

CURRENT AFFAIRS for UPSC

DreamIAS

23rd to 29th August 2026

Current Affairs for UPSC



INTERNATIONAL

EYES ON THE SEAS

On August 18, 2026, an unknown projectile hit the Liberia-flagged bulk carrier Minoan Dignity while it was exiting the Strait of Hormuz, killing the ship's chief engineer.

For 25 years now, the **United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO)** has been providing seafarers, shipping companies and authorities "essential, verified and corroborated security information". According to its website, it is a "trusted authority in the maritime security sector, helping protect crucial trade routes". Always working in the background, the West Asia war and Iran's stranglehold over the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, and the threat posed by the Houthis at the Bab el-Mandeb in southern Red Sea, have put this under-the-radar organisation in the spotlight.

Maritime security

The UKMTO is a British Royal Navy-sponsored organisation that was formed in 2001 with an office in Dubai to handle distress calls during piracy threats, particularly near Somalia. In 2014, it was moved to Portsmouth in the U.K. The 'UK National Strategy for Maritime Security', presented in the British Parliament in 2014, outlines the U.K.'s broad-based thinking on maritime strategy of which the UKMTO is a part. The document said how "every aspect of our national life" is connected to the wider world and "most of these connections are provided by the sea". Hence, it was seen as an imperative to "organise and use our current national capabilities to identify, assess and address maritime security issues at home and overseas".

For its scale of operations, the UKMTO is a lean organisation with a team of 15 civilian 'watch-keepers' and three managers. The team, which works in shifts, takes calls from ship masters irrespective of their nationalities and coordinates rescue responses and issues warnings and advisories.

The UKMTO works in West Asia and the Indian Ocean Region through an information framework agreement and operates a "Voluntary Reporting Scheme within the Voluntary Reporting Area (VRA)" outlined in a maritime security chart, according to its website. This zone stretches to almost 2.5 million sq. miles of the ocean and includes the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, a majority of the northwestern Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, and Persian Gulf.

The UKMTO has three 24/7 phone lines and an e-mail to report emergencies or incidents. Ship masters are requested to file multiple reports — an initial report when entering the VRA, a daily report while transiting the area, and a final report after exiting the VRA or reaching a port. Following an incident, the UKMTO says that a "detailed After Action Report" is submitted.

In June, while reporting on a U.S. attack on a ship in which three Indians were killed off Oman, The Hindu had called one of the numbers and sent an email. While the response was prompt, the staff refused to divulge any information about the attack.

Though initially set up to fight piracy and serve British interests, the UKMTO assumed greater significance in November 2023 when Houthis started attacking commercial ships it claimed were linked to Israel or its allies in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Between October and December 2023, after the Hamas attack on Israel and the beginning of the Israeli offensive, the UKMTO "put



out 71 warnings and advisories, took part in 40 exercises and drills, handled 27 emergency events,” according to the BBC.

Today, the UKMTO has positioned itself as the primary point of contact for commercial vessels with military forces in the region. The reporting system aims to, in the UKMTO’s words, “increase security and provide anti-piracy support to maintain the freedom of navigation to all vessels”.

STRIKES TO SANCTIONS: THE LIMITS OF US MOVE ON IRAN

On Monday (August 24), the US threatened to impose severe sanctions on any country or entity that maintains economic ties with Iran. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who announced ‘Operation Economic Outcast’, termed it “Economic D-Day”, a reference to the June 1944 Allied offensive against Nazi-occupied France.

Key Takeaways:

- The US has issued fresh sanctions against Iran’s digital assets, technology, gold, aviation and shipping sectors, with the Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioning “nearly 60 entities, individuals, and vessels in multiple jurisdictions that enable the Iranian regime’s recklessness”. These include sanctions against firms across countries such as China, UK, France, Singapore, UAE and Ukraine.
- In the hours following the announcement, Pakistan’s Chief of Defence Forces, Asim Munir, made his second trip to Tehran since the March war. Islamabad described the visit as part of its efforts to “promote regional peace and stability”. Al Arabiya also reported that Munir spoke to US President Donald Trump in the lead-up to the visit.
- These interlinked developments come at a time when the US appears to be shifting away from its military strategy that has failed to dislodge the Iranian regime. Both countries are entering a de facto ceasefire following the expiry of the interim peace framework’s 60-day implementation period.

Do You Know:

- The US’s new ‘Economic D-Day’ sanctions are only the latest in a series of sanctions regimes that Washington has had in place against Iran since 1979, the year of the revolution.
- President Trump intensified these sanctions through his “maximum pressure” campaign in his first term (2017-2021). While the Joe Biden administration diluted this campaign’s measures, the second Trump administration renewed them in February 2025.
- This meant that by the time the US attacked Iran a year later, the Iranian economy was reeling from inflation crossing 50% (near hyperinflation), national per capita income dropping to about \$5,000, rising youth unemployment and the rial in near free-fall. The currency has now fallen to around 2 million rial per US dollar.
- Historically, US sanctions on Iran have proven to have a limited deterrence effect. Despite their adverse economic effect, the principal affected party is the citizenry of Iran with government actors consolidating power further as the sole arbiter of resources.
- Now, the imposition of the D-Day sanctions reflects the limits of military means as an effective coercion instrument against the Islamic republic. But they also represent a large-scale unlearning



of Washington's lessons from its history of economic coercion against Tehran. Iran has near-continually been the most heavily sanctioned country in this century. Its sustained ability to both prevent regime collapse as well as to militarily respond to American attacks successfully in 2026 have already proved the ineffectiveness of Washington's historic economic measures.

WITH 'NO SOAP OR TOOTHPASTE', WHY THE USS LINCOLN IS STILL AT SEA

The senior-most US military commander in the Middle East, US Central Command chief Admiral Brad Cooper, visited the USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea on Saturday (August 15), amid claims of food shortages, flagging morale, and even suicide attempts on the aircraft carrier. The USS Abraham Lincoln has been at sea without a break for over 260 days.

Key Takeaways:

- While US President Donald Trump has dismissed reports of hardships on the USS Lincoln, the USS George Washington is leaving the Pacific Ocean, at a time China has been assertive about its territorial claims in the region, in all likelihood to replace the long-deployed carrier in the Arabian Sea.
- The USS Lincoln has been at sea for over eight months now, three months behind its original target of May. It has been parked in hostile territory, amid a naval blockade of the Strait of Hormuz by both Iran and the US, so vessels carrying mails and fresh rations have faced difficulty reaching the carrier and the 5,000 personnel abroad.
- For more than a month now, there have been reports of deteriorating conditions aboard the ship. At a town hall with senior US Navy officers held earlier in August, families spoke of sailors feeling distressed, and at least two trying to jump overboard.
- Captain Anurag Bisen, a veteran Indian Navy submariner with over 35 years of service, told The Indian Express, "For seafarers, the biggest factor is mental stress. The long separation from loved ones extracts a heavy toll, particularly when there is a complete lack of communication. Material factors, even though important, are secondary, but as time goes by, they have a multiplier effect on the young minds. Also, the monotonous routine, with little space for diversions, is another major contributor. The movies, books, puzzles, games, and whatever else is carried onboard, run their course after a while."
- On August 15, Acting Secretary of the Navy, Hung Cao, said as part of a longer statement, "A small number of mental health cases were treated with no loss of life. Meal plans were adjusted when fresh resupply was unavailable, without a single meal being missed. Calls home were limited when the operational threat was too high. There is no question our young men and women have been pushed to their limits—but they have never broken. They are rightly tired—but have never been out of the fight."

Do You Know:

- An aircraft carrier is basically a mobile airbase. A land-based fighter plane can fly hundreds or even thousands of kilometres out over the ocean. But after it completes its mission, it needs somewhere to land. It also needs fuel, weapons, maintenance and people to service it. A carrier takes all of this with it.



- A carrier can launch fighter jets to attack targets, intercept enemy aircraft and defend the fleet. Other aircraft and helicopters can search for submarines. Specialised aircraft can provide early warning, essentially acting as flying radar stations. The carrier can therefore serve as an airbase miles away from a country's territory.

- India currently operates two aircraft carriers — INS Vikramaditya, the refurbished former Soviet-era Admiral Gorshkov, and the indigenously built INS Vikrant. The Navy has also sought a third carrier to expand its ability to maintain a sustained presence in distant waters.

—INS Vikrant was the first indigenously built aircraft carrier of the Indian Navy. With a displacement of 45,000 tonnes, it is the largest warship ever built in India. The Navy says roughly 76% of the carrier comprises indigenous content, including 23,000 tonnes of steel, 2,500 km of electric cables and 150 km of pipes. Vikrant can carry up to 34 aircraft, with Russian-made MiG-29K fighter jets as its primary combat aircraft. It has a crew of about 1,600 and functions almost like a small town at sea, with a hospital featuring two operation theatres and an ICU, workshops, and three galleys.

—INS Vikramaditya, commissioned in 2013, was originally the Soviet-era Admiral Gorshkov, which India acquired from Russia and had refurbished. It operates MiG-29K fighter jets using a ski-jump for take-off and arrestor wires for landing.

—Before Vikramaditya and Vikrant, India operated INS Viraat, formerly the British HMS Hermes. Commissioned by the Indian Navy in 1987, Viraat participated in Operation Pawan, the Indian Peace Keeping Force mission in Sri Lanka, and later in Operation Parakram in the North Arabian Sea. It was decommissioned in 2017.

NEPAL–TIBET FLASH FLOODS, 2026: HIMALAYAN GLACIER COLLAPSE & CROSS-BORDER DISASTER

WHY IN NEWS

On 26 August 2026, a Himalayan glacier collapse near Langtang Lirung (Rasuwa district, Nepal) triggered catastrophic flash floods and debris flows down the Trishuli–Bhotekoshi river system, destroying the Gyirong Port border crossing with China's Tibet Autonomous Region and sweeping away villages, roads, bridges and hydropower projects. It is among the deadliest disasters in Nepal's history, with the death toll crossing 1,300 and thousands still missing weeks later, reviving debate on glacier instability, disaster preparedness and cross-border early-warning cooperation in a rapidly warming Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region.

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

Static linkage: Himalayan geomorphology, glaciology and disaster management.

- **Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region:** Stretches ~3,500 km across 8 countries (incl. India, Nepal, China/Tibet, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar); holds the largest ice/snow mass outside the polar regions and feeds 10 major Asian river systems, supporting the water/food/energy security of over a billion people.
- **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF):** Sudden release of water impounded by a glacial lake when its moraine/ice dam fails — distinct from a “glacier collapse” (a mass of glacier

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ice/rock breaking off and falling), though both can trigger similar downstream flash floods and are sometimes combined, as suspected here.

- **Permafrost and warming:** Rising temperatures weaken the permafrost that binds rock, ice and slopes together, increasing rockfall, avalanches and glacier instability — the HKH is warming faster than the global average.
- **Precedents in the same region:** 2015 Nepal earthquake triggered a Langtang valley avalanche (350+ deaths); a 2025 GLOF washed away the Rasuwagadhi border bridge; the October 2023 South Lhonak Lake GLOF in Sikkim destroyed the Teesta-III hydropower project.
- **Sturzstrom (rock-ice avalanche):** A geological term for a massive rock avalanche in which a large volume of rock collapses suddenly and travels at extremely high speed over an unusually long distance; in high-mountain settings, where rock mixes with ice, snow, firn and frozen soil, it is understood as a rock-ice avalanche. Experts (Tribhuvan University's Himalayan Geodisaster Research Centre) classify the 2026 Nepal-Tibet event as a sturzstrom, and note the closest prior comparable event was the 2021 Chamoli disaster in Uttarakhand, India, where a bedrock failure beneath a glacier triggered a rock-ice avalanche of over 25 million cubic metres that transformed into a debris flow.
- **India's own vulnerability:** The Indian Himalayas have roughly 15,000 glaciers and 7,500 glacial lakes, many poorly monitored due to inhospitable, high-altitude terrain accessible for only a few months a year.

KEY FACTS

Trigger and Mechanism

- A seismic signal of magnitude Ms 5.2 (USGS) / Mw 5.7 (GFZ, Germany) was recorded on 26 August 2026 near Langtang Lirung; analysis of long-period seismic waves showed this was generated by the glacier collapse itself, not a tectonic earthquake — the initial 'earthquake-triggered-avalanche' theory was later revised.
- An estimated 0.2 sq. km slab of glacier ice and rock, originating at 5,200–5,400 m altitude, broke off and fell roughly 1,200 m into the valley, generating enormous meltwater and debris that entered the Lhunde Khola, a tributary of the Trishuli (upper reaches locally called the Bhotekoshi) river.
- Floodwaters reportedly reached the Gyirong Port crossing within about seven minutes of the collapse; river levels rose as much as 9 metres in 30 minutes in places, and debris travelled roughly 100 km downstream at speeds up to ~50 m/s (180 km/h).
- A western disturbance moving eastward over north India and the Himalaya, combined with a persistent monsoon rain spell (16–25 August) over Nepal's southern foothills and southern Tibet, is considered a possible contributing factor to the broader wet conditions — but the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has clarified this was not established as the direct trigger; a cloudburst was also not confirmed.



- Two temporary barrier (landslide-dammed) lakes formed after the collapse; one overflowed slightly on 28 August, prompting a brief pause in rescue operations, before draining out by 30 August.
- Nepali and Chinese authorities have traced the source to the Langtang Lirung area but describe it as a combination of an ice avalanche, permafrost movement and a rockslide straddling the Nepal-China border — the rockslide is assessed to have occurred on the Chinese side, with its impact extending into Nepal, while the avalanche itself is believed to have originated on the Nepalese side very close to the boundary; pinpointing the exact point and side of origin remains difficult. The debris entered the Lhende Khola — a transboundary high-altitude river originating in Gyirong County, Tibet, and flowing south into Nepal as a tributary of the Bhotekoshi and Trishuli systems (Binod Parajuli, Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology).
- Mechanism of a sturzstrom-type failure: an unstable rock-ice slope collapses suddenly, and the moving mass fragments and mixes with ice/snow; friction and pressure generate meltwater that lubricates the mass, reducing resistance and producing an unusually long runout — the whole process can unfold within a few minutes, incorporating more rock, soil, ice and water as it descends before finally depositing as debris.

Human Toll (progression across sources)

- Nepal's death toll rose steadily through the following weeks: from single digits and 157–162 (26–27 Aug) to 359–389 (27–28 Aug), ~469–579 (28 Aug), over 900 (31 Aug), crossing 1,000 (1 Sep), 1,114–1,130 combined (2 Sep), and 1,287–1,355 in Nepal alone by early September, with several thousand people still listed as missing at each stage.
- On the Chinese (Tibet) side, Gyirong County reported a much smaller toll — from single digits initially to around 31–43 dead and roughly 500–550 missing by early September.
- Missing/affected persons included foreign tourists and pilgrims from 30+ countries, notably en route to Mount Kailash; hundreds of hydropower project workers (some trapped in tunnels); and Nepali government staff, police, army and teachers.
- Rasuwagadhi, the border checkpoint destroyed in the disaster, handles the bulk of Nepal-China trade and is the main route used by pilgrims (May–September) for the Kailash Mansarovar yatra — Indian nationals form the largest share of these pilgrims, which explains the high proportion of missing Indians reported.

Infrastructure and Economic Impact

- Reported figures on power capacity lost from the national grid varied across sources — approximately 431–475 MW — alongside separate under-construction hydropower capacity of about 470 MW also damaged; at least 13 hydropower projects (including Rasuwagadhi, Chilime, Trishuli 3A/3B and Devighat) were affected.
- Bridges and roads: reports gave different counts for bridges destroyed (ranging from about 35 motorable + 45 suspension bridges in early reports to 33 driveable + 68 suspension bridges in later, fuller assessments) and 40–55 km of roads damaged.



- The Gyirong Port border crossing — built at a cost of about US\$175.8 million and upgraded to international-gateway status in 2017, handling roughly 30% of Nepal-China trade — was buried under debris and destroyed.
- Nepal's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) estimated losses at roughly Nepali Rs 387–400 billion (~US\$2.5–2.7 billion); Nepal's Finance Minister separately estimated total reconstruction needs at US\$4–5 billion, close to a tenth of the country's economy.

Cross-Border and Regional Response

- Nepal: The Nepali Army, Armed Police Force and Nepal Police (over 21,000 personnel) led search and rescue; the government declared the region a disaster-hit zone for three months and set up a Prime Minister's Natural Disaster Relief Fund.
- China: The Tibet Autonomous Region mobilised the People's Armed Police, PLA units and national fire/rescue teams; Premier Li Qiang visited Gyirong; China initially restricted foreign search-and-rescue access to Tibet, citing terrain risk and later hosting a limited, government-supervised foreign media visit.
- India: Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Nepal's Prime Minister Balen Shah offering assistance; India sent disaster-relief material by air (India's Air Force flights reported at 47.5–62 tonnes across sources), plus NDRF teams, medical personnel and forensic/tunnel-rescue experts; downstream alerts were issued in Bihar (Gandaki, Kosi and Ganga rivers; Valmikinagar Barrage) and Uttar Pradesh (Maharajganj, Kushinagar districts), and bodies of some victims were recovered as far downstream as Kushinagar and Maharajganj districts in India.
- International: The UN, EU, WHO, Red Cross/Red Crescent, Asian Development Bank and numerous individual countries (Australia, UK, US, UAE, South Korea, Canada, Qatar and others) pledged funds, relief material and specialist rescue/forensic teams.

- Combined death toll: 1,385+ (Nepal: 1,342–1,355+; Tibet/China side: 43+) — figures were still being revised as bodies continued to be recovered and identified.
- Missing: 5,400+ combined (Nepal ~4,886+; Tibet ~519+); injuries reported at 5,300+.
- Bodies recovered in Nepal: 1,294+ as of early September; identification was slow (only about 4% identified as of 1 September) due to decomposition and lack of cold storage, leading to temporary mass burials pending DNA testing.
- Estimated economic loss stood at approximately Nepali Rs 387–400 billion (~US\$2.5–2.7 billion) as of the first week of September, with reconstruction cost projected at US\$4–5 billion by Nepal's Finance Minister.
- Rescue operations continued into September, including at hydropower tunnels (e.g., Upper Trishuli-1 and Upper Trishuli 3A), where a small number of survivors were pulled out days after the disaster; by early September, most of Nepal's telecom towers affected had been restored.



ANALYSIS

Significance

- Establishes glacier collapse (as distinct from a classic GLOF or monsoon cloudburst) as a major, under-monitored Himalayan hazard capable of causing mass casualties with almost no warning time.
- Highlights the acute vulnerability of hydropower infrastructure concentrated in narrow Himalayan valleys — about 10% of Nepal's power capacity was affected in this single valley.
- Demonstrates the transboundary nature of Himalayan disaster risk, cutting across India-Nepal-China political sensitivities and prompting cooperative disaster response even amid broader geopolitical friction.

Implications

- Reinforces calls for a dedicated high-altitude glacier and permafrost monitoring network (beyond existing flood/GLOF sentry systems, which were configured for monsoon or lake-outburst floods, not sudden glacier collapse).
- Raises questions on land-use planning and construction codes for hydropower and settlements in glacially-fed river valleys across the Himalayan arc, including in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim in India.
- Strengthens the case for regional/cross-border hydro-meteorological data sharing and early-warning cooperation between Nepal, China and India.

Criticisms / Challenges

- Existing early-warning systems along the Bhotekoshi/Trishuli corridor were reportedly optimised for monsoon and perennial floods, not a sudden high-altitude glacier collapse, and upstream monitoring stations were themselves swept away before alerts could go out.
- Restricted independent reporting and information control on the Tibetan side made it difficult to verify the true extent of damage and casualties there.
- Difficulty of physically monitoring thousands of remote glaciers and glacial lakes across the Himalayan arc, given terrain and short accessible field seasons, remains a structural constraint on prediction and preparedness.

Exam Alert

- Death toll and other figures were reported variably across sources and kept changing as the disaster unfolded — always use only the latest verified/official figure (NDRRMA, Nepal Police) in an answer, and be alert to MCQs testing an early, since-revised number.
- Do not confuse a 'glacier collapse' (mass of ice/rock breaking off and falling) with a classic 'Glacial Lake Outburst Flood' (GLOF, dam-break of an existing glacial lake) — this event is primarily attributed to the former, though a temporary barrier lake did also form afterwards.



- The initial 'earthquake triggered the disaster' narrative (reported by Nepal's Foreign Minister on Day 1) was subsequently revised by USGS: the Ms 5.2 seismic signal was generated by the glacier collapse itself, not a tectonic earthquake.
- The western disturbance / monsoon rainfall was a contributing atmospheric factor cited by IMD, not the confirmed direct cause — do not equate the two in an answer.
- Nepal's power-loss figures (grid capacity removed) were cited variably as ~431 MW and ~475 MW across sources — flag this as reported variably rather than picking one.
- Terminology check: 'sturzstrom' (a rock or rock-ice avalanche travelling at very high speed over a long runout) is the term geologists have used for this event and for the 2021 Chamoli (Uttarakhand) disaster — do not use it interchangeably with GLOF, which specifically means the failure of an existing glacial lake's dam.
- Assessments of whether the early-warning system 'failed' vary: some reports say monitoring stations were swept away before alerts could be sent, while others say the system worked as designed but was simply too slow for a sturzstrom-type event — an example of nuanced, evolving reporting rather than a settled fact.

Do You Know

- Gyirong Port (destroyed in this disaster) was the main land gateway for pilgrims travelling from Nepal to Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar in Tibet — sacred to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and followers of Bon.
- The October 2023 South Lhonak Lake GLOF in Sikkim, caused by a different mechanism (lake-dam failure), destroyed the Teesta-III (Chungthang) hydropower project and is a frequently cited comparator event in current affairs.
- Since 1975, the world's glaciers have lost more than 9,500 gigatonnes of ice; the UN has separately estimated annual losses of around 267 gigatonnes a year between 2000 and 2019 — roughly equal to the mass of 46,500 Great Pyramids of Giza.
- The Hindu Kush Himalaya region has over 15 UN member states depending on rivers originating there for water, food and energy security — hence its description as the 'Third Pole' or 'water tower of Asia'.

✓ Quick Revision

- 26 August 2026: Glacier collapse near Langtang Lirung (Rasuwa, Nepal) triggered flash floods down the Trishuli-Bhotekoshi river, destroying Gyirong Port on the Nepal-China border.
- Initially suspected to be earthquake-triggered; USGS analysis later confirmed the seismic signal came from the glacier collapse itself.
- One of Nepal's deadliest-ever disasters — combined Nepal-Tibet toll crossed 1,385 dead with 5,400+ missing by mid-September 2026; economic loss estimated at US\$2.5-5 billion.
- Triggered coordinated disaster response from Nepal, China and India despite ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region, and renewed debate on Himalayan glacier monitoring and early-warning systems.



COMPARISON: RECENT HIMALAYAN GLACIER/FLOOD DISASTERS

Feature	Nepal-Tibet Floods (2026)	South Lhonak GLOF, Sikkim (2023)	Kedarnath Flood, Uttarakhand (2013)
Immediate cause	Glacier collapse (ice-rock mass fall) near Langtang Lirung	Glacial lake outburst (moraine dam failure)	Cloudburst + breach of Chorabari glacial lake
River affected	Trishuli / Bhotekoshi	Teesta	Mandakini
Key infrastructure lost	Gyirong Port; multiple hydropower projects	Teesta-III (Chungthang) hydropower project	Roads, bridges, pilgrim township of Kedarnath
Approx. deaths	1,300+ (still rising)	40+ dead/missing (Sikkim + downstream Bengal)	5,000+ (official estimate, many unrecorded pilgrims)
Cross-border dimension	Nepal-China(Tibet)-India	Downstream impact in West Bengal	None (fully domestic)

CURRENT AFFAIRS AT A GLANCE

Parameter	Detail
Event	Nepal-Tibet flash floods / glacier collapse
Date	26 August 2026 (ongoing rescue/relief into September 2026)
Location	Rasuwa & Nuwakot districts, Bagmati Province, Nepal; Gyirong County, Tibet Autonomous Region, China
Proximate cause	Glacier collapse near Langtang Lirung (Ms 5.2 seismic signal from ice-rock fall, not tectonic)
Rivers involved	Lhende Khola → Trishuli (upper reach locally Bhotekoshi) river system
Border crossing destroyed	Gyirong Port / Rasuwagadhi (Nepal-China)
Toll (as verified, Sept 2026)	1,385+ dead; 5,400+ missing; 5,300+ injured (combined Nepal + Tibet)



Parameter	Detail
Economic loss	~Nepali Rs 387-400 billion (~US\$2.5-2.7 bn); reconstruction estimate US\$4-5 bn
India's downstream response	Alerts in Bihar (Gandaki/Kosi/Ganga) and Uttar Pradesh; NDRF, IAF relief flights, medical/forensic teams
Related static concepts	Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH); GLOF; permafrost thaw; Himalayan hydropower vulnerability



DreamIAS

**NATIONAL****‘HIGHLY MALICIOUS, MOTIVATED’: INDIA REJECTS UN RIGHTS PANEL’S FINDINGS**

India on Wednesday rejected a report by a UN panel that alleged discrimination against various ethnic and religious groups in the country.

Key Takeaways:

- The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) flagged concerns on Tuesday over human rights violations against people belonging to scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and Rohingya refugees.

- It also called for action against those involved in “hate crime” in India. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India rejects “any politically motivated highly malicious references in the report with all the contempt that it deserves”.

“While we will respond to the committee’s observations through the established procedure, the inter-ministerial delegation, which was led by the Solicitor General of India, Tushar Mehta, had already rejected the sweeping generalisations, unsubstantiated allegations, or tendency to exceed the Convention’s mandate during the review meeting,” he said.

- The United Nations (UN) human rights panel had raised concerns about violations against marginalised communities in India, and urged New Delhi to protect them from alleged abuse, torture, extrajudicial killings, and stripping of citizenship.

- It also sharply criticised the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, and raised concerns about the subjecting of Bengali-speaking Muslims to “systematic and structural racial discrimination”. The NRC implementation was leading to mass arbitrary deprivation of citizenship, it said, while expressing concerns about Bengali-speaking Muslims being categorised as “non-original inhabitants”.

- It had called for India to suspend the NRC and review its legislative framework. The Election Commission of India’s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process was also called out in the report, with the committee raising concern that Bengali-speaking Muslim voters were reportedly disproportionately impacted in West Bengal and Assam.

Do You Know:

- According to UN website, Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

- The International human rights law lays down the obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups.



- The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights exercises principal responsibility for UN human rights activities. The High Commissioner is mandated to respond to serious violations of human rights and to undertake preventive action.
- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the focal point for United Nations human rights activities. It serves as the secretariat for the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies (expert committees that monitor treaty compliance) and other UN human rights organs. It also undertakes human rights field activities.

DRAWING LINES

India and China must be transparent about the talks on boundary dispute

Following Tuesday's talks between the Special Representatives (SRs) on the boundary question, India and China have agreed to substantial outcomes on managing the disputed border. According to an eight-point consensus released on Wednesday, both countries have agreed to advance discussions on "an early and substantial harvest of boundary delimitation". They have agreed to hold next month a meeting of an expert-level mechanism on trans-border rivers and to maintain communication on sharing hydrological data, which India has been pushing for. Two additional meeting points to hold talks between top military commanders will be set up, along with two new channels of hotlines in the Eastern and Middle Sectors. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi reaffirmed the efforts taken over the past two years to keep the peace along the Line of Actual Control, and committed to continuing the on-going normalisation in relations. That the NSA's visit to Beijing took place before India hosts the BRICS Summit, on September 12, underlined both sides' keenness to continue with this process of re-engagement, with the expected visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping after a gap of seven years. An October 2024 meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Xi kickstarted this calibrated effort towards normalcy, and a 2025 meeting in Tianjin helped continue the momentum. It is apparent that both sides see continued engagement at the highest level as key to sustaining this process of normalisation.

The dual tracks of the SR meetings and the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on border affairs, a body comprising diplomats and military officials, have worked well towards keeping the borders generally stable over the past two years. The latest outcomes will certainly help in keeping the peace. Less clear is how both sides intend to take up the task of border delimitation. Neither side has explained which parts of the border they plan to delimit, or whether they are reconsidering the 2005 agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles, under which the SRs were tasked with first agreeing a framework to settle the boundary. While both sides in Beijing reaffirmed the 2005 agreement, Article 10 of its text notes that it is only on the basis of the framework that both sides can delineate the boundary. Tangible progress on the border dispute must certainly be welcomed. However, agreements made without public visibility, notwithstanding their merit, may invite suspicion. As India and China continue negotiating their long-running boundary question, it is imperative that they bring their publics along.

J&K IMPORTANT PART OF INDIA, WILL RELOOK AT TRAVEL WARNINGS: US ENVOY IN SRINAGAR

In a strong endorsement of New Delhi's long-standing position on Jammu & Kashmir, US Ambassador Sergio Gorrer, who was in Srinagar Wednesday on his maiden visit to the Valley,



described J&K as “an important part of India” and signalled that Washington would review the situation in the Union Territory to downgrade and ease travel warnings for US citizens.

- Gor met Chief Minister Omar Abdullah at his Gupkar Road residence, marking the first standalone visit to the Valley by a serving US Ambassador since the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. In January 2020, Kenneth Juster, the then Ambassador, had visited the Valley as part of a government-facilitated delegation of foreign envoys.
- Stating that he was “thrilled” to be in the Valley, Gor said, “This is an important part of India. I am here, visiting for the first time. It’s an incredibly beautiful place.” He said he had “a very warm, very cordial” meeting with the Chief Minister. “We have some follow-ups that we hope to take back to Washington and back to Delhi. We look forward to building this relationship.”
- The current US advisory on J&K, citing concerns over terrorism and unrest, urges its citizens not to travel to this area “except for visits to the eastern Ladakh region and its capital, Leh”.

Do You Know:

- After the US Ambassador to India, Sergio Gor, on Wednesday (August 19) called Jammu and Kashmir “an important part of India”, Pakistan lodged a formal protest, summoning the US Charge d’ Affaires (top diplomat in absence of ambassador) in Islamabad to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This comes at a time Pakistan’s ties with the US have been unusually warm, with Islamabad cheering Donald Trump’s offers of mediating between the Asian neighbours and Pakistan mediating between the US and Iran.
- Gor echoing India’s right on Jammu and Kashmir is especially significant for two reasons. One, he is considered very close to Trump. Second, he is not just the US ambassador to India, but also the Special Envoy for South and Central Asian Affairs, in charge of overseeing US foreign policy with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Since January 2025, the post of US ambassador to Pakistan has been vacant.
- When the 1947 war broke out between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, the US position had been to favour bilateral resolution but to support UN involvement if the need arose. When, on Governor-General Lord Louis Mountbatten’s advice, India did take the Kashmir issue to the United Nations, the US and UK were sympathetic to Pakistan, to India’s shock. The five members of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan were Czechoslovakia, Belgium and Colombia, Argentina, and the USA.
- During the 1962 India-China war, Washington provided military assistance to India. Kennedy also stopped Pakistan from opening another front against India. But in return for this, the US pushed New Delhi to negotiate with Pakistan over Kashmir. Six rounds of talks followed, without producing an agreement.
- The 1965 India-Pakistan war made it clear to the US that it could not maintain close strategic relationships with both countries while also trying to manage the Kashmir dispute. With the Vietnam war dominating US attention, it maintained a lower profile in South Asia.
- After the 1971 war, India and Pakistan signed the 1972 Simla Agreement, agreeing to resolve their differences bilaterally and to respect the Line of Control in Kashmir. The US became receptive to this approach.



- Once the Cold War ended, the US largely gave up public support for calls of plebiscite. While the first Bill Clinton administration criticised India's human-rights record in Kashmir, after the Kargil war, Clinton blamed Pakistan for the aggression, and became more receptive to India's arguments.
- A US Congress document of 2020, after India had abrogated Article 370, said, "The long-standing US position on Kashmir is that the territory's status should be settled through negotiations between India and Pakistan while taking into consideration the wishes of the Kashmiri people." Trump has repeated the mediation claim several times, even claiming he stopped the conflict after Operation Sindoor.

WHAT DID TRUMP SAY ABOUT INDIA'S VOTING SYSTEM?

The story so far:

U.S. President Donald Trump posted on his social media platform, Truth Social, that **India's Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar had asked his administration how elections are held in the U.S. without a valid photo identity card.** He also pointed out **that just 1% of India's 64.64 crore electors who voted in the last general elections voted by mail (unlike the large number who do so in the U.S.)** Mr. Trump reiterated his demand that Congress pass the **Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE America) Act**, which would **require documentary proof of citizenship to register to vote in federal elections and a photo ID to cast a ballot, among other restrictions.**

How are elections conducted in the U.S. and how do they differ from elections in India?

Article I, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution (the Elections Clause) empowers the State legislatures to determine the "times, places, and manner" of federal elections even as it allows Congress to alter or make such regulations. There is **no national election authority like the Election Commission of India.** There is **the Federal Election Commission**, but it is only empowered to regulate campaign finance as **registration, balloting, and counting are done by the States' county and municipal jurisdictions.** This is due to the **strongly federal nature of the U.S., unlike India's quasi-federal system.**

The U.S. Congress also passed the National Voter Registration Act, 1993, which required States to offer voter registration at motor vehicle and public assistance offices, and the Help America Vote Act, 2002, which provided funding for States to buy new voting machines and called for State-wide elector databases.

Voter eligibility in the U.S. is therefore a State concern, and registration is elector-initiated. While documentary proof of citizenship is not demanded, **a potential elector has to affirm citizenship under penalty of perjury on the registration form.** **Thirty-six States ask for some form of identification at the polling place and 23 ask for a photo ID.**

This is unlike India, where electoral rolls are compiled in each State via house-to-house enumeration conducted by the ECI, which has superintendence over the whole process of registration. Eligible electors are then issued the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC), though other documents, including Aadhaar, can be used as identification at the booth as well.

Is non-citizen voting a real problem in the U.S. as Mr. Trump has made it out to be?

Independent studies have found **that almost all non-citizen registrations in the U.S. are accidental and only a small proportion of them votes.** The Trump administration's claims have not survived



scrutiny. The New York Times reported that after announcing in July that **it had identified 2,78,000 non-citizens on the rolls of four States, including 15,903 in Nevada**, the Department of Homeland Security told **Nevada's election administrators this month that it had identified just 185 potential non-citizens so far**. It described the earlier figure as a “ceiling” and shared a list without names.

Surveys show that a large majority of the electorate supports the requirement of photo identification at the polls. Yet, even this is short of the more onerous requirement of proving citizenship at the point of registration, which is what the SAVE America Act requires.

What is the SAVE America Act, and why is it opposed by Democrats and others?

The SAVE America Act was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in February along party lines, with Republicans outnumbering Democrats. **It requires every new registering elector or an existing elector who wants to update his/her record to produce a passport, or a birth certificate, or naturalisation papers along with a government photo ID. Mail-in voters — a widely used option in the U.S. — have to enclose a copy of their photo ID.** States will then run names on electoral rolls through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the latter could flag non-citizens for removal. Election officials who register people who lack the documents can face up to five years in prison.

The Bipartisan Policy Center in the U.S. estimates that over 20 million eligible American citizens do not have ready access to a passport or a birth certificate. Newly registering young adults have also faced problems producing these documents. These concerns have led the Democratic Party to oppose the SAVE America Act, which has stalled in the Senate.

Is India's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process delivering the “pure” rolls that the ECI promises?

The SIR, launched by the ECI to “purify” the electoral rolls, uses a peculiar methodology in which electors must self-enumerate on forms distributed door-to-door by the ECI before being included in the draft roll. After scrutiny by election officials, who will compare the forms with the previous SIR conducted more than two decades ago in the States, the draft rolls will be updated (the corrections and clarifications phase) before new SIR rolls are released.

The three phases of the SIR conducted by the ECI have been beset by anomalies in each State. By phase 2 of the SIR, for instance, more than 7 crore names were deleted during the process. The issues with the SIR are reflected in the drastic fall in gender ratio in the new rolls across most States. In West Bengal, in particular, an analysis published in The Hindu showed that there has been a religious skew in the deletions as well, which mattered in the way the election results panned out in the State. Despite these infirmities and anomalies, the Supreme Court held that the exercise was well within the ECI's statutory mandate.

The SIR in India has shifted the onus of verifying voter eligibility onto electors, unlike the earlier process in which election officials prepared the rolls by identifying and enrolling eligible citizens through house-to-house surveys. Opponents of the SAVE America Act have raised a similar concern about the Trump administration-backed legislation.

WHY BIHAR WANTS THE FARAKKA TREATY SCRAPPED — AND WHY IT PUTS GOVT IN A BIND

- As the treaty's lapse approaches, Bihar's ruling National Democratic Alliance is pushing against its renewal — a development that could put the BJP-led Centre in a bind.



- In the latest push against the pact, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary, who handles the state's water resources portfolio and who had accompanied Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary during a recent meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in Delhi, told reporters that the state had "expressed our concerns regarding the Farakka treaty and how it has proved detrimental to Bihar's interest". This comes after JD(U) national working president and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Kumar Jha also urged the Centre not to renew the pact.

- "The Farakka treaty has done enormous harm to Bihar. It is also surprising that the treaty was never reviewed in the last 30 years," Sanjay K Jha told The Indian Express. "Bihar suffers floods, heavy siltation and also paucity of water because of it. Now that we are in the phase of industrialisation, we need rational use of water. During summers, when we need water for ourselves, we have to concede water to Bangladesh as per the treaty."

Do You Know:

- The Farakka Water Treaty (officially called the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty) is a bilateral agreement signed on December 12, 1996, between India and Bangladesh that regulates the sharing of the Ganga waters at the Farakka Barrage in West Bengal, India, primarily during the dry season from January 1 to May 31. The treaty expires in December.

- The barrage was built in 1975 to divert water from the Ganga into the Hooghly River to flush out silt and to keep Kolkata Port navigable. However, this reduced downstream river flow into Bangladesh, causing severe water shortages, increased soil salinity, and ecological stress in southern Bangladesh.

- The 1996 treaty established a 30-year binding framework (1996–2026) to replace earlier short-term stopgap arrangements and ensure predictable water distribution.

- Unlike the earlier 1977 temporary agreement, the 1996 treaty lacks a "minimum flow guarantee clause". If total flow falls drastically below 50,000 cusecs, the treaty only calls for immediate emergency consultations between both governments. Siltation, reduced groundwater discharge, upstream water withdrawal, and erratic rainfall patterns have altered the river's actual availability in Bihar compared to 1996 baseline levels.

- For two decades, the Bihar government has been flagging concerns over the barrage with the Centre — first under Nitish Kumar and now under Samrat Choudhary.

- The Bihar government argues that the structure has created a severe "flood-and-parch" dynamic upstream, and that the heavy silt trapped behind the barrage has drastically elevated the Ganges riverbed, destroying its natural water storage capacity and driving severe seasonal floods into surrounding districts like Bhagalpur and Munger during the monsoons.

UNKIND CUTS

The scale of ECI's deletions in Telangana and Karnataka needs explanation

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process being conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI) is increasingly leading to a clear case of disenfranchisement in several parts of India. Marauding on after a judgment by the Supreme Court of India allowed it to proceed, the SIR has now struck out a fifth of the names from the electoral rolls in Telangana and Karnataka — nearly 22% and 19.5% respectively — and among the highest in the country. The cuts are steepest in



their capital cities — five constituencies in Bengaluru have lost more than half of their electors while nine of Hyderabad's 15 have seen deletions of more than 40%. Cuts of this kind cannot simply be a trimming of bloated rolls at the margins. If they are accurate, the ECI's own summary revision processes were yielding bloated rolls in recent elections, and doing so in the very places with high net in-migration from the rest of India. And if the deletions are to be justified, those struck off the rolls must have left the States — a move within Karnataka or Telangana would only relocate a voter's name on the same State roll, not remove it altogether. Yet, this is neither borne out by recent survey data nor by the government's own population estimates.

During the Bihar SIR, the Court asked why political parties had filed so few objections, seeking inclusion of wrongly deleted names; that question might hold true for the Southern States as well. A plausible reason could be that the voter id is useful to a citizen only once in a few years, leading to less alacrity on their part. This may explain why a process that puts the onus on electors yields cuts of this scale. Meanwhile, proving a smoking gun in the data is difficult because of the ECI's opacity. It has not published the elector-to-population ratio for any State so far during the revision even though doing so is mandatory and is the only test of under-enrolment. The Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer has not even bothered to release a gender-wise breakdown of the deletions, instead scattering the lists across several Google Drive links without the old booth numbers, making verification arduous. The outcome of such shoddiness is visible in West Bengal, where the ECI's dubious "logical discrepancy" process disenfranchised lakhs of electors, forcing them to seek redress before tribunals set up under the aegis of the Court. Months after the elections, records obtained under a Right to Information request show that barely 82,000 of the nearly 38 lakh appeals before the 19 tribunals have been decided, with more than 90% of those decisions favouring electors seeking restoration. The ECI — an institution once envied even by wealthier democracies for bringing large numbers of Indians to the polling booth — is now an obstacle to universal adult franchise.

INVISIBLE ACTORS

The ECI must stop filing of bulk applications for deletion of voters

The Election Commission of India (ECI)'s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has seen allegations of bulk filing of applications seeking to delete voters' names from draft lists using Form 7 in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and, more recently Uttarakhand. Ground reports by The Hindu from Karnataka, Rajasthan and Gujarat noted that these forms were often filed in bulk fraudulently using names of people who were unaware of the filing. In several instances, hundreds of objections were filed under a single person's name. Form 7 is filed to object to an existing name — or to request its deletion — on the electoral rolls for reasons such as death, shifting, or ineligibility. The ECI's Booth Level Officer or the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has to conduct an inquiry on the application and issue a notice to the voter before taking any action. While Booth Level Agents (BLA) of political parties can file up to 10 Form 7s a day, totalling 30, there is no limit on how many forms an individual registered as a voter from the same constituency can submit. To prevent misuse, the ECI has said that if a person files more than five objections, it will trigger a mandatory review by the ERO to ensure the legitimacy of the claims.

The Opposition parties have alleged that the form was being misused through "systemic and coordinated efforts" to delete names of eligible voters and embolden the BJP's efforts to wrongfully gain electoral advantage. In the case of Uttarakhand, the Congress has alleged that the manner in which the bulk forms were submitted online pointed to "institutional" access being granted to some in the process. These parties have also sent delegations and submitted

4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



representations to the ECI. What is important to note is that in most cases, voters were unaware that applications for deletion of their names had been filed at all, leaving it to workers of political parties active in the constituency to bring it to their notice. According to ECI data, for the third phase of the SIR covering 16 States/three Union Territories there are 3,42,409 BLAs of political parties for an electorate of 36,73,87,831 or one BLA for approximately 1,073 voters. These numbers include agents from ruling and Opposition parties. In such a situation, it is incumbent upon the ECI to step in and protect the voting rights of an individual rather than leave it to the grassroots strength of political parties. The ECI should thus take immediate steps to address this concern. Abnormal patterns should be investigated and the process should be monitored, with a uniform, country-wide Standard Operating Procedure, requiring verification of identity and constituency of the objector and the following of due process before any elector is deleted pursuant to a Form 7.

WHY 543 SHOULD REMAIN 543

Days after both Houses of Parliament were adjourned sine die on August 13, 2026, the monsoon session has yet to be formally prorogued. The delay has prompted speculation that Parliament could be reconvened for another attempt at the constitutional amendment linked to delimitation and women's reservation. Whether or not that happens, it gives urgency to a question Parliament must confront: must delimitation necessarily mean an enlargement of the Lok Sabha?

Numbers alone cannot decide

At first glance, the issue looks like arithmetic. India's population has grown enormously since Lok Sabha seats were frozen half a century ago, so it seems natural to argue that representation must now expand correspondingly. But, constitutional design is not arithmetic alone.

Article 81 requires representation broadly to correspond to population, "so far as practicable", while Article 82 provides for readjustment after every Census. Yet, Parliament has twice modified the mechanical application of this principle when another compelling national objective was at stake. In 1976, through the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, the inter-State allocation of seats was frozen on the basis of the 1971 Census so that States successful in family planning were not politically penalised for reducing population growth. The freeze was later extended by the 84th Amendment until the publication of figures from the first Census conducted after 2026. Parliament thus recognised that population matters, but it is not the only constitutional value at stake.

The government has reportedly suggested increasing every State's representation by roughly 50%, arguing that this would leave each with the same 'proportion' of Lok Sabha seats that it has today. On the face of it, that appears to answer the fear of the southern States of losing their relative position. But 'proportion' tells only half the story.

Suppose Uttar Pradesh rises from 80 seats to 120, while Tamil Nadu rises from 39 to about 59. Their proportional relationship remains unchanged. Yet, the absolute gap in voting strength rises from 41 Members of Parliament (MP) to around 61. Parliament does not vote in proportions; it votes in absolute numbers. Governments are formed by numbers, and confidence motions, legislation, and constitutional amendments are decided by numbers. A 50% pro-rata increase may preserve the ratio while widening the numerical gap.



The 1976 freeze therefore embodied a federal compact: States that succeeded in population stabilisation would not see their political voice diminished for doing what national policy encouraged. That understanding should not now be thoughtlessly discarded.

There is also a misconception that delimitation and enlargement are inseparable. They are not. India has already shown that constituency boundaries can be redrawn without changing the number of seats allocated to each State. The delimitation after the 2001 Census reorganised constituencies within States while maintaining the existing inter-State allocation.

That principle can be adopted again. The 2027 Census can provide the basis for redrawing constituencies within each State so that populations are more evenly distributed. Boundaries can reflect demographic movement and urbanisation. None of this requires increasing the Lok Sabha beyond 543 or disturbing the present federal balance.

A continuously expanding legislature is also not an inevitable consequence of population growth. The United States House of Representatives has remained at 435 voting members (there were some temporary exceptions) for more than a century despite enormous population growth. Switzerland's National Council has remained at 200 members since 1963. Going a step further, Hungary reduced its Parliament from 386 members to 199, while Italy reduced its Chamber of Deputies from 630 to 400. There is no democratic law requiring legislatures to grow whenever population grows.

Bigger House, weaker deliberation

There is another serious concern: what a larger House does to Parliament's own functioning. Parliamentary time does not expand with the number of MPs. Even with 543 members, many MPs hardly get opportunities to speak, ask questions or raise matters of public importance. A Lok Sabha enlarged by 50%, to more than 800 members, would reduce those opportunities further. It may increase representation numerically while weakening the quality of deliberation, one of Parliament's most important functions. Indian MPs already represent the largest average constituencies among the world's major democracies — several times the size of a U.S. congressional district or a U.K. constituency. Freezing the House at 543 while the population keeps growing means that burden only increases after delimitation, and the case for more representatives to improve accessibility is a real one. But it does not follow that the additional representatives must sit in Parliament. Most citizens approach elected representatives over roads, schools, hospitals, local services and State administration - matters substantially within the State sphere. If population growth has made constituencies unwieldy, strengthening representation at the State level is, therefore, a more sensible solution. More MLAs and smaller Assembly constituencies can bring representatives closer to citizens without continuously enlarging the national legislature.

That expansion faces none of the federal-arithmetic constraint that makes Lok Sabha expansion fraught. A larger Assembly shifts no balance between States — each answers only to its own population. Vidhan Sabhas can therefore grow to meet accessibility needs without disturbing the inter-State balance in Parliament that the 1976 freeze was designed to protect. Then comes women's reservation. One-third reservation for women is now being connected with delimitation, and enlargement of the Lok Sabha is presented partly as a way of accommodating women without disturbing existing political interests.

But women's representation should not become a constitutional justification for enlarging the House. One-third of the present Lok Sabha is approximately 181 seats. Women can receive their



constitutionally promised representation within the existing House of 543. The purpose of reservation is to alter who occupies parliamentary seats, not necessarily to create hundreds of additional ones.

A 50% expansion could produce a curious result: the number of women MPs would rise, which is desirable, but so would the numerical dominance of the already larger States. A reform intended to correct one representational imbalance could deepen another. Women's representation and federal fairness are both legitimate constitutional objectives. India need not choose between them.

Preserve 543, undertake reforms

The solution is simple: retain the Lok Sabha at 543; preserve the present inter-State distribution of seats; undertake delimitation within States on updated population figures; implement women's reservation within that structure; and expand the Vidhan Sabhas to absorb the accessibility pressure that population growth has created.

For half a century, States have pursued demographic policies knowing that successful population stabilisation would not reduce their parliamentary influence. Southern States in particular invested heavily in education, health care and family welfare and achieved fertility levels that national policy itself encouraged. To reward that success with a larger political advantage for States where population grew faster would invert the incentive the Union deliberately created.

The question, therefore, is not whether population should matter. Of course it should. The question is whether it should now mechanically rearrange the federal political balance that India consciously preserved for five decades. Twice before, Parliament amended the constitutional framework to preserve the existing inter-State allocation despite population changes. There is no reason it cannot do so a third time. The uncertainty over whether Parliament may be recalled makes this more than an academic debate. Decisions taken now could shape the federal balance of the Republic for decades.

Delimitation is necessary. Women's representation is overdue. Updated constituency boundaries are desirable. But none of these objectives requires an 800-plus-member Lok Sabha.

Sometimes constitutional wisdom lies not in making institutions larger, but in preserving the balance that has allowed them to endure; 543 has served India for more than half a century. There is a strong constitutional, federal and democratic case for letting this number remain 543.

BEHIND NEW TRIBUNALS BILL, DECADE-LONG TUSSLE BETWEEN CENTRE, SC

Parliament has passed the Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026, introducing sweeping changes to the administration of tribunals across the country.

Key Takeaways:

- Tribunals are quasi-judicial bodies that are set up to provide swift and specialised resolution of disputes and reduce the caseload of courts.
- The Bill establishes a National Tribunals Commission, fixes the tenure of tribunal members at five years and requires the Union government to appoint members within three months of their names being recommended by the commission.



- These changes address several of the concerns repeatedly raised over the years by the Supreme Court regarding the administration of tribunals, particularly over tenure and the executive's discretion in appointments.
- But the Bill does not entirely remove the government from the administration of tribunals: the Centre retains important powers over the commission, its funding and rules, and service conditions.
- For years, the Supreme Court and the Union government have been locked in a legislative and judicial back-and-forth over the governance of tribunals.
- The friction began with the Finance Act of 2017, which empowered the Centre to frame rules for tribunals. These rules were struck down by a Constitution bench of the court in the 2019 Rojer Mathew case for undermining judicial independence.
- When the Centre notified new rules in 2020, the Supreme Court recommended several modifications, including suggesting a five-year tenure for members. Instead of incorporating these suggestions, the Centre promulgated an Ordinance in April 2021 that fixed the tenure at four years, set a minimum appointment age of 50 and required selection committees to recommend a panel of two names for the government to choose from.
- After the Supreme Court struck down these provisions as arbitrary, Parliament passed the Tribunals Reforms Act in August 2021, re-enacting the exact provisions the court had just declared unconstitutional.

Do You Know:

- The 2026 Bill repeals the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021 and contains detailed transitional provisions protecting certain existing appointments and allowing some selection processes begun under the old framework to continue.
- The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the 2026 Bill says that it is being introduced “in consonance with the directions of the Supreme Court” to “improve the efficiency, ensure independence, transparency and uniformity” in the functioning of tribunals. The reference is to a Supreme Court judgement in November last year that had struck down provisions of the Tribunal Reforms Act, 2021.
- The most significant change is the establishment of the National Tribunals Commission. The Supreme Court had repeatedly insisted on the creation of this independent body to sever the tribunals' reliance on their parent government ministries for administrative and financial needs, which the court argued kept them under executive control.
- The Commission will conduct the selection process for vacancies, review the performance of tribunals, oversee inquiries into complaints against members and maintain a National Tribunals Data Grid. It will be headed by a former Supreme Court judge or a former Chief Justice of a High Court and comprise two judicial members and two technical members. The technical members must have at least 25 years' experience in fields such as public administration, finance or law.
- The Bill resolves the previously contested issue of tenure by aligning with the court's mandate and stipulating that chairpersons and members of tribunals will hold office for a term of five years. The maximum age limit has been set at 70 years for chairpersons and 67 years for members. They can be considered for reappointment.



- The selection process has also been changed. The search-cum-selection committee for members will be headed by a judicial member of the Commission and will include a retired High Court judge, a government secretary, a technical member and experts. The committee will recommend one suitable candidate for each vacancy, with one additional name kept on a waiting list. The government must make the appointment within three months of receiving the recommendation.

DIGNITY IN DEATH: DEBATE OVER 'HUMANE' EXECUTION

Can a method of execution devised in colonial India still satisfy the Constitution's promise of dignity? The Supreme Court on Aug 18 said it can, at least on the material currently before it.

Key Takeaways:

- A bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta upheld the constitutional validity of hanging as a mode of executing a death sentence, dismissing a PIL that argued the method is scientifically unreliable and violates the right to a dignified death under Article 21.
- The court held that the challenge ran into two hurdles – the 1983 precedent of Deena vs UOI in which a three-judge bench upheld hanging as a constitutional mode of execution, and the Parliament's decision to retain hanging while enacting the BNSS.
- It said, "this constitutional protection does not cease to exist at the gallows, it must apply with equal emphasis to prisoners who are on death row."

Do You Know:

- Hanging is designed to work through a calculated "drop" based on the person's height and weight, meant to cause a fracture-dislocation at the C2-C3 vertebrae and bring about near-instant unconsciousness.
- The Supreme Court in Deena vs UOI upheld the constitutional validity of hanging after examining medical evidence, expert opinion, and comparative execution methods. The court held that hanging, when properly administered, is a quick and certain method of execution and does not violate Article 21. It said that the process causes no greater pain than any other known method and avoids "barbarity, torture and degradation."
- But the petitioners argued that both the scientific understanding and constitutional doctrine have evolved since. The petition sought a declaration that the provision prescribing hanging was unconstitutional and argued that Article 21 includes a right to die through a dignified procedure. They said the method is "accompanied by intense physical torture and pain," and inherently unpredictable; too short a drop causes death by strangulation, too long a drop can decapitate.
- Reliance was placed on a 1992 study of the skeletal remains of 34 people hanged in England between 1882 and 1945. Fractures at C2-C3 were common, but the "hangman's fracture" — assumed to cause near-instant death—showed up in only three of the 34 cases; six died of asphyxiation instead. They argued that this made hanging neither quick nor controllable and thus violated Article 21, as it isn't reliably instantaneous, the run-up to execution causes severe psychological suffering, and its outcomes can't be managed.
- The Union argued that since 2003, only eight executions have taken place in India and pointed out that no botched execution has ever been recorded in India, while lethal injection in the US carries a well-documented history of failures.



- The right to die with dignity flows from the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court in *Gian Kaur v State of Punjab* (1996) held that the right to life includes the right to live and consequently to die with dignity.
- A key plank of the challenge was the Law Commission of India's 187th report submitted in 2003 under the chairmanship of Justice M. Jagannadha Rao. After examining the execution practices in India and abroad, the commission recommended that the law "be amended by providing an alternative mode of execution of the death sentence by lethal injection until the accused is dead." The report also examined military laws under which death sentences awarded through court-martial may be carried out by shooting. The petitioners also relied on these provisions to argue that hanging need not remain the sole legally recognised mode of execution.

RAHUL GANDHI GETS PRIVILEGE NOTICE FOR ALLEGATIONS AGAINST SHAH

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi has been served a breach of privilege notice for allegedly using "unparliamentary and derogatory language" and for levelling "grave allegations" against Union Home Minister Amit Shah, it is learnt.

Key Takeaways:

- The senior Congress leader is learnt to have been asked to furnish his reply by August 28 for consideration by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla after he received two notices in this regard from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Chief Whip Sanjay Jaiswal and party MP Anurag Thakur.
- Thakur is said to have given a notice of "question of breach of privilege" and "contempt of the House" on July 30, accusing Gandhi of "using unparliamentary and derogatory language and for levelling grave allegations against" Shah without adequate advance notice under Rule 353 during the debate on Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026.
- Jaiswal, in a letter on July 29, is learnt to have asked Birla to take cognisance of the alleged use of "unparliamentary expressions" by Gandhi during the debate on the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, and to take appropriate action under the Rules of Procedure.

Do You Know:

- Parliamentary privileges are certain rights conferred to the Members of Parliament for conducting the business of the Parliament.
- According to the Constitution, the powers, privileges and immunities of Parliament and MP's are to be defined by Parliament. According to the Constitution of India, Articles 105 and 122 outline the privileges of Parliament, while Articles 194 and 212 pertain to the privileges of state governments.
- Article 105, there shall be freedom of speech in Parliament. No member of Parliament shall be liable to any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by him in Parliament or any committee thereof.
- Article 122: The validity of any proceedings in Parliament shall not be called in question in court on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure.
- Article 194 and Article 212 are corresponding articles for state legislature.



— If there is a belief that such a privilege has been breached, a motion can be raised by any member.

— The right to raise a question of privilege is based on satisfying two conditions, namely: (i) the question shall be restricted to a specific matter of recent occurrence, and (ii) the matter requires the intervention of the Council.

— The Speaker/Rajya Sabha Chairman is the first level of scrutiny of a privilege motion. Therefore, the Speaker/Chairman can decide on the privilege motion himself or herself or refer it to the privileges committee of Parliament.

VANDE MATARAM AND THE RIGHT TO DISSENT

Parliament has given Vande Mataram the same criminal-law protection long enjoyed by the national anthem. But a closer look at the Constituent Assembly's own reasoning, the actual text of the new law, and the Supreme Court's judgment in *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* (1986) suggests that the position is far less settled and far more protective of individual conscience than the political rhetoric around the amendment implies.

Why it was not the anthem

The question of India's national anthem was left open for nearly the entire life of the Constituent Assembly. It was finally settled not by a vote, but by a presidential statement on January 24, 1950, at the Assembly's last sitting, when Dr. Rajendra Prasad declared that Jana Gana Mana would be the National Anthem of India, and that Vande Mataram, "which has played a historic part in the struggle for Indian freedom, shall be honoured equally with Jana Gana Mana and shall have equal status with it."

That formula is worth reading carefully, because what it conspicuously does not do is make Vande Mataram the anthem or even a co-anthem. The Constitution, when it came into force two days later, contains no reference whatsoever to a "national song". The status of Vande Mataram rests entirely on Dr. Prasad's 1950 statement and on subsequent convention, and nothing more.

The reason for this restraint lies earlier, in the Indian National Congress's own reckoning with the song in the 1930s. Vande Mataram's later stanzas, rarely sung today, invoke the motherland in explicitly devotional, goddess-centred terms. In the context of the 1882 novel *Anandamath*, from which the song is drawn, some of its verses were also read as casting Muslims as adversaries. Objections from the Muslim League and others led the Congress Working Committee, in October 1937, to resolve that only the first two stanzas — pastoral, secular in imagery and free of any reference to a deity — would be sung at official gatherings.

That 1937 compromise is what Dr. Prasad's Constituent Assembly statement inherited and preserved in 1950: full-throated reverence for the song's role in the freedom struggle, but a deliberate decision to keep its more contentious, devotional verses out of India's civic and constitutional life. It was not an oversight.

What the amendment says

The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on July 24, 2026, and cleared both Houses within a week. The Rajya Sabha cleared it on July 29 and the Lok Sabha on July 30, each after only a brief discussion, with the Opposition,



including the DMK and Congress, raising strong objections about the Bill being used to advance a particular cultural agenda and about the timing amid unrelated protests in the House. It received Presidential assent shortly after.

Given the speed and thinness of the debate, the Amendment — one of 12 Bills passed in a Monsoon Session in which, by Parliament's own record, most legislation went through with barely any discussion — has had remarkably little parliamentary scrutiny for a law that touches on religious sentiment, free expression and criminal liability all at once.

What the Amendment actually does is narrower than the headlines suggest. It substitutes Section 3 of the 1971 Act with a provision that punishes two things, and only two things, in relation to both the national anthem and the national song: intentionally preventing their singing and causing disturbance to an assembly engaged in singing them. The punishment — up to three years' imprisonment, a fine, or both, with a mandatory minimum of one year for repeat offenders — is now common to both compositions.

Here is the question mark worth putting squarely to the government: nowhere does the amended Act say which stanzas of Vande Mataram must be sung, or that all six stanzas must be sung, for the law's protection to apply. The statute does not prescribe a mandatory version of the song at all. It does not compel singing in the first place by anyone, of any stanza.

All the amended Section 3 requires is that if the national song is being sung, at whatever length and in whatever form, that rendition must not be intentionally prevented or disturbed. That is a materially narrower obligation than the political framing around the Bill — including the government's own push, since late 2025, to popularise and even mandate all six stanzas at official functions — might lead the public to believe. The law penalises disrespect and disruption of a performance; it does not, on its text, mandate participation in one, nor does it fix which version of the song is entitled to protection.

The later stanzas

The commonly sung opening stanzas of Vande Mataram describe the motherland in pastoral terms, her waters, her fruit, her cooling breezes, her fields. It is the later stanzas, historically dropped from public renditions by the Congress in 1937 but increasingly promoted for full recitation since the government's commemoration of the song's 150th anniversary in late 2025, that shift register entirely.

In substance, and in every available English rendering, they describe the motherland as embodied in the Hindu goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati, respectively, goddesses of power, wealth and learning, and speak of her as an object of worship enshrined in temples, with "crores" of arms raised in her defence. This is not patriotic verse loosely coloured with cultural reference; on a plain reading, it is a devotional address to a deity, structured in the grammar of prayer.

Freedom of conscience

India is constitutionally committed to a plurality of faiths: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and others, each entitled under Article 25 to freedom of conscience and the free profession, practice and propagation of religion, and under Article 26 to manage its own religious affairs without State interference.

For adherents of monotheistic faiths in particular, being required, whether by direct compulsion or by the coercive pressure of a criminal statute looming over any public assembly, to stand



through or refrain from disrupting an extended recitation addressed to Hindu goddesses raises a genuine and serious constitutional difficulty. A citizen's discomfort with participating in what is, on the text, an act of worship of deities outside their own faith is not eccentric; it is exactly the kind of conscientious objection that Articles 25 and 26 exist to protect.

Articles 25 and 26 are fundamental rights. It is a basic proposition of Indian constitutional law that no ordinary legislation, however patriotically framed or however overwhelming its parliamentary majority, can override a fundamental right. A law that has the effect of pressuring citizens, on pain of criminal liability for anyone thought to be "disturbing" its recitation, to acquiesce in a devotional performance contrary to their faith would not survive that Part III scrutiny. The 2026 Amendment does not, fortunately, go that far on its text, but the danger, as the next section shows, lies in how it may be applied.

The Bijoe Emmanuel ruling

This is not an abstract or first-time question for Indian courts. It was addressed directly and decisively in *Bijoe Emmanuel & Ors. v. State of Kerala* (1986), a case that remains the single most important precedent on the collision between compelled patriotic ritual and freedom of conscience.

Three siblings, Bijoe, Binu Mol and Bindu Emmanuel, practising Jehovah's Witnesses, stood respectfully and silently while their schoolmates sang Jana Gana Mana during morning assembly. They did not sing themselves because their faith forbade what they understood as an act of worship of anyone or anything other than god. For this, they were expelled.

The Kerala High Court upheld the expulsion, holding that Article 51A's fundamental duty to respect the national anthem overrode any claim under Articles 25 and 26, and that Jehovah's Witnesses could not even invoke those protections.

The Supreme Court, in a judgment authored by Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy, reversed the High Court in emphatic terms. The Bench held that compelling a person to join in singing despite a genuine, conscientiously held religious objection contravenes both Article 19(1)(a) — freedom of expression, which the court held extends to the freedom to remain silent — and Article 25(1), the guarantee of freedom of conscience.

Crucially, the court held that the fundamental duties enumerated under Article 51A cannot be used to cut down or override the fundamental rights guaranteed under Part III of the Constitution; a duty to respect national symbols cannot, in law, be turned into a licence to punish sincere religious dissent. The court also read the 1971 Act itself as requiring nothing more than respectful conduct, not active participation from anyone present. It closed with the observation that the country's tradition, philosophy and Constitution alike "practise tolerance," urging that this not be diluted.

That ruling has never been overturned, and its logic transfers with full force to Vande Mataram, arguably with greater force, given that the song's later verses are, unlike the anthem, addressed to specific deities. If the Supreme Court held that a Jehovah's Witness could not be compelled to sing a secular anthem against conscience, the same protection must extend, a fortiori, to a citizen who objects to reciting verses that are, on their face, prayers to Hindu goddesses.

Legal position

Put together, the three strands here point to a single, clear conclusion.

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First, the Constituent Assembly and the country's founding leadership deliberately confined official recognition to the first two, secular stanzas of Vande Mataram. That is precisely why the fuller, devotional version was never made compulsory, then or since.

Second, the 2026 Amendment, whatever its political framing, imposes no textual obligation on any citizen to sing any particular version of the song, let alone all six stanzas. It penalises only the prevention or disturbance of a singing that is already taking place.

Third, and most importantly, even where the song, including its later stanzas, is sung, a citizen who chooses not to join in because doing so would offend their freedom of conscience under Article 25 is under no legal obligation to participate.

The law as laid down by the Supreme Court in *Bijoe Emmanuel* gives that citizen complete protection: standing respectfully, in silence, without disrupting others, is not an offence under this Act, was not an offence under the original 1971 Act, and cannot be made one merely by extending the statute to a new composition.

Citizens uneasy about the fuller version of Vande Mataram do not need to wait for a court to vindicate them after the fact. The law, correctly read, already protects them.

WEARING HIJAB NOT ESTABLISHED AS 'ESSENTIAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICE' FOR WOMEN IN ISLAM, SAYS HC

The Allahabad High Court recently held that wearing a headscarf could not be established as an "essential religious practice" of Islam. The observation was made on a Muslim student's petition for permission to wear hijab along with her school uniform.

A Division Bench of Justices J.J. