing artificial general intelligence (AGI) — announced 11 key hires from arch rivals like OpenAI, Anthropic and Google. If reports are to be believed, Mark Zuckerberg has been personally leading the hiring campaign by hosting some of the potential hires at his home. This prompted OpenAI CEO Sam Altman to claim that Meta offered \$100 million signing bonuses to some of his employees. And Meta isn't alone. The move echoes industry-wide trends. This begs the question whether anti-compete contracts aren't at play?

### Anti-compete contracts

In a recent case of a software engineer vs. his former employer, the Delhi High Court ruled that non-compete clauses blocking job switches are not enforceable.

The court said that Section 27 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872, clearly says that any agreement that restrains anyone from exercising a lawful profession, trade, or business shall be void. A research handbook published by the leading global law firm DLA Piper offers insights into anti-compete laws worldwide. Interestingly, among the 34 major countries they studied, only in five, including India, are the non-compete employment contracts non-enforceable. But, just in case you have forgotten the fine print of your employment contract and want to browse it again, you will find an anti-compete clause glaring at you. Did the MNCs bring their global template to India, and were we only too happy to copy and paste it from entry-level jobs to senior leaders, making no distinction between the dictates of the roles and the laws of the land?

### High stakes

Cognizant's hiring of Wipro's former CFO sparked a legal battle, which eventually got settled after nine months. The current legal proceedings between Cognizant and Infosys, involving allegations of anti-competitive practices in the U.S. healthcare IT market, shows that the stakes are high for these enterprises.

When firms lose leaders who hold key customer relationships or techies who have the IP to build new-age products or platforms at the competition, the threat is real. This may prompt organisations to protect their interests, which explains the suits. In spite of these potential legal exposures, why do boards still hire CEOs from the competition?

The mindset of large enterprises with deep pockets is to 'buy' talent, rather than 'building' it, since this takes time, and the risks of a potential anti-compete suit are outweighed by the benefits of the hiring.

The popular ask from hiring managers is "We want to recruit someone who hits the road running". Even the stock market cheers when you hire from the competition.

The hypocritical mindset of enterprise culture is hard to miss. We hire our top talent from rivals, but internally we berate them on a regular basis to build the competitive spirit in our teams.



### Emotionally hard

Whenever we chest-thump about our products, services, or employers, we can't help but reference them against our competitors, and hence it's emotionally hard to accept anyone among us joining a rival. Hence, we resort to practices like 'garden leave', immediate relieving, legal threats, and/or holding on to financial dues as a mark of retaliation. All these also send a 'message' to colleagues of the consequences of joining competition.

## INSPACE GIVES NOD TO STARLINK TO LAUNCH SERVICES IN INDIA

Elon Musk-owned Starlink has received the last remaining regulatory clearance from the government, paving the way for the company to start offering satcom services in India.

- In May, the company had received an operator licence from the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) — three years after first applying for one — and on Wednesday, the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) granted authorisation to the satcom company for its satellite constellation.
- “IN-SPACe has granted authorisation to Starlink Satellite Communications for enabling provisioning of Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites constellation, namely Starlink Gen1,” the agency, which operates under the Department of Space, said in a statement. It added that the authorisation will enable Starlink to provide satellite communication services in India.
- “IN-SPACe authorisation to (Starlink) has a validity period of five years from the date of authorisation or end of operational life of Gen1 constellation — whichever is earlier. The roll-out of services is subject to the stipulated regulatory provisions and requisite clearance/approval/license from the relevant government department(s),” it added.

### Do You Know:

- The Starlink Gen1 Constellation is a global constellation with 4,408 satellites orbiting earth in altitude varying between 540-570 km, capable of providing around 600 Gbps throughput over India.
- Since turning its attention to launching services in India three years ago, Starlink came up against the country's telecom giants Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel, and differed with the former over how frequency for such airwaves should be assigned to satcom operators. While Starlink lobbied for administrative allocation, Jio made a pitch for the auction route. The government had opted for the administrative route, given that spectrum used for satellite communication is shared spectrum and is technically difficult to auction.
- Satellite communication services rely on an array of satellites in orbit to offer connectivity to homes and businesses on the ground. They are an alternative to ground-based communication, called terrestrial networks, such as cable, fibre, or digital subscriber line (DSL), and they don't require wires to transmit data. Starlink operates the world's largest satellite constellation, with around 7,000 satellites in orbit.
- Companies will have to provide real time monitoring to ensure that no user traffic originating from, or destined for India is being routed through any gateway outside Indian territory. They will also have to submit an undertaking that they will not copy and decrypt Indian telecom data outside India.



