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INTERNATIONAL

NATO DEFENCE PUSH STRAINS EUROPE'S BUDGETS

With Eastern Europe and West Asia in prolonged turmoil, leaders of the 32 member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) will gather in Turkey on July 6-7 for the so-called Ankara Summit.

Key Takeaways:

- NATO summits take place roughly once a year to impart strategic direction to the world's most powerful alliance. Established at the beginning of the Cold War in 1949, NATO aims to safeguard its members through political cooperation and collective defence.
- The cornerstone of NATO, enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, or the Washington Treaty, stipulates that an armed attack against one or more of its members will be considered an attack against all. But now, alongside the military threat from its principal adversary, Russia, NATO faces demands for a more equitable burden-sharing from its principal financial contributor, the US.
- Last fortnight, NATO outlined the broad themes that it expected to dominate discussions during the Ankara Summit. The first is a topic that has been contentious ever since NATO's beginnings: Spending levels on defence by the alliance's European members.
- At last year's NATO summit in The Hague, NATO's European members committed to investing 5 per cent of their respective Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) into defence. This commitment covers two categories of defence expenditure. First, each member must spend at least 3.5 per cent of GDP on core defence equipment and to meet NATO Capability Targets. In addition, NATO countries must spend 1.5 per cent of GDP on defence- and security-related investments, such as protection of critical infrastructure, defence networks, and strengthening the defence industrial base.

Do You Know:

- The Ankara Summit will be about execution, not grand strategy, say NATO watchers. The focus will be on delivering on the 5 per cent pledge with the US piling pressure on the European allies to step up. Washington is altering its contribution to NATO, pressing Europe to grow high-end capabilities, such as logistics, command and control, aerial refuelling, missile defence, and special operations forces.
- NATO watchers expect three themes to dominate the Ankara Summit. The first will be a continued focus on "alliance adaptation", as NATO seeks to transform from a force optimised for crisis management to one that is focused on collective defence against peer competitors. The second theme will be "capability delivery", with NATO identifying its security requirements and actually fielding those capabilities at the speed demanded by today's security environment. The third theme will be "technology and industrial resilience".
- Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 was the wake-up call that goaded NATO into reversing a quarter century of spending cuts. At the 2014 Wales Summit, the NATO allies signed the so-called "Defence Investment Pledge", committing themselves to spending targets of 2 per cent of their GDPs by 2024.



WHAT DID SCOTUS RULE ON BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP?

The story so far:

On June 30, 2026, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) upheld birthright citizenship provided under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The SCOTUS struck down President Donald Trump's Executive Order (EO) 14160, which sought to end unconditional birthright citizenship that the U.S. grants. With the 6-3 judgment, anyone who is born on U.S. soil becomes a citizen, regardless of the status of their parents. Exceptions include children of foreign diplomats and invading militaries.

What did Trump's executive order say?

Mr. Trump's EO directed federal agencies to stop issuing citizenship-recognising documents — social security numbers and passports — to children born after February 19, 2025 (i) to mothers unlawfully present when the father was not a citizen or lawful permanent resident, or (ii) to mothers lawfully but temporarily present (students, tourists, guest workers) when the father was not a citizen or permanent resident.

What provisions of the U.S. legal system allow and protect birthright citizenship?

The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, says "all persons born or naturalised in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), 1952, is the foundational body of U.S. citizenship and immigration law, which draws from the above constitutional provision with regard to birthright citizenship. The INA declares that a person born in the U.S. and subject to its jurisdiction is a citizen "at birth." Among the questions that SCOTUS examined was whether birthright citizenship is only a statutory guarantee or both statutory and constitutional. One of the judges who struck down the EO — Justice Brett Kavanaugh — limited it as a statutory question.

How and when did birthright citizenship become a political issue in the U.S.?

It was Mr. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign that put the spotlight on birthright citizenship as a question of population management. This was in the broader context of the anti-immigration politics, a central concern of the politics of the 'Make American Great Again' (MAGA) movement. In fact, when the Court heard the oral arguments in the case on April 1, 2026, Mr. Trump was personally present. This showed how critical this was to his politics of influencing the population composition of the country.

But before it was adapted by Mr. Trump, birthright citizenship was more a concern of Democrats, who are traditionally more anti-immigrant than Republicans. Democratic Senator Harry Reid's 1993 Immigration Stabilization Act proposed a narrower reading of the 14th Amendment. The argument against birthright citizenship is based on the assumption that a large number of non-citizens — both authorised residents (such as visa holders) and unauthorised residents (including illegal immigrants) — were having children who would automatically become citizens at birth.

What do numbers suggest about children born to non-citizens in the U.S.?

It has been estimated that births to unauthorised immigrant mothers rose from roughly 1.2 lakh in 1990 (about 3% of all U.S. births) to a peak of approximately 3.7 lakh-3.9 lakh in 2006-2007



(roughly 9% of all U.S. births.) This growth mirrored the tripling of the unauthorised immigrant population between 1990 and 2007.

After the 2008 financial crisis, the trend reversed. By 2016, births to unauthorised immigrant mothers had fallen about 36% from the 2007 peak, to roughly 2.5 lakh (about 6% of that year's U.S. births in total).

Pew Research Center's most recent analysis found that births to unauthorised or temporary-status immigrant mothers grew rapidly again between 2019 and 2023, reaching an estimated 9% of all U.S. births in 2023.

What is the argument against birthright citizenship?

Apart from its place within the broader anti-immigration politics of the MAGA movement, opposition to birthright citizenship is also rooted in allegations of its misuse. An entire industry of 'birth tourism' facilitates expectant foreigners to give birth in the U.S. Opponents also say the 14th Amendment provision was meant to address the citizenship status of freed slaves; it cannot apply universally and unconditionally in the changed circumstances. The SCOTUS held that the text of the Constitution is clear, and changes in circumstances can't justify new meanings to it.

What is the link between slavery and birthright citizenship in the U.S.?

The evolution of the U.S. citizenship regime is closely linked to slavery and racism in the country. In the original Constitution of the U.S., there was no definition of the word citizen; instead, citizenship was guided by multiple factors. In practice, citizenship depended on the laws of individual States governing civil and political rights, including voting and property ownership. The Federal Naturalisation Act, 1790, made it clear that only "free white persons" can be eligible. The result was varied practices across the U.S.: in northern States, free Black residents had some rights including voting rights, but in southern States, citizenship was denied to them.

This changed in 1857, when the Supreme Court held that no Black person can ever be a citizen of the U.S; and that the political community established by the Constitution did not include them at all. This followed a plea by an enslaved Black man, Dred Scott, for freedom. In 1865, the 13th Amendment abolished slavery, but the 1857 judgment stood as law, making the citizenship status of freed slaves ambiguous.

In 1866, the Civil Rights Act was passed by Congress, legislating that any person born in the country is a citizen. President Andre Johnson vetoed it; and Congress overturned the veto. To pre-empt a future Congress or a future President from overturning it, the principle of birthright citizenship was written into the Constitution in 1868, as part of the 14th Amendment.

How did that link play in the current case?

The Trump administration argued that birthright citizenship was a remedy for the specific situation of former slaves, and the provision must be read with that narrow view.

The majority judgment took the position that the framers deliberately chose sweeping, universal language so the promise wouldn't be limited to one group or vulnerable to a future court narrowing it the way the judgment in Dred Scott had narrowed citizenship before.



What can we expect next?

The Trump administration has said it will pursue a legislative path to end birthright citizenship, but the move will not have enough support for a constitutional amendment in the U.S. Congress. The administration argues that an ordinary statute can achieve the objective but that is contested. For now, birthright citizenship will continue, but so will the political slugfest over it.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE MAKING OF UNIVERSAL RIGHTS

On September 2, 1945, in Hanoi's Ba Dinh Square, Ho Chi Minh stood before a crowd of hundreds of thousands of people to proclaim the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. He was a committed Marxist-Leninist, a founding member of the French Communist Party, and the leader of a revolution the United States would spend the next two decades trying to defeat. He did not open with Marx. He did not open with Lenin. He opened with Jefferson:

"All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776."

Ho believed the Declaration meant what it said and that if it meant what it said, it had to apply to Vietnam. The United States spent thirty years demonstrating that it did not agree.

To understand why a Vietnamese communist reached for an 18th-century American document at the founding moment of his republic, one must understand what that document actually was: where it came from, what it cost to produce, and what, precisely, it said.

A rough draft of history

In June 1776, Thomas Jefferson, 33, sat at a portable writing desk in a rented room in Philadelphia and drafted what the Second Continental Congress had commissioned. He later said he "turned to neither book nor pamphlet while writing it," drawing only on what he called "the common sense of the subject." The resulting document went through 86 changes before adoption: 47 from John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, 39 from Congress during debate on July 3 and 4. The final text was adopted on the afternoon of July 4. Formal signing began on August 2.

The most important change was a deletion. Jefferson had included a paragraph indicting King George III for perpetuating the Atlantic slave trade, calling it "a cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people." Congress cut it entirely, reportedly at the insistence of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern delegates whose constituents profited from the trade. What replaced it was a vague reference to the King inciting "domestic insurrections" among the colonists, which recast enslaved people as a threat rather than victims. The Declaration's claim that "all men are created equal" was left to stand without any acknowledgment of the 5,00,000 people held in bondage in the colonies that signed it. Jefferson called the changes "mutilations" and kept private copies of his original draft to document what had been lost.

A subtler but significant change was in the preamble. Jefferson had written: "We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable." Someone, most likely Franklin, changed it to "self-evident." The revision moved the argument from religious authority to rational logic and made the document considerably harder to dismiss without first engaging the laws of nature on their own terms.



First principles

The Declaration's core propositions came primarily from John Locke's Two Treatises of Government (1689): natural rights precede government; government derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed; when a government systematically violates those rights, the people may overthrow it. Jefferson borrowed this framework wholesale but made one consequential substitution. Locke's three natural rights were life, liberty, and property. Jefferson changed the third to "the pursuit of happiness."

Property is a legal category with defined contents. The pursuit of happiness is an open-ended aspiration that every subsequent generation has filled with different content: economic freedom, personal autonomy, religious practice, and the welfare state. That elasticity has become the document's most durable feature.

The Virginia Declaration of Rights, drafted by George Mason and adopted June 12, 1776, weeks before Jefferson began writing, had already declared that "all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights." Jefferson knew it intimately and drew on it directly. Thomas Paine's Common Sense, published in January 1776, had made similar arguments in the popular idiom that shaped the mood Jefferson then addressed in a more formal register. The Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson had argued that certain moral truths were felt directly by any rational person without philosophical demonstration, which is the epistemological basis for calling truths "self-evident." What Jefferson did was synthesise an existing tradition into a document designed to justify revolution to an international audience, under deadline, with a specific political purpose.

Historical innovations

Magna Carta (1215) and the English Bill of Rights (1689) framed rights as concessions from a sovereign to subjects: grants from above, which could in principle be revoked by the same authority that issued them. The Declaration grounded rights in the fact of being human, prior to any government and independent of any sovereign's generosity.

More distinctively, it addressed itself not to subjects within an existing constitutional order but to "the Powers of the Earth," asserting the right to constitute a new political order from scratch. The right to revolution followed as a logical consequence of the premises. If governments exist to secure natural rights, and a government instead systematically destroys them, the people are not merely permitted but obligated to act. The argument moves like a syllogism. That formal clarity is part of what made the document so portable across political traditions that had nothing else in common. Thirty-five American state constitutions contain the same or similar provisions on the right of revolution as in the Declaration's preamble, and comparable language appears in the constitutions of France (1793), Texas, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, among others.

The Declaration also pioneered what might be called the audit model of political accountability. Its long middle section lists 27 specific grievances against George III, functioning less like a complaints register and more like a prosecutor's indictment. Jefferson opens the charges: "The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid World." The grievances that follow are concrete and particular: quartering troops among the civilian population; allowing British soldiers who murdered colonists to face trial in England rather than in the colonies; cutting off colonial trade with the rest of the world; taxing the colonists without their consent; and depriving them of trial by jury



through the use of Admiralty courts. Other charges struck at self-governance itself: royal governors had suspended colonial legislatures and replaced statute law with royal proclamations in New York, Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina. The final counts escalated the indictment from civil abuse to open warfare, accusing the King of having “plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people,” and of deploying Hessian mercenaries “to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny.” The implication running through all 27 counts is that a government’s conduct can be itemised, documented, and judged against a standard. Every constitutional system that enumerates rights and governmental obligations inherits this structure.

A grammar for liberty

Karl Marx, writing in 1864 on behalf of the First International to congratulate Abraham Lincoln on his reelection, named the Declaration directly, calling it “the first Declaration of the Rights of Man” and identifying it as the event that had given “the first impulse to the European revolution of the eighteenth century.” He designated the document as the origin point of an entire historical era and argued that the working class would finish what 1776 had begun.

Twelve years earlier, on July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass perhaps explained the phenomenon of the Declaration more keenly than anyone else. Born into slavery, self-educated, and by then the most prominent Black abolitionist in America, he stood before a crowd of around 600 people in Rochester, New York, invited to speak on the Independence Day of the United States of America. His speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”, is one of the most deliberate engagements with the Declaration in American history:

“I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost.”

Then he turned: “This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.” Douglass’s argument was not that the Declaration had failed but that its inheritors had.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on December 10, 1948, by 48 nations with no dissenting votes, carries the architecture of Jefferson’s preamble into international law: rights that are inherent, that precede states, and that no authority can grant or revoke. Its preamble opens with “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.”

Unfinished business

Jefferson owned over 600 people at the time he wrote that all men are created equal. The document he produced was, at its core, a lawyer’s argument for a political purpose: to justify, to an international audience, the decision of thirteen colonies to break from Britain. Its universalist language was a rhetorical instrument, not a programme.

What it became is something else. The deletion of the slavery paragraph did not bury the contradiction; it drove it into the text’s foundation, where it sat under the pressure of “all men are created equal” for ninety years.



The shift from “sacred and undeniable” to “self-evident” planted the argument on rational ground where it could not be closed by authority or tradition, only by reason. Each of these changes, deliberate or incidental, made the document harder to contain.

Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, fifty years to the day after the Declaration’s adoption. Weeks before his death, he wrote that he hoped it would prove “an instrument... pregnant with our own and the fate of the world.”

FAR FROM OVER

Iran and the U.S. must address the trust deficit for their talks to progress

It took only 20 days for the U.S.-Iran memorandum of understanding (MoU), which promised to extend the ceasefire by 60 days and launch talks about outstanding issues, including Iran’s nuclear programme, to start unravelling. On Tuesday night, the U.S. carried out sweeping air strikes in Iran after three tankers were attacked in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran struck American bases in Kuwait and Bahrain after which Mr. Trump declared that the ceasefire was over. While he is known for making exaggerated claims, the current crisis poses the biggest challenge to the peace process since the June 17 MoU. The crisis did not emerge overnight. From the outset, the agreement had three major sticking points — Israel’s war in Lebanon; Iran’s access to its frozen funds and the status of the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran sees Israel’s refusal to withdraw from southern Lebanon, along with Washington’s push for a parallel trilateral framework involving the U.S., Lebanon and Israel, as violations of the spirit of the MoU. And, despite talks, Iran has yet to get access to its frozen funds. Finally, Iran appears determined to assert control over the Strait. It has opened a “safe passage route” along its coast, while the U.S. is backing an alternative route along Oman’s coast.

Iran fears that the U.S. is trying to strip away the leverage it established over the Strait during the war by promoting an alternative route. The U.S. does not want Iran to emerge as the sole custodian of a strategic waterway. These conflicting positions trigger skirmishes, further undermining the MoU. What Mr. Trump, who senses strategic defeat, is trying to do is to mount economic and military pressure on Tehran to change its position on the Strait. He can continue his air campaign, but his years-long maximum pressure and 40 days of bombing have done little to alter Iran’s negotiating positions. If he returns to war over Hormuz, Iran’s stance on its nuclear programme — still unaddressed — would only get hardened. If war resumes, it would be bad news for the whole West Asia region and the entire global economy. Mr. Trump is at a strategic dead end, and instead of digging deeper, should stick to his way-out road map — the MoU. An obstacle in the peace process is the complete absence of trust. Mr. Trump’s public tirades and abuses against Iran’s leadership and hyperbolic threats, which are detached from ground realities, are not helping his cause. Equally, if Iran continues targeting commercial vessels, it risks being seen as an aggressor rather than a victim. Both sides should address the trust deficit, resolve the sticking points in the MoU and begin serious talks about the outstanding issues for a final settlement.

BAD FOR BOTH

Russia and Ukraine must end the war and concede mutual concessions

More than four years into Russia’s invasion, Ukraine has found ways to raise the cost of the war for the Kremlin — striking its energy infrastructure with drones and imposing a drone blockade on Crimea. When the war began in February 2022, Ukraine’s immediate response was to resist



Russia's battlefield advances, while mobilising international support. As the war dragged on, Ukraine received advanced defensive and offensive weapons from its western partners, while Russia was subjected to sweeping sanctions. But this approach did not slow Russia, which reinforced its front lines and captured more Ukrainian territory. Both sides have suffered tens of thousands of casualties. Ukraine's economy has become heavily dependent on western aid. Kyiv has also transformed the way the war is fought by launching hundreds of drones each day at Russian troops and critical infrastructure. For President Vladimir Putin, who initially sought to shield the Russian public from the consequences of the war, these attacks are a stark reminder that the war has come home. Strikes on Russian oil facilities, described by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as "long-range sanctions", have knocked out parts of Russia's refining capacity. Ukraine has also targeted the electricity infrastructure and fuel logistics of Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula Russia annexed in 2014, forcing a state of emergency.

Mr. Zelenskyy wants to use this offensive pressure to force Mr. Putin to the negotiating table and secure a ceasefire. But drone warfare has only slowed Russian advances. Last week, Russia's Defence Ministry announced the capture of the eastern city of Kostiantynivka and a closing in on Lyman. Russia now controls over 20% of Ukraine since 2014. Russia has repeatedly accused NATO countries of enabling Ukraine to strike deep inside its territory. Mr. Putin is already under pressure over his inability to secure a decisive victory, and nationalist voices have urged him to widen the conflict to increase pressure on NATO. The situation remains highly volatile with no political settlement in sight. Ukraine can hurt Russia economically, but it continues to lose ground on the battlefield. Russia can inflict military losses on Ukraine, but it is also facing attacks on a scale unseen since the Second World War. Neither side has a viable military path to achieving its objectives. Mr. Putin and Mr. Zelenskyy should adopt a more accommodative position with mutual concessions. They should agree to a ceasefire and be ready to begin substantive negotiations on the outstanding issues, including the security concerns of both countries and the future of NATO.

PRISONERS OF VIOLENCE

Sri Lanka must do more to uphold order, prevent prison crowding

The killing of 28 people in sudden, apparently uncontrolled violence in an overcrowded prison outside Colombo, on Monday, speaks to a culture of mismanagement and official apathy. Reports of tensions inside the premises emerged on Sunday, with two inmates reported dead initially. Authorities deployed the military around the prison soon after, but the violence escalated on Monday, leaving more than two dozen dead and over 100 injured. Monday's riots followed a group of inmates tipping off officials on an alleged drug operation on the prison premises. Some inmates reportedly grabbed arms from the guards, while others assaulted rival gang members with clubs and stones, even as guards struggled to contain the violence; eight guards were among those dead. Authorities have transferred hundreds of remaining inmates to other prisons. The incident, one of the deadliest prison riots in Sri Lanka, foregrounds two key challenges facing the Anura Kumara Disanayake administration — the narcotics menace that it has resolved to wipe out, and the chronic overcrowding in prisons, a concern that rights defenders have repeatedly highlighted for years.

In 2020, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka found prison conditions to be dire, owing to overcrowding and under-resourcing. As of December 31, 2024, the country's prisons housed 28,278 inmates against an approved capacity of 10,395, operating at nearly thrice their capacity, according to the 2024 Auditor General's Report. Authorities have linked the immediate trigger for the riots to the drug underworld, which the Disanayake administration has been trying to crack

4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



down on. Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara has rightly noted that regardless of the attackers' motivations or the crimes they are accused of, the death of people in state custody is "deeply shocking", and that the government accepts responsibility. The Cabinet has appointed a three-member committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge to carry out a thorough investigation. The government's response and seeming willingness to probe the causes for the deadly incident, are welcome and necessary. It is the third after the 2012 Welikada prison riots, where 27 inmates were shot dead by police, and the 2020 riots in Mahara, near Colombo, which claimed 11 lives. The pace of the probe and the government's response will reveal its intent to address long-pending concerns around the country's prisons. It must work towards improving prison conditions, living standards, and security, to prevent further clashes. Meanwhile, authorities must persist with the efforts to disable drug networks that pose a grave threat to society, including within prisons.

A SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE

When Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow met Myanmar's newly designated President Min Aung Hlaing in April 2026, he was told that the regime in Naypyitaw was "considering good things" for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. This was the same general who, as chief of the dreaded junta, had deposed the country's civilian government yet again in 2021, plunging Myanmar into a protracted civil war before refashioning himself into a "civilian" leader.

Ms. Suu Kyi — the former State Counsellor and the symbolic head of the pro-democracy movement — had meanwhile been jailed in a high-security prison in the capital, Naypyitaw, after a sentence of close to three decades was handed to her in a farcical trial that followed the coup. The junta sought to legitimise its rule through a stage-managed election, which was held with a low-turnout vote, largely in areas the military controlled, and handed victory to its proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party. After the "victory", it reduced Suu Kyi's sentence several times. Yet when ASEAN asked for access to her, it refused outright.

The 81-year-old is understood to have been moved to "house arrest" somewhere within Naypyitaw, though very few even among the junta know her whereabouts. This led to a "proof of life" campaign online demanding details of her detention. Ms. Suu Kyi's limbo is symbolic of the state of the pro-democracy movement, which still regards her as its icon, even in an ethnically fractured country that has been at war with itself since the coup.

Ms. Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, released only recently, and other leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD) were arrested in 2021, months after the party's landslide victory in the 2020 elections. But the movement did not collapse with them. Ousted parliamentarians and party figures regrouped to form a government in exile, the National Unity Government (NUG), which took up armed resistance against the junta by raising People's Defence Forces in the Bamar-majority heartland and fighting alongside ethnic armed organisations that had renewed their own wars against the military.

Today, more than five years on, the civil war has claimed more than a lakh lives. While the junta has regained the initiative after heavy setbacks, the resistance remains formidable.

Hard-won authority

Ms. Suu Kyi's authority as the symbol of the pro-democracy movement was hard-won, even if it was later tarnished by the stances she took as State Counsellor. The daughter of the independence



hero Aung San, assassinated when she was two, she was educated in New Delhi and later at Oxford. She married a British academic and raised two sons abroad before returning in 1988 to a Burma going through a revolt against military rule. She soon led that uprising in a role that would cost her nearly 15 years of house arrest across two decades, and make her an international cause célèbre. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 while confined. Her release in 2010 came only after the dictator Than Shwe staged a controlled election and began cautiously opening the country to Western investment and legitimacy. The NLD swept by-elections in 2012 and then won a genuine landslide in 2015.

The military, forever wary of her clout and her intent to widen the democratic space, had sought to keep her from the presidency through a clause in the 2008 constitution barring anyone with foreign-national children. But she outwitted the generals by getting the NLD to use its parliamentary majority to legislate a new office, the State Counsellor, placed above the president and serving as effective chief executive.

Working pragmatically within a parliament where the military still held a quarter of the seats, Ms. Suu Kyi contained the generals politically but her accommodation of them carried a heavy cost. When the military, then commanded by Min Aung Hlaing, led a genocidal campaign against the Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2017, leading to an exodus of more than 7,00,000 and killing thousands, she did not condemn it. In 2019, she personally defended Myanmar against the genocide charge before the International Court of Justice.

This pragmatic accommodation did not benefit her. The junta did not want to share power and wanted all of it. As the veteran analyst Bertil Lintner argues, the military had expected the NLD to lose in 2020, convinced that it had shed support in the cities and ethnic-minority areas. It was proven spectacularly wrong and refused to accept the result when the NLD won another landslide. It manufactured claims of mass fraud and orchestrated violent protests through its proxy USDP, using the “crisis” as a pretext to seize power in the coup.

After losing vast territory during the civil war in 2023 and 2024, the junta has now turned the tide, clawing back some of what it lost. Propitious circumstances made that possible — China’s changed stance in particular. Having earlier indirectly enabled the gains of ethnic armies in the north, Beijing swung behind the regime once prolonged war began to threaten its border stability and economic corridor. It pressured the Ta’ang National Liberation Army and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army — two members of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, the third being the Arakan Army — to accept ceasefires and pull back from crucial towns they held in Shan State and neighbouring areas.

With pressure easing in the north, and a forced-conscription law bringing new recruits, the junta could redirect its forces to other fronts, against the People’s Defence Forces and ethnic armies such as the Kachin Independence Organisation and the Karenni forces.

Seeking legitimacy

It is now trying to regain international legitimacy through the civilian-government route. On taking the presidency, Min Aung Hlaing installed loyalists in the high command, elevating former intelligence chief Ye Win Oo to commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Among his first visits as President was one to New Delhi, where he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India, wary of Beijing’s outsized sway over Naypyitaw and eager to revive its stalled connectivity projects and secure access to rare earths, has sought re-engagement with the regime. ASEAN nations, too, are slowly doing the same.



Does this mean Myanmar's pro-democracy and pro-federal forces are facing defeat? Some developments suggest the military will not have it easy. The NUG and other Bamar democratic forces have joined with key ethnic organisations to form a Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF), which many observers term an improvement over the National Unity Consultative Council formed after the coup. It may be a key step to centralise the resistance against military rule and its proxies. Led by a battle-hardened younger generation of activists still inspired by Ms. Suu Kyi's example, the initiative may still depend on fissures within the junta, and on the indulgence of a perennially frayed and somewhat insular ethnic resistance, for a genuine breakthrough. But it has something the junta lacks, and that Ms. Suu Kyi has always symbolised: the popular support of the long-suffering people of Myanmar.



DreamIAS

**NATIONAL****MODI, PRABOWO LAUNCH PROJECT TO CONSERVE INDONESIA TEMPLE**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, before concluding his Indonesia visit on Wednesday, visited the 9th-century Prambanan Temple complex in Yogyakarta along with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to inaugurate a joint conservation project for the UNESCO World Heritage Site. The project will be led by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Key Takeaways:

- Calling the initiative a “shining example of the enduring civilisational bonds” between India and Indonesia, the two leaders also unveiled a plaque at the temple, marking the commencement of the ASI’s conservation and restoration project at the site.
- “President Prabowo Subianto and I inaugurated the UNESCO World Heritage Prambanan Temple Compound Restoration and Conservation Project,” Modi posted on X after his visit.
- “The magnificent Prambanan Temple stands as a timeless symbol of our cultural and spiritual links. Preserving such heritage is about safeguarding the traditions that continue to inspire generations,” he said, adding that India is privileged to partner with Indonesia in this important endeavour.
- The central focus of the project is the restoration of the Pervara temples — 224 subsidiary shrines arranged in four concentric rows within the middle zone of the compound, official sources told The Indian Express. Of these 224 temples, only six have been restored to date and the remaining 218 stand as extensive ruins.
- The project, spanning 10 years (2026–2036) with a total outlay of Rs 65 crore, will be executed by ASI in collaboration with the Indonesian Heritage Agency, sources added. The key activities of the project include LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) sensor, and photogrammetric documentation of scattered stone members, archival research, structural, hydrological, and geotechnical studies.

Do You Know:

- The Prambanan Temple Compound, inscribed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991, is considered among the most magnificent ensembles of Hindu temple architecture in the world. Built in the 9th century under the Mataram Kingdom in Central Java, the compound contains over 500 temples, including the soaring 47-metre Shiva temple.
- India said its support for the restoration and conservation of the temple complex “reflects its enduring commitment to preserving shared civilisational heritage”. The conservation project follows the understanding reached between the two sides during President Prabowo’s state visit to India in 2025 to explore India’s assistance for the restoration of the temples at the Prambanan complex, the MEA said in a statement.
- From conserving key sections of the Angkor heritage complex in Cambodia to providing grant assistance for restoration of one of Sri Lanka’s five ancient temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, India has extended help to multiple partners in the past 12 years in reviving the “shared civilisational heritage”, according to officials.



History of the Prambanan Temple

The Sanjaya dynasty was a Javanese dynasty that ruled the Mataram Kingdom in Central Java during the eighth and ninth centuries, and is generally associated with the revival of Shaivite Hinduism on the island.

Rakai Pikatan of the Sanjaya dynasty is believed to have married Samaratunga's daughter of Sailendra dynasty, Pramodhawardhani, and ruled between 842 and 856 CE. The Sailendra dynasty was a powerful Buddhist royal house.

Rakai Pikatan is widely credited with commissioning Prambanan as a grand Hindu sanctuary.

Researcher Hary Gunarto notes that the construction of Prambanan was intended to mark the return of the Hindu Sanjaya dynasty to power after nearly a century of Buddhist Sailendra dominance. Although the exact date construction began remains uncertain, inscriptions record the consecration of the temple in 856 CE.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ASTRA MISSILES, WHICH INDONESIA WILL PURCHASE

India and Indonesia on Tuesday reached a significant milestone in their growing strategic cooperation by signing a deal for the supply of the Astra Mk 1 'beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles' (BVRAAM).

Key Takeaways:

- The development is significant as it marks India's first export of Astra missiles to another country. These missiles will arm Indonesia's Su-30 fleet.
- The deal came alongside other key agreements — including the sale of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles, major defence technology transfers, critical mineral extraction and maritime security. Developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Astra is a family of indigenous BVRAAMs that will be integrated with the Air Force and the Navy.
- Beyond-visual-range (BVR) missiles are those capable of engaging beyond the range of 20 nautical miles, or 37 km. Air-to-air missiles are primarily fired from an airborne asset to destroy an airborne target.

Do You Know:

- Indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air missile, Astra is designed to be mounted on a fighter aircraft and is also designed to engage and destroy highly manoeuvring supersonic aircraft. With a 15-kilogram high-explosive pre-fragmented warhead, Astra has a range of over 70 km and can fly towards its target at a speed of over 5,555 km per hour. The missile has all-weather day and night capability.
- The missile has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), along with almost 50 other public and private organisations, which were involved in multiple variants to meet specific requirements.
- India's deal with Indonesia, signed on Tuesday to supply Astra Mk 1 missiles, marking the first export of the missiles to another country, shows that they have good potential for export to other countries as well. India is also set to supply the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to Indonesia,



as well as to Vietnam and the Philippines. In future, India is likely to explore other friendly countries for the sale of the Astra missiles.

MISSILES, MINERALS AND PORT: DELHI, JAKARTA SEAL KEY DEALS

India and Indonesia signed a series of landmark agreements Tuesday covering the supply of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles and Astra air-to-air missile systems, as well as major defence technology transfers, critical mineral extraction, maritime security, and digital telecom connectivity. The developments came during a bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto in Jakarta.

Key Takeaways:

- Modi, who reached Jakarta as part of a three-nation trip from July 6 to 11, said, “The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership we forged in 2018 is taking a new flight today. We are taking important steps forward in every sector—development, security, technology, culture, and education... I am confident that a golden chapter of India-Indonesia partnership begins today.”
- This is PM Modi’s fourth visit to Indonesia and the first bilateral visit since the elevation of ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in May 2018.
- As a special gesture reflecting deep bilateral ties, President Prabowo conferred the Bintang Adipurna (Medal of Honour) upon Prime Minister Modi. The medal is Indonesia’s highest civilian award, reserved for people who have rendered exceptional service to the nation’s unity, continuity, and prosperity.
- “The growing trust between our countries is strengthening our defence, security, and maritime cooperation. Today, we have reached an agreement to enhance defence exchanges, disaster management, and industrial cooperation,” said Modi, who will visit Australia and New Zealand as well.
- The agreements signed between the two nations included a pact to open an Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore campus in Indonesia, the supply of medicines and medical products to Indonesia, the provision of telecom technology such as wireless and quantum systems, and efforts for the conservation and restoration of the Prambanan Temple complex in Yogyakarta, among others.

Do You Know:

- Advancing defence and maritime partnership, officials said that India’s defence and security cooperation has seen increased momentum and expanding scope through high-level visits, regular bilateral and multilateral exercises and deeper defence industry cooperation, including the sale of BrahMos.
- As maritime neighbours, both countries adopted the Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in 2018. “The stationing of an Indonesian Liaison Officer at Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) will give further impetus to our maritime domain awareness. India will also be earmarking slots for Indonesian cadets and officers in National Defence Academy (NDA) and Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), which will enhance defence capacity building,” said a source.



- Indonesia has emerged as India's second largest trading partner in ASEAN region with bilateral trade of US\$ 24.78 billion in 2025-26. Over 130 Indian companies are invested in different sectors in Indonesia.
- On cooperation in critical minerals, officials said Indonesia dominates the sector, commanding roughly 21% of world's nickel reserves and ranking among the top global producers of copper, bauxite and tin. On trade and investments, officials said there are "strong synergies between developmental visions of Viksit Bharat 2047 and Emas (Golden) Indonesia 2045".

TWO TOGETHER

India and Japan did well to ring-fence their ties from multilateral accords

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's first official visit to India turned out to be an occasion to signal enhanced bilateral coordination in the face of global uncertainties. Rapid changes in geopolitics and technological advances are forcing all countries into fresh thinking, most consequentially with regard to China. The U.S. appears less enthusiastic about the Quad grouping (with India, Japan and Australia) and is unsure of the nomenclature "Indo-Pacific" in its strategy. Against this backdrop, India and Japan declared a joint intent to continue with an 'updated' Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) posture, ring-fencing bilateral ties from multilateral arrangements. Ms. Takaichi signed at least 16 agreements and documents, including a joint statement on energy resilience to support bilateral cooperation along the 'maritime energy transport value chain'. The commitments to energy cooperation were supported by the awareness that to play lead roles in the FOIP, the two sides should cooperate in the energy domain from South Asia to the Indo-Pacific. This concern was also linked with the problems both sides faced regarding the safety of energy-carrying ships and sailors during the U.S.-Israel war against Iran. The two major Asian economies have a shared interest in ensuring that the nearest energy sources in the Gulf remain accessible. They have agreed to build naval platforms to enhance maritime domain awareness and surveillance.

A joint statement issued during the visit mentioned "serious concerns" about the prevailing situation in the South China and East China Seas, and Japanese officials spoke to the media frankly about the need to address the Taiwan issue peacefully. Though a planned visit to Guwahati was dropped, Ms. Takaichi underscored Japan's attention to the northeastern regions of India by connecting them with "relevant partners and regional organisations" of the Bay of Bengal region. BIMSTEC was mentioned as a partner organisation for Japan. Japan has major investments in Bangladesh and Thailand, and connecting these projects, including the Matarbari port in Cox's Bazar, through an 'industrial value chain' with India's northeast can boost regional prosperity and security. Ms. Takaichi has painted a vast canvas of cooperation stretching from India's neighbourhood to the Pacific Ocean to protect the India-Japan relationship from the uncertainties of the current world order, but both sides have to manage multiple other relations effectively to ensure optimal outcomes. They have to manage their relations with China and the U.S. in such a manner that their strategic interests are protected and conflicts avoided. It can be a path of mutual learning and cooperation for India and Japan as they seek to navigate the global turbulence.

RAINFALL IN EASTERN RIVER BASINS DOWN 20% SINCE 1951: STUDY

In the first-of-its-kind assessment of the impact of climate change on water availability in the Indus river system, a new study has revealed that the catchment areas of the three eastern rivers



— Ravi, Beas and Sutlej — saw a 20 per cent decline in precipitation in the period between 1951 and 2024.

Key Takeaways:

- On the other hand, rainfall in catchment areas of three western rivers — Indus, Jhelum and Chenab — was largely stable, with only a 6 per cent reduction observed over the same period, “which is statistically non-significant”, the study has found.
- The findings are relevant in view of India’s argument that the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan, which governs the sharing of waters of the Indus basin between the two countries, needs to be renegotiated to account for new ground realities created by climate change and other factors like demographic changes. Under the treaty, the waters of the three eastern rivers have been fully allocated to India, while that of the three western rivers are mostly meant for use by Pakistan.
- After the Pahalgam terror attack last year, India had declared that it had put the treaty “in abeyance”, meaning it no longer considered itself bound by its provisions.
- It has repeatedly maintained that the treaty would remain “in abeyance” until Pakistan “credibly and irrevocably” abjures its support for cross-border terrorism. But much before this incident, in 2023 and 2024, India had served more than one notice to Pakistan seeking a “review and modification” of the treaty.
- India had argued that population pressures, changes in water demand, need for accelerated development of clean energy, and changes in water availability due to climate-induced processes had brought about “fundamental and unforeseen changes in circumstances” that required suitable modifications to be made in the 1960 treaty.

Do You Know:

- The latest study is the first data-based evidence to support the argument that water availability and the flow in the rivers had been substantially altered over the decades due to climate change. The study was carried out by Vimal Mishra, a professor of Civil Engineering at IIT-Gandhinagar and one of India’s leading researchers on hydrology and the impact of climate change on water resources, and his colleague Urmin Vegad. It is due for publication in a peer-reviewed international journal.
- The study also found significant depletion of groundwater in the Sutlej and Ravi sub-basins. The groundwater situation in the Chenab, Jhelum and Indus basins was found to be relatively better, “possibly reflecting limited agricultural use, lower population density, or higher recharge from snowmelt and precipitation”.
- The study found a “pronounced decline” in annual inflow of water in the reservoirs of major dams on the eastern rivers like Pong, Bhakra and Thein. The reservoir of Pong dam, for example, saw a decline of nearly 34 per cent in annual inflows between 1951 and 2020. The major reservoirs in Pakistan, on the other hand, were not substantially affected. Flows into Mangla and Tarbela dams, two of the biggest in Pakistan, both built on the western rivers, remained mostly stable, with very minor declines.
- The study says these largescale changes may make the treaty unsustainable in the long run. “The treaty was designed in the mid-20th century amid hydro-climatic conditions that differ remarkably from the recent period. Since the formation of the treaty, the Indus River Basin has



undergone substantial hydro-climatic and geopolitical changes that have led to questions about its long-term sustainability,” it says.

FOUR INDIAN NATIONALS PUSHED INTO BANGLADESH RETURN HOME

Four people from Birbhum in West Bengal, detained by the Delhi Police last year and pushed into Bangladesh, were brought back to India on Wednesday after a year-long legal battle. The group of returnees included Sweety Bibi, her two minor sons, and Danish Sheikh, who were picked up by the police along with two others from the national capital in May last year over suspicion of being infiltrators and later pushed across the border into Bangladesh.

In December 2025, Sunali Khatun, wife of Mr. Sheikh, and her minor son had returned to India after the Supreme Court intervened. Ms. Khatun was pregnant at that time and her father had argued that if his daughter gave birth in Bangladesh, the child would have no claim to an Indian citizenship. After her return, Ms. Khatun gave birth to a child in a State-run hospital in West Bengal in January.

Trinamool Congress leader Samirul Islam on Thursday applauded the Indian judiciary for its help in bringing back the remaining four, who returned through the border in Malda district. He said that while there is no problem with the deportation of illegal migrants, Indian nationals should not be subjected to injustice and harassment. “They stayed there [Bangladesh] for over a year. Even Bangladesh had written letters that Indians who were pushed back illegally must be taken back, but it took such a long time,” Mr. Islam, Trinamool MP and former chairperson of the West Bengal Migrant Welfare Board, told The Hindu on Thursday.

WHAT IS THE ‘HUMMUS TRAIL’ AND WHY IS IT UNDER SCRUTINY?

The story so far:

On June 2, 2026, the Hind Rajab Foundation (HRF), a Palestinian rights organisation based in Brussels, filed a complaint with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, the Bureau of Immigration and the police to arrest Eitan Gilboa, an Israeli soldier, who was found to be vacationing in Himachal Pradesh. Gilboa, a member of the 271st Combat Engineering Battalion, was accused by the organisation of committing “war crimes in Gaza” in 2024. The organisation submitted evidence that involves specific instances in which he participated in the destruction of residential buildings and civilian infrastructure in Khan Yunis and Rafah. He filmed videos of himself celebrating the execution of these activities, which were later posted on social media by his mother. The HRF provided geo-located videos, social media videos and chain-of-command documentation along with the complaint.

How does Indian law apply to alleged war crimes?

The HRF alleged that these activities by Gilboa were in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which India is a signatory. Under this convention, any intentional launch of an attack which is known to cause loss of life or injury to civilians, along with severe damage to civilian objects, is considered to be a war crime and a grave breach of the convention.

Though India does not have its own law criminalising war crimes, it has passed the Geneva Conventions Act, 1960. Under this law, any act which constitutes a ‘grave breach’ under four sections of the Geneva Convention is criminalised. India can arrest any person, irrespective of



nationality, if found to have committed an offence under the convention, regardless of the geographical location of the offence.

If an arrest is not possible, the Home Ministry and the Bureau of Immigration can facilitate the deportation of the accused from Indian territory. However, the Union government did not issue a statement regarding the allegations by HRF, nor initiated a probe.

What is the 'Hummus trail'?

Though Gilboa has now fled India, he was traced by pro-Palestinian activists and the HRF in Old Manali and Gondla Village of Himachal Pradesh, which are popular spots among Israelis along the 'Hummus trail.'

Every year, around 80,000 Israelis visit India, a large number of them young veterans who have been discharged from the mandatory Israeli army service. This trip, known as the Tiul Gadol, could last up to 6 months or a year and is mainly funded by the bonus they receive after serving in the army. In February 2026, the Israeli government allocated four million NIS to boost tourism collaboration with India.

From the north to the south of the country, there are several areas which are frequented by Israelis, and this is colloquially known as the 'Hummus trail in India'. This includes Kasol (also known as mini-Israel), Kodaikanal, Kerala, Goa, Hampi, Gokarna, Rishikesh, Varanasi, Pushkar, Almora, Dharamkot, and, more recently, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

In these places frequented by Israelis, one can observe several changes to the cultural landscape. It is common to see signs in Hebrew, posters promoting the Israeli Defence Forces, along with cafes, stores and hostels run by Israelis. In 2015, an Israeli-run cafe in Himachal Pradesh faced backlash for allegedly denying entry to Indians with a 'whites only' sign.

According to a 2020 study published in the Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, drug abuse and rave parties are common along the Hummus trail, with drug peddling cases on the rise in these regions.

The study found that to cope with mental health challenges faced by these veterans during their service in the army, they resort to high drug consumption. Mental health workers from Israel have also been sent to India to aid these reservists.

Why is the issue drawing global attention?

"India-Israel tourism is not merely about routine holidays and cultural exchange. It is part of a broader normalisation process that seeks to deepen social and economic ties between the two countries," Azad Essa, author of Hostile Homelands: The New Alliance Between India and Israel, told The Hindu. He added that Israel has thanked India multiple times for being one of the few countries that have provided political and moral support to Israel, when much of the world has turned its back on it, at least publicly.

As Israel has killed over 73,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack, and is currently facing a case filed by South Africa in the International Court of Justice over allegations of genocide, allowing unrestricted entry of Israeli soldiers to India after their service in Gaza demands scrutiny.



The UN Commission of Inquiry, in its report, has said that the Israeli military “deliberately carried out acts inflicting death and severe bodily and mental harm on hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children.”

Five-year-old Hind Rajab is among the thousands of children killed by the Israeli forces in Gaza.

The HRF’s legal action in other countries against Israeli soldiers travelling there has resulted in successful outcomes in Brazil, Romania, Peru, Belgium, and Canada, according to its website. A court in Chile is the latest to recognise universal jurisdiction over war crimes in Gaza while hearing HRF’s complaint against Rom Kovtun, an Israeli-Ukrainian citizen accused of war crimes during the siege of Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza.

“The ‘Hummus Trail’ — or these extended trips that IDF soldiers take to decompress after military duties — cannot become a route for impunity,” Natacha Bracq, Head of Litigation at the HRF, said in a statement.

TABLING REPORT ON JUSTICE VARMA: ACCOUNTABILITY AFTER RESIGNATION

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla’s decision to table the report of the parliamentary investigative committee against former Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma will bring India’s judicial accountability framework into uncharted territory.

Key Takeaways:

- When Justice Varma resigned in April, it was widely assumed that the impeachment proceedings against him had hit a dead end. However, legal experts argue that tabling the report is a crucial step for public accountability, challenging a long-held assumption that a judge’s resignation automatically extinguishes a parliamentary probe.
- The impeachment proceedings against Justice Varma can be traced back to last year when wads of burnt and partially destroyed currency notes were recovered from his official residence in New Delhi. This triggered an in-house inquiry by the Supreme Court, which reportedly found him culpable.
- Subsequently, over 146 Lok Sabha MPs moved a motion for his removal, prompting the Speaker to constitute a three-member investigative committee under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. Before the committee could conclude its hearings, Justice Varma tendered his resignation to President Droupadi Murmu.

Do You Know:

- Under Article 217 of the Constitution, a High Court judge can resign by writing to the President. In a 1978 judgment, the Supreme Court ruled that a judge’s resignation is a unilateral act that takes effect immediately on the date chosen by the judge, without needing formal acceptance.
- No judge has ever been impeached in India. In 2011, impeachment proceedings against Sikkim High Court Chief Justice P D Dinakaran and Calcutta High Court judge Soumitra Sen were dropped after they resigned. Justice Dinakaran had resigned while the committee was in the midst of its probe against him. Upon his resignation, the Rajya Sabha secretariat reasoned that since the goal of the probe was the removal of the judge, a resignation rendered the process meaningless and the committee’s work infructuous.



WHAT IS THE RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN?

The story so far:

The Delhi High Court, in its recent ruling, has laid down the principles governing the right to be forgotten. The court has evolved a new jurisprudence to protect the privacy of those who continue to be victimised on account of their digital footprints on social media and elsewhere, despite having those matters settled in their favour.

What is the 'right to be forgotten'?

The "right to be forgotten" is the right to have information erased or de-indexed from the public digital environment when its continued accessibility is harmful and serves no public interest.

The concept came to the fore in 2014, when a Spanish citizen, Mario Costeja González, complained to the European Court of Justice that Google continued to display an old newspaper notice about the auction of his repossessed house even though the debt had been settled. The court ruled in his favour, laying the groundwork for the right to erasure, which was later incorporated into Article 17 of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

How has the idea of the right to be forgotten evolved in Indian law?

The Supreme Court's judgment in *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017) held that privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21, including the right to informational privacy. In the years that followed, however, High Courts adopted divergent approaches.

While some permitted anonymisation in limited cases, such as the Delhi High Court ordering the masking of names in certain matrimonial and criminal matters, others rejected similar requests on grounds of open justice.

The real challenge was the lack of a coherent framework to balance these competing interests, which the May 2026 Delhi High Court judgment sought to address.

What did the Delhi High Court decide?

On May 29, the Delhi High Court ruled in a batch of over 30 consolidated petitions, led by *Laksh Vir Singh Yadav v. Union of India*. The core issue was whether informational privacy could justify the de-indexing or masking of judicial records in a system committed to open justice. The court held that the right to be forgotten flows from Article 21's guarantee of dignity and informational privacy. The structured proportionality test is that retention must have a legitimate purpose, that the harm to privacy must be balanced against the public interest, and that the least intrusive means, typically by masking names instead of deleting the entire judgment, should be preferred. The court also prescribed a two-week deadline for legal databases to comply and explained that only the parties' names should be redacted, not the facts of the case.

How does the right to be forgotten interact with constitutional values?

This is not a stand-alone right. It frequently conflicts with freedom of speech and press under Article 19(1)(a), the principle of open justice, and the public's right to know. A right to privacy must be sacrificed when the public interest is of a high order, particularly in serious cases of crime, but the digital presence should not destroy a person's life long after the trial ends. The judgments



are still publicly accessible by case number or a keyword search; only name-based searches are restricted.

What are the practical challenges?

The toughest aspect is enforcement. An acquittal judgment may still appear highly in name-based searches even after a court has ordered the removal of the search results. Search engines are designed so that the original accusation, or the “shadow of crime,” is often the first thing the user sees. De-indexing can benefit at the search level, but it won’t prevent mirrors, archive copies, or social media sharing. Without effective technical compliance and coordination among platforms, the right may remain largely symbolic.

What is the relationship between the right to be forgotten and DPDP Act?

As of now, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, offers a limited statutory right to erasure in section 12. It is primarily based on consent and does not explicitly address judicial records and public archives, where the right to be forgotten is most needed. The Act is deficient because rules have not been notified and the data protection board has not been completely effective.

Who should decide requests for erasure or de-indexing?

The challenge lies in balancing efficiency with accountability. Requiring every request to be decided by a court would create significant bottlenecks, while leaving such decisions entirely to technology companies raises concerns about due process and transparency. A more sensible approach would be a tiered system, where cases could be heard by platforms, contested ones by the data protection board, and judicial cases by courts.

The Delhi High Court has established an important framework, but until the Supreme Court rules on the matter, establishes a data protection board, and platforms comply with it, this ruling will be mostly declaratory. The conflict over freedom of expression and open justice is a reality. The task ahead is now to establish the institutions that facilitate it.

MEDIA’S ‘PUBLIC FUNCTION’: IMPACT OF DELHI HC VERDICT ON PRESS FREEDOM, PRIVACY

Fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution have traditionally been viewed as a shield for citizens against the State. However, a judgment by the Delhi High Court on Wednesday (July 1) extended the “horizontal application” of these rights, ruling that private media houses perform a “public function” and can be taken to a High Court for violating an individual’s right to privacy.

Key Takeaways:

- A two-judge bench of the High Court upheld a single-judge’s order from 2013 directing TV Today Network to pay Rs 5 lakh in compensation for broadcasting details that could identify a minor victim of sexual assault. The judgment, authored by Justice C Hari Shankar on behalf of himself and Justice O P Shukla, laid down legal principles that carry implications for press freedom, the right to privacy, and the avenues through which citizens can sue the media.
- The case dates back to August 2005, when a woman filed a police complaint accusing her husband of sexually assaulting their minor daughter. Despite the mother explicitly refusing to interact with a visiting television crew from the news channel Aaj Tak, the network broadcast a

4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



segment that disclosed the father's name, his official designation, the colony's address board, visuals of the house, and the mother's voice. The mother subsequently filed a writ petition against the channel before the High Court.

- The main legal question before the High Court was whether a writ petition could be filed against a private television channel.
- Under Article 226 of the Constitution, High Courts have the power to issue writs for the enforcement of fundamental rights as well as for any other legal right against the State or authorities discharging public duties.

Do You Know:

- The court ruled that the media, even when privately owned, discharges a "public function". Referring to previous Supreme Court judgments, it reasoned that the media's role in disseminating news and shaping public opinion is so central to society that it constitutes a public function. Noting that it would be "unrealistic to hold that the media... do not perform any public function", the court held that this role carries an inherent "public duty to ensure that the rights of the public are not prejudiced or injured by the manner in which such public function is performed".
- Based on this, the court applied the fundamental right to privacy horizontally. While fundamental rights are typically applied vertically — meaning a citizen enforces them against the government — horizontal application allows a citizen to enforce these rights against a non-State actor. A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court had, in the 2023 Kaushal Kishor judgment, established this principle, ruling that certain fundamental rights can be enforced horizontally against private individuals.
- The Delhi High Court has now extended this principle specifically to the right to privacy against the press, holding that the channel's broadcast, aired without consent, was an illegal intrusion into the victim's privacy, justifying the award of monetary compensation in a writ court.

CAN BAR ASSOCIATIONS REFUSE TO REPRESENT AN ACCUSED?

The story so far:

The Faizabad Bar Association's resolution to not represent the accused in the Ayodhya Ram Temple embezzlement case has prompted the question of whether a Bar Association could collectively decide not to represent a particular accused.

What is the Supreme Court's take?

The Supreme Court has consistently held that every accused has the right to fair trial and legal representation and it is illegal, unconstitutional and contrary to professional ethics to deny that right.

In a Supreme Court judgment in 2010, *A.S. Mohammed Rafi v. State of Tamil Nadu*, the case arose out of a confrontation between lawyers and police personnel in Coimbatore.

Following the incident, a local Bar Association passed a resolution that none of its members would represent the accused police personnel. A Division Bench of Justices Markandey Katju and Gyan



Sudha Misra held that such resolutions by Bar bodies were “wholly illegal, against all traditions and professional ethics”.

The court declared in the judgment that “all such resolutions of Bar Associations in India are null and void and the right-minded lawyers should ignore and defy such resolutions if they want democracy and rule of law to be upheld in this country”.

What is the accused’s right to be defended?

Article 22(1) of the Constitution guarantees that no arrested person shall be denied the right “to consult, and to be defended by, a legal practitioner of his choice”. Article 14 provides for equality before the law and equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

The Supreme Court has recognised the right to a fair trial as an integral part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21.

Article 39A, a Directive Principle of State Policy, further requires the State to ensure that the legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity and that no citizen is denied access to justice because of economic or other disabilities, including through free legal aid.

What do the Bar Council of India Rules say?

The ‘Standards of Professional Conduct and Etiquette’ chapter of the Bar Council of India Rules says that “an advocate is bound to accept any brief in the Courts or Tribunals or before any other authorities in or before which he proposes to practise at a fee consistent with his standing at the Bar and the nature of the case. Special circumstances may justify his refusal to accept a particular brief.”

However, the Uttarakhand High Court in *Kuldeep Agarwal v. State Of Uttarakhand And Others* (2019) clarified that “special circumstances mentioned in Clause II, justifying refusal of an advocate to accept a particular brief, refers, by the use of the word “his”, to the advocate in his individual capacity, and not to the Bar Association whose members are advocates”.

Have such resolutions been passed before?

Yes. Following the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, a Bar resolution opposed legal representation for arrested terrorist, Ajmal Kasab. The legal aid lawyer initially assigned to him declined to appear, while another advocate who agreed to defend him faced political threats before a lawyer was eventually appointed under police protection.

After the December 16, 2012 Delhi gangrape case, lawyers at the Saket courts passed a similar resolution refusing to represent the accused. Likewise, lawyers declined to defend the accused in the 2019 Hyderabad veterinary doctor’s rape and murder case.

How have courts dealt with such resolutions?

The Uttarakhand High Court had in 2019 declared null and void a resolution passed by the Kotdwar Bar Association threatening to terminate the membership of any lawyer who represented an accused in the murder of an advocate.

In 2020, the Karnataka High Court criticised the Hubballi Bar Association after lawyers objected to advocates representing Kashmiri students accused of raising pro-Pakistan slogans. The Bench described the conduct of lawyers on the Dharwad court premises who prevented advocates from



filing bail applications as “sheer militancy”. It also indicated that such resolutions could amount to criminal contempt.

More recently, the Madras High Court in *Manikandan Nair v. State of Tamil Nadu* in 2025 reiterated that Bar Associations cannot formally or informally prevent advocates from appearing for any accused.

In the case of *J. Jayalalithaa v. State of Karnataka* (2014), the Supreme Court observed that “fair trial is the main object of criminal procedure and such fairness should not be hampered or threatened in any manner. Fair trial entails the interests of the accused, the victim and the society. Thus, fair trial must be accorded to every accused in the spirit of the right to life and personal liberty and the accused must get a free and fair, just and reasonable trial on the charge imputed in a criminal case”.

Thus, the Supreme Court has consistently held that the right to legal representation is a core feature of a fair trial.

HC UPHOLDS UNIFORM LEGAL MARRIAGE AGE FOR ALL RELIGIONS

The Allahabad High Court has held that the minimum age of marriage prescribed under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, applies to all citizens irrespective of religion, observing that the Muslim personal law principle recognising puberty as the age of marriage cannot override the provisions of the Central law.

The observations were made in a judgment pronounced on July 1 by a Division Bench of Justice J.J. Munir and Justice Achal Sachdev while hearing a writ petition seeking to quash an FIR registered against 19 people in connection with the alleged attempt to solemnise the marriage of a 16-year-old girl in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh in February.

The petitioners argued that under the Muslim personal law, a girl who has attained puberty is competent to marry, and that the PCMA does not override the Shariat. They also relied on provisions of the Indian Majority Act, 1875, and the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937.

The Bench acknowledged that High Courts across the country have taken divergent views on whether marriages involving Muslim minors are governed by Muslim personal law or by the PCMA, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. However, it agreed with the reasoning adopted by the Kerala High Court in *Moidutty Musliyar v. Sub Inspector, Vadakkencherry Police Station*, which held that personal law cannot override the statutory prohibition on child marriage or dilute the operation of the POCSO Act.

“The age of marriage, in our considered opinion, for every citizen of the country, irrespective of religion, is that which is spelt out by the PCMA,” the court said. It added that permitting the marriage of a person below 18 years would be inconsistent with the POCSO Act, which criminalises sexual relations with a child.

WITH CEO POST, HOW RAM TEMPLE TRUST IS CHANGING

The Ram Temple Trust has accepted the resignations of its two most influential office-bearers, General Secretary Champat Rai and trustee Anil Mishra, and announced that it will appoint a Chief



Executive Officer for the first time. The move marks the biggest administrative overhaul of the body that runs the Ayodhya temple since it was constituted in 2020.

Key Takeaways:

- The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra owes its existence to the Supreme Court's November 2019 Ayodhya judgment. The Court directed that the government formulate a scheme within three months for setting up the trust and transferring the disputed land to it. Acting under the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993, the Centre constituted the Trust on February 5, 2020, and transferred the acquired land to it through a Gazette notification.
- Unlike Tirupati, Jagannath, Vaishno Devi or Kashi Vishwanath, the Ram Temple is not governed by a dedicated statute enacted by a state legislature. Its legal foundation is a combination of the Supreme Court's 2019 judgment, the 1993 Ayodhya Acquisition Act, the Central government's scheme and notification, and the trust deed of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra.
- The trust is therefore neither a conventional private religious trust nor a statutory temple board established by legislation. It occupies a unique institutional position: a public religious trust brought into existence by executive action in implementation of a judicial mandate.
- The 15-member Trust is the temple's highest decision-making body. It is chaired by Mahant Nitya Gopal Das, although because of age and ill health, day-to-day leadership gradually came to rest with General Secretary Champat Rai, who emerged as the public face of the institution.
- The trust deed provides for a combination of permanent members, nominated members and ex-officio representatives, ensuring representation from the religious community as well as the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government. Construction has been supervised by a committee headed by former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Nripendra Mishra, as ex-officio member.

Do You Know:

- Most of India's older major temples are administered under dedicated legislation enacted by state governments. TTD functions under the Andhra Pradesh Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments Act, the Jagannath Temple under the Shri Jagannath Temple Act, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine under the Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, the Siddhivinayak Temple under a Maharashtra law governing its trust, while the Kashi Vishwanath Temple is administered under the Uttar Pradesh Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act. These laws create the governing bodies, define the powers of administrators, prescribe financial procedures, provide for government oversight and statutory audits, and in some cases lay down detailed rules for handling donations.
- The Ram Temple follows a different model. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra functions through a trust deed rather than a dedicated statute governing the administration of the temple. Day-to-day management, including appointments and financial administration, rests with the trust.
- Another point of departure is the composition of the management itself. In several of the older temples, key financial processes involve executive officers, statutory administrators, government nominees, magistrates, auditors, or other public officials whose responsibilities are defined under law.



- At the Ram Temple, many of the key office-bearers associated with donation management — including General Secretary Champat Rai, trust member Anil Mishra, administrator Gopal Rao, and donation supervisor Subhash Srivastava — have long associations with the RSS or its affiliates. Responsibility for administration is therefore concentrated within the trust structure rather than distributed across a broader statutory administrative framework.

EC CAN HOLD BYPOLLS ANY TIME WITHIN 6 MONTHS AFTER VACANCY, SAY EXPERTS

The Election Commission announced byelections to only three Assembly seats — one each in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat — on Thursday, though there are currently at least 14 vacant seats in State legislatures across the country, apart from six vacant Parliamentary seats — three each in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

The Representation of the People (RPA) Act mandates bypolls within six months of a seat falling vacant, but experts said the EC has the discretionary power to choose at which point during these six months it should conduct the polls. The courts have generally shown deference to the EC's decisions in such matters, they said.

The RPA Act also carves out two exceptions to this six-month rule: where the remainder of the term is less than one year, or where the Election Commission, in consultation with the Union government, certifies that it is difficult to hold the byelection within the prescribed period. However, through judicial interpretation, a third exception has been recognised — when there is a pending election petition concerning that vacant seat.

Too fast, too slow

Opposition parties have repeatedly questioned the “hurry” and “delay” in announcing bypolls.

For instance, the EC's announcement of a bypoll in Madhya Pradesh's Datia Assembly seat on Thursday led to protests from the Congress, which questioned the “hurry” of the poll body. The seat had fallen vacant after the disqualification of the Congress's Rajendra Bharti in April, following his conviction in a fraud case. He has challenged the verdict in the Delhi High Court and sought a stay. His plea is scheduled to be heard on July 8 and bypolls are scheduled for July 30.

According to legal experts, the EC can go ahead with its schedule for bypolls until and unless the court grants a stay. “Till the court gives a stay on holding a byelection, the EC can announce bypolls anytime within a six-month time frame, even if a case is pending,” senior Supreme Court lawyer Sanjay Hegde told The Hindu.

The Congress is also pointing to the delay in holding a byelection for Uttar Pradesh's Milkpur seat, which was vacated following the election of the Samajwadi Party's Awadesh Prasad to the Lok Sabha.

In this case, however, an election petition by the BJP candidate was pending in the Allahabad High Court and the bypoll was scheduled only in February 2025, after the petition in the High Court was eventually withdrawn.

The Supreme Court, in the Election Commission of India v. Telangana Rashtra Samithi case, had held that a seat cannot be treated as available for a bypoll while the validity of its previous election



itself is under challenge. The commission must therefore await the outcome of the election petition before proceeding with the byelection, it had said.

“This interpretation is sound because an election petition may ultimately result in the court declaring another candidate to have been duly elected. If a byelection has already been held by then, that declaration would become largely otiose,” said Swapnil Tripathi, Lead at Charkha, the Constitutional Law Centre at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.

HC HALTS BYELECTIONS IN 5 T.N. CONSTITUENCIES

Court grants the respondents time till July 31 to file their counteraffidavits to the main case

The Madras High Court on Friday restrained the Election Commission (EC) from notifying byelections to the Tiruchi East, Perundurai, Ambasamudram, Viralimalai, and Karur Assembly constituencies until July 31. The elected representatives have resigned, but their victories are under challenge before the court.

Chief Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and Justice G. Arul Murugan passed the interim order following a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by K. Venkatachalapathy of Tirunelveli.

He had contended that the conduct of byelections before the disposal of the election petitions could lead to an anomalous situation of the constituencies being represented by two individuals if the petitions were allowed.

The court passed the interim orders after hearing the preliminary submissions made by senior counsel G. Masilamani for Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay; Advocate-General Vijay Narayan for the Legislative Assembly Secretary; advocate V.R. Shanmuganathan for the PIL petitioner; and EC counsel Niranjan Rajagopalan. The judges granted the respondents time till July 31 to file their counteraffidavits to the main case.

The PIL petitioner had contended that the EC could not treat the vacancies that had arisen due to the resignation of five legislators as a ‘clear vacancy’ under Section 151A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, since such vacancies would be subject to the result of the election petitions. He claimed that the conduct of byelections to these constituencies would run contrary to three Supreme Court decisions on the matter.

His counsel Mr. Shanmuganathan, argued that the top court had in Sanjeevayya vs Election Commission of India (1967), Election Commission of India vs Telangana Rashtra Samithi (2011), and Pramod Laxman Gudadhe vs Election Commission of India (2018), had held that byelections could not be conducted if election petitions related to those constituencies were pending adjudication.

He said that all five election petitioners who were the candidates in Tiruchi East, Perundurai, Ambasamudram, Viralimalai, and Karur in the election held this year, had not only challenged the victory of the returned candidates but also sought a consequential prayer to declare those election petitioners as the winning candidates.

‘Great confusion’

Therefore, conducting by-elections to those constituencies even before the disposal of the election petitions would cause great confusion owing to the election of the new representatives, he said.



On the other hand, the A-G said, there must be a distinction between those who had resigned before the filing of the election petitions and those who had resigned after they were filed.

He said the Chief Minister had resigned from Tiruchi (East) on May 10 itself, but his rival candidate S. Inigo Irudayaraj had filed the election petition much later. Pointing out that a few others, too, had resigned much before the filing of the election petitions challenging their victory, the A-G sought time to file a detailed counter-affidavit to the PIL petition.

On his part, Mr. Masilamani, representing Mr. Vijay, questioned the locus standi of the PIL petitioner to dictate what the EC must do or what it must not do. The senior counsel said the PIL petition was premature since the EC had not taken any decision so far on conducting byelections to the five constituencies, and no notification to that effect had been issued.

After hearing all of them, the Chief Justice's Bench said that in matters touching upon the purity of the democratic process, a narrow and pedantic interpretation of locus standi could not be applied. The judges, however, agreed that the A-G's nuanced arguments concerning the date on which the vacancy had arisen compared with the dates on which the election petitions had been filed required a deeper examination. It decided to pass final orders on the PIL petition after issuance of notice to all the respondents and filing of counter-affidavits by them.

IN INDIA, VOTING CANNOT REMAIN MERELY A STATUTORY RIGHT

Recently, a Congress leader revived an old constitutional debate by demanding that voting should be recognised as a fundamental right. At first sight, the demand appears unexceptionable. In a democracy, what could be more fundamental than a citizen's right to choose those who govern? Yet, for more than seven decades, the Supreme Court of India has consistently held that the right to vote is not a fundamental right but merely a statutory right.

This judicial position, though well established, has become increasingly difficult to reconcile with the Court's own evolving jurisprudence. In a series of landmark decisions, the Court has gradually transformed the voter from a passive statutory creature into an active constitutional actor.

The result is a curious paradox: while the act of voting itself continues to be described as statutory, many of its essential facets have already acquired constitutional protection.

The traditional position dates back to *N.P. Ponnuswami vs Returning Officer* (1952), where the Court held that the right to vote and the right to contest elections are not common law rights but rights created by statute. The principle was reaffirmed in *Jyoti Basu & Others vs Debi Ghosal & Others* (1982), where Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy observed that the right to elect, "fundamental though it is to democracy", is neither a fundamental right nor a common law right, but "purely a statutory right". A Constitution Bench reiterated this position in *Kuldip Nayar vs Union of India* (2006), holding that while democracy forms part of the basic structure of the Constitution, the individual right to vote flows from legislation, principally the Representation of the People Acts.

The logic behind this approach is understandable. The Constitution does not expressly enumerate the right to vote among the fundamental rights contained in Part III. Parliament, therefore, enjoys considerable latitude in prescribing qualifications, disqualifications and procedures governing elections.

However, the story does not end there.



Constitutionalising the poll process

Beginning in the early years of this century, the Court embarked upon a process of constitutionalising the electoral process. In *Union of India vs Association for Democratic Reforms* (2002), the Court held that voters have a right to know the criminal antecedents, educational qualifications and financial assets of candidates. This right was located squarely in Article 19(1)(a), the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. The Court reasoned that meaningful participation in democracy is impossible unless voters are adequately informed.

A year later, in *People's Union of Civil Liberties vs Union of India* (2003), the Court drew an important distinction. While reiterating that the right to vote is statutory, it held that the freedom of voting — that is, the freedom to make an informed choice — is a fundamental right protected by Article 19(1)(a).

The most intriguing development came in the 2013 NOTA judgment. Recognising the option of “None of the Above”, the Court held that a voter’s decision to reject all candidates is a form of political expression protected by Article 19(1)(a). The Court further held that secrecy of the ballot must extend even to those who choose not to vote for any candidate.

This produces an extraordinary constitutional anomaly. The Court has effectively held that the right to know is fundamental, the freedom to make an informed choice is fundamental, the secrecy of the ballot is fundamental, and even the right to reject all candidates is constitutionally protected. Yet, the act of voting itself continues to be treated as a mere statutory entitlement.

One is tempted to ask: if the Constitution protects the right to reject all candidates, why does it not protect the right to choose one?

Recent constitutional jurisprudence also points in this direction. In *Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India* (2023), Justice Ajay Rastogi, in his separate opinion, expressly favoured recognising voting as a fundamental right. Although this view did not command a majority, the Constitution Bench repeatedly referred to voting as a constitutional right rather than merely a statutory one. This marks an important shift in judicial understanding. The Court may not yet have elevated voting to the status of a fundamental right, but it has undoubtedly moved beyond the narrow statutory conception that dominated earlier decisions.

The anomaly becomes even more striking when viewed through the prism of the basic structure doctrine. Since *Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala* (1973), the Court has repeatedly held that democracy forms part of the Constitution’s basic structure. In *Indira Nehru Gandhi vs Shri Raj Narain & Anr.* (1975), the Court underscored that free and fair elections are an essential feature of democracy. Subsequent decisions have consistently reaffirmed this principle.

Democracy begins with votes

But democracy does not exist in the abstract. It operates through elections, and elections derive their legitimacy from the participation of citizens through the ballot. The vote is the very instrument through which popular sovereignty is exercised. It is through the vote that “We, the People” periodically renew the legitimacy of the state and hold governments accountable.

If democracy is a part of the Constitution’s basic structure, and if free and fair elections are indispensable to democracy, it is difficult to explain why the citizen’s right to vote should remain outside the constitutional core. To say that democracy is basic to the Constitution while the



citizen's vote is merely a statutory right appears incongruous. A democracy without voters is inconceivable.

This does not necessarily mean that every aspect of voting should be elevated into an absolute fundamental right immune from regulation. Parliament must continue to prescribe qualifications, disqualifications and procedures necessary for the conduct of elections. Age requirements, electoral rolls, residency conditions, disqualifications for corrupt practices and other regulatory provisions are indispensable for orderly elections.

What requires constitutional recognition is not every procedural detail but the core right of every eligible citizen to participate in the democratic process.

This becomes particularly evident when one examines Article 326 of the Constitution. The Article mandates that elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be based on universal adult suffrage. Every citizen above the age of 18 is constitutionally entitled to be registered as an elector, subject only to narrowly defined disqualifications. The source of this entitlement is not legislation but the Constitution itself. The Representation of the People Acts merely operationalise that constitutional command.

Thus, while the mechanics of voting may be statutory, the citizen's entitlement to be a voter flows directly from the Constitution. Exclusion from the electoral roll, except in accordance with constitutionally permissible limitations, therefore, strikes at a constitutional guarantee.

A matter for the Court to revisit

The distinction between statutory and constitutional rights may have served a useful purpose in the early years of the Republic, when electoral jurisprudence was still in its infancy. But the Court's own decisions have steadily blurred that distinction by progressively constitutionalising various facets of voting.

Perhaps the time has come for the Court to revisit an old doctrine. In a Constitution where democracy and free and fair elections constitute the basic structure, the citizen's vote cannot remain a constitutional orphan. The ballot is not merely a statutory privilege conferred by Parliament. It is the instrument through which popular sovereignty is expressed and the Republic periodically renews its democratic legitimacy.

After all, if the Constitution protects the right to reject every candidate, it can scarcely deny protection to the right to choose one.

EC CHANGES FORM 6 FOR NEW VOTERS, INSERTS SECTION ASKING THEM ABOUT PARENTS IN SIR

For the first time, the Election Commission's online version of the electors' registration form, known as Form 6, has a new section that seeks the status of the applicant's parents vis-a vis the last Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, even though the statutory form itself has not been amended, The Indian Express has learnt.

Key Takeaways:

— The EC's ECINET portal, as accessed Saturday, showed an un-lettered "declaration form" inserted in between part "J" and "K" of Form 6 that asks for details of the applicant or their parents



in the last SIR. But the copy of the Form 6 available for download on the same portal, ostensibly for filling and submitting physically, does not include this new declaration part.

— This part of the form was visible for applicants from all states and UTs where the SIR has concluded in 2025-2026 or is currently ongoing, except for Bihar, which was the first state to have the SIR in June last year, and Assam, where the EC has decided not to hold the SIR. While the new part has not been marked mandatory, the user cannot move forward toward the submission before completing it.

— It asks the applicant to pick from three options: “my name exists in Electoral Roll of last SIR; my parents name (Father, Mother, Grandfather, Grandmother) exists in the electoral roll of last SIR; neither my name nor my parents name exists in the electoral roll of last SIR”.

— While the EC sought the same details during the SIR in 12 states/UTs last year and also in the ongoing SIR in 19 states/UTs in its enumeration form for existing electors, Form 6 for new electors has not been amended since the EC started in SIR in June last year, a look at all gazette notifications by the Law Ministry since then shows.

— It is the Central government that has the power to notify rules under Section 28 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and Form 6 emanates from one such rule in the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.

— The Act itself emanates from Article 326 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to enrol as an elector to all adult citizens who are ordinarily resident in a particular constituency and have not been otherwise disqualified.

— “The Central Government may, after consulting the Election Commission, by notification in the Official Gazette, make rules for carrying out the purposes of this Act,” reads Section 28 of the RP Act, 1950.

— In the past, changes to Form 6 required an amendment to the Act itself by Parliament and/or an amendment and notification to the rules by the Law and Justice Ministry. Two senior former EC officials speaking on condition of anonymity said any change to the form would require at least an amendment and notification by the Law Ministry as the EC does not have the power to do so.

— “The EC cannot even add a comma to the form on its own,” one of the former officials said. For instance, after Parliament amended the Act in 2021 to allow the EC to collect Aadhaar numbers of electors, the Legislative Department of the Law Ministry issued a notification on June 17, 2022 making the necessary changes to the Registration of Electors Rules and Form 6.

— Form 6 is the statutory form for either those who have newly become eligible after turning 18 years of age or acquiring Indian citizenship or deleted voters who want to apply afresh.

— The existing Form 6, which is published in the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, asks the applicant to provide the name and EPIC number of those family members with whom they currently reside.

— Three United Nations-appointed experts have written to the Centre expressing concerns over alleged discrimination towards minorities during the Election Commission’s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, particularly in West Bengal, and seeking information on the steps taken to ensure the process aligns with India’s obligations under international human rights law.



— The UN's Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, on promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and on freedom of religion or belief — Nicolas Levrat, Irene Khan and Nazila Ghanea respectively — wrote to the government on May 1.

Do You Know:

— The Part XV of the Constitution of India deals with Elections. It has the following articles (Articles 324-329) to empower the Election Commission and provide insight into the potential roles and functions of the commission.

— Article 324: The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and the Legislature of every state and of elections to the offices of President and Vice-President.

— Article 325: No individual to be excluded from electoral rolls on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or any of them.

— Article 326: Adult suffrage shall be the basis for elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States.

— Article 327: Parliament may, according to the provisions of this Constitution, from time to time enact laws with respect to all matters relating to elections to Parliament and Legislative Assemblies of States.

— Article 328: A state's Legislature may from time to time by law make provision with respect to all matters relating to, or in connection with, the elections to the House or either House of the Legislature.

— Article 329: The article prohibits the courts from becoming involved in electoral matters.

— SIR, or Special Intensive Revision, is a large-scale verification exercise that the ECI undertakes when it believes the routine annual "Summary Revision" is not enough to clean the voter rolls. It involves house-to-house enumeration, pre-filled forms, online submissions, and fresh verification of old voter data.

CHECKBOX CASTE

An open-ended method of counting caste may not yield usable data

The rehearsal for the second phase of Census 2027, underway in 16 States and Union Territories since July 6, carries a key feature: an "open column" where respondents can state their caste, which the enumerator will record. Unlike the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), which also had this feature, this counting of caste in the Census itself has statutory backing. The pre-test ends on July 20, and the government says that it will then finalise the methodology for counting caste. The hope is that the pre-test findings will corroborate what is known: an open-ended response on caste yields only unwieldy data, as seen in the 2011 SECC, which eventually proved unusable. It is not difficult to understand why. The method led the 2011 SECC to return more than 46 lakh "caste names", against the 4,147 in the 1931 Census, the last to tabulate caste. Respondents entered surnames, sub-castes and clan names as if interchangeable, inflating the count into incoherence. The Centre told the Supreme Court in 2021 that the SECC figures were too error-ridden to be relied upon for reservation. The pre-test should instead point to a better method — using the digital Census's hand-held devices, pre-loaded with a curated list of castes

4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



and sub-castes, so that the enumerator selects the 'correct' entry after asking the respondent. Mistakes and mismatches will happen, but as the 2022-23 Bihar caste survey revealed, this method could return more usable data.

Unlike the other identities — linguistic, religious and gender — that the Census notes, caste is an abstract, irrational one that designates people not by biological, physical, or professed attributes, but by a perceived, primordial identity conferred at birth and arranged in a hierarchy. Even this hierarchy is not self-evident, with the perceptions of social status of different castes often contradicting one another. India's Constitution, committed to social justice, set itself against caste by abolishing untouchability, forbidding caste-based discrimination and holding out the promise of a republic where birth would not determine a citizen's standing. So why count caste when the very act of enumeration can ossify or reify this abstract identity? The only rationale is that self-perceived or imposed caste identity creates social inequities, and welfare and social justice measures that address caste-based injustice can, over time, be expected to delegitimise the casteism rather than entrench it. Through sharper targeting of welfare and affirmative action, empirical caste data can also inform questions of the creamy layer and the sub-categorisation of castes and classes already benefiting from reservation. In these, better data are indispensable. If caste is to be counted, it should be counted well. The open-ended way of registering it will not serve the intended purpose.

ON THE METHOD FOR CASTE ENUMERATION

The story so far:

The rehearsal or the "pre-test" of the second phase of Census, which started in 16 States and Union Territories on July 6, 2026, has an "open column" for respondents to record their castes, several officials involved in the exercise told The Hindu. The pre-test is on till July 20, 2026, and the outcome will decide how Independent India enumerates caste for the first time as part of the Census. Other than the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), caste-wise population has not been enumerated in Independent India; the last time such data was collected was in 1931.

Background of caste Census

After repeatedly opposing caste enumeration, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) finally announced on April 30, 2025 that caste would be counted during Population Census 2027. Before this, the Opposition parties, particularly Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, had consistently demanded that the caste of all people be counted in India.

A few alliance partners of the BJP too made the demand. Unlike the 2011 Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), which was done outside the purview of the Census, this time, caste will be enumerated with the second and final phase of the Census, giving it a statutory backing.

Significance of the ongoing pre-test

Though the ongoing rehearsal gives an indication of how caste is likely to be enumerated in the coming days, Census officials said the final methodology would be prepared based on the feedback received during the exercise. The pre-test exercise also allowed self-enumeration and the portal was accessible from July 1-5 only in the specific area where the rehearsal is being done.

The discourse on the methodology of caste enumeration has largely swung between either leaving an open column for caste, just as the 2011 SECC did, or preparing a list of castes for people to pick



from — as the Bihar government did in its 2022-23 caste-based survey. The results of the SECC were neither released by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government nor by the NDA government after it came to power in 2014.

The open-column methodology had resulted in the 2011 SECC returning over 46 lakh different “caste names”, largely owing to the difference in what people understand by caste. The total number of castes during the 1931 Census conducted by the British was 4,147. In 2021, the Union government informed the Supreme Court in an affidavit, “Assuming that some castes may bifurcate into sub-castes, the total number cannot be exponentially high to this extent,” adding that the data cannot be relied on for reservation in education, employment or elections to local authorities.

Anomalies reported during 2011 SECC

Officials said the SECC threw up lakhs of caste names as it was kept open-ended. Respondents were asked to name their castes. For example, people wrote Gupta, Agarwal and so on for the Baniya caste, which increased the numbers exponentially. Though the method is not final, the pre-test is providing the same open-ended column for respondents to record their castes.

According to the latest government data, there are about 2,650 Other Backward Classes (OBCs) on the Central List, 1,170 in the Scheduled Castes category, and 890 in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list. The State governments maintain their own OBC list.

Concerns about the methodology

The Opposition parties have demanded wider consultation with all stakeholders before the caste Census is undertaken. On December 2, 2025, Mr. Gandhi asked in the Lok Sabha if the government has any proposal to publish the draft Census questions and seek inputs from the general public or people’s representatives and whether it will consider best practices such as caste surveys done in other States.

Responding to this, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said, “The draft Census questionnaires are pre-tested in the field to assess their feasibility before finalisation of the same. Census has a history of more than 150 years. Learnings from previous Census are taken into consideration for conducting next Census. Before each Census, the inputs are also taken from stakeholders.” Throughout 2025, the government repeatedly stated that the final caste questionnaire had not been settled. Parliament was informed in February 2026 that questions relating to caste would be notified before the commencement of the second phase of Census operations. The Union Home Ministry said representations had been received from various organisations and State governments regarding caste enumeration, and that the final questionnaire would be prepared according to established procedures.

Reason for delay in Census exercise

The Population Census exercise is done in two phases — the Housing and House Listing Operations (HLO) and Population Enumeration, spanning over 11 months. The last Census was completed in 2011. The next exercise, Population Census 2021, was initially delayed owing to the COVID pandemic that surfaced in India around March 2020, coinciding with the first phase enumeration that was to begin from April 1, 2020. While the restrictions related to the pandemic were over by 2022, government did not specify the reasons to delay the exercise till now. On June 4, 2025, the government announced that the population Census along with the enumeration of



castes will be conducted in two phases by February 28, 2027. The reference date of the people's headcount will be 12 a.m., March 1, 2027.

FIX THE HOUSE

Governments should regulate social media platforms, not users

The more wicked the problem, the more the people yearn for a simpler solution. This tendency has complicated the public debate on how and how much social media harm teenagers. While the idea that these platforms were stoking a mental health crisis prevailed in several countries for long, researchers have now adopted a more cautious stance. Social media use and mental health are clearly associated — more so among girls — but how much of that is actually causal and in what circumstances is still being debated. Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke favourably of Australia's decision, in 2024, to ban social media access for those aged 16 and below. His words augur a similar ban in India, one that Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have publicly mulled as well. However, Australian psychologists, digital health researchers, child-rights scholars, and online safety experts have criticised the ban because, while there is a credible body of evidence linking social media use and harm among children, evidence of a link between an age-based access ban and better mental health has been lacking. In the absence of a real-world precedent, Australia has effectively been conducting a natural experiment. And research has estimated that around 85% of 12-16-year-olds still use social media platforms.

While some psychologists and advocacy groups have argued that waiting for perfect evidence to act would recreate the mistake governments made with tobacco, many experts believe that the state should drop the ban and instead adopt a stronger duty of care, include digital literacy in school education, restrict addictive user interfaces/experiences, mandate a chronological feed for minors, enforce stronger content moderation, improve privacy protections, and introduce effective parental controls. Most studies of adolescent harm due to social media have also been observational and thus susceptible to reverse causation (depressed teenagers may spend more time online) and smaller average effects; experts have also noted that hours per day is less explanatory than passive versus active engagement, participation in supportive versus hostile communities, and so on. Indeed, while social media use can disrupt sleep and increase exposure to cyber-bullying, addictive recommendation patterns, and content about self-harm and eating disorders, it can also help maintain friendships and explore one's identity, offer peer support, and increase access to LGBTQIA+ communities and mental health information. The overall picture is mixed and the solutions are not simple. However, the first step could be: rather than regulate 'who may enter', governments should change how platforms operate.

WHY ARE THERE CONCERNS OVER WHATSAPP USERNAMES?

The story so far:

On July 1, 2026, the Union government sent a notice to Meta asking it to stop the rollout of WhatsApp's username feature, for which the Meta-owned messaging platform is currently taking reservations. In a notice to the social media platform, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) wrote that hiding phone numbers and only showing usernames may increase the incidence of online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams and impersonation attacks.

What is the WhatsApp username feature?



WhatsApp advertises usernames as a way to chat without sharing phone numbers. Instead of a mobile number, new contacts will only see your chosen username. This is an optional feature.

There is no search directory of usernames within WhatsApp. To contact someone, you need to know the person's exact username. For those who are concerned that someone could guess their username, WhatsApp has said they would be able to set a personal identification number (PIN). In that case, even someone who knows your username will not be able to contact you if they don't know your PIN.

The feature is yet to be rolled out. Meta has said it will be made widely available over the next few months with multiple safeguards in place.

Why is the government concerned about the feature?

MeitY said in its notice, a copy of which was reviewed by The Hindu, that the feature could "facilitate impersonation and identity spoofing, including impersonation of individuals, public authorities, financial institutions, and government agencies, by permitting the adoption of usernames closely resembling those of genuine persons or institutions".

Echoing MeitY's concerns, some public personalities have said that variations of their names have already been reserved by users. In a post on X, MobiKwik founder Bipin Preet Singh said this had happened to him. He wrote: "Not a good idea at all. Will lead to proliferation of fraud and impersonation."

MeitY also said in its notice that the feature may materially increase the incidence of online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams, and impersonation attacks, "by enabling bad actors to solicit and message victims."

Shortly thereafter, it sent similar notices to Telegram, Signal, and Arattai, which have had username features that allow phone number concealment for quite some time already.

What is WhatsApp's response to these concerns?

A WhatsApp spokesperson said that Meta had already "reserved" usernames of prominent personalities to prevent those handles from being claimed by imposters. As per its statement, prominent personalities include public figures, government entities, celebrities, and verified Meta accounts.

If you receive a message from a user who has hidden their phone number, Meta says WhatsApp will display the sender's country of origin and indicate whether they are already saved in your phonebook.

WhatsApp officials met MeitY officials on July 3 to present these views. A written response to the government's notice was due on July 4.

Users can choose to avoid responding to strangers, a spokesperson said on July 1.

Can the government dictate an app's features?

It is unclear whether a feature on a privately owned and operated app such as WhatsApp can be vetoed by the government. "The notice treats the launch of a lawful feature as a wrong the company must justify," said the Delhi-based digital rights advocacy group, Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), in a statement.



In its notice, the government said that WhatsApp is an “intermediary” and a “significant social media intermediary” within the meaning of Section 2(1)(w) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, read with Rules 2(1)(v) and 2(1)(w) of the Information Technology Rules, 2021. A significant social media intermediary is defined as a platform that has more than 50 lakh registered users in India; WhatsApp has an estimated user base of over 80 crore. The government said the platform is therefore squarely subject to the due-diligence and other obligations set out under the rules.

The notice also cited Sections 66C (identity theft), 66D (cheating by personation) and 79 (intermediary liability/safe harbour) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

The IFF said that those rules do not permit such a notice. “MeitY does not name any provision that lets it approve a product feature before release or order one withdrawn, because there is none, and the provisions it does cite do not supply that power,” the group said. “Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000 is a safe harbour that protects an intermediary from liability for what its users post, so long as it observes due diligence. It decides when a platform can be held liable. It is not a power for MeitY to decide what features the platform may offer.”

WhatsApp is possibly the largest digital platform in the country and the government has scrutinised its operations in the past. For instance, when the app went down globally in October 2022, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the government had asked the company to share the reasons for the outage.

‘TRAI’S ATTEMPT TO REGULATE TRUECALLER MAKES ‘NO SENSE’

Truecaller hit out against the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) for reportedly trying to bring the caller ID firm under regulation. The move comes months into TRAI’s mandate that promotional and banking calls respectively use 140- and 160-series numbers and apps such as Truecaller whitelist these numbers from spam warnings.

While Truecaller was doubtful of TRAI’s authority to order apps — as opposed to telcos — to whitelist such numbers, it deferred to the instructions. Now, the firm says, the whitelisting has led to a “significant” increase in spam calls. Truecaller CEO Rishit Jhunjhunwala wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that “[o]ver 51 million calls from both series go unanswered every single day,” and “[t]his happened in front of our eyes and we are mandated not to tell users those calls are spam.”

As the number of such calls blocked by Truecaller users mounted to over one lakh a day, Mr. Jhunjhunwala said, “We said enough is enough,” and “built the ‘Frequently Blocked’ badge,” which was displayed even on whitelisted numbers. Banks have been using the series, sanctioned by TRAI earlier this month, to reach out to customers with loan, credit and other offers.

Mr. Jhunjhunwala’s riposte on X came a day after a financial daily reported TRAI took exception to the labelling of calls from this series and wrote to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) seeking the authority to regulate caller ID apps. MeitY, whose remit includes regulation of online services, did not respond to a request for comment. Neither did TRAI.

App regulation



Multiple Ministries within the government have gradually asserted themselves into private platforms' platform design over the last few months. Last year, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), which regulates telecom operators and Internet service providers, issued directions to WhatsApp that would require the messaging app to only work if the registered SIM card was currently inside the phone of a user.

MeitY, on the other hand, has also taken up the issue with WhatsApp's username feature, which would allow people to contact others and be contacted without disclosing their phone numbers, and has asked the firm to pause the feature. TRAI's discussions with Truecaller preceded both moves, in which it told the firms to whitelist 140- and 160-series calls.

The regulator made a provision for the two series last year with the Telecom Commercial Communications Customer Preference (Second Amendment) Regulations, 2025, last February. Those amendments, TRAI said, were aimed at "tightening the threshold norms for action against [unsolicited commercial communications], bringing in higher accountability of senders and telemarketers, curbing the misuse of 10-digit numbers for telemarketing, implementing stricter measures against unregistered telemarketers."

TRAI's attempt to regulate apps like Truecaller "makes absolutely no sense," Mr. Jhunjhunwala said. "We are the good actors who are helping hundreds of millions of Indians every day, including the vulnerable elderly, to have a trusted communication experience. Instead, they want to enable bad actors and give them an open playground to spam and scam us by censoring community information."

META TOLD TO DISABLE 'CHILD SEX ABUSE' CONTENT

IT Act, 2000, penalises obscene material; the IT Rules, 2021, enforce obligations on social media

Social media firms in breach may lose exemption under the law for third-party information or data

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has directed Meta, the parent body of several social media platforms, to disable advertisements and content promoting and facilitating access to child sexual exploitative and abuse material (CSEAM) on Instagram, according to government sources.

It has also sought an explanation on the issue.

"The Ministry has ordered Instagram to disable such advertisements. The government has also demanded a detailed explanation on the action taken and other relevant information within seven days. A notice in this regard was issued on Saturday," said a source.

It is learnt that the notice was sent following a directive from IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to senior Ministry officials. Further course of action will be decided after reviewing the reply, said the source.

Policy and standards



The move came a day after the BBC Eye published its investigation revealing that Instagram had allegedly been running “paid adverts promoting child sexual abuse material in India” and that such advertisements linked users to channels on Telegram, where they could buy the material.

Meta’s policy on advertisements, meanwhile, stipulate that their content must comply with community standards and must not have imagery depicting nudity and activities that are sexual or sexually suggestive.

In response to a query on the notice, a Meta spokesperson pointed to an earlier statement shared after the BBC report came out, where Meta said it had a “zero tolerance policy for soliciting or sharing CSEAM” and added that while the company deployed technology to detect such advertisements, it was in a “constant battle with criminals who hide among 3.5 billion users and try to evade our detection”.

According to Meta’s policy, advertisements must “comply with the community standards on adult nudity and sexual activity. Ads must not contain imagery depicting nudity, sexual activity, depictions of people in explicit or sexually suggestive positions, or activities that are sexually suggestive”.

Rules and punishments

The policy sets additional restrictions beyond the Community Standard on Adult Nudity and Sexual Activity, says its sub-site.

According to a written reply by Mr. Vaishnaw to the Lok Sabha last year, the IT Act, 2000 provides punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material and material containing sexually explicit acts in electronic form.

The Act also provides for stringent punishment for publishing or transmitting material depicting children in sexually explicit acts in electronic form.

Besides, the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 enforces obligations on the intermediaries, including social media intermediaries, to observe due diligence.

If they fail to observe it, they lose the exemption under law for third-party information or data or communication links hosted by them. The intermediaries are required to remove any such content within 24 hours.

The Ministry of Home Affairs operates the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal to receive complaints against cybercrimes, with special focus on cybercrimes against children.

It has also set up the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) for such crimes.

The government has, from time to time, blocked websites containing CSAM, based on lists from Interpol received through the Central Bureau of Investigation. It has issued an order to Internet Service Providers (ISPs), directing them to block access to such web pages or websites, said the reply.

IS INDIA PREPARED TO HANDLE AN INTERNET BLACKOUT?

What is India’s preparedness to handle a Internet blackout? Well, in a list of top 10 countries least likely to be badly hit by a digital breakdown, India stands at the ninth position globally with a



vulnerability score of 23.4 just ahead of Sweden at 10th place with a vulnerability score of 24.3, reported TRG Datacenters, a U.S.-based colocation and digital infrastructure provider backed by venture firm Tallvine Partners.

United States tops the list with 0 (zero) vulnerability, followed by Indonesia at 10.3 and United Kingdom in the third position with a vulnerability score of 16.2. The study also noted that India had the lowest number of submarine cables at 22, while the U.S. has the highest at 115.

The number of submarine cables indicates the strength of a nation's digital infrastructure and connections it has across the globe via Internet. On the population front, 70% of India's population use Internet, standing slightly behind Indonesia at 72.8%, while Australia has the highest at 96.1%, pushing U.K. and U.S. slightly behind at 95.5% and 94.7%, respectively.

India has 40 Internet exchange points, while the U.S. has the highest at 209, Indonesia has 70 and the U.K. has 30.

A country with the largest number of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) possesses a highly developed, decentralised, and efficient digital infrastructure and that means domestic networks can exchange data directly rather than routing traffic internationally, resulting in lower costs, much faster internet speeds, and resilient network ecosystems. So, if the Internet ever goes down, the U.S. would bounce back fastest, thanks to 115 undersea cables and 209 hubs (Internet exchange points) linking it to the world.

With 30 Internet exchange points and 65 cables, the United Kingdom is the best-prepared country for any Europe-wide network breakdown, while Indonesia relies on 72 submarine Internet cables and 77 exchange points, as per information released by TRG Datacenters.

The research examined nearly 100 countries to find which ones could handle the Internet blackout the best.

BSNL ANNOUNCES SATELLITE PHONE PRICED AT ₹1.34 LAKH FOR 'CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS'

State-run BSNL on Thursday announced the availability of a satellite phone for ₹1.34 lakh, part of its push to expand satellite communication services to defence, maritime and disaster-response users.

In a social media post on Thursday, BSNL mentioned that the satellite phone is priced at ₹1,34,166 apiece, including all taxes, and has been designed for challenging environments, offering voice calls and SMS services in remote areas not covered by conventional mobile networks.

"When conventional mobile networks can't reach, the BSNL Satellite Phone keeps you connected. Designed for challenging environments, making it an ideal solution for Defence, Maritime, Disaster Response, Mining, Remote Operations and Adventure Travel," the BSNL social media post displaying the price of a satellite phone said. Users can contact the nearest BSNL office for more details, the telco said while sharing a mobile number in the post.

The mobile number, however, was not responsive.

"As Always. No one is responding to the above Given Number," a verified account holder on X commented on the post.



An email query sent to BSNL did not elicit an immediate response. In February, an official statement said that BSNL had been providing voice call and SMS services through the Global Satellite Phone Service (GSPS) to the general public and private enterprises since January 1, 2018. According to an official statement dated February 11, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) issued the instructions on June 12, 2017, in respect of the provision of satellite-based services, which inter alia mandated that BSNL is required to complete the customer acquisition process prescribed for mobile connections, as amended from time to time.

BSNL's satellite phone postpaid plans were available for government and commercial entities at fixed monthly charges of ₹3,500, ₹5,835 and ₹11,670, offering 16, 30 and 60 minutes of free talk time or SMS.

FOUR BENEFICIARY STATES SIGN PACT ON NARMADA OUTSTANDING DUES

Chief Ministers of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan signed an agreement on Tuesday relating to the settlement of outstanding dues of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) Award Projects.

Key Takeaways:

- The "historic agreement" was signed in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil.
- CMs Devendra Fadnavis (Maharashtra), Bhupendra Patel (Gujarat), Bhajan Lal Sharma (Rajasthan) and Dr. Mohan Yadav (Madhya Pradesh), along with senior officials from the Centre and the states, were present on the occasion.
- In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs said, "This agreement marks a historic milestone in resolving the long-standing disputes among the States of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra relating to cost-sharing arrangements for the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Project. Under the agreement, payments to be made towards the final settlement of pending dues have been resolved."
- Commending Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, Shah said several historic initiatives have been undertaken to strengthen water security and promote cooperative federalism in the water sector.

Do You Know:

- The Centre had constituted the NWDT in 1969, which gave its Award in 1979. The NWDT Award specified the quantum of water that could be utilised by the four states, as well as determined their share of the net power produced at Navagam at Canal Head and River Bed Power Houses. While most issues were resolved after the Award's distribution, issues like dues pertaining to the cost-sharing of the Sardar Sarovar Project and the Indira Sagar Project, Resettlement & Rehabilitation (R&R) Expenditure, Compensation for Submerged land, and the interest burden on borrowings during construction remained pending which are now resolved.
- In a statement, the Ministry of Home Affairs said, "This agreement marks a historic milestone in resolving the long-standing disputes among the States of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra relating to cost-sharing arrangements for the construction of the Sardar Sarovar



Project. Under the agreement, payments to be made towards the final settlement of pending dues have been resolved.”

MARATHI AND THE LONG POLITICS BEHIND THE LANGUAGE QUESTION

In April and June of 2025, the government of Maharashtra, led by the Mahayuti coalition, issued two resolutions mandating Hindi as the compulsory third language for students from Class 1 onwards in Marathi- and English-medium State board schools, citing alignment with the National Education Policy of 2020. The announcement was, by any administrative measure, modest in scope, though its political consequences were anything but.

Within weeks, the streets of Mumbai and Pune were filled with protesters. Two figures who had not shared a platform in years, Uddhav Thackeray of Shiv Sena (UBT) and Raj Thackeray of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, found themselves, improbably, on the same side. By the end of June, the government had withdrawn the orders. The grammar of this linguistic confrontation is centuries old.

I. The first language war

By the early 17th century, Persian was the language of power across the Deccan. The Mughal court, the Adil Shahi sultans of Bijapur, and the Nizam Shahi of Ahmednagar all conducted their affairs in Persian. Marathi-speaking people were governed, taxed, and adjudicated in a language foreign to them.

Shivaji did not accept this. In 1630, approximately 86 per cent of the vocabulary in Maratha administrative documents was Persian. By 1677, it had fallen to 37 per cent. The instrument of this transformation was the Rājyavyavahārakośa, the Thesaurus of State Usage, commissioned and completed in that same year. Every Persian and Arabic administrative term was given a Marathi or Sanskrit equivalent. Forts received Sanskrit names: Sindhudurg, Suvarndurg, Prachandgarh, Pratapgarh, etc. The royal seal was inscribed in Sanskrit.

Every subsequent episode of Marathi linguistic resistance is a repetition of this founding act.

II. The colonial period

Jyotirao Phule's deposition to the Hunter Commission on Education in 1882 is among the most important documents in the history of Indian educational policy. Phule argues that colonial educational expenditure overwhelmingly benefits the upper-caste elite, using revenue extracted from Shudra labour to subsidise the very class that oppresses them. He demands compulsory primary education for all, teachers drawn from the cultivating classes, and instruction in Modi and Balbodh, the two Marathi scripts. His writing in the spoken tongue of working people was itself the argument made visible: this language is adequate for the highest moral and political purposes.

The founding of Kesari (Marathi) and Mahratta (English) in January 1881 by Chiplunkar, Agarkar, and Tilak transformed Marathi into an instrument of mass political mobilisation: Marathi for the people, English for the world.

Tilak's Home Rule speech at Ahmednagar on June 1, 1916, put the question of vernacular education in his characteristic direct manner.



“Is the question whether education should be given through vernaculars such a big one? Our voice is nowhere. Do the English educate their people through the French language? Do Germans do it through the English language? Because we have no authority. You have not got the authority.”

Yet, Tilak was also the first Congress leader to advocate Hindi in Devanagari as India's national language at the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras in December 1905.

III. The paradox of purity and pluralism

Vinayak Savarkar's Bhāshā Shuddhikaran, first published in 1926, was political surgery: a comprehensive project to replace Arabic and Persian borrowings in Marathi with Sanskrit-rooted coinages. The results are now embedded in daily speech across India. Savarkar coined or revived: doordarshan (television), akashwani (radio), sansad (parliament), and hutatma (martyr, one who has sacrificed their soul). Doordarshan became India's national television network. Sansad is in the Constitution. Hutatma names the traffic circle in central Mumbai where the martyrs of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement are commemorated. Savarkar's linguistic project is present in the names of the country's own institutions.

And yet it was also Savarkar who telegraphed the Constituent Assembly in August 1949 with the request: “I beseech the Constituent Assembly to adopt Bharat as the name of our nation, Hindi as the national language, and Nagari as the national script.” He saw a purified, Sanskrit-rooted Hindi as the proper national language of a Hindu civilisation in the throes of revival. He was a fierce champion of Marathi within Maharashtra but an advocate for Hindi outside it. Savarkar never resolved this contradiction; perhaps he did not see it as such.

On the day Hindi was formally adopted as the official language of the Union, the Maharashtrian Congress leader Shankarrao Deo spoke not against Hindi but for a different conception of India entirely:

“It is not uniformity but unity in diversity. It is Vividhata (diversity) that India stands for. That is our richness; that is the contribution that India can make to the world-culture and world progress... I admit India is a nation and I am an Indian, but if you will ask me what is your language, Sir, you will excuse me if I say ‘My language is Marathi’... If you mean by national language one language for the whole country, then I am against it.”

And on Marathi's sufficiency: “I do not want to belittle the culture or the richness of Hindi, but as far as culture goes, I can receive it from my own language, Marathi and Sanskrit, the grandmother of all languages. They are rich enough to do that.”

B.R. Ambedkar's position in the same debate was, characteristically, more layered. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he ultimately presided over the adoption of Hindi as the official language, a constitutional outcome he accepted as the will of the majority. But he warned, on September 14, 1949, that Hindi speakers, while a significant group, remained “a minority of the population,” and that privileging one language risked fracturing the federal spirit. His earlier pamphlet Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province (1948), submitted to the Dar Commission, had already argued formally for a unified Marathi-speaking State - the position eventually vindicated by the creation of Maharashtra in 1960. And his Thoughts on Linguistic States (1955), written in the last year of his life, articulates with characteristic rigour his conviction that the stability of Indian democracy depends on the recognition of linguistic identity at the level of the state: “One State, one language” is a universal democratic principle, not a nativist claim.



Ambedkar's great argument in the Assembly, for mother-tongue primary education as a precondition of democratic participation, is perhaps his most durable contribution to the language question. Speaking on September 2, 1949, he argued that a child educated in a language foreign to their home is disadvantaged from the start in the race for knowledge and civic life. For communities already disadvantaged by centuries of caste exclusion, that additional burden is not merely unfair. It is politically disabling.

IV. Blood at flora fountain

The constitutional settlement did not resolve Maharashtra's boundaries. On January 15, 1956, Nehru declared Bombay a Union Territory. The streets filled immediately.

The Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, formed on 6 February 1956 with Prabodhankar Thackeray, poet and father of Bal Thackeray, among its key members, organised a sustained campaign of strikes and mass demonstrations. Morarji Desai, Chief Minister of Bombay State, ordered police to fire. On November 21, 1955, police opened fire on demonstrators at Flora Fountain, killing fifteen. In the months that followed, as Morarji Desai continued ordering police action, the death toll climbed. It reached 106 before the movement was over. The square was later renamed Hutatma Chowk, using a word coined by Savarkar.

Maharashtra was formed on May 1, 1960. The memory of those 106 is not ceremonial. It connects every subsequent confrontation over the language to the knowledge that recognition required blood, and that the State did not hesitate.

Bal Thackeray, son of Prabodhankar, launched Marmik in 1960 and the Shiv Sena on June 19, 1966, to protect the cultural and economic standing of Marathi workers in a city filled with migrants. The Sena began by targeting South Indians, then pivoted as the demographics of migration shifted northward.

By the 1990s, the name of Bombay itself became a political question. The city's name derived from the Portuguese Bom Bahia (Good Bay), overlaid on the older name Mumbai, which itself derived from Mumba Aai, the name of the tutelary goddess Mumbadevi whose temple has stood on the site since before the Portuguese arrived. The Shiv Sena campaign to restore the name Mumbai, the name by which the city's original Koli fishing community and most Marathi speakers had always known it, succeeded in 1995 when the Sena-BJP government made the change official. The renaming was simultaneously a de-anglicisation and a re-Marathicisation: the city was being given back, in name, to the community that believed it most deeply belonged to them.

V. Indians first, Indians last

The 2025 government orders were resisted not out of hostility to Hindi but because state power was being used to privilege one language with material consequences for children. Children are required from age six to study a language their family does not speak, at additional expense, conferring benefit primarily on those seeking employment in the Hindi belt. Ambedkar said it in 1949: Education in a foreign language is not a gift. It is a burden. The coalition that formed, Uddhav and Raj Thackeray on the same platform, joined by literary organisations and citizens across party lines, reflects not party politics but civilisational memory.

Marathi is not threatened by other languages in the abstract. It is threatened by specific institutional arrangements that advantage one language over another in daily life. And Marathi itself has never been pure: its vocabulary retains Persian-derived words that centuries of use have



made its own; its great literary tradition was radically inclusive. What it asks, what every living language asks, is not immunity from change but reciprocity: time to absorb change on its own terms rather than by institutional imposition.

B.R. Ambedkar, who had the foresight to see where competitive loyalties would lead, expressed his view of these fissiparous tendencies that would likely plague the future of India's body politic in his 1949 Constituent Assembly speech.

"We are all Indians. I do not like what some people say, that we are Indians first and Hindus afterwards or Muslim afterwards. I am not satisfied with that. I frankly say that I am not satisfied with that. I do not want our loyalty as Indians should in the slightest way affected by any competitive loyalty whether that loyalty arises out of our religion, out of our culture or out of our language. I want all people to be Indian first, Indians last and nothing else but Indians."

IN THANE, SEEN AGAIN, THE ROWDY SHIV SAINIK. SENA DOES WELL TO ACT AGAINST HIM

The Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) has done the right thing in admonishing its corporator, Ramesh Mhatre, for the assault on doctors and medical staff of a Thane municipal hospital after a video of the incident went viral. The altercation reportedly arose over the treatment of a patient on Monday. At times, tempers do run high in hospitals with patients and their families contending with overcrowded, and often unhygienic, facilities. But Mhatre's conduct is reprehensible not only because it's an assault on medical professionals but also an abuse of his official position. Residents approach their municipal representatives over a host of everyday civic concerns. Their effectiveness lies in responding with empathy, escalating complaints for redressal, and demanding public accountability. A corporator should never intimidate or browbeat officials when they are discharging their duties. Mhatre's arrest on Wednesday has, therefore, sent the right message — Maharashtra's Mahayuti government, of which the Shinde Sena is a part, will not treat high-handedness with impunity.

For at least three decades since its formation in 1966, the Shiv Sena cultivated a politics that was seen to encourage direct action even at the cost of transgressing the rule of law. While upholding Marathi pride was the party's avowed objective, parochialism often slipped into shows of force and violence. Whether in enforcing bandhs, intervening in local disputes or confronting officials, the Sena projected itself as an organisation willing to bypass institutions in favour of a rough politics. However, as the party assumed greater responsibilities in government, it sought to present itself as a mature political outfit capable of administering complex public institutions.

Shiv Sainiks, though, have not completely abandoned their ways of yore. After the party split in 2022, cadres loyal to Uddhav Thackeray reportedly vandalised the offices of the rival Shinde faction. In March last year, workers of the Shinde Sena ransacked a Mumbai auditorium, where comedian Kunal Kamra had taken a jibe against their leader. The Mahayuti government, which often makes developmental initiatives its calling card, can ill afford to allow such acts of intimidation to become normalised. It must ensure that Wednesday's action is not an isolated response but the standard for dealing with the abuse of political power.

CBSE'S SUPPLEMENTARY EXAMINATION AND THE PROMISE OF NO INJUSTICE

Barely weeks after the controversy over CBSE's On-Screen Marking (OSM) system erupted, three developments this week have created an extraordinary contradiction. First, CBSE has announced



the Class XII supplementary examination, requiring students to improve their performance even though many might have secured substantially higher marks had they been given timely access to their digitised answer scripts for verification and re-evaluation. Second, the Central Information Commission (CIC) has directed CBSE to frame transparent, time-bound Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for providing students with their marks, answer sheets, and assessment records. Third, within a month of appointing a new CBSE chairperson, the government reverted him and converted the post into an interim additional-charge arrangement, even as the OSM controversy remained unresolved.

These developments stand in stark contrast to the Union Education Minister's assurance that no student would suffer injustice — a commitment that inspired confidence among millions of students, parents, and teachers. Yet many students still await access to their answer scripts and an opportunity to verify their evaluation and seek correction of genuine errors. The issue is no longer one of software glitches or administrative procedures, but of whether that assurance has been translated into transparency, accountability, and timely corrective action. Until every student is given a fair opportunity to verify the original evaluation, requiring them to appear in a supplementary examination addresses the consequence rather than the cause.

Premature test

CBSE's circular of June 30 announced the Class XII supplementary examination, permitting compartment candidates and students who have passed the examination to improve their performance. However, it overlooks another category of students — those whose marks may have increased substantially had they first been given access to their digitised answer scripts for verification and re-evaluation.

The scale of the issue is significant. Of the nearly 17.7 lakh Class XII students, only about four lakh obtained access to around 11 lakh answer scripts out of 98 lakh scripts. CBSE stated that about 95% of the requested scripts had been delivered by the end of May, while the status of nearly 20,000 pending requests remains undisclosed. Consequently, nearly 14 lakh students never had the opportunity to examine their evaluated answer scripts independently. Only about 1.6 lakh students reached the re-evaluation stage, and results were declared for about 87% of them.

Even within this limited sample, several candidates secured extraordinary mark revisions, including increases approaching 20 marks out of 60 in highly structured Science subjects, while another student's History marks rose from 74 to 97. In one widely reported case, a student became the CBSE topper after re-evaluation by securing 100 out of 100 in all five subjects. These outcomes emerged from only a small fraction of students, while the overwhelming majority remained outside the independent scrutiny.

Against this backdrop, asking students to appear in a supplementary examination before ensuring that the original evaluation was accurate and fairly reviewable appears to be premature. A supplementary examination is meant to improve academic performance — not to compensate for possible deficiencies in the original evaluation. Before asking students to take a second examination, CBSE must first ensure that every student has had a fair opportunity to verify and, where warranted, correct the first. That remains the unfinished business of the OSM controversy.

A clear roadmap

The present controversy is particularly striking because the CIC, while deciding an appeal by a Class XII student seeking access to her 2021 assessment records, identified a clear way forward.



Invoking Section 25(5) of the RTI Act, 2005, the CIC observed that time-bound SOPs for providing marks, answer sheets, and assessment records were “the dire need of today’s scenario.”

It was further observed that such SOPs would avoid the hardship faced by the young minds. It directed CBSE to formulate and publish a transparent SOP, holding that the denial of access to one’s own assessment records was contrary to the spirit of the RTI Act.

Ironically, the OSM framework, introduced to enhance transparency, operated in the opposite direction. Instead of providing automatic access to already digitised answer scripts, students were required to navigate applications, fee payments, portal access, verification, and re-evaluation within overlapping timelines. The resulting delays, portal failures, and restricted disclosure limited independent scrutiny to only a small fraction of students.

The CIC’s recent directions provide CBSE with an opportunity to institutionalise a transparent, student-centric review process. The lesson is clear: transparency must be built into the examination system through well-defined, time-bound, and publicly accountable SOPs — not left to ad hoc procedures.

Questions persist

As the OSM controversy escalated, the Union Education Minister publicly accepted responsibility and assured the nation that no student would suffer injustice. Soon thereafter, the government replaced the then CBSE Chairperson with a new full-time incumbent. Yet, barely a month later, he was reverted, and his appointment was converted to an additional-charge arrangement.

The leadership transition does not diminish the need for institutional accountability. Instead, it leaves several fundamental questions unanswered.

There has been no satisfactory explanation for why already digitised answer scripts were not proactively disclosed, forcing students to apply, pay fees and depend on portal access merely to obtain their own records. Nor has the CBSE explained why alternative arrangements were not put in place after widespread portal failures and payment disruptions became evident, or why verification and re-evaluation windows were opened simultaneously even though re-evaluation depended on prior access to answer scripts. Most importantly, despite expressing confidence in the OSM process, the Board has not opened all digitised answer scripts to universal independent scrutiny. Public confidence will be restored not by administrative reshuffles, but by transparency, accountability and timely corrective action.

Seven-day plan

The present impasse can still be resolved before the supplementary examination through a simple, practical, and student-centric framework. Since every Class XII answer script has already been digitised, no further scanning or processing is required.

A short, time-bound transparency exercise can ensure that deficiencies in the original evaluation do not disadvantage any student.

Day 1: Universal disclosure: Provide every Class XII student, free of cost, with a secure digital copy of the evaluated answer script through registered email, WhatsApp, and the respective school.

Days 1-3: Verification: Allow students, parents, and schools to verify the completeness and authenticity of the digitised answer scripts and report any deficiencies relating to scanning,



digitisation, document management, or evaluation. Students whose scripts are found to be free from such deficiencies may proceed directly to re-evaluation.

Days 2-7: Re-evaluation: After verified or corrected answer scripts are made available, permit students to seek re-evaluation of identified questions or awarded marks. Complete the process within a fixed timeline, publish anonymised statistics on verification deficiencies, and marks revisions to strengthen public confidence.

Such an exercise would be far more meaningful than requiring students to sit a supplementary examination before confirming the correctness of the original evaluation. It would reinforce transparency, accountability, and fairness while ensuring that no student is compelled to take a second examination because of avoidable deficiencies in the first.

The way forward

The OSM controversy should not end with administrative closure, leadership changes, or supplementary examinations. It should end only when every affected student has a fair opportunity to verify the original evaluation and secure the correction of genuine deficiencies.

In an examination affecting nearly 17.7 lakh students, transparency cannot remain selective; it must become universal.

The proposed seven-day transparency framework offers a practical, low-cost, and time-bound solution. Since every answer script has already been digitised, universal disclosure, verification, and targeted re-evaluation can still be completed before the supplementary examination. Such an exercise would restore confidence in the OSM process while reinforcing fairness, accountability, and student-centric governance.

Ultimately, this is not about defending a technology vendor, an administrative process, or an institution. It is about protecting the academic future of millions of young students. The credibility of India's examination system will be judged not by assurances, audits, or leadership changes, but by whether every student receives a fair, transparent, and trustworthy evaluation. Even now, it is not too late to restore public confidence. Universal transparency, timely correction of genuine errors, and the assurance that no student suffers injustice should define the true legacy of the CBSE-OSM initiative.

INDIA'S ENGINEERING COLLEGES ARE LOSING SHEEN IN AI ERA: WHAT A RESET CAN LOOK LIKE

India's ambition to become a global-tech powerhouse hinges on its ability to produce world-class engineers. From artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, and quantum technologies to advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and the digital economy, engineering talent will be the cornerstone of the country's next phase of growth and global competitiveness.

Key Takeaways:

- The contrast is striking. While the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and a handful of premier public and private institutions continue to attract the country's brightest students, achieve excellent placements, and expand their research and innovation ecosystems, a large segment of engineering colleges is witnessing declining admissions, weak faculty, outdated curricula, and poor employability. The trend is reflected in the All India Council for Technical Education's



(AICTE) decision during 2025-26 to place 58 engineering colleges under progressive closure and discontinue more than 950 engineering and technical courses.

- The challenge, therefore, is not that engineering has become less relevant; rather, the real crisis lies in the widening gap between the capabilities expected by a technology-driven economy and those delivered by a large section of India's engineering education ecosystem. Unless this gap is bridged, India's aspirations for global leadership in deep technologies could be constrained not by a shortage of opportunities but by a shortage of employable, high-quality engineering talent.

Do You Know:

- The AICTE, India's apex statutory regulator for technical education under the AICTE Act, 1987, traces its origins to an advisory body established in 1945. It is mandated to plan, coordinate, regulate, and promote the development of technical education by prescribing norms and standards, approving and inspecting institutions and programmes, framing regulations, and fostering quality, innovation, faculty development, and student welfare across the country.
- Every engineering institution in India must obtain AICTE approval before admitting students. Approval is contingent upon compliance with the prescribed norms for infrastructure, faculty, governance, financial viability, laboratories, libraries, classrooms, and other academic and operational requirements. It is not a one-time licence but a continuous regulatory process that requires institutions to maintain these standards year after year. Based on periodic assessments of compliance and performance, AICTE may permit expansion, reduce student intake, impose restrictions, or even withdraw approval.
- One of AICTE's key regulatory mechanisms is "progressive closure", introduced to safeguard students while ensuring the orderly exit of non-viable institutions. Under this framework, institutions are barred from admitting fresh students but allowed to continue until existing batches graduate.
- Until the late 1990s, engineering education in India was largely confined to publicly funded institutions such as the IITs, regional engineering colleges (now National Institutes of Technology, or NITs), a few state engineering colleges, and private institutions concentrated mainly in Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Limited capacity made admissions highly competitive, leaving the country with a persistent shortage of engineering graduates.
- The global IT boom around the Y2K revolution transformed this landscape. Surging worldwide demand for software professionals triggered an unprecedented expansion of engineering education. Thousands of new colleges emerged across metropolitan, urban, and rural India.
- At the same time, the Union government expanded the network of Institutes of National Importance (INIs) by establishing new IITs and Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs) and upgrading the regional engineering colleges into NITs. Today, India has 79 INIs: 23 IITs, 31 NITs, and 25 IIITs. The remainder comprises state universities, affiliated colleges, and private engineering institutions regulated by AICTE. The AI revolution, which gathered momentum in the mid-2010s, has fundamentally reshaped engineering education. As industry demand shifted rapidly towards computer science, AI, data science, and allied disciplines, student preferences followed suit, while traditional branches such as mechanical, electrical, and related engineering experienced sustained declines in demand. Reflecting this changing landscape and the resulting decline in engineering enrolments, AICTE imposed a moratorium on new engineering institutions in 2020, before lifting it in 2023.



OVER AND ABOVE

Women must find support to stay in jobs that match their degrees

With more Indian women entering university campuses, the gender gap in college classrooms has narrowed. The latest All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) data for 2023-24 reveal that absolute female enrolment rose by 42% over the past decade, climbing from 1.57 crore in 2014-15 to 2.24 crore. In comparison, male enrolment grew from 1.85 crore to 2.26 crore during the same period. Women have comfortably surpassed the male growth rate of 22.16%, pushing total higher education enrolment to a record 4.5 crore. They now account for nearly half (49.7%) of all students in Indian universities and colleges. With a Gender Parity Index of 1.08, 108 young women now enter higher education for every 100 men. This marks a hard-won victory, especially for marginalised communities, where female enrolment among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes rose by 51.4% and 75.7%, respectively. Yet, a deeper look at the data demands caution. High enrolment numbers are a superficial veneer if the pipeline of employment opportunities beyond the college gate remains broken. While women make up 44% of STEM students, this number is heavily skewed toward the “S” (general sciences such as biology and chemistry), where they hold a 54.6% majority. In contrast, engineering and technology remain male-dominated, with women making up just 31.1% of enrolment. By clustering in traditional sciences, women are isolated from the future-proof economic drivers of artificial intelligence and software engineering.

Educational institutions remain largely patriarchal. While the student body reflects a 50-50 split, there are only 82 female teachers for every 100 male teachers. Women remain absent from top-tier leadership roles. Further, the influx of students has coincided with an explosion of private and low-tier colleges, which face acute faculty shortages and poor infrastructure. India also faces a disconnect between higher education and the formal job market. The Female Labor Force Participation Rate remains low due to societal expectations, domestic responsibilities, and safety barriers. According to the 2025 PLFS report, men dominate the regular salaried workforce (26.5% versus 18.2%) and earn more. Average monthly earnings stand at ₹24,217 for men, compared with ₹18,353 for women. While 64.2% of women are classified as self-employed, this categorisation is vague and the statistic often includes unpaid household or farm labour, failing to show where women students go after they exit lecture halls. As 2.24 crore young women claim their place on campuses, the burden shifts to policymakers, institutional heads, and industry leaders to ensure that these women stay on in fruitful paid employment aligned with their degrees.

ARMED FORCES SEEK LARGER RETENTION OF AGNIVEERS AFTER END OF 4-YR TENURE

The Armed Forces are seeking an increase in the percentage of Agniveers who can be retained in the services after completing their four-year tenure, even as the overall percentage agreed upon remains 25 per cent for each of the three services at present.

Key Takeaways:

- Agniveers recruited under the Agnipath scheme began their training in early 2023. The initial batches of Agniveers will complete their four-year tenure with the services later this year.
- All of them would initially be released from the services, and the selected number of Agniveers who volunteer to serve in the defence forces would be enrolled back as regular soldiers based on merit.



- It has been learnt that the Navy will likely seek a higher retention percentage of sailors who joined under the scheme at around 75 per cent, while the Army and the IAF might seek an increase to around 50 per cent from the current 25 per cent.
- The defence forces have maintained so far that the retention percentage remains at 25 per cent at present.
- The need for more retention has been felt keeping in view the requirement of a larger pool of trained and experienced soldiers, who have participated in multiple operations over the last four years and are experienced in handling new technologies and weapons. This is likely to be discussed further between the services and the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) to explore feasible options.
- According to sources, even if an increase in the retention percentages of Agniveers is not approved, certain specialised units might induct a higher percentage of soldiers from among the retained Agniveers, who are more experienced, while other units may take a larger number of soldiers from among the Agniveers who will still be serving their four-year tenure.
- For instance, the newly raised Bhairav battalions of the Army may eventually have a larger percentage of retained soldiers as compared to regular infantry battalions, which might have a larger percentage of Agniveers undergoing their four-year tenure.

Do You Know:

- The Agnipath scheme was introduced last year to take in recruits for the Army, Navy, and Indian Air Force (IAF) on four-year contracts, including six months of training.
- At the end of four years, up to 25% of recruits can apply to join the services on a regular basis, subject to merit and organisational requirements.
- The scheme was announced as the armed forces looked to restart the recruitment of soldiers, sailors, and airmen after the Covid-19 pandemic led to the suspension of recruitment for around two years. At present, all sailors, airmen, and soldiers, except the technical cadre of the medical branch, are recruited to the services under the scheme.
- The scheme had also opened doors for recruitment of women as Agniveers to the IAF and Navy. The Army started the process of recruiting women soldiers into its Corps of Military Police in 2019.
- The government had said the scheme aimed to ensure a “youthful profile” for the armed forces by bringing down the average age of serving soldiers.

It said the scheme would help transform the armed forces into a “tech-savvy and modern fighting force”, and would ensure the availability of disciplined and skilled youth from a range of backgrounds in civil society after their retirement at the end of four years.

However, a major consideration was understood to have been the burgeoning defence pension bills of the Government of India. Over the next couple of years, the scheme will bring down the overall defence pension bill.

- The remuneration of an Agniveer is Rs 30,000-Rs 40,000 per month, and they are entitled to risk and hardship allowances.



The scheme also has a Seva Nidhi contributory package, under which the Agniveers contribute 30% of their monthly emoluments, and the government contributes the same amount. On completion of four years, they will receive around Rs 11.71 lakh (with interest) from the package, and this will be exempt from income tax.

- In case of death on duty, they will receive more than Rs 1 crore, including the Seva Nidhi package and full pay for the period they could not serve.

In the instance of a disability, they can receive up to Rs 44 lakh depending on the extent of disability suffered, which is attributed to or aggravated by military service.

- The biggest difference between a soldier employed on regular service and an Agniveer serving for four years is that the former will draw a pension post-retirement, while an Agniveer will not. The 25% of Agniveers who would eventually be absorbed into the forces after four years will, however, be eligible for pension after retirement.

MAHENDRAGIRI, AN INDIGENOUS STEALTH FRIGATE, TO BE COMMISSIONED ON JULY 11

The Indian Navy is set to commission its sixth Project 17A indigenous stealth frigate, Mahendragiri (F38), at Visakhapatnam later this week. It was designed by the Navy's Warship Design Bureau and built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, Mumbai.

Key Takeaways:

- According to the Navy, it exemplifies India's growing expertise in indigenous warship design and construction. The warship incorporates advanced stealth features, enhanced survivability, a reduced radar signature, and a high degree of automation. The frigate is powered by a modern combined diesel or gas propulsion system, enabling high-speed operations with exceptional endurance across the full spectrum of maritime missions.
- The stealth frigate is equipped with an advanced suite of indigenous and state-of-the-art weapons and sensors, including surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missile systems, sophisticated electronic warfare capabilities, comprehensive anti-submarine warfare systems, and an integrated combat management system.
- "Capable of undertaking anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine operations, Mahendragiri is equally suited for maritime security, power projection, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, search and rescue, and sustained presence missions," the Navy said in a statement.

Do You Know:

- With over 75 per cent indigenous content, the construction of the stealth frigate has brought together a vast network of Indian industries, including numerous micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), generating employment while strengthening the nation's defence industrial base, the statement added.
- The Navy said the commissioning of Mahendragiri would mark another significant milestone in the successful execution of the Project 17A programme.
- As successive frigates of the class join the Fleet, they continue to strengthen the Indian Navy's combat capability while reinforcing India's position as a leading indigenous warship-building nation," the Navy said, adding that Mahendragiri will serve as a formidable force multiplier,



safeguarding the nation's maritime interests and contributing to a secure, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. The frigate is named after the Mahendragiri mountain range in the Eastern Ghats, and embodies resilience, strength and unwavering resolve, according to the Navy.

The frigate is the first naval warship to bear the name.

WHY TANKS STILL MATTER

Military experts and strategic think tanks believe that achieving victory in war ultimately requires a physical ground presence. While drones, missiles, air power and cyber warfare can inflict heavy damage on military assets and infrastructure, they cannot occupy territory, enforce surrender or establish political control. History consistently shows that long-term military and political success requires ground forces.

Missiles and drones can destroy targets, but they cannot capture and hold territory. Ground forces, supported by armoured vehicles, remain indispensable for achieving decisive military objectives.

The role of tanks in modern warfare has become a subject of intense debate. Critics argue that the proliferation of drones and precision-guided weapons has reduced their battlefield relevance, while supporters maintain that tanks remain indispensable as mobile armoured platforms capable of delivering overwhelming firepower, breaching enemy defences and supporting infantry.

Over the decades, tanks have evolved into highly mobile, heavily armed main battle platforms equipped with advanced protection systems, improved sensors and networked battlefield capabilities.

A senior Indian Army officer said drones can create panic and inflict damage, but they cannot achieve the ultimate objective of war.

"To enforce surrender, a ground invasion of enemy territory is essential. That is what India demonstrated during the 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan. Tanks remain critical for such operations," the officer said.

He added that tanks are also evolving to meet emerging threats through lighter designs, anti-drone protection, electronic warfare jammers and hard-kill active protection systems capable of intercepting incoming missiles and drones.

Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine war

The Russia-Ukraine war has highlighted both the strengths and vulnerabilities of tanks. Numerous battlefield videos have shown tanks being destroyed by inexpensive drones, exposing their susceptibility in an increasingly transparent battlefield dominated by aerial surveillance and precision strikes.

The widespread adoption of drones has transformed modern warfare. They now perform reconnaissance, anti-infantry and anti-tank roles at a fraction of the cost of traditional Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGMs). Many of the early drones used in the conflict were assembled from commercially available components, making them highly cost-effective.

Although tanks can no longer spearhead assaults without support, they remain highly effective when employed as part of an integrated combined-arms operation involving infantry, artillery, air



defence, electronic warfare and drones. In such formations, tanks continue to provide unmatched mobile firepower, operational flexibility and battlefield shock effect.

Recent conflicts have demonstrated that low-cost drones can impose disproportionate costs on technologically superior militaries.

During the U.S.-Iran conflict, reports indicated that U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense radar sites in West Asia were targeted by inexpensive Shahed-like drones.

India witnessed a similar trend during Operation Sindoor, when Pakistan reportedly employed swarms of low-radar cross-section drones to saturate Indian airspace, overwhelm air defence systems and exhaust expensive interceptor missiles. Cheap drones costing only a few lakh rupees can force defenders to launch interceptors worth several crores of rupees. Even when intercepted, these drones create an unfavourable economic equation for the defender. Modern warfare is increasingly becoming a battle of mathematics, where defenders can lose economically despite winning tactically.

The Zorawar light tank

Recognising the changing character of warfare, India is developing the indigenous Zorawar light tank specifically for operations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

In June this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Larsen & Toubro's Hazira manufacturing facility in Gujarat, where he reviewed the Zorawar light tank and other indigenous defence systems.

Jointly developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and L&T Defence, the 25-tonne, air-transportable combat vehicle is designed for rapid deployment in high-altitude regions.

The Indian Army now expects to induct the Zorawar between 2028 and 2029. Now-retired Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi recently stated that issues identified during development and testing are being addressed through routine design refinements. The Army plans to induct 354 Zorawar tanks under a programme estimated to cost around ₹17,500 crore.

One of the primary reasons for the revised induction timeline is the Army's demand for enhanced protection against enemy fire.

Developers face the difficult challenge of improving armour protection while maintaining mobility and an optimal power-to-weight ratio. Achieving both objectives simultaneously is technically demanding and has extended the development cycle.

The Zorawar has been specifically designed for operations along the LAC, where China's People's Liberation Army has already deployed Type-15 light tanks. Indian military planners view the platform as critical to narrowing the operational gap and enabling rapid reinforcement of forward positions in mountainous terrain.

India has deployed Russian-origin T-72 and T-90 tanks in Ladakh, but these platforms were originally designed for plains and desert warfare.



The T-72 Ajeya remains the Army's largest tank fleet, with approximately 2,400-2,500 tanks, many of which are over four decades old. The more capable T-90S Bhishma, numbering more than 1,200, forms the backbone of India's armoured corps.

India has also inducted 124 Arjun Mk1 tanks, while 118 upgraded Mk1A variants are on order. However, the Arjun's weight of nearly 67 tonnes has limited its operational utility because of constraints imposed by bridges, culverts and railway transporters.

Until recently, India possessed more than 4,000 medium and heavy tanks but not a single light tank. That absence became a major operational concern after the 2020 India-China border crisis.

Unique challenge

India faces a unique strategic challenge: preparing simultaneously for conventional warfare against Pakistan in the plains and armoured operations against China in the high Himalayas.

The western theatre is ideal for traditional armoured manoeuvre warfare. The northern theatre presents an entirely different environment, characterised by extreme altitude, narrow valleys, weak bridges and steep gradients.

At high altitudes, tank engines lose significant power because of thin air, fuel consumption increases, movement becomes difficult and recovering disabled vehicles is extremely challenging. Without a credible offensive armoured capability in the mountains, Indian planners feared continued vulnerability to incremental Chinese military pressure.

The capability gap had been recognised after the 1987 Sumdorong Chu crisis and again after the 2017 Doklam stand-off. However, the 2020 Ladakh confrontation accelerated the launch of Project Zorawar under an emergency procurement programme. Alongside the Zorawar programme, India is pursuing Project Ranjeet, also known as the Future Ready Combat Vehicle (FRCV). The programme aims to replace ageing T-72 tanks with approximately 1,700-1,800 next-generation main battle tanks over the next decade. Expected to weigh around 55 tonnes, the FRCV will feature a gun larger than 120 mm, advanced explosive reactive armour, underbelly mine protection, integrated anti-drone systems, AI-assisted fire control and network-centric connectivity with UAVs and satellites.

The programme is estimated to cost between ₹57,000 crore and ₹60,000 crore.

'Tanks are adapting, not disappearing'

Lieutenant General (retd.) Dushyant Singh, director general of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), said no single template applies to every conflict.

"In the India-Pakistan context, territory remains central. Neither side will voluntarily surrender land. Likewise, the Iran-U.S. conflict demonstrates that unless territory is physically occupied, victory remains incomplete. Air strikes and missiles are effective for punitive action and destroying military assets, but controlling land requires boots on the ground. Legacy platforms such as tanks remain relevant despite advances in drones and missiles," he said.

He noted that Russia has managed to seize and hold territory in Ukraine because it possesses both infantry and armoured formations.



According to him, tanks now require dedicated anti-drone protection and integrated air defence support. Obstacles such as canals and layered defensive lines also complicate armoured operations.

Singh emphasised that future warfare will increasingly rely on integrated multi-domain operations involving the Army, Air Force and Navy, supported by cyber warfare, economic measures and maritime power.

He added that military history demonstrates a continuous cycle of technological innovation and countermeasures.

“Whenever one weapon system appears dominant, countermeasures eventually emerge. Tanks will continue adapting through technological innovation and remain relevant,” Singh said.

Role has changed, not ended

Globally, tanks no longer dominate battlefields in the way they did between the Second World War and the end of the Cold War. Cheap drones have significantly reduced their ability to operate independently. Yet they have not become obsolete.

India is introducing an entirely new class of tanks because its principal armoured challenge lies not on drone-saturated plains but in the high Himalayas, where altitude, mobility and transportability determine operational success.

The Zorawar is designed to address a uniquely Indian strategic requirement that many Western militaries do not face. The tank is no longer the undisputed king of the battlefield. But it remains something even more enduring: an indispensable component of combined-arms warfare.

In a battlefield increasingly dominated by drones, guided missiles and precision weapons capable of destroying multi-million-dollar armoured vehicles within seconds, tanks continue to provide one capability that no drone can replicate: the ability to physically seize, occupy and hold ground. Ultimately, wars are won not only by destroying the enemy but by controlling territory. And for that, boots on the ground, supported by tanks, remain indispensable.

AI IS RESHAPING WARFARE: HOW INDIA CAN KEEP PACE

The trinity of artificial intelligence (AI), military autonomy and algorithmic warfare is redefining modern-day warfighting and deterrence. The workflows of combat are being infused with AI and driven by autonomy, but what is making them unfailingly lethal is algorithmic precision. Indeed, these three factors are poised to exponentially increase battlefield lethality over the next few years.

Key Takeaways:

- The strategic-military establishment in India would do well to take note of this ‘Manhattan Project’ moment in combat — the deployment of software at unprecedented speed and scale.
- Drones are the greatest techno-military revolution since gunpowder and nuclear weapons. Their integration with AI and associated technologies has given birth to the art and science of drone warfare as warcraft, even statecraft.



- Their impact has been particularly visible in the Russia-Ukraine war. Ukraine, for instance, uses an AI-enabled data analytics platform called Delta that fuses multiple data inputs (from radar imagery to social media feeds) into one intelligent stream. Delta then plugs into a versatile inventory of drones to form a digital 'kill web' that compresses engagement times (detection to neutralisation) to a couple of minutes.
- A 35-km corridor along the Russia-Ukraine frontier is nicknamed the "death zone". In this area, artillery has been pushed back and outranged, tanks don't move, and infantry soldiers are picked up by surveillance drones and neutralised by FPV (first-person view) drones in a matter of minutes. Unmanned platforms are taking over functions once performed by humans. This ranges from acquiring information and fixing targets to resupplying ammunition and rations, and evacuating casualties. This year, Ukraine is buying eight million drones, more than the artillery it fired last year. These platforms provide commanders options ranging from close air support (25 km) to strategic air power (2,500 km).
- In Venezuela, the US used Anthropic's Claude in the operation to capture ousted president Nicolas Maduro. AI platforms gave the US top brass insights into Maduro's movements and helped them anticipate what he would do. Electronic attacks and cyber exploits were then synchronised with the Delta Force's heliborne assault to telling effect.
- In Iran, we saw the development of targeting packages at machine (not human) speeds, enabling precise strikes that wiped out almost the entire Iranian leadership in minutes on the morning of February 28.
- Military autonomy is making giant strides. Drone warfare is moving from remote to algorithmic control. The captains of naval platforms are increasingly going to be autonomous software systems, not humans. In the aerial domain, the development of the YFQ-44A Fury, an AI-powered autonomous fighter jet, by the defence tech startup Anduril, tells us that the future of airpower will be collaborative. This also shows that the business model is moving steadily from traditional defence primes to agile startups.
- Lethal technologies are seeing an unprecedented boom. Mythos is a virtual cyber-nuke that can disable any adversary operating system. DeepSeek and Tau's Law of Scaling (Huawei professing to achieve 1.4 nanometre transistor density by 2031 to challenge the Nvidia Blackwell chips which are in the range of 4 nanometres) are symbols of how Chinese digital innovations are turbo-charging strategic-military competition.

Do You Know:

- The future of defence is also sovereignty. Beginning now, we can embrace the trinity of AI, autonomy and algorithmic warfare through these sovereign pathways:
 - Urgently develop an AI-enabled data analytics platform, in the manner of Delta.
 - Create software that can autonomously coordinate drones swarms; identify objects of interest; differentiate between birds, civilian aircraft and combat platforms; and direct shooters to destroy targets.
 - Set up a diverse inventory of drones, with a target of five million by 2028.



—Deploy an array of counter-drone systems (such as laser and microwave weapons) with drone-hunting teams. This will help to establish drone-driven, AI-enabled “kill webs” along the LoC and LAC.

—Crowd the LEO (low-Earth orbit) space so that we transit from persistent surveillance to offensive ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance).

—The 2027 defence budget must reflect the transition. At least 40% of the Rs 2 lakh-odd crore earmarked for modernisation should be spent on technological solutions.

This is a huge challenge that will require a cultural and structural transformation. Successful adoption, however, will be game changing. It will expand options in crisis situations while enabling India to attain “combat overmatch” with Pakistan and “asymmetric deterrence” with China.

PM TO FLAG OFF INDIA'S FIRST HYDROGEN TRAIN: WHY THE TECHNOLOGY IS SO CHALLENGING

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off India's first hydrogen-powered train in Jind, Haryana on July 17. This will mark a major milestone for the Indian Railways in a green technology where few countries have ventured so far.

Key Takeaways:

— According to the Railways, this is one of the world's longest (eight passenger cars and two driving power cars) and most powerful (2400 kilowatt) hydrogen trainsets.

— The train can carry at least 682 passengers on the 89-km Jind-Sonipat railway section at a maximum operational speed of 75 km/h. It will make two round trips a day, covering 356 km and consuming an estimated 300 kg of hydrogen. Notably, hydrogen is highly flammable and needs to be transported at very high pressure.

— French rolling stock giant Alstom presented the hydrogen train technology for the first time at a 2016 exhibition in Berlin. Its two-car trainset, the Coradia iLint, was launched in Germany two years later, becoming the world's first hydrogen-powered passenger train.

— Later, countries such as Japan, China and the US also launched their own hydrogen-powered trains. The technology, however, is still evolving to cater to the mass transportation of passengers and freight. That is why few countries have hydrogen train services, and those that do use them mostly for relatively short trips.

— Normal electrical locomotives require overhead wires to draw the alternating current that powers their movement. Hydrogen trains don't. They run on the simple formula of combining hydrogen with oxygen to produce the tractive electricity.

— In the Indian hydrogen train's case, each of the two driving power cars will have four sets of integrated power packs, comprising hydrogen fuel cells and a lithium ferro phosphate battery.

— The hydrogen fuel cell will draw in the hydrogen stored on board (440 kg) at high pressure and oxygen from the outside air, then combine them to release electrical energy.



— Normal atmospheric pressure is measured as one “bar”. Hydrogen, however, has to be stored at 200-500 bar. This is the biggest challenge in using hydrogen as a clean fuel in trains. There are other issues too. Hydrogen production levels are low and transporting is difficult.

— To ensure the continuous supply of hydrogen for the trains, the railways has set up a 3000-kg-capacity fuelling facility at Jind. A chiller plant has also been developed to keep the hydrogen at minus 15 degrees Celsius during dispensing — the low temperature will transform it into a liquid state and, thus, ensure its easy dispensing.

Do You Know:

— Decarbonisation of the railways is a significant step towards attaining the net-zero goal by 2070. Indian Railways under “Hydrogen for Heritage” envisages deploying 35 hydrogen-powered trains on heritage and hill routes across the country.

— Significance of hydrogen trains for India?

- Attaining net-zero target by 2070
- Reduce diesel dependence
- Support India’s effort to decarbination of Railways
- Promotes clean energy transition

Types of Hydrogen

- **Grey Hydrogen**

It constitutes the bulk of India’s production. It is mainly produced through steam methane reforming (SMR), in which natural gas (methane) is used as the feedstock. The process relies on fossil fuels and releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere

- **Blue Hydrogen**

Production of hydrogen from coal/natural gas combined with Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS). CCS is a way to catch carbon and trap it beneath the earth. It is different from carbon dioxide removal (CDR) — where carbon is sucked out of the atmosphere. The byproducts, like carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, are captured and stored.

- **Green Hydrogen**

In this, hydrogen is produced from water electrolysis—splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen—by using renewable energy-powered electrolyzers. It is considered a virtually emission-free pathway for hydrogen production.

FALLING BEHIND

Urbanisation in Mumbai is evolving faster than its infrastructure upgrades

The southwest monsoon has been highly active over western India, with southwesterly winds loaded with moisture sweeping over the Western Ghats and delivering intense rains along the Konkan coast, while other weather systems offshore are routing more moisture over Mumbai and



the surrounding areas. In urban areas in general, rainfall intensity matters more than volume. Mumbai itself can generally absorb moderate rainfall over several hours; however, its drainage — like in many Indian cities — cannot handle several hundred millimetres in short bursts. Heavy rainfall also overwhelmed river catchments in parts of Maharashtra, including around Nashik, while high tides reduced the efficiency of Mumbai's stormwater drainage, worsening flooding in the city. Mumbai-Pune rail services were suspended after landslides in the Bor Ghat and flights were affected. The closures of the Mumbai-Pune expressway and the Mumbai-Goa highway and significant flooding on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad expressway were disruptive, speaking to the increasing erraticity of monsoon rainfall, the vulnerabilities associated with linear infrastructure projects, and the ease with which the effects of natural disasters are compounded by cascading failures. A chawl collapse in Mankhurd took the lives of five children.

Mumbai lies on a peninsula built mostly on reclaimed land, former marshes, tidal flats, and low-lying coastal areas, creating the characteristic risk of higher flooding when rainfall coincides with high tide. It is compounded by decades of haphazard urbanisation that has encouraged water to run-off rather than be absorbed by the ground, forcing drains to handle more water than their design limits. After the July 2005 floods, when it received 944 mm in 24 hours, Mumbai launched the BRIMSTOWAD project and widened drains, installed pumping stations, and undertook premonsoon de-silting. Many of these works remain incomplete while some completed upgrades are based on assumptions about the monsoon that climate change has since undermined. Officials have also argued that pre-monsoon desilting helped reduce flooding in parts of Mumbai, but water on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad expressway, the chawl collapse, deadly tree falls in Kurla and Aarey, lack of redundancies in public transport, and the BMC's belated advisory to builders to halt hazardous construction all suggest a governance lapse. Mumbai's accountability also remains split across the BMC for local drainage and roads, the IMD for forecasting, the NDRF, two Railway zones, the State government, and highway authorities. Overall, the city has improved at shutting down to save lives and minimising the death toll — but as climate change and urbanisation evolve faster than infrastructure upgrades, simply waiting for system capacity to catch up to demand will be a failing strategy.

WHY MORE INDIAN COUPLES ARE BEING DIAGNOSED WITH SECONDARY INFERTILITY

A few weeks ago, a couple sat in my consulting room looking almost apologetic. They already had a bright six-year-old waiting at home. "We feel silly taking your time, doctor," the mother said. "We have one child. Everyone keeps telling us to just be grateful." And then, quietly, she started to cry.

I have heard that phrase — "at least you have one" — more times than I can count. It is almost always meant kindly. It almost always lands like a door being shut. And it is one of the reasons the couples I see struggling to conceive a second time carry their grief so silently.

Understanding the condition

The condition has a name: secondary infertility — the difficulty conceiving or carrying a pregnancy after you have already had a baby. For years it was brushed aside as a non-problem. The numbers say otherwise.

Analyses of India's National Family Health Survey data show secondary infertility rose from roughly 19.5% in the early 1990s to about 28.6% by 2015–2016 — close to a doubling in a single



generation. It is now one of the most common reasons a “previously fertile” couple walks in, bewildered. “We didn’t even try the first time,” they say. “Why is it so hard now?”

Part of the answer is the calendar. A generation ago, most couples finished their families in their twenties. Today a first baby often arrives at the age of 31 or 32 — after the degree, the job, the EMI, the move to a rented flat in a city.

By the time life finally feels “ready” for a second child, the mother may be aged 36 or 38, and fertility, unfairly, does not wait for our life plans. Egg numbers and quality fall with every passing year; clinics in cities including Delhi/NCR, Bengaluru, Mumbai and others, have reported a sharp rise in women seeking help only after the age of 35.

But age is just one thread. In the years between the first and second child, bodies change. Weight creeps up. The thyroid quietly slips. As many as one in five Indian women now lives with Polyendocrine Metabolic Ovarian Syndrome (PMOS), which tends to worsen with time. A Caesarean section may have left adhesions; an old, untreated infection may have scarred a fallopian tube. And — this matters — the problem is very often on the man’s side. Sperm counts fall with weight, stress, smoking and even the polluted air so many of us breathe. Yet in my experience, Indian men will wait years longer than their wives before agreeing to a simple semen test, convinced that “we already have a child, so it can’t be me.”

Layered over all of this is something newer: our phones. Social media has, in many ways, been a gift for fertility awareness. Couples now arrive far better informed than a decade ago; the taboo is finally cracking; brave women share IVF journeys that once would have been whispered about. But scroll through any feed and you also meet the other side — an unending stream of “Baby No. 2!” announcements, and picture-perfect siblings.

For a woman in her fourth month of trying, or recovering from a second miscarriage, that scroll is a slow bruise. The comparison is relentless — and so is the family WhatsApp group where an aunt asks, yet again, when the “good news” is coming. I have also watched social media do harm the other way: glossy reels promising IVF “success in one cycle,” or home remedies that persuade a couple to delay proper testing by a year they cannot afford to lose.

Telling the truth

So what do I tell the couple crying in my room? First, that their pain is real and they are allowed to feel it.

Wanting a sibling for the child you adore is not ingratitude; it is love asking for a little more room. Second, that this is a medical condition, not a moral verdict — not a punishment, not nazar, not something they did wrong. Third, that timing matters. If a woman is under the age of 35 and has tried for a year, or over the age of 35 and has tried for six months, both partners — together — should be evaluated. Do not let the calendar run, out of politeness.

And I tell them the truth about hope, honestly. Modern fertility care helps a great many couples in exactly this situation, and IVF succeeds for many even in their late thirties and forties. But I will never promise a guaranteed outcome, and I would gently warn anyone against a clinic that does. What I can promise is a clear answer and a plan.

If there is one thing I wish more of us understood, it is this: the woman who “already has one” may be quietly grieving a child who simply has not arrived yet. She does not need to be reminded how



lucky she is. She needs to be asked how she is. Often the most healing thing a family member, a friend — or a doctor — can do is stop offering gratitude as a cure, and simply listen.

BENGALURU CRECHE ORDEAL POINTS TO A CRISIS OF CARE

For most working parents, leaving a toddler at a daycare is as much an act of necessity as a leap of faith — that the vigilance and kindness of well-meaning strangers will stand in for a parent's own presence for those hours. The alleged abuse of toddlers at an on-campus crèche of global IT firm Capgemini in Bengaluru, where children too young to articulate or comprehend their ordeal were locked in washrooms and washing machines to discipline them, strikes at the heart of that trust. The incident raises disturbing questions about a sector that has come up in response to changing family structures and rising workforce participation of women but still lacks commensurate oversight mechanisms.

Reliable childcare is crucial to women's participation in the labour market. A Dalberg-UNDP study published earlier this year found that India's public childcare system currently meets only around 5 per cent of urban demand, while private alternatives are largely unaffordable for low-income families. An estimated 6-7 million urban women need crèche access, a figure projected to reach 20-23 million by 2047. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 requires establishments with 50 or more employees to provide crèche facilities, but it covers only a fraction of India's workforce and leaves the unorganised sector entirely out of its ambit. While the female labour force participation rate has risen to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24, it is driven by rural, often unpaid or distress-led self-employment. Urban female participation has stayed stubbornly in the mid-to-high twenties. Each reported case of abuse leads to more women cutting back hours, turning down professional opportunities, or leaving the workforce entirely to take on the onus of care work.

While the investigation in Bengaluru must run its course, justice after the fact cannot substitute prevention. That task begins with recognising childcare as essential social and economic infrastructure rather than a discretionary employment perk. At present, daycare centres are governed by an uneven web of state rules, municipal by-laws and local licensing norms, with little uniformity in standards and even less consistency in enforcement. India needs a national regulatory framework that establishes minimum standards for registration, caregiver training, staff verification, child-to-caregiver ratios, inspections and grievance-redressal mechanisms. Regulation must also be matched by sustained public investment to expand access to quality childcare, ensuring that safety is a right, not a privilege.

COURT SEEKS BENGAL GOVT.'S STAND ON ENGAGING ISKCON TO PROVIDE MIDDAY MEALS

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday directed the West Bengal government to file an affidavit stating its position on the announcement to engage the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) for the preparation and supply of cooked food for midday meals in schools across the Kolkata Municipal Corporation area.

The court's order came after the State government submitted that there was no official order yet in this regard.

A Division Bench comprising Acting Chief Justice Tapabrata Chakraborty and Justice Partha Sarathi Chatterjee was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by advocate Sirsanya



Bandopadhyay challenging the State government's announcement made by Finance Minister Swapan Dasgupta during his maiden budget speech on June 22.

The plea argued that handing over the cooking and provision of cooked food for West Bengal government-run and -aided schools under the PM POSHAN (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman) scheme to the ISKCON would mean depriving students of eggs and loss of livelihood for thousands of self-help group (SHG) members.

SHG members currently cook midday meals in schools across the State.

Appearing for the petitioner, senior advocate Kalyan Banerjee said, "The scheme was envisioned to provide nutritious food to students to prevent school dropouts." He stated that the other purpose of the scheme, which was to provide employment to women SHG members for cooking and providing food to the students from raw materials supplied by the government, would be defeated as these women would also lose their livelihood.

Mr. Bandopadhyay argued that the Chief Minister has already announced it and so naturally when ISKCON takes over, all the SHG workers and women will be removed from the job.

In response to the court's query whether any follow-up action has been taken following the Chief Minister's announcement, Advocate General Surojit Nath Mitra told the court that "no decision has yet been taken in this respect. Hence, the entire petition is premature and proceeds on the basis of an assumption".

He stated that a clause in the scheme allows for centralised kitchens in urban areas where schools have space constraints for cooking, and that this can be done using the public-private partnership model.

The court adjourned the matter for four weeks and directed the State to file an affidavit.

Row over 'imposition'

The announcement to engage ISKCON has drawn considerable criticism from Opposition parties, particularly the Trinamool Congress, which called it an attempt by the newly elected BJP government to impose vegetarianism on students.

INDIA'S ESSENTIAL MEDICINE LIST LAGS BEHIND GLOBAL BENCHMARK; UNREVISED IN 4 YEARS

India's roster of essential medicines has not been updated in nearly four years, even as the World Health Organization (WHO) has revised its own list twice in the same period, says a civil society network of activists and organisations working for affordable healthcare.

The collective — Working Group on Access to Medicines and Treatments — has written to the government demanding an urgent revision of the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM), so that such drugs are available at affordable prices. The NLEM is a curated list of medications compiled by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. It prioritises drugs that satisfy the critical healthcare needs of India's population based on safety, efficacy, and cost-effectiveness. Medicines on this list — 384 at present — are generally dispensed free of cost by government hospitals. The government uses the NLEM to instruct the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) to enforce a strict price ceiling on them. The list was last overhauled in 2022.



The WHO Model List of Essential Medicines, meanwhile, was revised in 2023 and again in 2025, and contains 523 medicines — leaving India's list trailing well behind the global benchmark, said the group in its letter on Friday.

“The prolonged delay results in medicines being denied to millions of citizens — who could have had free access to newly recognised essential medicines within the public health system, while also restricting affordable access in the private sector,” the letter said, adding that the delay was not merely a bureaucratic lag but a matter with “profound constitutional and human rights implications”.

The consequences, the Working Group argues, fall hardest on patients battling cancer and diabetes. Its letter identifies 17 active cancer-treating agents and four supportive cancer-care medicines that feature on the WHO list but not the NLEM. Also missing, it says, are nine monoclonal antibodies none of which currently appear on India's list. “We urge immediate initiation of a transparent, time-bound, and conflict of interest-free process to revise the NLEM, ensuring that it reflects the latest evidence, public health priorities, and the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines. Timely action is essential to safeguard the constitutional guarantee of the Right to Life for it ensures equitable access to essential medicines for all citizens,” said K.M. Gopakumar, co-convenor, Working Group on Access to Medicines and Treatment, which comprises patient advocates, patient groups, civil society organisations, academics, lawyers and journalists.

AIDS PREVENTION SOCIETY LAUNCHES DRIVE TO IMPROVE HIV DIAGNOSIS IN KARNATAKA

More than 56,000 people in Karnataka are estimated to be living with HIV without knowing their status, the highest such number among States in the country. This is posing a major challenge to the State's HIV control programme despite free testing and treatment services being widely available, with the changing nature of sexual networks adding to the complexity.

As per estimates from the Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society (KSAPS), 56,406 people are unaware of their HIV-positive status, making early diagnosis and linkage to treatment a key public health priority. While over two lakh people are already receiving treatment, officials said, the focus is now on identifying those who remain outside the healthcare system.

KSAPS Project Director Padma Basavanthappa told The Hindu that one of the biggest hurdles is the changing nature of sexual networks, with increasing numbers of people meeting partners through dating apps.

No voluntary testing

Ms. Basavanthappa said the problem was compounded by the reluctance of people to voluntarily undergo HIV testing. “People still do not walk into testing centres on their own. Many believe they are not at risk, while others avoid testing because they fear stigma and discrimination,” she said, pointing out that awareness about HIV transmission also remained inadequate.

To address the gap, KSAPS has launched the Mobilisation for AIDS Suraksha campaign. As part of the campaign, initiated by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), KSAPS has introduced a BreakFree QR code that links users to a confidential self-risk assessment, nearby HIV testing centres and counsellors.



The self-assessment tool asks users a series of questions to determine whether they may be at risk and guides them to appropriate services while protecting their identity.

LAB-GROWN PLACENTA TO HELP STUDY HOW DRUGS, NUTRIENTS PASS DOWN FROM MOTHER TO BABY

For decades, doctors have had to prescribe medicines during pregnancy with surprisingly little evidence about whether many of them reach the developing foetus via the placenta, the temporary organ that connects a mother and her unborn baby. Or whether it is indeed an effective barrier against microbes and toxins.

Key Takeaways:

- Now, researchers from Mumbai's ICMR-National Institute for Research on Women's Health (ICMR-NIRWoH) and the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT Bombay) have developed a placenta-on-chip that closely mimics the human placenta.
- This offers scientists a new way to study how drugs, nutrients, pollutants and infectious agents pass from mother to baby. Although it remains a laboratory research tool that requires further validation, researchers believe it could accelerate the development of pregnancy-safe therapeutics and provide new insights into conditions such as gestational diabetes, foetal growth restriction and pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure that damages organs).
- The human-cell-based platform recreates several key structural and functional features of the placenta and could reduce dependence on animal models, which often fail to accurately replicate human pregnancy. The study was led by researchers Anshul Bhide and Sourav Mukherjee under the supervision of Professor Deepak Modi (ICMR-NIRWoH) and Professor Abhijit Majumder (IIT Bombay).

Do You Know:

- The placenta is one of the most critical organs in pregnancy. Yet it is one of the least understood. It supplies oxygen and nutrients to the foetus, removes waste products, produces hormones essential for sustaining pregnancy and acts as a selective barrier, determining what passes from the mother's bloodstream to the developing baby. How well the placenta functions influences foetal growth, pregnancy outcomes and the safety of medicines prescribed during pregnancy.
- Despite its name, it is not an electronic computer chip. It is a transparent plastic device containing a porous membrane on which researchers grow human placental cells alongside human endothelial cells, which line blood vessels. Together, these recreate the interface through which nutrients, hormones and other molecules are exchanged between mother and foetus.
- Unlike many existing placenta-on-chip systems that require sophisticated microfluidic equipment, the Mumbai team's model is a static two-chamber platform that can be used in a standard laboratory, making it simpler, reproducible and more accessible. Explaining the concept, Anshul Bhide, from ICMR-NIRWoH, told The Indian Express: "We tried to recreate the placenta to provide researchers a more humanised platform to better understand pregnancy and improve maternal and foetal health." The project took more than three-and-a-half years to complete, beginning during the Covid-19 pandemic, and has been built entirely using human cells.



STUDY TO CONTAIN ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANT NEONATAL SEPSIS BEGINS IN INDIA

Striking at the heart of antimicrobial resistance, the international NeoSep 1 trial to evaluate life-saving antibiotic combinations for newborns with sepsis has expanded to India, with the first baby being recruited at the Jawaharlal Postgraduate Education Institute of Medical and Research (JIPMER) in Puducherry.

This was followed by recruiting an infant for the study in Pt. B.D. Sharma PGIMS in Rohtak. The next on the list is Lokmanya Tilak Municipal College and General Hospital, Mumbai. Globally, the study, sponsored by the GARDP Foundation in collaboration with the UCL Innovative Clinical Trials Unit; City St George's, University of London (SGUL), and Penta Foundation, is also underway in Vietnam and Pakistan, and will soon start in Malaysia, Bangladesh and Uganda.

According to a GARDP statement, NeoSep1 aims to enrol 3,000 newborns across Asia and Africa by the end of 2028. Earlier, newborns were enrolled in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa.

Life-threatening infection

Neonatal sepsis is a life-threatening bloodstream infection that occurs in babies under 90 days old, often affecting premature or low-birth-weight infants. It is categorised into early-onset (occurring within the first 72 hours of life) and late-onset (occurring up to 28–90 days), according to a book on neonatal sepsis, authored by Meenakshi Singh.

"With underdeveloped immune systems, newborns are especially prone to life-threatening sepsis," Sally Ellis, Children's Antibiotics Project Leader for GARDP, told The Hindu, explaining the significance the NeoSep1 has in the context of growing antimicrobial resistance.

"Today, we stand at a tipping point. The antibiotics for newborns that we have relied on for decades are failing against resistant infections, in many hospital settings. This trial, led by GARDP and partners, is about giving neonatologists new tools, and giving babies with sepsis a fighting chance at life," she adds.

Sepsis is the second most common cause of neonatal mortality, globally responsible for over one million deaths annually. In India, neonatal sepsis remains a leading cause of neonatal mortality, contributing to approximately 30%–40% of all neonatal deaths despite advances in neonatal care, argues a recent paper 'Neonatal Sepsis in India: Epidemiology, Risk Factors and Preventive Strategies from a Public Health Perspective' in the Journal of Clinical Neonatology.

The author Ahmed Abdulaziz Almohammadi, writes "In India, neonatal sepsis accounts for an estimated 30%–40% of all neonatal deaths, translating to approximately 2,00,000–2,50,000 preventable deaths annually. Despite substantial reductions in under-five mortality over the past two decades, progress in reducing neonatal mortality has lagged, with sepsis representing a persistent and largely preventable cause of death."

Divergence from global trends

It turns out that causative agents in India show a divergence from global trends. Dr. Almohammadi notes that the microbiological profile of neonatal sepsis in India differs substantially from that of high-income countries, with gram-negative organisms predominating in most Indian studies. *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Escherichia coli*, *Acinetobacter* species and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* constitute the majority of bacterial isolates, often demonstrating multidrug resistance. Group B



Streptococcus (GBS), which is the leading cause of neonatal sepsis in developed countries, accounts for only 2%–5% of cases in India.

This makes the NeoSep 1 critical — to evaluate and produce a profile that is India specific, addressing the circumstances that can contribute to, or ameliorate the condition in India. It is pioneering the use of a Personalised Randomised Controlled Trial (PRACTical) design, which will evaluate and rank multiple antibiotic regimens for newborns with sepsis. This approach will help clinicians choose effective treatments best suited to their local context, GARDP spokespersons say.

The goal of the trial is to identify one or more safe, effective, and affordable treatments that can reduce the high number of newborn deaths caused by drug-resistant sepsis, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Part 1 of the NeoSep1 trial, conducted in South Africa and Kenya in 2023, assessed and validated the appropriate dose for fosfomycin and flomoxef for use in newborns, in combination with other antibiotics.

Nishad Plakkal, Principal Investigator of the NeoSep1 trial in India and Head of the Department of Neonatology at JIPMER, explains: “the study is a pragmatic trial and allows clinicians to make the diagnosis of sepsis as they normally would. However, to ensure the inclusion of infants with a high probability of infection, we use a sepsis severity score that we derived from an earlier global observational study (NeoOBS). Our microbiology team cultures the baby’s blood (and sometimes spinal fluid) to help identify the organism causing sepsis, typically within a day or two. They also identify antibiotic-resistant infections.”

Dr. Plakkal explains that the primary outcome, or the main question the study is designed to answer, is death within 28 days; while secondary outcomes will include death within 90 days, need for additional antibiotics, length of hospital stay, and re-admission.

LANDSLIDES: THE NEED FOR EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

The landslides in recent days in the Western Ghats and other parts of India have reignited discussions on the need for an early warning system for such events.

Key Takeaways:

- Landslides can indeed be predicted, at least in highly prone areas like Wayanad, where a 2024 landslide killed more than 300 people. Early warning systems can be installed for timely evacuations from danger zones.
- Examples of early warning systems for landslides can be found in India, too. Barely two weeks before the 2024 landslides in Wayanad, a series of landslides in the hills of Munnar (further south in Kerala) saw no loss of life. This was partly because the Idukki district administration had evacuated people on the advice of a team of researchers from Amrita University, who were testing an early warning system at a few sites in the district.
- About 13% of India’s total landmass, covering about 0.42 million square km, is known to be prone to landslides, according to the National Disaster Management Authority. The risk is highest in the Himalayan region and along the Western Ghats.
- Recently, Professor Dericks Praise Shukla and his team at IIT Mandi have unveiled their own landslide early warning system, which is in the process of getting validated with ongoing events



in the Himalayan region. Over the last year, their models were validated against about 80 actual landslides in the region.

— Shukla has been using a probabilistic forecasting method to track possibilities of landslides in the Himalayan region. His team has mapped out vulnerable spots in the region using a satellite-based database of past events.

— Since rainfall is one of the most common triggers, the team uses highly localised rainfall forecasts to model the probability of a landslide at these sites. Several other relevant factors like soil conditions, rock stability, extent of slope, and population density have to be fed into the model.

Do You Know:

— A landslide is a physical phenomenon in which a mass portion of rock, debris, or soil falls due to the influence of gravity. Landslides are one of the common geological hazards in hilly areas throughout the world.

— The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) released the “Landslide Atlas of India” in 2023. Landslides mapped in the ISRO atlas are mainly event-based and season-based.

— Excluding snow covered areas, approximately 12.6 per cent of the country’s geographical land area (0.42 million sq km) is prone to landslides. As many as 66.5 per cent of the landslides are reported from the North-western Himalayas, about 18.8 per cent from the North-eastern Himalayas, and about 14.7 per cent from the Western Ghats.

INDIRA POINT: INSIDE THE PLAN TO PROTECT LIGHTHOUSE, DEVELOP TOURISM HUB

The Union Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has proposed protection and development works at Indira Point and the famous lighthouse at the site in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Through the Directorate of Lighthouses and Lightships, Sri Vijaya Puram (formerly Port Blair), an agency under the ministry, the Centre has sought coastal regulation zone clearance to carry out the proposed work.

Key Takeaways:

- Indira Point is India’s southernmost tip, located on the Great Nicobar Island (GNI) in the Union Territory (UT) of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is an important maritime landmark, and lies to the south of the Galathea Bay, where a transshipment port has been proposed under the GNI mega infrastructure project.
- The lighthouse located at Indira Point is an important landmark on the Singapore-Colombo international maritime route and is used as a navigational aid by mariners. It also holds importance for safe navigation towards the Galathea Bay in the coming times, where a transshipment port has been proposed.
- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, through the Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships, wants to structurally repair and eventually develop tourism infrastructure and facilities around the lighthouse.

The Centre wants to strengthen the structure, the immediate site around it and along with it, it has proposed a string of development activities. In late November 2023, Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways made an official tour to the GNI and visited the



proposed site of the International Container Transshipment Port at Galathea Bay. Sonowal also visited Indira Point and directed Union Territory and the Centre's officials to explore the site's development as a tourism destination including tourism amenities and facilities.

- The works proposed fall in sensitive coastal habitats, which are protected under the Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) Notification, 2019. So, it needs prior approval from the UT's Coastal Zone Management Authority and the Environment Ministry.

Do You Know:

- The Indira Point lighthouse was established in 1972 on an area of 11.5 hectares, with a 35-metre-high cast iron tower. In the 2004 tsunami, the southern shores of Great Nicobar Island subsided by about 4.25 metres, leaving much of the area surrounding the lighthouse closer to the sea. While the lighthouse tower survived the tsunami, its peripheral structures were damaged or washed away.
- Great Nicobar is the southernmost and largest of the Nicobar Islands, a sparsely inhabited 910-sq-km patch of mainly tropical rainforest in southeastern Bay of Bengal. Indira Point on the island, India's southernmost point, is only 90 nautical miles (less than 170 km) from Sabang at the northern tip of Sumatra, the largest island of the Indonesian archipelago.
- Great Nicobar has two national parks, a biosphere reserve, small populations of the Shompen and Nicobarese tribal peoples, and a few thousand non-tribal settlers.
- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a cluster of 836 islands, split into two groups — the Andaman Islands to the north and the Nicobar Islands to the south — by the 150-km wide Ten Degree Channel. President Droupadi Murmu visited the archipelago in February this year, and interacted with some of its indigenous inhabitants.
- The mega infrastructure project — which is being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) — is proposed to include an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), a greenfield international airport with a peak hour capacity to handle 4,000 passengers, a township, and a gas and solar based power plant spread across 16,610 hectares.

AFZAL PATHAN, THE MODERNIST PAINTER FROM MADHYA PRADESH WHOM INDIA FORGOT

Not many know his works, and looking at them you might think he is a rising star in India's dynamic contemporary art scene – the form is fluid, the palette sombre, the hand light, and the composition experimental.

Key Takeaways:

- The fact is Afzal Pathan was part of the same modernist art revolution that gave India and the world Husain, Raza, Sher-Gil, and Gaitonde. He was born in 1936, passed away in 2000, and has remained largely absent from the storied history of the art of modern India.
- "When I was in Indore last year, I happened to see some of Pathan's works at an exhibition. I was so impressed. But somehow he has not been part of the larger scene of Indian modern art. I thought that this was an artist who needed to be brought to notice and attention," poet, literary critic, and editor Ashok Vajpeyi said.

4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



- Vajpeyi is Managing and Life Trustee of The Raza Foundation, an arts and culture non-profit established in 2001 by the modern Indian master S H Raza, which has organised the exhibition.
- Pathan was a prolific painter, and Akhilesh said his repertoire of more than 5,000 works now remain in the care of his family in Dewas. "He wasn't like other artists who would spend hours or days on a single work. He would finish a painting in half an hour," said Akhilesh who, like Pathan, went to the Indore School of Art.

Do You Know:

- According to Wikipedia, the modern Indian art movement in Indian painting is considered to have begun in Calcutta in the late nineteenth century. The old traditions of painting had more or less died out in Bengal and new schools of art were started by the British. Initially, protagonists of Indian art such as Raja Ravi Varma drew on Western traditions and techniques including oil paint and easel painting. A reaction to the Western influence led to a revival in primitivism, called as the Bengal school of art, which drew from the rich cultural heritage of India. It was succeeded by the Santiniketan school, led by Rabindranath Tagore's harking back to idyllic rural folk and rural life.
- Afzal Pathan: Ek Behta Dariya, on at the Shridharani Gallery at the Triveni Kala Sangam complex until July 10, is only his seventh solo show, including those held in his lifetime and posthumously.

INDIA NEEDS A SECOND HOME FOR ASIATIC LIONS

India's conservation of the Asiatic lion is widely celebrated as a remarkable success story. From a population which was reduced to just a few dozen in the early 20th century, the number of Asiatic lions has increased to approx. 891 today. Yet, behind this achievement lies a persistent policy failure: the inability to establish a second, geographically separate population. Scientific institutions, government bodies, and even the Supreme Court have long warned that without such a step, the species remains vulnerable to extinction from a single catastrophic event.

A second dwelling

The need for a second home for Asiatic lions is rooted in decades of government-backed research. Multiple reports of the Wildlife Institute of India have consistently emphasised that a single population confined to one landscape is inherently vulnerable. Studies conducted since the 1980s have concluded that threats such as epidemics, forest fires, or other natural disasters could potentially wipe out the entire species if it remains geographically concentrated.

This scientific consensus was formally acknowledged in the landmark Supreme Court judgment of April 15, 2013, which directed the translocation of Asiatic lions from Gujarat's Gir forest to the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The Court made it clear that conservation must be guided by ecological principles rather than regional considerations, stating that a second population was essential for the species' long-term survival. The judgment explicitly recognised the risk that a single calamity could eliminate the entire population if it remained confined to one location.

Despite this clear directive, the translocation project has been stalled for over a decade. Gujarat has consistently resisted the relocation of lions outside the State, citing its success in conserving the species and raising concerns about habitat suitability elsewhere. This has created a policy impasse between scientific recommendations, judicial mandates, and State-level political considerations. While the Kuno National Park was prepared specifically to host the lions — by



relocation of villages and habitat restoration among others — no lions have been introduced there.

Meanwhile, the ecological risks identified by experts have only intensified. The concentration of the entire global population of Asiatic lions within the Gir landscape makes them uniquely vulnerable to disease outbreaks. The 2018 outbreak of the Canine Distemper Virus among the population, which killed several lions and infected many others, serves as a stark reminder of this danger. Such diseases spread more rapidly in dense, socially structured populations, and their impact is amplified by the limited genetic diversity of the lions.

Government-supported studies and conservation plans have repeatedly highlighted that geographically isolated carnivore populations face extinction risks from both biological and environmental factors. In a single-site population, even non-recurring events — such as droughts, wildfires, or sudden prey decline — can have disproportionate effects. This is why conservation science advocates for a “metapopulation approach”, where species are distributed across multiple habitats to reduce risk.

Recognising these concerns, recent policy initiatives such as Project Lion (2020) have attempted to revive the discussion on expanding lion habitats. There have been proposals to develop alternative sites such as the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary within Gujarat itself. However, experts argue that such sites, being geographically close to Gir, may not adequately address the core issue of risk diversification. A second population must be sufficiently distant to prevent the spread of disease or disaster across both populations simultaneously.

The delay in establishing a second home raises broader questions about environmental governance in India. It reflects a tension between national conservation priorities and State-level interests, where wildlife — though constitutionally recognised as a shared responsibility — can become entangled in regional identity and political considerations. The Supreme Court had clearly stated that Asiatic lions are a national heritage, not the property of any single State, yet implementation of this principle remains incomplete.

From success to security

Ultimately, the issue is whether India is willing to move from conservation success to conservation security. The current situation represents a paradox: a thriving population that remains ecologically fragile. Without establishing a second free-ranging population, the gains of decades of conservation effort remain vulnerable to reversal. The case of the Asiatic lion underscores a fundamental principle of modern conservation: numbers alone do not ensure survival; resilience does. Creating a second home is an ecological necessity; continued delay in implementing this vision risks turning a global conservation triumph into a preventable ecological vulnerability.

ASSAM RELEASES BOOKLET SHOWCASING BODOLAND FORESTS’ BUTTERFLY DIVERSITY

The Assam Forest Department on Saturday released a special booklet on the butterflies found in the forest landscape of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

Hagrama Mohilary, the Chief Executive Member of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), released the booklet in Kokrajhar, about 220 kilometres west of Guwahati.

Spread across 3,653 sq. km., the Bodoland forest landscape comprises a mosaic of tropical evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist mixed-deciduous forests, and alluvial grasslands situated at the



confluence of the Indo-Malayan and Indo-Gangetic biogeographic zones. The landscape supports 346 of Assam's 620 recorded butterfly species, including several rare, endemic and threatened taxa, making BTR one of the richest butterfly habitats in Northeast India.

According to Sonali Ghosh, the chief of the Forest Department for BTR, the region is the only ecological corridor in the Northeast where butterfly species of the Eastern Himalayas, Indo-Malayan region, and the Indo-Gangetic plains occur together.

BTR's Ultapani-Manas landscape supports several rare and remarkable butterflies including the endemic yellow-crested spangle (*Papilio elephenor*) and Swinhoe's flat (*Celaenorrhinus zea*). Other notable Eastern Himalayan species recorded from the landscape include the great windmill (*Byasa dasarada*), Moore's cupid (*Shijimia moorei*), Mussoorie bush bob (*Pedesta masuriensis*), and green awlet (*Burara vasutana*).

Among the Ultapani-Manas landscape's Indo-Malayan butterflies is the witch (*Araotes lapithis*). This landscape also boasts the Indian cupid (*Everes lacturnus assamica*) and the white-line bushbrown (*Mycalesis malsara*), rarely found elsewhere in the Northeast.

Experts from the Northeast Butterfly Meet Network say the BTR represents not only an extraordinary centre of butterfly diversity but also a unique cultural landscape where butterflies have inspired traditional folklore and performing arts. The Bagurumba, popularly known as the butterfly dance of the Bodo community, is believed to have been inspired by the colourful mud-puddling congregations witnessed across the forests during the monsoon.

WHAT ARE ICC'S 'RETURN TO PLAY POST-PREGNANCY' GUIDELINES?

The story so far:

On June 22, 2026, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced a framework to assist women players who are returning to the sport after pregnancy and childbirth. The Return to Play Post-Pregnancy Guidelines can be used by the boards of member countries of the ICC to design their own policies in line with local laws for the welfare of the cricketers. "Motherhood and elite cricket should not be seen as mutually exclusive," said a spokesperson for the ICC via a press release.

What does the policy say?

The guidelines, drafted by a team led by ICC Medical Advisory Committee member and Australia Team Doctor Dr. Philippa Inge focuses on "practical, physical and psychological considerations" to support return to play. It calls for the appointment of a case manager (usually a doctor or a physiotherapist), who will serve as the primary point of contact.

Centered on the welfare of the mother and child, the policy urges flexible and focussed communication. While recommending exercise during pregnancy, it also highlights the lack of evidence on designing programmes for elite athletes. The board recommends that players stop competing at the end of their first trimester.

For return to play, the guidelines outline the 6 Rs framework: Ready (0-6 weeks), Review (6-8 weeks), Restore (8-16 weeks), Recondition (12-16+ weeks), Return, and Refine, which includes addressing social barriers such as childcare, and the mental well-being of the player.



Practical assistance, such as access to childcare facilities (including spaces to change or rest the baby), breastfeeding areas, travel support, and opportunities for alternative employment, is also addressed in the guidelines.

Which countries have maternity policies?

Among the cricket-playing countries, Australia has a comprehensive parental policy which includes paid leave, benefits, support till the child is four years old, and contract extension guarantees. Other countries, including New Zealand, South Africa, England, Pakistan, and the West Indies, also have maternity or parental policies, though the level of support varies. India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh do not have dedicated board-level maternity policies for women cricketers. In Taliban-led Afghanistan, women are barred from playing cricket.

Have mothers played at the international level?

Players including Bismah Maroof (Pakistan), Afy Fletcher (West Indies), Amy Satterthwaite (New Zealand), Megan Schutt (Australia), and Masabata Klaas (South Africa) are mothers who have competed on the global stage. The 2022 Women's ODI World Cup saw the participation of eight mothers; a few even captained their side. In India, while there are no mothers on the national side, Sneha Deepthi played at the domestic level and the Women's Premier League after giving birth.

Why is such a policy necessary?

During the 2022 World Cup, a video of Indian players interacting with Pakistan captain Bismah Maroof and her daughter after a game went viral. Such scenes are uncommon as women players have historically been forced to choose between their careers and starting a family.

The 'motherhood penalty' — the economic disadvantages women face in the workplace as a result of becoming mothers — plagues women across sectors, including sports. In sport, players face the additional burden of making a physical comeback after pregnancy. Balancing motherhood and professional sports is an uphill battle for women, with many of them being forced into early retirement. Limited research on reproductive health in athletes also restricts insights into how such factors interact with performance outcomes.

These situations persist due to lack of systemic support, protections, and failure to take into account the practical realities of parenthood for players. A strong and robust maternity policy will not only support players, but will also help retain a talented pool of cricketers, which will benefit the sport.

Speaking about the guidelines, ICC Chairman Jay Shah said, "No player should have to choose between motherhood and representing her country at the highest level."

Cricket is growing increasingly global and is set to return to the Summer Olympics in the 2028 edition. Fixed policies are needed to help players make informed and secure choices about their futures. The release of the guidelines is a step in the right direction and shows ICC's "commitment to building a game where women can thrive, both on and off the field."

TEEJAN BAI CLAIMED HER RIGHT TO SING

One will probably remember the remarkable talent of Chhattisgarhi folk musician Teejan Bai, who died in Raipur on Sunday at 69, as an innate gift. But what was often admired as genius was her extraordinary resolve.

**Key Takeaways:**

- In Ganiyari village, where singing on any public platform was forbidden for women, people didn't want their daughters to become like Teejan, the 10-year-old, who under the pretext of collecting cow dung for the hearth would escape to the ponds, fields and naalas to belt out the verses of Pandavani — an oral storytelling tradition from Chhattisgarh, where a lone performer combines music and narration to bring a story from the Mahabharata to life. The sun would go down and Teejan would return home, only to be shunned by family and community because she dared to sing a form that was a preserve of men.
- Married at 12, she would run away from her husband's home at 13 to live alone in a neighbouring village to become Teejan Bai, the first woman to perform Pandavani professionally from the Pardhi community.
- For decades, one saw Teejan become the Pandavas, Kauravas, Krishna, Bhishma and Karna, shifting effortlessly between characters, conjuring kingdoms and battlefields, with just her voice and an ektara. In the 1970s, Urdu playwright Habib Tanvir, struck by her talent, brought her into Naya Theatre, introducing her to a national audience. She later appeared in Shyam Benegal's Bharat Ek Khoj and received the Padma Vibhushan and the Sangeet Natak Akademi award. But perhaps her greatest achievement lay in winning the hardest battle to begin with: Claiming her right to sing.

Do You Know:

- Teejan Bai's talent and her work in the arts eventually earned her the country's highest honours, including the Padma Shri (1988), Padma Bhushan (2003) and Padma Vibhushan (2019) and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1995). While Teejan found much success, none of her children, however, took to Pandavani. But she herself trained about 200 students in it over the course of her career. But what will always remain significant about Teejan Bai is the courage she showed in breaking the barriers she faced, paving the way for other women performers who continue to perform Pandavani globally.

SHORT NEWS**INDIA AND AUSTRALIA**

- PM Modi visited Australia from 8 to 10 July 2026 for the third Australia-India Annual Summit in Melbourne.
- The historical ties between India and Australia started immediately following European settlement in Australia in 1788. Australia and India upgraded their bilateral relationship from 'Strategic Partnership' in 2009 to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2020.

Key outcomes:

-  The finalisation of the administrative arrangement to operationalise the Civil Nuclear Agreement signed in 2014 and enable the supply of uranium from Australia to India.
-  To support India's domestic renewable energy push, a joint 'Rooftop Solar Training Academy' will be established in Gujarat to build technical capacity among women and youth under the PM Surya Ghar Yojana.



- The two leaders also launched the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains (PACTS). The partnership targets supply chain diversification, cybersecurity, digital resilience, and joint semiconductor research.
- Pact for the repatriation of Indian artifacts, with Australia agreeing to return the sacred bull Nandi (11th–12th century, granite), a trident with Auspicious Kali (11th century, bronze), and a six-headed Skanda (12th century, basalt).
- A separate trilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed under the Australia-Canada-India Technology and Innovation (ACITI) umbrella, cementing a trusted technological alliance between the three Commonwealth nations.
- India-Australia Sports Collaboration Roadmap: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese jointly unveiled the India-Australia Sports Collaboration Roadmap at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

One of the notable features as a part of this collaboration was the announcement of the inaugural match of the upcoming edition of the Big Bash League being played at MA Chidambaram Stadium (Chepauk) in Chennai this December.

INDIA AND NEW ZEALAND

— During the final leg of the three-nation tour, PM Modi visited New Zealand from July 10 to July 11. He became the first Indian PM to visit New Zealand in 40 years. Both countries elevated their bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership and signed several agreements and MoUs across key sectors.

Key outcomes:

- India and New Zealand agreed to double bilateral trade to NZ\$7 billion or Rs 35,000 crore by 2030, in the context of the Free Trade agreement signed in April this year.
- They agreed to establish a regular Foreign Ministers' Dialogue and consolidate the practice of annual senior officials' meetings between India's Ministry of External Affairs and New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- India welcomed New Zealand's nomination of Maritime Security as its priority pillar under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, and both sides agreed to explore specific cooperation activities under this pillar.
- The two sides also signed a pact for enhanced cooperation in animal husbandry and dairying through technical collaboration, knowledge exchange, and best practices. They also decided to launch the 'Kiwifruit Action Plan and Establishment of two Centres of Excellence for Kiwifruit in Nagaland and Uttarakhand'.
- The India-New Zealand Joint Action Plan on Sport will provide a framework for collaboration in sports, including high-performance sport, sports science, sports medicine and athlete development.

Maori Haka



Prime Minister Narendra Modi was welcomed with a traditional Māori Haka during his official visit to Auckland, New Zealand. The haka is of deep cultural significance to Maori identity and is traditionally performed by warriors on the battlefield or to welcome another tribe. According to New Zealand Tourism's website, haka "was a show of physical prowess but also an embodiment of cultural pride, strength, and unity."

It is usually performed in a group and involves chanting, dramatic facial gestures, hand movements, and stamping the feet. The Haka traces its roots to the Maori people, the indigenous Polynesian inhabitants of Aotearoa (the Maori name for New Zealand). Traditionally, the haka was a ceremonial dance or challenge performed by warriors before battle. It was designed to intimidate opponents with synchronised movements, powerful chants, and piercing expressions.

INDIA-INDONESIA

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Indonesia on a state visit from 6-8 July 2026.
- PM Modi has become the first Indian Prime Minister to address the Parliament of Indonesia.
- This is PM Modi's fourth visit to Indonesia and the first bilateral visit since the elevation of ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in May 2018.
- As a special gesture reflecting deep bilateral ties, President Prabowo conferred the Bintang Adipurna (Medal of Honour) upon Prime Minister Modi.
- The medal is Indonesia's highest civilian award, reserved for people who have rendered exceptional service to the nation's unity, continuity, and prosperity.
- The agreements signed between the two nations included
 - ➡ A pact to open an Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore campus in Indonesia
 - ➡ The supply of medicines and medical products to Indonesia
 - ➡ The provision of telecom technology such as wireless and quantum systems
 - ➡ Efforts for the conservation and restoration of the Prambanan Temple complex in Yogyakarta
 - ➡ Both agreed to jointly develop Sabang Port near the Strait of Malacca
 - ➡ Defence cooperation: supply of the ASTRA Mk 1, BrahMos Missiles batteries, among others.

INDIA SEEKS REVIEW OF US' FORCED LABOUR INVESTIGATION

- India has sought the review of proposed US tariffs of 12.5% citing inconsistencies in its Section 301 investigation into forced labour concerns, as the deadline for fresh US tariffs scheduled to be imposed by July 24 nears. The US has currently imposed 10% global tariffs.
- Joint Secretary in the Department of Commerce Brij Mohan Mishra, during a public hearing, said that India takes the elimination of forced labour seriously as a Constitutional obligation, and as a matter of international law and principle.



— The USTR has not satisfied the relevant legal standards under Section 301(d) of the Trade Act. A mere absence of a forced labour import prohibition without evidentiary basis of other statutory requirements cannot be construed as unreasonable under Section 301, he added.

BOHR (BETAVOLTAIC ORBITAL HIGH-RELIABILITY)

— SpaceX has successfully launched what is being described as the world's first commercially built nuclear-powered satellite, marking a significant milestone for space-based nuclear technology.

— The satellite, called BOHR (Betavoltaic Orbital High-Reliability), was developed by Florida-based company City Labs and lifted off on 7th July aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket as part of the company's Transporter-17 rideshare mission from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California.

— BOHR is a demonstration mission designed to test City Labs' proprietary NanoTritium betavoltaic micropower source in space for the first time.

— Unlike conventional satellites that rely entirely on solar panels, NanoTritium generates electricity by using the beta particles released during the radioactive decay of tritium, a radioactive form of hydrogen. Those particles are converted directly into electrical energy using a semiconductor device.

— The technology differs from the radioisotope thermoelectric generators used on Nasa spacecraft such as the Voyager probes, which generate power from heat emitted by decaying plutonium.

WAYANAD TWIN TUNNEL PROJECT

— The Kerala government on 8th July decided to suspend construction of the Wayanad twin tunnel project until all vulnerable factors are reviewed.

— Konkan Railway Corporation is the implementing agency for the project, which is expected to be completed in four years.

— Construction of the tube tunnels has been awarded to Bhopal-based Dilip Buildcon, while the approach roads and bridges in the project will be constructed by Kolkata-based Royal Construct. The tunnel connects Anakkampoyil in Kozhikode to Meppadi in Wayanad.

— The length of the tunnel is measured at 8.2 km, making it one of the longest tunnel roads in India. The estimated cost of the tunnel is Rs 2,400 crore, and the aim is to reduce travel time between Kozhikode and Wayanad districts.

AI-HALLUCINATED JUDGMENTS: WHY SUPREME COURT SET ASIDE A TRIBUNAL ORDER

— Six AI-hallucinated judgments formed the basis for the Supreme Court's striking down of an order passed by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Thursday.

— Three of the cited judgments did not exist, while the remaining three either did not contain the propositions attributed to them or did not correspond to the context for which they were cited.



— The bench of Justices P S Narasimha and Alok Aradhe observed on July 2 that while the use of AI judgments could be “gratifying, even inspiring,” AI may eventually “infiltrate our intellectual work ethic and before long, render us dependent on its vast capabilities.”

PIRATED MOVIES, OTT CONTENT: GOVT NOTICE TO TELEGRAM, SEEKS REPORT IN 15 DAYS

— The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on Saturday issued a notice to Telegram over the alleged widespread dissemination of pirated films, OTT content, and other audio-visual material through its platform, while directing the messaging app to take corrective action and submit an action-taken report within 15 days.

— The Ministry has directed Telegram to act against repeat infringers, including channels, groups, bots, accounts, administrators, and associated entities, while seeking details of its grievance redressal mechanism for producers, OTT platforms, and law-enforcement agencies.

— Reminding Telegram that, as an intermediary, it is required to observe due diligence under the Information Technology Act and the Information Technology Rules, the I&B Ministry has stated that Telegram should not be waiting for the government to identify each piracy channel and also emphasised that a purely reactive, channel-by-channel takedown approach may not be sufficient to demonstrate due diligence as required under the IT Act, 2000, and the IT Rules, 2021.

— The I&B Ministry had underlined that copyright infringement is not just a civil violation but a criminal offence in India under the Copyright Act, 1957, and the Cinematograph Act, 1952, and the continued availability of pirated content, evasive compliance, or an incomplete response may invite further examination and action under the legal framework.

PREMATURE LIFE POLICY SURRENDERS SOAR, OVERTAKE MATURITY PAYOUTS

— Blame it on financial stress or mis-selling by insurers — surrenders and withdrawals of life insurance policies before maturity have been increasing over the past five years.

— Payouts for surrenders and withdrawals increased from around 30% of total benefits paid to policyholders in FY2022 to 38.3% in FY2026, suggesting that a growing number of policyholders are exiting their policies before maturity.

— According to insurance experts, many families have surrendered traditional life insurance policies to meet immediate cash needs due to inflation, rising living costs and higher loan repayments in recent years.

— Some customers purchase policies expecting short-term investment or FD-like returns, but discontinue them after realizing later about the long lock-in period and surrender penalties. Further, higher interest rates on bank FDs, stock market and mutual fund investments have become more attractive, prompting many customers to move away from insurance policies that offered comparatively lower returns, they say.

EL NIÑO STRENGTHENS, COULD DEVELOP INTO STRONGEST SINCE 1950, SAYS US AGENCY



The prevailing El Niño in the Pacific Ocean could intensify during the coming months and turn into one among the largest events in the historical records, US-based National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said on Thursday.

El Niño and La Niña are the two phases of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), a naturally occurring ocean-atmosphere interaction. These events influence global weather patterns and can trigger extreme weather, droughts, and heatwaves across the globe. El Niño has a general warming impact on the planet. Over the Indian region, it has the effect of suppressing rainfall. This year, the monsoon in India is expected to be well below normal, mainly on account of the developing El Niño.

VACCINE-DERIVED POLIOVIRUS (VDPV)

— Last month, vaccine-derived polio virus (VDPV) was detected in a sewage sample in Ghaziabad. After that, the authorities carried out an extensive polio campaign in the areas nearby.

— A vaccine-derived poliovirus is a strain related to the weakened version of the live poliovirus contained in the oral polio vaccine (OPV).

— ‘Polio drops’ are by and large safe — they have led to the successful eradication of the infection in most countries — but on rare occasions can trigger the disease in children with weak immune systems.

— The WHO defines polio or poliomyelitis as “a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children. The virus is transmitted by person-to-person, spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.

— Initial symptoms of polio include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs. In a small proportion of cases, the disease causes paralysis, which is often permanent. There is no cure for polio; it can only be prevented by immunization.”

— There are three types of wild polio virus. Type 2 wild polio virus was eradicated in September 2015, while Type 3 wild polio virus has not been found since November 2012 and was certified eradicated on 24 October, 2019. As of 2022, endemic wild poliovirus type 1 remains in two countries: Pakistan and Afghanistan.

— India was declared free of wild poliovirus in 2014 after decades of mass immunisation, making it one of the 11 countries in South East Asia which have been certified free of wild poliovirus. But environmental surveillance – testing sewage for traces of the virus – continues as an early warning system.

— These cases do not affect India’s polio-free status — only the detection of the wild poliovirus will change that.

METHADONE MAINTENANCE THERAPY



— On June 26, the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, Punjab Health and Family Welfare Minister Balbir Singh inaugurated six Methadone Maintenance Therapy clinics in government hospitals.

— Methadone Maintenance Therapy (MMT), also known as Methadone Treatment Therapy (MTT), is a medically supervised treatment for people addicted to opioids such as heroin, “chitta” (an adulterated form of heroin), opium and prescription opioid painkillers.

— It uses methadone, a long-acting opioid agonist, under medical supervision to reduce cravings and prevent withdrawal symptoms without producing the intense high associated with illicit opioid use.

— The treatment is combined with counselling, psychosocial support and regular medical follow-up to help patients recover and reduce the risk of overdose, relapse and the spread of infectious diseases.

— Recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and implemented under the guidelines of the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), methadone is administered under strict medical supervision.

— Methadone Maintenance Therapy was first introduced in India in 2012 through pilot projects supported by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, NACO and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

— Punjab became the first state in the country to introduce MMT in 2012, when a pilot methadone treatment programme was launched at the de-addiction centre of Civil Hospital, Kapurthala.

— The backbone of Punjab’s government de-addiction programme continues to be Buprenorphine-Naloxone (BNX) therapy, provided through over 450 Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment (OOAT) centres across the state.

ETHANOL BLEND IN PETROL

— Amid a raging backlash over a rapid increase in the use of ethanol in petrol from 10% to 20% in just three years, the government is likely to push back the proposed shift to a higher blend of ethanol fuel E25 comprising 75% petrol and 25% ethanol.

— The government had originally planned to dispense petrol blended with 20% ethanol only by 2030. But the E20 fuel — 80% petrol and 20% ethanol — is now the standard petrol variant available nationwide.

— Using a higher ethanol blend in petrol for engines, especially those not designed for these blends, results in a drop in fuel economy depending on when the car was manufactured. Older vehicles fare comparatively worse in this transition.

— While a fuel with 10% ethanol (E10) made little difference to a car’s performance, the transition to E20 did impact the operational parameters of older vehicles.

— Ethanol has lower calorific value than petrol, which results in a perceptible drop in mileage. Also, regular petrol cars running on higher ethanol blends, alongside the drop in mileage, are harder to start on winter mornings because ethanol burns at a higher temperature than petrol.



— The proposed E25 transition requires automakers to do additional engineering and validation work around engine calibration, fuel-system durability, corrosion resistance, and material compatibility and homologation.

Homologation is the process that officially certifies a vehicle or component as compliant with regulations pertaining to safety, environment, and road-worthiness.

GI TAG TO JODHPURI'S MOJARI

— The Centre has granted a Geographical Indication (GI) tag to Jodhpur's nearly 200-year-old Mojari craft, giving the traditional footwear official recognition and a boost in global branding.

— Jodhpuri Mojari are crafted by members of a caste called Jinagar, who according to researchers, were traditionally saddle makers. Once patronised by the royals, the Mojari gradually evolved into a distinctive craft giving the city a unique identification. Today, artisans practice the craft in over 5,000 households in Jodhpuri.

Recent GI tags:

1. Chandannagar's Jolbhora Sandesh and Janai's Manohara: In June, West Bengal received GI tags for four more products, taking the total to 21 products. Alongside Chandannagar's Jolbhora Sandesh, Janai's Monohara, and Balagarh's traditional wooden boats have also received recognition.
2. Khurasani Imli of Mandu: The fruit of the iconic Baobab trees of Mandu, Madhya Pradesh, locally known as Khurasani Imli, was awarded the GI tag in June 2026. It is famous for its distinctive sweet-sour flavour and high nutritional value.
3. Bhagaiya silk, Kuchai silk, Munda jewellery, and bamboo craft of Jharkhand received GI recognition last month. It gives national recognition to crafts rooted in traditional knowledge. The Munda jewellery is known for its distinctive designs, traditional craftsmanship and cultural significance, reflecting the identity of the Munda community.
4. Ponduru Khadi of Andhra Pradesh: Ponduru Khadi is a traditional hand-woven cotton fabric produced in Ponduru village of Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh, locally known as Patnulu. The fabric is made using Hill cotton, Punasa cotton, and Red cotton grown in the same region. One of its most distinctive features is the use of the jawbone of the Valuga fish for cleaning cotton, a practice not found anywhere else in the world.

THREE ANTIQUITIES FROM TAMIL NADU RETURNED BY THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM

— Three antiquities from Tamil Nadu, dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries and housed at a museum in Australia, are all set to make their way back to India.

— The repatriation of the antiquities is among the outcomes of the India-Australia summit during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the island nation. For its part, India has committed to the repatriation of the relics of an Australian First Nations ancestor presently held at the Government Museum of Chennai.



(i) A stone sculpture of sacred Nandi – the vehicle of Lord Shiva (11th to 12th century): Sculpted in the Tamil Shaiva temple tradition, it originates from Sri Kasiviswanathaswamy Temple, Kollumangudi village in Thiruvavur district.

(ii) A metal trident with the image of Bhadrakali (11th century): Originating from Sri Kasiviswanath- aswamy Temple in Kollumangudi, it was crafted in the

South Indian temple ritual metalwork tradition for religious worship

(iii) A six-headed Karthikeya statue in stone (12th century): Carved in the Chola-period sculptural tradition, it originates from the Naganathswamy Temple, Manambadi village of Thanjavur district.

WIMBLEDON 2026

— Wimbledon, French Open, US Open, and Australian Open are the most prestigious events on the annual tennis calendar, bestowed with the moniker of “Grand Slam”, a term that has been in use for almost a century.

— Wimbledon is the only one to still be played on grass. Of the other three, the Australian Open and the US Open are both played on hard courts, and the French Open is played on clay.

— Through a shared governance structure, Grand Slam Tennis is the partnership between the four Grand Slam tournaments, forming an opportunity to lead a shared vision for advancing the game of tennis at all levels while acting as custodians of the sport’s history and traditions.

NIGHTINGALE OF SOUTH INDIAN CINEMA, WHO GAVE VOICE TO OVER 40,000 SONGS, FALLS SILENT

— S Janaki, who recorded over 40,000 songs in multiple languages, including Tamil, Odiya, Bengali, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada and Hindi among others, died at a private hospital in Mysuru on Saturday evening due to age-related issues. She was 88.

— In 2013, Janaki declined the Padma Bhushan, saying the recognition had come too late (she had been successfully singing for 55 years), and that she deserved nothing less than a Bharat Ratna, an honour that Mangeshkar was given in her lifetime.



BUSINESS AND ECONOMY

ARGENTINA'S PLAN FOR AI-RUN FIRMS CAN'T AVOID HUMANS

Argentine President Javier Milei generated both excitement and fear last month when he announced a Congressional bill to create “non-human corporations” run by AI, but the firms would actually require human involvement.

Milei described in a Financial Times op-ed piece a new type of company that could run without human employees, in which AI agents or robots would “exercise independent judgment in unpredictable environments.”

First to pass law

Argentina would become the first country to pass legislation creating a category for companies run by AI, several legal experts said.

“We are open for business,” Milei declared, sparking criticism from Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, who warned giving AI too much power may reduce corporate accountability.

But the reality is less revolutionary, corporate attorneys said. The “automated company” introduced in the proposed reform, part of a comprehensive bill seeking to modernise and cut bureaucracy in corporate law, would be required to have a human administrator to oversee operations.

The company would be liable for damages caused by AI or algorithmic systems, the bill states. A representative for the office of the Presidential spokesperson said that there are currently no companies or commitments of investment that are connected to the bill.

Something innovative

“What is happening is that we are proposing something innovative, aimed at making Argentina an attractive jurisdiction for the establishment of automated companies,” the representative said in a statement. “This project is key to creating better conditions for attracting investment.” Milei, who brought inflation down sharply and sought to attract foreign investors with sops, has repeatedly pitched Argentina as a future AI hub, highlighting Patagonia’s cold weather and energy supply as ideal for data centres.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION INTENSITY (GEI) TARGETS

Why it matters

The Centre has once again issued a draft notification to set greenhouse gas emission intensity (GEI) targets for the intensive iron and steel sector and to align them under India’s carbon credit trading scheme (CCTS). The Centre has already finalised emission reduction targets for eight sectors – aluminium, cement, chlor-alkali, pulp and paper, secondary aluminium, petroleum refinery, petrochemical and textile. Let’s understand what is meant by greenhouse gases emissions intensity?

**Core Concept:**

— GHGs are gases that trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to the “greenhouse effect” that raises surface temperature on Earth.

— The five most abundant GHGs in the atmosphere are water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and ozone. Other GHGs include synthetic fluorinated gases such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs).

— GEI is the amount of greenhouse gases (GHG) emitted per unit of product output, such as the quantum of gases released while producing cement.

Why is it important to have the GEI targets?

— The introduction of industry-specific targets is crucial to meet India’s climate goals. The ultimate objective is to push industries towards a low-carbon growth trajectory through reduction, removal or avoidance of GHG emissions.

India’s climate targets for the year 2035

On March 25, India revealed its revised nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) for 2035. India said it would ensure that at least 60% of its electricity installed capacity in 2035 was based on non-fossil fuel sources, up from the 50% target it had set for 2030.

It has promised to attain at least a 47% reduction in emissions intensity, or emissions per unit of GDP, on 2005 levels, which is two percentage points more than its current target of 45% for 2030. It has also promised to create a carbon sink that is at least 3.5 to 4 billion tonnes of CO₂-equivalent larger than what existed in 2005.

Carbon Credit Trading Scheme

— GEI Target puts in place a compliance mechanism for the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023 (CCTS). The CCTS was launched to create a framework for the trading of carbon credits, to facilitate the reduction of emissions in energy intensive industries, and to support India’s climate commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015.

— The CCTS established a framework for generating, trading, and using carbon credit certificates. With the introduction of the GEI targets, industries will know what exactly to achieve in order to earn carbon credits.

— Industries will be issued carbon credits for cutting emissions intensity, which they can trade on India’s carbon market. Industries that fail to meet their obligations under the carbon trading scheme would have to buy credits to meet their compliance shortfall, or be penalised by the Central Pollution Control Board, as per the Rules.

— Carbon credits are traded through the Indian Carbon Market platform, with oversight of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency under the Union Ministry of Power. Similar carbon credit markets have been operational elsewhere in the world — in Europe and China since 2005 and 2021 respectively.



WILL EL NIÑO WEAKEN INDIA'S ECONOMY?

The story so far:

After the first month of this year's monsoon ended in a massive 40% deficit, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast that rainfall in July will also be "below normal" or less than 94% of what is usual for the month. "Below-normal rainfall can pose significant challenges for agriculture, water resources, hydropower generation, ecosystem sustainability, and drinking water availability," the agency warned. The outlook for July comes on the back of weak rainfall in June. This comes weeks after Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan sounded the alarm, warning about the impact of a potential 'super' El Niño.

How could a poor monsoon damage India's economy?

A poor monsoon can damage the economy in three ways: it affects agricultural output, reducing the sector's contribution to the economy; it hits rural income, denting aggregate demand; and it threatens to push up food prices, causing inflation.

India came into this kharif season from a position of strength — foodgrain output in 2024-25 jumped to 357.73 million metric tonnes, up 25.43 MMT from the previous year. A weak monsoon now puts that momentum at risk.

In a report, CRISIL notes that while paddy acreage is expected to expand in Punjab, Haryana and Bihar, maize acreage is expected to decline as farmers shift towards more remunerative crops. Farmers might also prefer pulses because of lower cultivation costs and water requirements, and may choose not to plant vegetables at all. Irrigation, MSP, procurement support and market conditions also factor in the decision-making process.

This could trigger food and beverage inflation. In its June bulletin, the Reserve Bank of India warned: "An adverse south-west monsoon, if materialised, may weigh on the domestic growth-inflation outlook."

The report noted that daily price data up to June 18 showed food inflation continued to rise and the prices of edible oils, potatoes, onions and tomatoes edged up. A weak monsoon will only push them higher.

Agriculture accounts for only one-fifth of India's Gross Value Added (GVA) but employs 46% of the workforce and supports nearly 55% of the population. "It will have a direct impact on the lives of people," said Prof. R. Ramakumar, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Prof. Bharat Ramaswami, Department of Economics, Ashoka University, believes farm incomes could fall by up to 10%. "The rural non-farm sector consists mostly of non-traded services such as construction. These sectors contract when agriculture is adversely affected. Industries that depend on rural demand will be affected," he said.

This stress moves into the wider economy. Automobile sales are a reliable early signal; two-wheelers and tractors are among the first sectors to feel the squeeze, followed by real estate in smaller towns and cities. Kotak Mutual Fund, in a blog, has noted that a combined El Niño-plus-drought scenario may shave 20–65 basis points off GDP growth.

Compounding the pressure are pests and fertilizer supply constraints caused by the Iran war.



The Union Cabinet approved a ₹41,533 crore Nutrient-Based Subsidy for Phosphatic and Potassic fertilisers for the kharif season, covering 28 grades. If output still falls short, the government will have to release buffer stocks and import commodities, widening the Current Account Deficit and putting pressure on the rupee.

India's agri-exports face a threat too. "Agriculture exports have clocked a CAGR of 8.2% between fiscals 2020 and 2025, contributing 12% to India's core exports," said Dipti Deshpande, Principal Economist, CRISIL.

How did El Niño impact the economy?

Several of India's worst droughts fell in El Niño years — 1972, 1982, 2009, and 2015. "In the 11 instances of below-normal or deficient monsoon performance at an all-India level since 2000, six were classified as El Niño years by the IMD. Of these, five saw deficient rainfall," Ms. Deshpande said.

The 2009 and 2015 failures illustrate the different impact poor monsoons can have on the economy. "Two subsequent years of rainfall stress and all-India average irrigation cover less than 45%, caused agriculture output to suffer — crop GVA contracted 2.5% and 3.2% in fiscals 2009 and 2010, respectively. Inflation was in double digits," she said.

El Niño conditions moved from weak to strong in 2014 and 2015, and both years saw monsoon disruptions. Crop GVA contracted, but the impact on inflation was different.

Unlike 2009, when food inflation spiked, inflation was rather muted in 2015 due to proactive food management, restrained MSP hikes, and a global commodity price slump, which kept inflation muted despite the monsoon failure, Ms. Deshpande noted.

Can India 'drought-proof' the economy?

Mr. Chouhan's presser raised an important data point: 315 districts are vulnerable to a poor monsoon, of which 111 across 12 States are of primary concern due to poor irrigation facilities.

On July 2, storage levels across the 166 reservoirs monitored by the Central Water Commission stood at 47.725 BCM, against 78.077 BCM in the corresponding period last year, and below the normal storage of 48.402 BCM for this time of year. While the system can provide water to meet requirements, a poor monsoon could strain it.

"A second successive bad weather will be more damaging," Prof. Ramaswami said, adding that irrigation is crucial in adapting to water stress due to climate change.

India needs to 'drought-proof' its economy, said Prof. Ramakumar. He said the country must move from crop insurance to ex-ante risk reduction. "We need to pay attention to policies and interventions that reduce risk itself. That requires public investment, and that's lacking," he said. He added that India needs enough drought-resistant, high-yielding crops, and that farmers must have access to them. "We have not invested adequately in any of these, and hence our disaster preparedness is very poor," he said.



CREDIT-DEPOSIT GAP

Why it matters

Credit growth has picked up over the past few months, but banks have struggled to grow their deposit base to match it. Growth in current account and savings account (CASA) deposits has particularly slowed, with retail investors now having a range of avenues to put their savings in, such as stocks and mutual funds. In this context, why is the mismatch in growth of credit and deposit a matter of concern?

Core Concept:

— CASA deposits are low-cost for banks and are used to fund loans, the major source of revenue. They are considered a reliable and “sticky” source of funds for banks due to low churn, as such depositors aren’t likely to shift this money to other banks easily.

— The greater the CASA book, the higher their net interest margins tend to be. However, the shift away from low cost deposits makes banks more sensitive to interest rate movements.

— Due to this mismatch in growth, the gap between credit and deposit growth has widened from 1.8 percentage points in December to 5.4 percentage points as of June 15, according to data from the RBI. This has led to the credit-to-deposit ratio of banks — which is the percentage of a bank’s deposits deployed as loans — widening to 82.5% as of June 15 from around 75% in mid-2025.

— As CASA deposits have slowed, banks have shifted to other sources of funds such as term deposits and CDs.

Do you Know?

Term deposits refer to financial instruments where one locks in their money for a particular tenure to earn interest in return. This includes retail options such as fixed and recurring deposits. A CD is a type of term deposit used by corporates and institutions to raise money through the money markets.

— High credit-to-deposit ratio of banks is a matter of concern because CASA deposits have always been a reliable funding source for banks due to their low cost (around 3-4% interest rate) and “stickiness”. Term deposits and CDs, on the other hand, are much higher-cost (7-8% interest rate) options that ultimately squeeze the margins of banks.

— Thus, while banks have found shorter-term funding solutions as CASA growth has dried up, the over-reliance on such temporary fixes is a double-edged sword.

— Although it helps manage liquidity and fund the booming credit growth for now, a hike in interest rates by the RBI or an external crisis may hit the sector hard if CASA growth is not rejuvenated.

Debt-to-GDP ratio

— The debt-to-GDP ratio is a metric that compares a country’s public debt to its gross domestic product (GDP).

— The Centre has projected the debt-to-GDP ratio to decline to 50±1% by March 2031 from an estimated 56.1% in March 2026.



WILL RECORD FPI INDIAN BOND FLOWS BE SUSTAINABLE?

The overall inflow of foreign investor money into India's bond market crossed a record ₹55,518 crore in June. Experts, however, aired concerns over sustainability of the momentum as the macroeconomic climate had not turned fully conducive.

In early June, the Centre waived Long Term Capital Gains (LTCG) tax on foreign investment in bonds. The RBI and the Centre further expanded the Fully Accessible Route (FAR) to include new long-term Government Securities with 15-year, 30-year, and 40-year tenors, as well as Sovereign Green Bonds

The steps came in the backdrop of net outflow of foreign funds from Indian capital markets and a constantly depreciating rupee.

"The reforms are poised to attract long-term institutional investors such as pension funds, insurance companies and sovereign wealth funds, leading to more stable and sustained capital inflows.

The question of whether tax cuts can deliver more inflows is a topic of debate among economists and financial analysts. "Tax tweaks can serve as a catalyst but rarely override core fundamentals like policy consistency and external conditions. India's progressive liberalisation through the FAR has often mattered more. While taxation was a constraint — especially for debt— it was secondary," said Lekha Chakraborty, Professor, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP).

The inflows, however, did come and they were across the bond market. FPI investment under general limit debt securities, which contains both corporate bonds and government securities, came in at ₹55,518 crore in June 2026.

Investments under the FAR were the highest since September 2024 when it was introduced. FAR recorded an inflow of ₹21,652 crore in June 2026. Put together, they more than compensated for the significant outflow of ₹49,340 crore from equities.

Many factors at play

"Overall, June has been a positive month for the bond market. The easing of geopolitical concerns surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, expectations of India's possible inclusion in the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Bond Index and improving market sentiment on RBI's recent policy steps have all supported investor confidence and foreign investor interest," Mr. Srinivasan continued.

The sustainability of the inflows, which the tax cut was aiming at, cannot be definitely guaranteed as the underlying economic data doesn't suggest that things have changed completely positively for the debt investors.

In all, bond market experts and economists, while certain the inflows cannot be directly attributed to the tax cut, do not discount the benefits of such a move.

Benefits of the tax cut

Benefits of the tax cut include 'diversifying inflows away from equities, deepening debt markets, and supporting external balances,' while fundamentals dominate in determining flows, said Ms. Chakraborty.



However, others in the policy-making space are more careful in evaluating the utility of cutting taxes to bring in capital market investments. Former Finance Secretary S.C. Garg said the move did not have much of a deeper policy thought and was 'more a desperate attempt at bringing in foreign exchange.'

"If you have to try something to get forex and there is no measure available for FDI or FPI in equity, you end up going for FCNR B and government securities," he said.

Now that the tax policy constraint on foreign investment into Indian debt securities has been removed, attention would shift to the macroeconomic climate which would have to be as lucrative for investors to show the same level of interest in bonds as it did in June 2026.

HOW INDIA'S LIFE INSURANCE SECTOR FUNDS GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE

When the government borrows, the question that follows is rarely asked aloud: who lends? A large part of the answer is the life insurance sector. Every year, millions of households across India pay premiums into life insurance policies. That money is reinvested, for decades, in the very securities that finance government expenditure — roads, railways, water supplies, hospitals, defence. The household protecting itself against the loss of its breadwinner is simultaneously, and unknowingly, lending to the sovereign [the Central government]. Life insurers collectively hold close to a quarter of India's outstanding central government dated securities, based on RBI and IRDAI data — a share that has remained stable even as the total sovereign debt stock expanded by around 40 per cent in three years. This is not a number that appears in budget speeches or parliamentary debates. It is, however, a number that matters.

Patient capital in a volatile world

The stoic and resilient quality of the sector's sovereign support is as significant as its scale. Life insurers write policies with tenures of twenty, thirty, sometimes forty years. Government securities are the natural habitat of long-duration liabilities — the only asset class that absorbs this scale of funds at matching tenures without distorting the market. Unlike foreign portfolio investors, whose appetite fluctuates with global risk sentiment, insurance companies buy and hold. They do not exit when oil prices rise or when a geopolitical event triggers a reassessment of emerging market exposure. Their participation is counter-cyclical by design — stable precisely when other buyers become unreliable. A steady domestic base of long-horizon holders reduces rollover risk and moderates borrowing costs across the maturity spectrum.

Life insurers buy when others sell, hold when others exit, and reinvest when others pause. That is the structural consequence of writing long-duration promises to millions of policyholders.

The heavyweight within the sector

The sector's contribution is not evenly distributed. The Life Insurance Corporation of India carries the dominant share — a consequence of its scale, its predominantly participating product mix, and the duration of its in-force book. Its March 2025 regulatory filing with IRDAI (Form L-26) confirms that sovereign paper accounts for nearly 63 per cent of its non-linked policyholder corpus — well above the regulatory minimum, and a direct expression of what long-duration liabilities demand at scale.

LIC holds approximately 19 per cent of all outstanding central government dated securities — a figure confirmed by the RBI's Public Debt Management Quarterly Report for FY24, the most



recently published data. LIC's IRDAI regulatory filings for March 2025 give the institutional reality in absolute terms: ₹20.2 lakh crore in central government securities alone, and ₹32.3 lakh crore in total government and government-guaranteed securities across all funds. These are not estimates. They are figures LIC files with its regulator every quarter and that any researcher can access on the IRDAI website. This makes LIC the single largest institutional holder of Indian government's debt.

Private life insurers, with a higher proportion of unit-linked and shorter-tenure products, contribute a smaller fraction today. As they grow and deepen their traditional offerings, their sovereign allocations will follow the same structural logic.

The regulator has already recognised the systemic dimension of this function: IRDAI designates LIC as a Domestic Systemically Important Insurer every year, describing it as an institution whose distress would cause significant dislocation in the financial system. That designation, rightly made on insurance-sector grounds, points toward a wider truth — the dislocation would extend into the sovereign borrowing programme itself.

Insurers in Japan, the United Kingdom, and South Korea are among the largest holders of their respective governments' long-dated securities, not because regulation mandates it but because their liability profiles demand it. India's life insurance sector is following the same path.

The fragility within the stability

India's life insurance penetration stood at 2.7 per cent of GDP in FY25, the third consecutive year of decline from a pandemic-era peak of 3.2 per cent, against a global life average of 3.0 per cent. Three regulatory interventions between 2023 and 2024 — restructured distribution economics, taxation on certain high-value policies, and mandatory product repricing, simultaneously, has compressed new businesses. While each was defensible in isolation, their cumulative effect was adverse. The sector is recovering. But the episode illustrates a risk worth noting: when multiple regulatory actions compress new business at once, the household savings that would otherwise have flowed into the sovereign debt market through insurance, reduce or find shorter-duration homes elsewhere. The sovereign borrowing programme may not notice this in the short term. Over a decade, it would.

The unacknowledged pillar

Banking commands policy attention in proportion to its systemic importance. Insurance, which quietly holds close to a quarter of outstanding central government dated securities, does not.

The case for deeper insurance penetration is most often made in the language of household financial protection — the uninsured family, the inadequate sum assured, a mis-sold product or an unsettled claim. These are legitimate concerns. But there is a parallel case, made in the language of sovereign fiscal stability, that has not been fully articulated in public policy discourse. If the reliability of India's domestic sovereign funding base is a macroeconomic priority given the scale of annual borrowing requirements, then the depth and health of the life insurance sector remain directly relevant to that priority.



WHY IS THE CENTRE REVISING THE NFSA?

The story so far:

On July 6, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay urged the Centre to retain the present provision of 35 kg of foodgrains per household per month under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) meant for the poorest of the poor, and not to make it a per capita system. The next day, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau voiced its concern and demanded that the proposed amendment to the entitlement criteria be dropped. About 10 days ago, immediately after the Union government made public its plan to amend the National Food Security Act (NFSA), Kerala's Food Minister Anoop Jacob expressed reservations over the move.

What is the amendment mooted?

On June 24, the Union Food and Public Distribution (F&PD) Department, while publishing a draft amendment Bill to the NFSA, said every person belonging to AAY households would be entitled to seven kg of foodgrains per month, subject to a maximum of 35 kg per household per month. At present, the entitlement is for the entire household with a ceiling of 35 kg per month. The proposed amendment covers the first proviso to sub-section (1) of Section 3 (Right to receive foodgrains at subsidised prices by persons belonging to eligible households) of the Act.

Why is the change being proposed?

The existing household-based entitlement, though intended as a protective measure for the most vulnerable families, results in significant inequities depending upon the size of the household, according to the F&PD Department. Smaller households receive a higher per-capita entitlement, whereas larger households receive a lower per-capita entitlement, which may fall below the entitlement available to priority households.

The aim and purpose are to remove intra-category inequities, provide for more rational foodgrain allocation, and better align entitlements with nutritional requirements, a note prepared by the department said.

However, the proposed amendment does not seek to address the inclusion of ineligible persons as beneficiaries, a problem that persists at the State level.

What is the story behind the two southern States' opposition?

It is not for the first time that the two States are articulating their opposition to matters concerning the food policy, as their contemporary political history has an important ingredient — the politics of food. Kerala, which has a long history of the public distribution system (PDS) dating back to the now-abolished princely State of Travancore, introduced informal food distribution mechanisms to mitigate the food shortage of the poor and vulnerable, and was perhaps the first to launch a formal PDS in 1962, three years before the establishment of the Food Corporation of India (FCI). At least on two occasions — 1952 and 1967 — Tamil Nadu saw political upsets, the incumbent regime getting reduced to a minority in 1952 and being shown the door (in 1967). The reason was that the governments of the periods in question were not being swift in handling the rice shortage. Since 1967, successive Chief Ministers of the State have been cautious in taking decisions with regard to the subject of rice.



It was no wonder that the two States were vociferous in their stand in the run-up to the formulation of the NFSA. Though the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) took charge in 2011 in Kerala, the government did not agree to the implementation of the 2013 law — an Act of Parliament — despite the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance regime at the Centre pushing the legislation. The main reservation it had was that the NFSA would lead to the removal of a “large number of poor families” from the list of beneficiaries and put an “enormous financial burden” on the State. However, the then Chief Minister, Oommen Chandy, at one point in time, committed himself to the enforcement of the law in his State, though it was left to his successor, Pinarayi Vijayan, to take the formal decision.

In Tamil Nadu, Jayalalithaa, as Chief Minister, virulently opposed the law because immediately after she came to power in May 2011, her government started the distribution of rice, free to all the ration cardholders, regardless of their economic status. She had criticised the government for stating that those who would be left out of the NFSA would not be eligible to receive free rice. Eventually, she extracted a major concession from the Union government that the existing allocations, as they stood in 2013, for all the States would be legally safeguarded.

Hence, it was no surprise that the two southern neighbours joined the rest of the country in November 2016 in implementing the law.

Why are Tamil Nadu and Kerala opposing the amendment to NFSA?

Explaining how Kerala would be affected by the latest move, Mr. Jacob has pointed out that States such as his, characterised by nuclear families, will be at a disadvantage as there will be a reduction in the quantity of free foodgrains for families with fewer than five members. He has recalled that even in 2013, when the law took effect, his State took the stand that the AAY cardholders deserved “special consideration,” a position that it continues. “As a consumption State, any cut in Kerala’s allocation is a matter of concern,” Mr. Jacob stated.

Mr. Vijay, who referred in his letter to Mr. Modi about how the amendment would cause a fall in the monthly allocation of foodgrains from 65,261 tonnes to 42,040 tonnes, stated that the number of AAY cardholders below the family size of five members is 15.75 lakh (out of a total of 18.64 lakhs), covering 58.51 lakh beneficiaries (total: 69.27 lakhs). “Rice provided to the AAY cardholders is a staple ingredient of all three meals of the day and cannot be substituted with any other commodity from the open market, resulting in substantial out of pocket expenses,” he said.

Besides, Anuradha Talwar, a functionary of the Right to Food Campaign, said that the amendment would bring a “North-South divide” in foodgrain allocation, as families in northern States would get higher allocations as their average family size was bigger than that of the southern States.

What is the way forward?

Ideally, such a change should have been subjected to greater public scrutiny to arrive at a consensus. However, T. Sadagopan, president, Tamil Nadu Progressive Consumer Centre and veteran activist who served on the State government’s panels on food, suggests that the Centre chalk out a middle path by making the allocation of 30 kg per family, irrespective of family members. This would help the Union government to cut down its subsidy bill.

**REVAMPED EPFO PORTAL: CENTRALISED DATABASE, WITH EASIER CLAIM FILING & INFO ACCESS**

As the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), India's retirement fund body, rolls out a revamped portal, members will be able to access all their details on a unified portal along with faster auto-crediting of interest by July 15.

Key Takeaways:

- One of the most important features of the Centralised IT Enabled Services (CITES) project under the EPFO 2.01 initiative is the move towards a centralised database. It follows the merger of information from all regional centres, which will allow members to resolve their issues at any regional EPF office and not necessarily in their city of employment, where Provident Fund deductions may have happened.
- "The EPFO has completed the process of migrating its entire database of member records to the new centralised database. Earlier, the services were tied to a particular Regional Office. Now, a member's service request can be processed from any authorised location across the country," the Ministry of Labour and Employment said in a statement on Wednesday (July 8).
- The new portal enables automated processes, including crediting of interest, online processing of claims verification, and a facility to view the eligible amount for withdrawals under various claim categories.
- A centralised database is a significant measure that will help employees who migrate for work and also the PF members who struggle to find solutions at a particular regional office, as has happened in the past. For instance, if an employee has worked in Chennai and moves back to their hometown in West Bengal, they can access their records and resolve any issues at the EPFO office in West Bengal instead of travelling to the Chennai office.
- The new portal will also help expedite the annual interest crediting process by July 15, which would earlier get delayed to October-November. Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday said the annual interest of Rs 1.44 lakh crore for financial year 2025-26 will be auto-processed on the new portal and verified by field authorities before being credited to 34 crore EPF accounts by July 15. The EPFO has nearly 8 crore contributing members.

Do You Know:

- In October 2025, the EPFO announced a slew of changes to its withdrawal norms by streamlining the withdrawal categories from 13 to three — essential needs (illness, education, marriage); housing needs; and special circumstances, along with an introduction of a minimum balance of 25%.
- The new EPF Scheme, 2026 incorporates those changes by allowing members to withdraw funds in case of illness of self and family members, up to 100% of the eligible member balance, after completion of 12 months of total membership of the Fund. The 100% eligible member balance means withdrawal of 75% of the total funds as 25% is mandatory minimum balance requirement. The full 100% amount can be withdrawn after remaining unemployed for one year.
- The rate of contribution remains the same from the previous scheme at 12% and 10% for certain notified establishments. As per the existing scheme, the rate of contribution is mandatory till the



wage ceiling. The EPF Scheme, 2026 requires provident fund contributions at 12% of wages from both the employer and employee and specifically provides that where wages exceed the statutory wage ceiling, mandatory contributions will be restricted on the wage ceiling amount. Gupta said. "Employees may, however, opt to make voluntary contributions either on wages exceeding the statutory wage ceiling or at a rate higher than the prescribed 12%. Employers also have the option to make matching contributions against such voluntary contributions," he added.

WHAT NEW NPS WITHDRAWAL RULES MEAN FOR RETIREMENT

For years, the one persistent complaint about the National Pension System (NPS) was its rigidity at exit. You built a retirement corpus over 20-30 years and at 60, the rulebook decided you couldn't simply walk away with it. A large chunk had to go into an annuity. That has now changed. Let us understand what's on the table.

What changed

In December 2025, PFRDA substantially amended NPS exit/withdrawal norms. The mandatory annuity portion has come down from 40% to 20% of corpus viz subscribers can withdraw up to 80% as lump sum against 60% earlier. For smaller corpus, the rules are more generous. If accumulated NPS wealth is up to ₹8 lakh, you can withdraw the entire amount as lump sum. For ₹8-12 lakh, you can take out up to ₹6 lakh with the balance routed into structured withdrawal or annuity. Above ₹12 lakh, the 80:20 split applies.

However, there's a tax issue here. Section 10(12A) of the Income Tax Act exempts only 60% of withdrawn corpus. The additional 20% PFRDA permits you to withdraw, gets taxed at a slab rate unless the tax law catches up with the new pension norms. So, the extra liquidity is real, but plan for tax bill on the incremental 20% rather than assuming it's tax-free

Retirement planning

The practical upshot is, NPS now gives you more control on the day you stop earning salary. Earlier, a large slice of money was locked into an annuity that paid a modest return, with limited say in how it was structured. Now, you can keep much bigger share of corpus working for you in instruments and at a pace you choose. That's particularly useful if you already have other income sources at retirement or want to deploy a chunk into something more efficient, like paying off a loan.

The flip side is this freedom shifts the responsibility for managing market and longevity risk back onto you. The new system trusts you to manage a larger pool of money sensibly over a 20-25-year retirement. It needs more care.

RIS, variants

This is where PFRDA's newer reform comes in - the Retirement Income Scheme or RIS. Until recently, if you didn't want to take lump sum at once, the main alternative was to defer withdrawal and take it out once a year which wasn't particularly useful for someone who needs monthly income to live on.

RIS addresses that gap. It applies to the non-annuity portion of corpus and lets you draw it down gradually instead of taking it in one shot while the balance stays invested and continues to earn market-linked returns. Within RIS, you choose between two payout methods. One is Systematic



Lump Sum Withdrawal or SLW, where you withdraw a fixed amount at a chosen frequency - monthly, quarterly, half-yearly or annually - until age 75 (now 85 in some cases). So it will run until the corpus runs out. The other is Systematic Unit Redemption or SUR where you redeem a set number of units at each interval so the payout itself varies with the prevailing NAV. Either way money stays within NPS, continues compounding and pays on schedule you set.

MF SWP

RIS is structurally very close to a Systematic Withdrawal Plan of mutual fund (MF). In both cases, you leave money invested and withdraw defined amount periodically rather than redeeming all at once.

A MF SWP gives wider choice of schemes and you can switch funds/change withdrawal amount with no curbs on moving money. RIS is more limited in fund choice and governed by PFRDA's process and timelines which means somewhat less flexibility.

NPS has historically run at a fraction of the cost MFs charge so the expense drag on retirement corpus is lower under RIS. MF SWP withdrawals are taxed as capital gains while RIS withdrawals sit within NPS tax framework where 60% is exempt and rest is taxed.

Neither is really better. If cost efficiency and staying in a regulated pension structure matter more, RIS fits. For wider choice of underlying funds and ability to move quickly between them, MF SWPs give that.

For the average subscriber, NPS treats retirement money the way most actually need it treated - accessible sans being reckless and flexible sans being chaotic. The combination of higher lump sum limit, slab-based withdrawal for smaller corpus and RIS as a built-in drawdown mechanism gives mass investors real choices at 60. The main thing to observe is discipline: more access to money is useful if you don't withdraw faster than retirement actually needs.

OLD WINE, NEW BOTTLE

EPFO's recent changes signal continuity, not radical reform

The Union Labour and Employment Ministry's notification of fresh rules for the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), and Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) is a procedural formality following the enforcement of the Code on Social Security, 2020, since November last year. Four months ago, the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) approved the implementation of social security measures framed as a sequel to the Code that subsumes nine laws, including the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, and the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952. With around eight crore subscribers, changes to the PF legal framework have wide implications for members and their families. Viewed from this angle, the notification signalled continuity and sought to make the framework align with the Code. Even the feature of PF contributions being made voluntary in excess of the statutory wage ceiling of ₹15,000 is not new. The practice of allowing contributions up to 12% of the basic pay, regardless of the wage ceiling, was the norm till the COVID-19 pandemic hit. It was only then that many establishments, while experiencing the shortage of funds, had begun limiting their contributions to the wage ceiling. However, pensioners and members had hoped that the notification would revise the minimum monthly pension of ₹1,000 and the monthly wage ceiling for contribution to the PF beyond ₹15,000, both of which were determined 12 years ago. But they have been left

4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



disappointed. According to the EPFO's 2024-25 annual report, about 36.8 lakh of its 81.5 lakh pensioners receive a monthly pension of ₹1,000 or less.

Yet, the government has taken no decision on either issue despite repeated demands from pensioners and other stakeholders. Even if financial implications are a concern, the government's grant-in-aid for the minimum pension, benefiting about 20.6 lakh pensioners, is only around ₹1,000 crore annually. Of the government's outlay of ₹11,000-odd crore towards the EPS for the current year, most of its provision goes for the component of its contribution at 1.16% of the monthly pay (limited to the wage ceiling of ₹15,000) of EPS members. The government should restore the applicability of the EPS to all workers, regardless of pay. If the government feels that the EPFO is getting overburdened with its work, it can formulate a tailored scheme with the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. Efforts to expedite and simplify claim settlements should continue. The government must remember that substantive EPFO decisions affect crores of employees.

WHAT DOES THE LIFTING OF GAS CURBS MEAN?

The story so far:

On July 4, 2026, the government lifted emergency curbs it had imposed on the supply of natural gas during the West Asia crisis in March. It cited "ceasefire and negotiations" and the resumption of "sea traffic through the Strait of Hormuz" to restore gas supplies to fertilizer plants, refineries, distributors and industrial users. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, in a notification, amended the Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026, and omitted provisions that had prioritised sale of domestically produced natural gas and imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) as per a priority list released by the government during the U.S.-Israel war on Iran.

On March 12, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri told Parliament about the "immediate priority sequence". "Domestic piped gas to homes and CNG for vehicles receive 100% supply with no cuts. Industrial and manufacturing consumers will receive up to 80% of their previous six-month average. Fertilizer plants will receive up to 70%, protecting the agricultural input chain ahead of the sowing season. Refineries and petrochemical units absorb a managed reduction, with that gas redirected to higher-priority sectors," he had said.

Which sectors will benefit?

The latest measure follows a series of steps the government has taken to ease the supply of gas in the wake of an improved supply situation. On June 25, it restored the supply of industrial and commercial LPG to the pre-West Asia crisis levels.

The move is expected to benefit the refineries, city gas distributors, and industries such as ceramic. These sectors need reliable supply of natural gas at affordable rates.

When the West Asia crisis peaked in March, ceramic manufacturing units based in Gujarat's Morbi bore the brunt with reports indicating that 600 factories and 4 lakh workers were affected amid a shortage of propane and natural gas, both used in the production of ceramic.

**Which sector uses LNG the most?**

Fertilizer plants are known to consume a bulk of India's LNG. In an earlier interaction with The Hindu in March, Mr. Vasishth had said, "A little less than 30% of natural gas use goes into making fertilizers, while power plants account for 13% and city gas distribution 21%."

Urea, which has around 46% of nitrogen, is the most common nitrogen fertilizer. It is produced by converting natural gas (methane) into ammonia and then combining it with carbon dioxide. The energy-dependent process, hence, makes LNG a crucial ingredient of the product.

What should be the next step?

India has been diversifying its energy sources. As Mr. Puri put it in a recent blog post, "The widening of our crude basket from 27 countries to 41, the doubling of our import terminals, and the pipelines and reserves built across a decade under Prime Minister Modi were not abstractions when the Strait finally closed; they were the very reason the lights stayed on."

The road ahead now is one of capacity building. As Mr. Puri wrote, "Learning from this experience, we will build additional capabilities to strengthen our energy resilience..."

EXPLAINED: CAN THE ED ATTACH A FIRM'S ASSETS AFTER IT ENTERS INSOLVENCY?**The story so far:**

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has held that the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) moratorium cannot shield assets alleged to be "proceeds of crime" from attachment under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The ruling came in a case concerning Siddhi Vinayak Logistics Ltd., where the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had attached assets despite the company entering insolvency proceedings. "Parliament did not legislate IBC with an intent to create a holy Ganges out of the IBC to wash the corporate debtor of its sin of criminality under the PMLA", the Principal bench of the NCLAT observed on June 30.

What is the issue?

The case arose from proceedings against Siddhi Vinayak Logistics Ltd., whose promoters were accused of bank fraud, forgery, criminal conspiracy and diversion of loan funds exceeding ₹1,600 crore.

The ED initiated proceedings under the PMLA and provisionally attached the company's assets in 2017. A few months later, the company entered the Corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP), triggering moratorium under section 14 of the IBC.

The moratorium in terms of IBC is described as a period wherein no judicial proceedings for recovery, enforcement of security interest, sale or transfer of assets, or termination of essential contracts can be instituted or continued against the Corporate Debtor. The main purpose of declaring the moratorium is to keep the Corporate Debtor's assets intact during the CIRP, which otherwise may be attached by any competent court of law during the pendency of proceedings against the Corporate Debtor.



During the moratorium, the ED withdrew ₹2.29 crore from one of the company's bank accounts. In 2019, while liquidation proceedings were under way and provisionally attached more than 6,000 vehicles belonging to the firm. The liquidator challenged these actions before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), arguing that they violated the IBC moratorium by reducing the assets available for creditors. After the NCLT rejected the plea, the matter reached the Appellate tribunal, NCLAT.

IBC, PMLA conflict?

The dispute lies at the intersection of two laws with different objectives.

The IBC seeks to resolve corporate insolvency by preserving a firm's assets and ensuring the creditors recover dues in an orderly manner. To facilitate this, Section 14 imposes a moratorium that generally bars proceedings and recovery actions against the corporate debtor once insolvency proceedings begin.

The PMLA, on the other hand, empowers the Enforcement Directorate to identify, attach and eventually confiscate the assets alleged to be the "proceeds of crime".

The legal question before the tribunal was whether the protection available under the IBC moratorium extends to assets that are simultaneously the subject of proceedings under the PMLA.

Ruling, importance

The tribunal described the dispute as one between the IBC and the PMLA rather than between the liquidator and the ED, holding that the two statutes operate in distinct fields.

It held that the IBC was enacted to maximise value for creditors through the sale of a company's legitimate assets and was not intended to legitimise wealth allegedly derived from criminal activity.

The moratorium under Section 14, therefore, protects only legitimately acquired assets and does not extend to assets alleged to be proceeds of crime under the PMLA.

The tribunal observed that while creditors routinely accept reduced recoveries during insolvency proceedings, the national interest underlying the PMLA cannot be compromised. It remarked Parliament did not enact the IBC to create a "holy Ganges" capable of washing away a corporate debtor's alleged criminality or legitimising "ill-gotten wealth".

The tribunal held that insolvency tribunals cannot examine the validity of attachment orders passed under the PMLA.

Relying on the Supreme Court's decision in Embassy Property Developments Pvt. Ltd. v. State of Karnataka, it held that any challenge to such actions must be pursued through the adjudicatory mechanism established under the PMLA.

Approach special courts

It also referred to a 2025 circular issued by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India advising insolvency professionals to approach the Special Court under the PMLA for restitution of attached assets.



The judgment clarifies that insolvency proceedings cannot be used to prevent the ED from attaching or retaining assets alleged to be proceeds of crime.

THINK TANK CSDS LIKELY TO FACE FUNDING CUTS FROM CENTRE

The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), established in 1963 and one of the premier social science research centres in the country, faces deep funding cuts from the government which could cast a cloud over its viability, The Indian Express has learned.

Key Takeaways:

- This action follows CSDS professor Sanjay Kumar flagging discrepancies in voter data in Maharashtra which Kumar himself later said was a mis-reading and apologised for it.

Another think tank, Centre for Policy Research, had to considerably whittle down its operations following an Income Tax probe and the cancellation of its foreign funding licence two years ago.

CSDS faces the prospect of losing its grants from Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), an organisation under the aegis of the Ministry of Education whose grants accounts for over 83% of its income.

- Sources said CSDS may also lose its status as an institution receiving ICSSR grants — called “grants-in-aid” — after a three-member probe committee, submitted a report that makes a slew of allegations regarding the centre’s functioning.
- The committee, constituted by the ICSSR, includes a former UGC secretary, a former government auditor and a former pro Vice-Chancellor of a Central university.

Their report submitted to the ICSSR is learnt to have alleged “irregularities”: academic appointments in violation of UGC regulations, requisite qualifications; processing of financial matters without complying with General Financial Rules; and appointment of non-academic staff without public advertisement.

- It has recommended that ICSSR take action against CSDS as per its “grants-in-aid” rules. This can mean suspension of grants, through which most of the salaries of the staff of CSDS are paid.
- ICSSR grants account for roughly 90% of the salary component at CSDS, apart from which it also gives allowances for research and some maintenance activities.

Do You Know:

- As per the unaudited ICSSR annual report 2024-25, the total income of CSDS was Rs 75.62 million that year, of which Rs 62.88 million came from the ICSSR: Rs. 57.88 million in salaries and allowances, and Rs 50 lakh under the heads research scheme/programme, non-salary.
- The CSDS, on its own, raised — from projects, fellowships and consultancy — Rs. 12.1 million in 2024-25. Thus, 83% of the total income of CSDS in 2024-25 was through ICSSR grants-in-aid.
- Last year, ICSSR withheld its grant to CSDS.
- The enquiry committee was set up after controversy erupted in August 2025 when CSDS professor Sanjay Kumar, in a post on X, said that the number of registered voters in Ramtek and Devlali in Maharashtra had gone down by 36-38 percent between the 2024 Lok Sabha elections



and the subsequent Maharashtra assembly elections. Subsequently, he apologised on X, saying that the research team had misread the data.

- Seizing on this, ICSSR sent a show-cause notice to CSDS, asking it to explain within seven days why the Grants in Aid to it, which is discretionary, should not be withdrawn, flagging multiple “irregularities”, including data manipulation and sharing it with the media, to “malign” the reputation of the Election Commission of India.
- The show cause notice also alleged faculty appointments in violation of UGC guidelines, an opaque method of appointment of directors, and not holding elections for the chairman of the governing body. It also said that House Rent allowance was paid to staff members who were staying in government accommodation of their spouses, and that annual accounts of CSDS were not submitted for audits to “hide” misuse of funds.
- A think tank is a research institute or organization that gathers experts to study complex problems—ranging from social policy and economics to foreign affairs and technology—and translates this data into actionable advice, policy recommendations, and solutions for governments and businesses.
- India’s most prominent think tanks shape policies on national security, economics, and international relations.

Major institutions include NITI Aayog, the government’s apex policy body; the Observer Research Foundation (New Delhi), focusing on foreign policy; and the Centre for Policy Research, known for economic and social research

E-RICKSHAW BATTERY ‘HACKS’ AND BLUETOOTH BMS VULNERABILITIES

The story so far:

Over the last week, social media has been flooded with videos depicting individuals using mobile applications such as BAT-BMS, Lossigy and Epoch-i-ion to wirelessly disable the batteries of e-rickshaws using Bluetooth. The videos have largely been shared as “pranks” — however cruel, unethical and unlawful they may be — while some have speculated that the applications were designed for high-tech sabotage by China’s manufacturers. The reality is far less dramatic, yet still worth understanding carefully.

as BAT-BMS are typically developed alongside the battery management system How are battery management systems diagnosed?

Applications such as BAT-BMS exist to allow fleet owners and service technicians to easily diagnose battery problems such as overvoltage or undervoltage. In most vehicles, battery management and diagnostics require physical access to the module and the use of a computer or other device to gather information.

Over time, manufacturers have begun equipping these modules with Bluetooth capabilities, making diagnostics and repairs easier without requiring extensive disassembly. Applications such as they support and are almost certainly not intended to sow chaos by disabling as many vehicles as possible. Instead, they search for specific devices advertising themselves as battery management modules over Bluetooth, connect to one device at a time, display diagnostic information, and provide basic debugging functions.



How are e-rickshaws built and why imported electronics matter?

The BAT-BMS application is specifically designed to discover and connect to Battery Management System (BMS) modules manufactured by a Chinese electronics company, Jiabaida. A seven-year-old public discussion on the open source code sharing platform GitHub documented a lack of authentication in Jiabaida BMS modules, with the author even providing a hacky workaround for this obvious security flaw.

Over time, this vulnerability appears to have been discovered and subsequently exploited by individuals who began popularising its misuse. In particular, some users circulated short-form “prank” videos demonstrating how it could be used to disable e-rickshaw batteries.

Almost all of the components that make up e-rickshaws are imported from China. In fact, one could order almost all the parts required to assemble one from consumer websites such as Alibaba Group or AliExpress. Of course, one could go even further and import a fully pre-assembled e-rickshaw from China through these platforms, though the shipping fees and Customs duties might eat into your margin. Most manufacturers import the electronic components required to assemble e-rickshaws from China, leaving only the fabrication and assembly of the aluminium frame and chassis to be done domestically.

When technology is blamed for system vulnerabilities

It appears that whenever something goes wrong, the government is quick enough to attribute blame to digital platforms. Telegram was ordered to be blocked during the re-NEET period, reportedly to protect individuals from fraudsters claiming to sell leaked examination question papers in advance. Similarly, following viral “prank” incidents, the government directed Google and Apple to remove several popular battery management apps from their respective app stores.

In both cases, the government has chosen to restrict access to applications rather than address the underlying issues in a meaningful way. While the two applications are fundamentally different — one being a widely used communication platform with social media features, and the other a set of utilities for diagnosing battery issues — the reasoning behind both decisions appears similar.

In essence, when a particular technology becomes associated with harm, restricting access to that technology is seen as a way to eliminate the harm itself.

Hypothetically, if the re-NEET examination were to be compromised, the breach would have to occur at the source or during transit — during question formulation, printing, or transport. The breach would not originate from, nor be enabled by, the Telegram platform itself. Blocking Telegram in this hypothetical scenario would only temporarily disrupt the sale of leaked question papers until sellers migrate to another platform of choice. Similarly, restricting battery management applications does not make vulnerable BMS modules any more secure. If anything, it might further inconvenience users who have been affected and are trying to restore functionality to their vehicles.

How should supply chain regulation be structured?

Contrary to popular belief, regulatory frameworks governing e-rickshaws do exist. Gazette notifications GSR 709(E) dated 8.10.2014 and S.O. 2590(E) dated 8.10.2014 define requirements related to overall dimensions, tyres, brakes, horns, and vehicle identification number standards, but do not provide detailed standards for electronic components.



Globally, as security risks become increasingly associated with the supply chains, various strategies have been adopted to address vulnerabilities before a product reaches the assembly line. These include vetting suppliers, auditing the firmware of electronic components, and tracing the origin and capabilities of individual parts. Such measures can be mandated through regulation. A simple Google search conducted seven years ago could have alerted e-rickshaw manufacturers to the security issues in the BMS modules they use.

Frameworks that establish standards, as well as responsibilities and liabilities for manufacturers, should ideally extend to all products containing electronic components, not just vehicles or specifically e-rickshaws. While sourcing parts from the cheapest available source might be suitable for building a quick prototype, the long-term production and marketing of products should require greater effort and due diligence than simply placing a few orders and setting up an assembly line.

INDIA'S EV TRANSITION CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE RETROFITMENT

The conflict in West Asia has once again reminded the world of an uncomfortable truth — severe energy dependency is a structural vulnerability, not a temporary inconvenience. For emerging economies such as India, which imports more than 85% of its crude oil requirements, such events can quickly test energy security and economic resilience.

Over the past decade, the government has placed enormous emphasis on transport-sector decarbonisation, with multiple schemes rolled out to support Electric Vehicles (EVs) and create long-term demand.

These efforts are beginning to show results, with EVs now accounting for 8.5% of total new vehicle sales in India in FY25-26. However, the transition is happening in new vehicle sales, while the existing pool of over 30 crore Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) vehicles on Indian roads continue to run entirely on imported petroleum.

That is where vehicle retrofitting enters the picture. It is the process of replacing a vehicle's engine, exhaust system, and related components with an electric battery pack, motor, and control systems to convert it into an EV.

The case for retrofitting is strongest when viewed through India's own cultural and economic lens. India has always valued repair, reuse, refurbishment, and life extension. Even when it comes to household appliances and electronics, the instinct has traditionally been to maximise utility before replacement. Retrofitment fits naturally within that ethos.

The logic is simple. Instead of forcing millions of functioning petrol two-wheelers into premature retirement, existing vehicles can be converted into EVs through certified retrofit kits. The chassis remains. The identity remains. The emotional connection remains. Only the powertrain changes.

Many middle-class households do not see a vehicle that still works as scrap merely because policy language categorises it as "old". In many cases, the structure is sound, the frame is usable, and the vehicle still has years of service left. What becomes burdensome is the rising fuel cost, maintenance pressure, and declining reliability of an ageing engine. Retrofitment addresses this gap.

It is cheaper, not just compared to buying a new EV, but also compared to purchasing a new ICE vehicle. More importantly, it democratises the EV transition for consumers who may otherwise



remain excluded from India's new-age electric market. So, retrofitment is more than a technical or economic solution. It is a social intervention. The environmental case is just as compelling. When functioning vehicles are discarded, the result is not merely lost utility, but also avoidable waste, disposal pressure, and resource intensity. Retrofitting extends the life of existing assets, reduces unnecessary scrappage, and supports a more circular mobility economy.

Moreover, a strong retrofit ecosystem can generate decentralised employment across technicians, service centres, electrical integration specialists, battery management services, software calibration, refurbishment supply chains, and rural mobility entrepreneurship. Unlike large centralised automotive manufacturing, retrofit ecosystems can scale through distributed employment models.

Scalable model

Globally, the idea is gaining traction. Countries across Europe are examining circular mobility models as part of their broader climate goals while Nepal has moved towards permitting and supporting retrofit solutions.

Support for retrofitment can be mainstreamed in India. The first Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme included retrofitment support, but it gradually disappeared from the conversation. Even so, some States have begun to acknowledge its potential.

Madhya Pradesh has taken steps toward building a more favourable ecosystem through upfront subsidies, a one-stop portal for subsidy access, and Statewide retrofitment agency registration instead of registrations via Regional Transport Offices (RTOs).

The market itself is maturing faster than the policy framework. Initial scepticism around legality, registration, insurance, safety, and reliability was understandable when the sector was nascent. But the ecosystem has evolved. Certified retrofit companies are now working alongside testing agencies, insurers, financiers, and transport authorities. Real-world adoption numbers are rising, and after the West Asia conflict, enquiries have reportedly doubled. The market is signalling confidence.

India needs a comprehensive national retrofitment framework. First, retrofit policies must be standardised across States. Second, financing institutions can formally recognise retrofitted vehicles as financeable assets. Third, India should create robust certification and safety standards to eliminate low-quality informal conversions that can erode consumer trust. Fourth, Goods and Services Tax (GST) treatment may be rationalised so that retrofitment kits are not taxed at a disadvantage compared with EVs. Fifth, retrofitment data has to be made publicly available. Finally, the latest PM E-DRIVE scheme that extends subsidy support to zero-emission trucks may also consider retrofitment.

As the world navigates oil vulnerability, India has an opportunity to think differently and choose between treating old vehicles as scrap, or recognise them as assets capable of transformation.

FROM SHAMPOO TO COOKIES, CONSUMER PRODUCTS GET AI MAKEOVER

French cosmetics company L'Oreal has used AI to identify molecules in its skincare products that can be repurposed for use in shampoo and can now create products four times faster than before, a senior executive told Reuters.



Consumer companies, including Nescafe owner Nestle, Sensodyne toothpaste maker Haleon and chocolate maker Mondelez, are using AI in product innovation, helping them in some cases test ingredients faster, generate recipe ideas and address supply chain vulnerabilities, executives said.

The push to integrate AI into product development comes as consumer goods companies face pressure to innovate faster and cut costs amid shifting consumer tastes. L’Oreal, which started using AI in its labs four years ago, has identified new molecules for beauty products by predicting the effect they will have on skin and hair, said Fabrice Megarbane, president of its consumer products unit.

L’Oreal’s recent innovation was repurposing molecules used in skincare products for a shampoo that uses collagen to add lift and fullness to hair, Megarbane said.

New benefits

“You can really go much faster by imagining ... new associations of molecules and new benefits of molecules,” Megarbane said at the Consumer Goods Forum’s Global Summit in Vienna in late June. L’Oreal CEO Nicolas Hieronimus launched a “beauty stimulus plan” last year to spur innovation after L’Oreal posted its slowest group sales growth in years.

Compress product development

Human product innovation augmented by AI is a “game-changer” at chocolate maker Mondelez, Chief Information and Digital Officer Filippo Catalano told Reuters. The technology has helped the Cadbury and Toblerone owner speed up processes and reimagine recipes. The firm said AI can create recipes, including “out-of-the-box” ideas, which a human expert assesses.

“You can optimise how you develop your recipes,” Catalano said, pointing to the possibility for reduced dependency on single sourcing in supply chains and the ability to adapt formulas to respond to changing consumer tastes.

Mondelez’s AI tool is reducing the number of samples typically generated through innovation, he said. It helped develop its Gluten Free Golden Oreo cookies and a refreshed recipe for Chips Ahoy cookies, the firm said. In the biscuit category, 60% of recipes produced using its AI tool performed better in areas such as nutrition, sustainability and cost. “(AI capabilities are) accelerating things you could do already, but compressing the time from months to weeks or years to months,” Catalano said.



LIFE AND SCIENCE

OLDEST QUASARS FOUND DEEPEN 'PERPLEXING' SPACE MYSTERY

The Euclid space telescope has spotted the oldest quasars -- the brightest objects in the universe -- ever discovered, deepening a cosmic mystery that has been puzzling scientists.

A quasar is the intensely luminous core of a distant galaxy powered by a supermassive black hole. As gas spirals into the black hole, extreme amounts of gravitational energy are converted into radiation, making quasars shine with the light of a trillion suns. They provide valuable insights into the early evolution of galaxies and black holes. Because they are so incredibly bright — and looking deep into space also means looking back in time — scientists have been hunting for ancient quasars to learn more about the little-understood infancy of the universe.

In a study published on Monday, an international team of astronomers announced they had discovered 31 quasars, including the two oldest observed yet, using the European Space Agency's Euclid telescope, which is at a stable hovering spot around 1.5 million kilometres from the earth. The light from the oldest pair comes from when the universe was roughly 670 million years old, just five percent of its current age of 13.8 billion years.

This beats the team's previous record for oldest -- and therefore most distant -- quasar announced in 2021 by around 20 million years. Previous quasar hunts were mostly carried out with ground-based telescopes, but the launch of Euclid in 2023 "has transformed this field," Daming Yang, the lead author of the study in *Astronomy & Astrophysics*, said.

In just two years, Euclid has doubled the number of ancient quasars known to science, added Yang, a PhD student at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Cosmic quandary

The newly discovered quasars date back to what is known as the epoch of reionisation. This was when the first stars and galaxies began to form, bringing an end to the cosmic dark ages. "We can use quasars as a lighthouse to study the gas between us and them, so that we can trace how the universe was reionised through this cosmic history," Daming Yang said. The quasars are also the latest example of a problem that has been increasingly baffling scientists.

As more powerful telescopes allow us to see further back in time, galaxies and other cosmic objects have turned out to be far bigger than had been thought possible at such an early age.

A HOLD ON AI

The UN's Preliminary Report of the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI drives at a few fault lines in the rapid investment into and proliferation of AI technologies: the Global South-Global North divide, with the latter poised to take the lion's share of the benefits of the diffusion of advanced AI models in different industries; and the challenge poorer countries face in regulating models far more advanced than what their own AI ecosystems can develop. These divides force emerging countries to choose between capital-intensive undertakings to get a seat at the table, or to accept the hand dealt to them by the half-dozen companies whose decisions shape AI access and use. These divisions are all the more urgent when seen in the light of what makes a country a voice that matters in AI: abundant electricity, highly capitalised firms that



employ scarce talent with high salaries, and a drive to plow through policy resistance with a competitive zeal to outdo last month's capabilities. While the report highlights AI technologies' transformative potential in scientific research, its development is far more rapid than that of social media — an industry that had time to act responsibly yet deformed public discourse and affected democracies, even as people were more or less able to tell what was going on in real time. It is unclear whether individual countries, even China or the U.S., have enough power to meaningfully arrest how AI develops.

AI firms acting irresponsibly have already caused harms that would not be tolerated in any other industry. AI models have ensnared teenagers and adults in parasocial fantasies that have sometimes turned fatal; they have flattened the world wide web, grievously injuring the news media's ability to deploy resources in their respective missions to inform the public; they have unleashed an epidemic of deepfakes, undermining trust in the written word and images alike; and they have deeply intertwined their promises of Artificial General Intelligence with global financial systems, with possible catastrophic economic consequences. The most important task for governments is how to hold these firms to account when needed, as taking a backseat on this conversation — even if industry leaders ignore the Global South's concerns — carries far greater costs. India has already experienced the cost of not asserting itself in the technology development of the decade: even as Anthropic's Mythos and Fable held out the tantalising promise of securing vast cyber systems, the U.S. pulled access, leaving the firms that had these models to ponder the risk of a different model succeeding at attacking their infrastructure. There is a limit to visions of AI as a geostrategic asset; much needs to be done to address its potential for broad damage.

FIBRE-OPTIC DEBRIS IN BIRD'S NEST SHOWS THE ENVIRONMENTAL COST OF DRONE WARS

A bird's nest found near Ukraine's front line has caught the attention of researchers, not because of the bird that built it but because of what it was made from. Mixed in with the usual twigs, grass and small branches were strands of fibre-optic cable, the same kind now used by military drones flying over some of the most fiercely contested parts of the battlefield.

Birds have always built nests with whatever they can find. Plastic bags, bits of cloth, fishing line and electrical wire have all been found woven into nests in different parts of the world.

But military-grade fibre-optic cable is something researchers have not seen before.

Electronic warfare

The nest was first reported by Reuters, and while it looks like an unusual wildlife story at first glance, it also raises a much bigger question.

Once military technology has done its job, what happens to everything it leaves behind? In many parts of eastern and southern Ukraine, the answer is already scattered across the landscape. Fields, forests and abandoned villages are now littered with broken drones, damaged batteries, shattered propellers, pieces of carbon fibre and long strands of fibre-optic cable left behind after drone missions. It is a kind of battlefield waste that did not exist on this scale before the war, reflecting how quickly drones have transformed modern combat.



Unlike radio signals, fibre-optic cable does not disappear once a mission is over. Every drone leaves a trail behind.

Some cables remain stretched across open fields, others become tangled in trees or wrapped around bushes, while many simply lie where they fall after a drone is destroyed or reaches its target. After thousands of drone missions, those cables have become another part of the landscape.

That is how some of them eventually found their way into a bird's nest. The birds were not looking for military equipment. Like birds anywhere else, they were simply collecting material lying on the ground around them. Researchers are now trying to understand whether those cables create new risks for wildlife or whether birds are simply treating them like any other synthetic material. The cables are lightweight and strong, which could help hold nests together, but they could also create problems such as entanglement or remain in the environment for years before breaking down.

For now, there are very few answers because this is something scientists have only just begun to study.

What is clear is that the war is leaving behind more than destroyed buildings and damaged infrastructure. It is also leaving behind materials that are slowly becoming part of the environment itself.

The First World War left behind trench systems and contaminated land across Europe. In Vietnam, Agent Orange devastated forests and caused environmental damage that lasted for decades.

In countries such as Cambodia and Bosnia, landmines and unexploded ammunition continue to threaten people and wildlife years after peace agreements were signed. The environmental impact changes with every conflict because the way wars are fought keeps changing. Ukraine could eventually add something new to that list.

A FINE BALANCE

Do phone batteries last longer when it's cooler outside?

You might think so — but the answer is not always. Smartphones use lithium-ion batteries. This battery works by moving lithium ions back and forth between two electrodes through a liquid electrolyte.

In colder weather, like in North India during the winter, the electrolyte becomes less conductive and the lithium ions move more sluggishly. The battery's internal resistance also increases. As a result, the voltage can drop faster if you use the phone heavily. Your phone might interpret this drop as low battery and trigger power-saving measures even when the battery has more charge.

In hot weather, the battery chemistry becomes more active and can deliver power easily. But heat also speeds up unwanted chemical reactions, which over time permanently reduce the battery's capacity and shorten its lifespan.

If the battery gets too hot due to fast charging, gaming, direct sunlight, and/or a bad phone cover, the phone may stop charging as a safety measure.



FIFA, THE WHITE HOUSE AND A RED CARD THAT ISN'T: JUST GIVE TRUMP THE FIRST PRIZE ALREADY

In sport — as in so much else — America does its own thing. Major League Baseball (most major American sports revolve around matches between privately-owned teams, based in cities à la IPL or club football) has a “World Series” every year in which most of the world does not participate. So, too, with basketball and what Americans call football. “Soccer”, though, is actually a truly global sport and one in which the US is far from ruling the roost. It is full of upsets and heartbreaks, and part of the joy of the Beautiful Game lies in its sorrows — a shot that goes off the pole, a spectacular save during a penalty shootout, the offside that robs the elation of what looked like a goal. The greatest of these, though, may be crying foul at a foul against your country’s star player. Everywhere, fans know that sinking feeling after a Red Card and complain against the referee, knowing that it is futile and they must live with the decision. Everywhere, that is, except in Donald Trump’s America.

Until last week, Trump’s imprimatur did not dominate the FIFA World Cup, which the US is co-hosting: While the actions of his administration, including the ordeal faced by Iran’s national team and the refusal to grant Somalian referee Omar Artan a visa, made headlines, Trump himself did not attend a single game and has hardly mentioned the tournament on his prolific social media posts. Then, on Wednesday, the US’s star striker Folarin Balogun was given a Red Card in the game against Bosnia and Herzegovina, which carried a one-match ban. Trump reportedly made multiple phone calls to FIFA, which announced that it had suspended the ban under Article 27 of its disciplinary code.

“The thing about football,” Terry Pratchett wrote, “is that it’s never just about football”. The Balogun episode is a reminder of that axiom. Even before the tournament began, Article 27 was used by FIFA to suspend a ban that allowed Cristiano Ronaldo to play in the first two matches of this World Cup. After all, no Ronaldo would have meant a lot less money and fewer eyeballs. And FIFA President Gianni Infantino awarded Trump a “peace prize” — made up all but on the spot — in December last year. The logic of his actions is familiar to anyone who has played gully cricket: It’s best not to upset the rich guy who owns the bat. Turns out, even on the biggest sporting stage, the backyard bully rules the roost.

SYNTHETIC CELL: MACHINE THAT COULD

Researchers from the University of Minnesota have developed a synthetic cell that can grow and divide. The team ‘started’ the cell as a liposome, a small bubble made of fats. Inside was a protein-making system called PURE, which contained all the necessary ‘machinery’ for the cell to turn DNA into proteins. The DNA consisted of 90,000 base pairs.

The synthetic cells ate by fusing with smaller feeder liposomes. The cell’s DNA instructed it to produce a protein called alpha-hemolysin that becomes like a hook on the cell’s surface. The hook grabbed the feeder bubbles and pulled them in, providing the lipids and nutrients the cell needs to expand.

As the cell grew, it used an enzyme called Phi29 to copy its entire genome, then it divided into daughter cells. While the researchers first used mechanical force to split the cells, they eventually engineered a biological way to do it. By making proteins crowd the surface of the cell, they created enough physical pressure to make the membrane split into two. The researchers also proved these cells could undergo selection. They introduced a mutation that allowed some cells to eat more



efficiently. These faster-growing cells produced more offspring than others and dominated the population. “It will, perhaps, provide a compelling argument against those who think there is some immaterial substance in addition to the chemicals that breathes life into material stuff,” University of Exeter professor John Dupré told The Guardian. “But almost no scientist now believes this.”

FINERENONE HELPS SLOW KIDNEY DISEASE IN PATIENTS WITHOUT DIABETES

In chronic kidney disease, the kidneys gradually lose their ability to filter waste from the blood. While diabetes is one of its leading causes, many patients develop the condition because of high blood pressure, autoimmune disorders, or other conditions that damage the kidney’s filtering units.

Doctors can slow the disease using medicines that lower blood pressure and newer drugs that lower blood sugar while reducing strain on the kidneys. Yet many patients continue to lose kidney function over time, creating a need for additional treatments that can delay kidney failure.

Beyond diabetes

Now, three global studies published in the New England Journal of Medicine, Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), and The Lancet suggest that finerenone, a drug previously used mainly in diabetes-related kidney disease, could help a much broader group of patients.

Across different forms of chronic kidney disease, researchers found that the drug slowed disease progression, reduced protein leakage in urine, and lowered the risk of kidney failure.

Finerenone does not target diabetes itself. Instead, it blocks inflammation and scarring inside the kidneys — processes that can occur in many forms of kidney disease, he added.

Evidence across diseases

The first of the three studies, known as FIND-CKD, enrolled 1,584 patients with kidney disease who did not have diabetes. Participants received either finerenone or a placebo in addition to their usual treatment. Researchers found that patients taking finerenone lost kidney function more slowly over nearly three years and were less likely to experience major kidney or heart-related complications.

In another study, researchers focused on more than 900 participants from the FIND-CKD trial who had glomerular diseases, conditions that damage the kidneys’ filtering units and are among the leading causes of kidney failure worldwide. These included IgA nephropathy, an autoimmune disease that damages the glomeruli, as well as focal segmental glomerulosclerosis and membranous nephropathy — two other major causes of kidney failure. Finerenone slowed the worsening of kidney disease, reduced protein leakage in urine by about 42%, and lowered the risk of kidney failure or major loss of kidney function in this group.

The findings suggest finerenone’s benefits extend beyond any single glomerular disease.

“I wouldn’t specifically isolate IgA nephropathy,” Prof. Agarwal said. “Anybody who has glomerulonephritis can use this drug. The alternatives are much more expensive. Some targeted therapies for IgA nephropathy cost \$400,000 to \$500,000 a year. How many people can afford that?”

Shared pathway



The third study took a broader view. By combining data from FIND-CKD with two earlier finerenone trials, researchers examined whether the drug was working only in certain kidney diseases or targeting a process common to many of them.

Across 14,574 patients, the benefits remained consistent across different causes and stages of kidney disease and in patients with or without diabetes. The consistency suggested finerenone may be acting on a shared pathway involved in kidney damage rather than on any one diagnosis alone.

Beyond the biology, Prof. Agarwal said the findings reflect a broader shift in medicine away from relying on a single drug and towards combination treatment. Much as cancer specialists use multiple medicines together, kidney specialists increasingly combine drugs that target different aspects of disease.

He cautioned, however, that the findings should not automatically be extended to every kidney disease.

For one, finerenone is not without side effects. The main concern across the studies was hyperkalaemia, or high potassium levels in the blood, which can sometimes trigger dangerous heart rhythm disturbances. About 17% of patients receiving finerenone developed elevated potassium levels but severe cases requiring hospitalisation were uncommon, per Prof. Agarwal.

“The people you won’t treat are the people who have potassium that is above normal,” he said. “So anyone who has potassium more than 5 — you won’t start them on this drug.” He was referring to a blood potassium level of 5 millimoles per litre or higher.

That risk can usually be managed with routine blood tests.

For Indian patients, cost and access may become an important part of the conversation. Finerenone is already available in India and currently costs around ₹80-90 a day, Prof. Agarwal said. However, he said he expected the drug to become significantly cheaper once it loses patent protection in 2028.

But even at current prices, Prof. Agarwal said the costs compare favourably with many other kidney therapies. A patient with diabetes-related kidney disease can receive a full course of modern kidney-protective therapy for less than ₹200 a day in India. Patients without diabetes could potentially be treated for around ₹100 a day, he said.

Detecting the smoke

Yet Prof. Agarwal argued that the larger challenge was not treatment but detection. The problem may be particularly acute in India, where people appear more genetically susceptible to diabetes and high blood pressure than many Western populations and where the prevalence of both conditions is rising rapidly. Many patients learn they have kidney disease only after substantial damage has already occurred. The growing number of effective therapies, he said, makes early diagnosis more important than ever.

“The people who are really going to make a difference are not the nephrologists but the primary care doctors,” he said.



Patients with diabetes and high blood pressure often spend years under the care of family physicians before ever seeing a kidney specialist. A simple, routine urine test that checks for protein leakage can identify kidney damage at a stage when treatment is most effective.

“We must detect the smoke before it becomes a fire,” he said. The message is especially important now because doctors increasingly have multiple therapies capable of slowing kidney disease once it is detected.

WHO FLAGS GROWING INEQUITIES IN ACCESS TO CANCER TREATMENT

With an estimated 20.6 million new cases and close to 10 million deaths annually, cancer remains the second leading cause of death globally after cardiovascular disease, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) first ever survey of people affected by cancer, released on Wednesday, said.

Beyond its impact on health, cancer remains one of the most financially and socially devastating challenges a household can face, the report said. The WHO survey found that at least 45% of affected people experience financial hardship, more than half report mental health challenges, and nearly all caregivers report strain, including unpaid services and social isolation.

The Global Status Report on Cancer, 2026, released by the WHO and the International Agency for Research on Cancer, warns that, without action, annual cases of cancer are projected to rise to nearly 35 million by 2050.

The report also indicates persistent and widening inequities in access to prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and supportive care, leaving millions of people without the services they need. Its analysis shows that while 87% of women with breast cancer survive at five years after their diagnosis in high-income countries, only about 42% do so in low-income countries. Fewer than one in three countries currently include cancer care in their universal health coverage packages. “Cancer is a deeply personal disease that touches nearly all of us. But whether a person survives cancer should never depend on where they were born or what they earn,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, adding, “The inequities documented in this report are not inevitable; they are the consequence of choices, and they can be reversed through stronger and unified action.”

The burden of cancer varies across regions. In 2024, Asia accounted for the largest share, with more than half of all cancer cases (50.7%) and deaths (56.5%) reflecting its large population. Europe carried a disproportionately high burden, contributing 21% of global cases and 20% of deaths despite having only about 9% of the world’s population. In contrast, many countries in Africa and parts of Asia experience lower incidence but disproportionately high mortality.