## LIFE AND SCIENCES

### ITS EYE ON DARK MYSTERIES, RUBIN WILL REVEAL THE COSMOS LIKE NEVER BEFORE

• How was the Milky Way formed? Does our Solar System have a ninth planet? Is there an asteroid that can pose a threat to Earth? What are dark energy and dark matter? These are some of the questions that the Vera C Rubin Observatory, which released its first test images last month, is expected to answer.

• The centrepiece of the observatory is the Simonyi Survey Telescope. This device is unique for three main reasons.

—WIDE FIELD OF VIEW: Astronomers typically use the size of the visible surface of the full Moon to describe a telescope's field of view. The Hubble Space Telescope observes around 1% of the full Moon's disc, and the James Webb Space Telescope around 75% — using such telescopes is like looking into space through a straw. The Rubin's telescope, however, is so wide-eyed that it effectively observes an area of the sky equivalent to at least 40 full Moons arranged next to one another. The primary mirror captures celestial light and reflects it upward to the secondary mirror. The secondary mirror then bounces the light to the tertiary mirror, which is the inner part of the primary mirror.

— LARGEST DIGITAL CAMERA: The telescope has the largest digital camera in the world. It is the size of a small car, weighs 2,800 kg, and boasts a staggering resolution of 3,200 megapixels (the latest iPhone 16 Pro Max has a 48-megapixel camera). The camera can produce an image so rich in detail that it would take a wall of 400 ultrahigh-definition TV screens to display it in full.

— RAPID MOVEMENT: It is not easy to move large telescopes. They usually take around 10 minutes to adjust their position so as to ensure that sensitive components do not wobble around during the movement. Scientists have to plan what they want to observe, and when, in advance.

• The Vera Rubin Observatory will constantly scan the sky of the southern hemisphere for 10 years, gathering 20 terabytes of astronomical data each night. The observatory's software will automatically compare new images with older ones and generate an estimated 10 million alerts per night for each change detected in the sky.

#### Do You Know:

• The Vera C Rubin Observatory in Chile has released its first breathtaking images, showcasing the power of its 3,200-megapixel digital camera—the largest ever built. Taken during testing in April, following the completion of the telescope's construction, the images hint at a new era of surveying the sky.

• One striking photo captures the Trifid and Lagoon Nebulae in a star-forming region of the Milky Way. Created from 678 monochrome exposures using four different filters, the image reveals rich, vivid detail in just over seven hours of observation.

• Another highlight was a video revealing a swarm of previously unknown asteroids—2,104 newly discovered space rocks, including seven near-Earth asteroids that pose no threat.

• In a single wide-field image, the Rubin Observatory's telescope simultaneously spotted asteroids within our solar system and galaxies billions of light-years away, demonstrating its extraordinary reach. Perched atop Cerro Pachón in Chile's Andes Mountains, the \$810 million US-led project is

4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



designed to scan the entire southern sky every 3–4 nights—vastly faster than space telescopes like Hubble or James Webb, which focus on small sections with greater detail.

## INTERCONTINENTAL CLOCK COMPARISON SETS STAGE TO REDEFINE THE SECOND

Researchers from around the world have completed the world's largest, most demanding head-to-head comparison of clocks in history to build confidence for the upcoming redefinition of the second.

The duration of a single second is currently defined by caesium (Cs) atomic clocks. Lasers “count” the radiation emitted by Cs atoms in these devices to measure one second, give or take a few billionths. As the applications of atomic clocks have expanded — including GPS navigation, climate science, and radio astronomy — expectations of their performance have also increased, necessitating the more advanced optical clocks.

Scientists around the world have been studying and testing these next-generation devices. Because they can enumerate one second up to around 18 decimal places, scientists expect optical clocks will replace Cs atomic clocks as the world's new time standard around 2030. Until then, however, optical clocks will have to pass rigorous tests attesting to their ability to work in step from different parts of the world.

The new effort presents the largest, most sophisticated such test to date. It involved 10 optical atomic clocks on three continents and 65 researchers.

### SI unit of time

To measure the passage of time, strike up a conversation with the person next to you. If it's riveting, time will fly. But if it advances in painstaking steps, time will slow to a crawl.

For better or for worse, this isn't good enough for scientists. To understand how much time one second denotes, they use natural phenomena. In the early 20th century, the definition of a second was one-86,400th of a mean solar day. The first quartz crystal clocks that appeared in the late 1940s could measure time more accurately than the earth's rotation. So scientists switched to the earth's revolution around the sun. In 1956, one second became equal to one-31,556,925.9747th of the time the earth took to go once around the sun from January 0, 1900.

Since then, scientists have been building better clocks that, at each step, also incentivised them to refine the time standard. The current standard is based on atomic clocks. These clocks don't directly measure time. Instead, they are complicated setups scientists put together to generate radiation of a fixed frequency. (Frequency is nothing but the inverse of time.)

In 1967, the SI unit of time was defined thus: “the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium-133 atom”. This verbose definition really communicates a simple meaning.

### Pass the last one

An atom's internal energy comes in fixed steps, like rungs on a ladder. It can jump up a rung by absorbing the right amount of energy and jump back down by giving that energy up again.

In a Cs atomic clock, the energy that makes the jump is supplied by a finely tuned microwave signal. The atoms react most strongly when the microwave frequency is 9,192,631,770 Hz.



Electronics watch how many atoms make the jump. If that number slips below a peak, the equipment nudges the microwave setting until the jump rate is back to the maximum. When that happens, the microwave signal itself is guaranteed to be exactly 9,192,631,770 Hz, i.e. composed of 9,192,631,770 waves per second.

Chips called frequency dividers count these microwave waves and pass on only every 9,192,631,770-th one. This wave comes along every one second — and is the SI definition of the second.

Around the world, many countries have set up their own Cs atomic clocks to define their respective national time standard. In India, the National Physical Laboratory in New Delhi maintains five Cs atomic clocks. The clocks' output is disseminated to various applications around India via the INSAT satellites, telecommunication signals, and fibre links. Scientists, however, are already at work refining the next big thing: the optical atomic clock.

#### **Good for 15 billion years**

The wall clock hanging in your house is likely powered by two AA batteries and uses a quartz crystal oscillator. After a few months, the clock will start losing a few seconds. The Cs atomic clock that defines the US national time standard loses only one second every 300 million years, however.

This is stupendous, yet in some cases it isn't good enough. As their application in defining the time standard suggests, atomic clocks are used in many technologies that we encounter every day. The American GPS network, Russia's GLONASS, Europe's Galileo, and India's NavIC constellation use atomic clocks onboard satellites to accurately measure distance and location data for both civilian and military use. Astronomers use it in radio-astronomy to piece together signals received on different parts of a large telescope. This is how they captured history's first photograph of a black hole in 2019. Climate scientists use atomic clocks for ultra-precise measurements of the earth's gravity that reveal where ice and water have been lost.

As these applications have expanded, the expectations of atomic clocks have, too. The definitive emission in Cs atomic clocks, of 9,192,631,770 Hz, is in the microwave range of the electromagnetic spectrum. In optical atomic clocks, it's in the optical (or visual) range. The radiation emitted when a strontium atom jumps between two particular energy levels is 429,228,066,418,009 Hz. When a ytterbium-ion jumps between two levels, the radiation has frequency 642,121,496,772,645 Hz. Because this radiation contains 10,000-times more waves per second, a device that can count them out can also measure one second more precisely.

The frequency of the radiation emitted is also proportional to the clock's stability. In 2014, one optical atomic clock that used strontium atoms would reportedly drift by less than one second in 15 billion years. This is why optical atomic clocks are set to become the next global time standard.

But ahead of the milestone, scientists must prove that clocks in different countries agree with one another to the 18th decimal place.



## WHY HAS GOOGLE'S 'AI OVERVIEWS' SPARKED AN ANTITRUST FIRESTORM IN THE EU?

### The story so far:

Google's AI-powered summaries, known as AI Overviews, are facing a formal antitrust complaint from a coalition of independent publishers in the European Union, as per a report by Reuters. Their complaint, lodged with the European Commission, alleges that Alphabet's Google is abusing its market dominance, siphoning traffic and revenue from publishers, and threatening the viability of independent journalism. The feature, rolled out in over 100 countries, represents Google's major strategic bet on integrating generative AI directly into its core search experience. However, this move has ignited fierce opposition from content creators who claim it undermines the very ecosystem that Google's search engine relies on.

### What is Google AI Overviews?

AI Overviews are AI-generated summaries that appear at the top of Google's search results page, positioned above the traditional list of blue links. Their purpose is to provide users with a quick, synthesised answer to their query, drawing information from multiple web sources. These overviews can range from a few paragraphs to lists or tables and often include links to the source websites within the generated text.

First introduced as an experiment called Search Generative Experience (SGE) in May 2023, the feature is now a core part of Google Search in many regions.

### How do AI Overviews work?

When a user enters a search query, Google's systems determine if generative AI could be particularly helpful in providing a comprehensive answer. If so, it employs a customised version of its advanced AI model, Gemini, to process the request.

The system doesn't rely solely on the AI's pre-existing knowledge. Instead, it uses a technique called Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), where it actively fetches and analyses relevant information from its web index. The AI then synthesises this information into a coherent summary. Google states that these overviews are designed to be backed up by top web results, and include links to allow users to "dig deeper."

### Why are publishers accusing Google?

The crux of the dispute lies in how these AI-generated answers impact the businesses that create the original content. The Independent Publishers Alliance, alongside groups like the Movement for an Open Web and the legal advocacy non-profit Foxglove, argues that this new feature hurts competition and is causing "serious irreparable harm," as per the Reuters report citing documents it has seen.

The publishers' key complaints stem from the concern that their content will be disincentivised because of Google's AI feature. By providing a direct summary at the top of the page, users have less incentive to click through to their websites.

This leads to a significant drop in traffic, which in turn slashes advertising revenue and subscriber numbers, the lifeblood of many online publications.



Their complaint alleges that Google is “misusing web content” by scraping information from publisher sites to train its AI models and generate summaries without fair compensation. Since May 2024, Google has also begun placing ads within these AI Overviews, meaning it is directly monetising content that publishers have invested in creating.

The complaint highlights that there is no way to opt out of having their content used for AI Overviews without also being removed from Google’s main search results. Given Google’s dominance in search, becoming invisible on the platform is not a feasible option for any publisher.

#### **How are regulators getting involved?**

The formal complaint, per the report, was filed with both the European Commission and the U.K.’s Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). The publishers are asking for “interim measures” to stop Google from using the feature while the case is investigated, to prevent further damage.

While the European Commission has not commented publicly on the complaint, it has previously investigated Google for other anticompetitive practices.

The U.K.’s CMA has confirmed receipt of the complaint and noted that AI Overviews fall within the scope of its ongoing work to designate Google with a “strategic market status.”

This designation would grant the CMA more power to regulate Google’s conduct, potentially including rules that give publishers more control over how their content is used in AI summaries without having to be de-listed from search entirely.

#### **How is Google defending AI Overviews?**

Google has pushed back against the publishers’ claims. A company spokesperson stated that “New AI experiences in Search enable people to ask even more questions, which creates new opportunities for content and businesses to be discovered.”

The company maintains that it sends billions of clicks to websites every day and that traffic fluctuations can be due to many factors, such as seasonal interest and regular algorithm updates. Google also claims that clicks from pages with AI Overviews are of “higher quality,” meaning users are more likely to stay on the sites they visit.

### **UNDER PRESSURE**

#### **How does a digital barometer work?**

A barometer is a device to measure pressure. From the 17th to the 19th centuries, most designs had the same working principle: air pressure pushed down on an open column of fluid, which was allowed to move into a second column with a closed top. The aneroid barometer was invented in 1844: air acted on a capsule that was kept from collapsing by a spring. As the capsule contracted under pressure, it moved small levers attached to a needle on a gauge.

Today, devices use digital barometers. Here, a micro-electro-mechanical system (MEMS) converts changes in pressure to electronic signals. One way is to use the piezoresistive effect: when pressure is applied on a conductor, its resistivity changes. Another way is to expose one plate of a capacitor to air pressure: as the pressure changes, the inter-plate distance varies.



The rest of the MEMS circuitry amplifies the changed resistance or capacitance signal, converts it into a pressure reading, and displays it on a screen.

### FRIENDZONE ISN'T A DEAD END. IT'S WHERE EMPATHY AND AFFECTION BLOSSOM

Between men and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, enmity, worship, love, but no friendship," noted Oscar Wilde in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. In Bollywood speak, that would be "Ek ladka aur ladki kabhi dost nahin ho sakte" — a dictum generations of Indians have grown up with and that has been the default script for friendships between men and women in films and IRL: Doomed, delicate, and perpetually flirting with something "more". But a recent NYU Stern-Meta study, which analysed 1.8 billion friendships across nearly 200 countries, finally bursts that bubble. It turns out that men and women do forge genuine, deep friendships, especially in societies where gender equality is strong. And the more liberated a culture is from old-fashioned gender roles, the more natural it becomes for men and women to simply enjoy each other's company without a romantic subtext.

The implications are more radical than they appear — and rooted in the long arc of feminism. Given the deeply entrenched gender inequality, in the 18th century, early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft recast friendship between the sexes as a revolutionary force — the emotional and intellectual bedrock of equal relationships, and the foundation of a happy marriage in which partners enjoyed more than just physical compatibility. It would take another century and another wave of feminism to get sex out of the way and push it into the realm of the platonic — not very successfully, going by popular culture. To paraphrase Nora Ephron's blockbuster *When Harry Met Sally*, "the sex part" still "gets in the way".

But what if it didn't? What if friendship between the sexes could finally shrug off its nudge-nudge-wink-wink baggage? When men and women meet as equals, they model respect, empathy, and emotional openness in workplaces, families, and communities. Sure, attraction can flutter in the background, but mature friendships absorb it with grace. As the study shows, affection doesn't have to moonlight as romance. Sometimes, it just shows up as camaraderie. And honestly, isn't that happily ever after enough?

### JAPAN BRACES FOR MORE EARTHQUAKES

Japan's government on Saturday warned of more possible strong earthquakes in waters southwest of its main islands, but urged the public not to believe unfounded manga comic-book predictions of a major disaster.

- Authorities on Friday evacuated some residents from remote islands close to the epicentre of a 5.5-magnitude quake off the tip of the southernmost main island of Kyushu.
- That quake on Thursday, strong enough to make standing difficult, was one of more than 1,000 tremors in the islands of Kagoshima prefecture in the past two weeks that have fuelled rumours stemming from a comic book prediction that a major disaster would befall the country this month.

#### Do You Know:

- An earthquake is an intense shaking of the ground caused by movement under the earth's surface. It happens when two blocks of the earth suddenly slip past one another, according to USGS. This releases stored-up 'elastic strain' energy in the form of seismic waves, which spreads through the earth and cause the shaking of the ground.



- The earth's outermost surface, crust, is fragmented into tectonic plates. The edges of the plates are called plate boundaries, which are made up of faults. The tectonic plates constantly move at a slow pace, sliding past one another and bumping into each other. As the edges of the plates are quite rough, they get stuck with one another while the rest of the plate keeps moving. Earthquake occurs when the plate has moved far enough and the edges unstuck on one of the faults.
- The location below the earth's surface where the earthquake starts is called the hypocenter, and the location directly above it on the surface of the earth is called the epicentre.

#### **Why is Japan prone to earthquakes and tsunamis?**

- That's because of its location. Japan is situated along the 'Pacific Ring of Fire', which is the most active earthquake tectonic belt in the world. The 'ring' refers to "an imaginary horseshoe-shaped zone that follows the rim of the Pacific Ocean, where many of the world's earthquakes and volcanic eruptions occur," according to a report by Live Science.
- Within the Ring of Fire, there are different tectonic belts, including the Pacific Plate, Eurasian Plate, and Indo-Australian Plate, which keep meshing and colliding with each other, causing earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis.

#### **MELTING GLACIERS CAN LEAD TO MORE VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS: NEW STUDY**

The rise in melting glaciers and ice caps can result in more frequent and more explosive volcanic eruptions, according to a new study. It also stated that the greatest risk of a resurgence of volcanic eruptions lies in West Antarctica, where approximately 100 volcanoes are buried under thick ice. This ice is expected to disappear in the coming decades and centuries due to soaring global temperatures.

- The research was presented at the 2025 Goldschmidt Conference, which is currently underway in Prague. It is the largest international conference dedicated to geochemistry, organised by the Geochemical Society and the European Association of Geochemistry.
- Other continental regions, such as parts of North America, New Zealand, and Russia, could also observe an increase in volcanicity, Pablo Moreno-Yaeger, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (US), said during the presentation.
- Scientists first suggested that melting ice could affect volcanic activity in the 1970s. Usually, the weight of the ice exerts pressure on underground magma chambers of volcanoes. However, when glaciers or ice caps melt, this pressure is reduced, and underground gases and magma expand which can ultimately result in explosive eruptions.
- Such a phenomenon has already occurred on the planet. For instance, in Iceland, during major deglaciation (the last of which occurred between 15,000 and 10,000 years before the present), volcanic eruption rates were 30 to 50 times higher than they are today.
- Studies have also found that the decrease in pressure due to ice loss can result in the production of magma. That is because rocks held at lower pressure tend to melt at lower temperatures.

#### **Do You Know:**

- The latest study has reiterated these findings. It examined Chile's Mocho Choshuenco volcano to estimate the age of volcanic rocks produced before, during, and after the last ice age. The research



found that due to a thick ice sheet over the volcano, pressure had suppressed the volume of eruptions between 26,000 and 18,000 years ago. This led to the formation of a large reservoir of magma that had built up 10 to 15 km below the volcano's surface. However, once this ice sheet melted, about 13,000 years ago, explosive eruptions took place.

- Volcanic eruptions can cause temporary cooling as they release ash or dust into the atmosphere which blocks sunlight. These eruptions also emit sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere which is more effective than ash particles at cooling the climate. Sulfur dioxide goes into the stratosphere and reacts with water to form sulfuric acid aerosols. These aerosols reflect incoming solar radiation, leading to the cooling of the Earth's surface.

## REFORMING UNFCCC PROCESS

The international climate negotiations, held under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), have been facing a credibility crisis in recent years.

- Their outcomes have been largely underwhelming as they have not delivered the kind of action required to curb global warming. Developed countries that fail to meet their targets, or deliver on their commitments, have not been held to account. Developing countries, particularly the small and most vulnerable of them, have repeatedly complained that their concerns are often ignored, and that the negotiations have failed to deliver climate justice.
- Also, the withdrawal of the United States from these negotiations, following the return of Donald Trump to the White House this year, has threatened to make the entire process irrelevant.
- As a result, there has been an effort to re-infuse trust and confidence in the system in the lead-up to the COP30 meeting in Brazil which will take place in November. As the host of the COP30, Brazil has been actively engaged with other countries to explore the possible steps that can be taken in this direction.
- The annual mid-year climate meeting in Bonn, Germany, which wrapped up last month, discussed the ideas and suggestions submitted by countries, climate groups, and non-government organisations, to reform the system and make it more effective.

### Do You Know:

- The Bonn meeting, held in the second half of June, acknowledged that the “growing scale and complexity” of the climate negotiations presented challenges. It also emphasised the need to “improve the efficiency of the UNFCCC process in a transparent and inclusive manner”.
- Civil society organisations and climate advocacy groups, which have been at the forefront of the demands to reform the UNFCCC process, have been asking for more fundamental changes. At Bonn, a letter signed by more than 200 such groups, suggested five major reforms. One of them was a demand to allow majority-based decision-making when attempts to find a consensus remain elusive.
- The UNFCCC works through consensus, which means no decision is accepted till every country accepts it. In a way, every country has a veto. Getting all of the more than 190 parties to agree to every part of a decision has always been a big challenge. This is often blamed for the lack of ambition in the outcomes of climate negotiations.



- Any decision to reform the UNFCCC process will have to be approved through consensus by all the parties, and it is unlikely that any of the more radical suggestions would go through.
- As the host of the COP30, Brazil has to take leadership in ensuring its success. The outcome of this meeting will be measured largely by the faith and confidence that countries, mainly developing and vulnerable ones, are able to put back into the process.

#### AHEAD OF COP30, BONN CLIMATE TALKS FUMBLE THE PRESSURE TEST

As the world braces for another climate summit in November this year, the Subsidiary Bodies meeting in Bonn, Germany, brought together negotiators, scientists, policymakers, and civil society actors to tackle the complex, behind-the-scenes work that shapes the outcome of the Conference of the Parties (COP) summit.

Held annually in Bonn, this mid-year gathering sets the technical and political groundwork for the ensuing COPs, with the 30th Session of the COP (COP30) scheduled for later this year in Belém, Brazil. Beyond setting the agenda, Bonn could be considered a litmus test to gauge how seriously countries are committed to implementing past pledges and how prepared they are to scale up ambition in the face of a rapidly closing climate window.

Sadly, this year's Bonn conference was marked by delays, deep disagreements, and mounting frustration, especially over procedural priorities and climate finance. As global temperatures continue to break records, the urgency to act was palpable — as was the resistance to revisiting entrenched political differences.

##### **Delayed start, deep divisions**

The conference got off to a slow start as agenda adoption, a procedural step, was stalled by disputes over finance and trade measures. The Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs, including India) demanded the inclusion of Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, which obligates developed countries to provide climate finance and unilateral trade measures, such as carbon border taxes, on the agenda. India, along with the LMDCs, continues to see carbon border taxes as unfair, undermining principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.

Both these propositions were opposed by developed nations, particularly the European Union, which argued that finance issues were being addressed under other agenda items. Eventually, a compromise was reached to address these issues: not as standalone agenda items but through informal consultations. Disappointed with developed countries' reluctance to discuss the legal obligations to provide financial support to developing countries, the LMDCs stated their intention to revisit this contentious issue at COP30.

This prolonged deadlock delayed the start of formal negotiations by nearly two days and underscored the persistent divide. While developing nations pushed for historical responsibilities to be acknowledged and operationalised, developed countries advocated forward-looking frameworks and voluntary support mechanisms.

#### AIR POLLUTION TIED TO PRETERM BIRTHS, LOW BIRTH WEIGHT IN INDIA:STUDY

A study published in PLoS Global Public Health links air pollution, specifically PM2.5 exposure, to increased risks of preterm births (PTB) and low birth weight (LBW) in India. Using data from the National Family Health Survey and satellite data, researchers from India, Thailand, Ireland, and

4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



the UK found that mothers exposed to higher PM2.5 levels during pregnancy had a 70% higher chance of preterm delivery and a 40% increased likelihood of delivering a baby with low birth weight. Northern states like Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, known for high industrialization, vehicular emissions, and solid fuel use, showed the highest risks. PTB was most prevalent in Himachal Pradesh (39%) and Delhi (17%), while LBW was highest in Punjab (22%) and Delhi (19%). Female children were more likely to have LBW (20%) compared to males (17%), with higher rates among children of illiterate and poorer mothers. Solid fuel use in households also correlated with increased PTB and LBW. Elevated PM2.5 levels raised the odds of LBW by 1.37x and PTB by 1.67x. Additionally, slight temperature increases were linked to higher LBW cases, while excessive rainfall during monsoons increased risks of waterborne infections and disrupted healthcare access, further impacting fetal growth and pregnancy outcomes.

#### U.S. FUNDING CUTS COULD REVERSE DECADES OF GAINS IN AIDS FIGHT: UN

The halt to U.S. foreign aid is a “ticking time bomb” that could reverse decades of hard-fought gains in the fight against AIDS, the United Nations warned on Thursday. Around 31.6 million people were on antiretroviral drugs in 2024 and deaths from AIDS-related illnesses had more than halved since 2010 to 630,000 that year, the UNAIDS agency said in a new report. Now however, infections were likely to shoot up as funding cuts have shuttered prevention and treatment programmes, it said.

The United States was the world’s biggest donor of humanitarian assistance until U.S. President Donald Trump’s abrupt slashing of international aid in February. That left the global humanitarian community scrambling to keep life-saving operations afloat.

The agency in April warned that a permanent discontinuation of PEPFAR, the massive U.S. effort to fight HIV/AIDS, would lead to more than six million new infections and an additional 4.2 million AIDS-related deaths in the next four years. This would bring the pandemic back to levels not seen since the early 2000s.

“This is not just a funding gap,” UNAIDS executive director Winnie Byanyima said in a press release. “It’s a ticking time bomb” whose effects are already felt worldwide. Over 60% of all women-led HIV organisations surveyed by UNAIDS had lost funding or had to suspend services, the report said.

#### Research hit

Crucial medical research on prevention and treatment have also shut down, including many in South Africa which has one of the highest HIV rates in the world.

In 25 out of 60 countries surveyed by UNAIDS, governments had found ways to compensate part of the funding shortfall with domestic resources.

“It is the responsibility of every government to provide for its people,” South Africa’s Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said, calling the U.S. pullout a “wake-up call”.

#### SUDDEN HEART ATTACK DEATHS AMONG YOUNGER POPULATION MADE ‘NOTIFIABLE’ IN KARNATAKA

All sudden heart attack deaths among the young (aged below 45) in Karnataka will now have to be notified to the Health Department.

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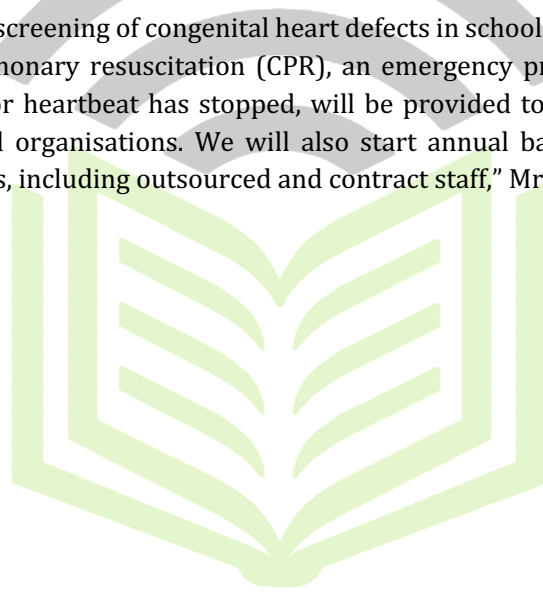


The department said on Monday that sudden heart attack deaths among people below the age of 45 were made 'notifiable' on the basis of a recommendation by the expert committee that was set up to study the link between COVID-19 vaccination and sudden cardiovascular events. The committee is headed by K.S. Ravindranath, Director the State-run Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research, Bengaluru.

The panel has not found any association between premature cardiovascular disease and a prior history of COVID-19 infection or COVID vaccination.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said the government of Karnataka would start monitoring sudden heart attack deaths reported among those below the age of 45. "Any such deaths that occur outside a hospital will have to be mandatorily reported to the department. Following the committee's recommendations, we will now make the autopsy of all such deaths compulsory to ascertain the cause of death. Directions in this regard will be issued soon," the Minister said.

He said, "We will start screening of congenital heart defects in school children aged 15 and above. Training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), an emergency procedure that is done when someone's breathing or heartbeat has stopped, will be provided to the general public through NGOs and like-minded organisations. We will also start annual basic health screening for all government employees, including outsourced and contract staff," Mr. Rao said.



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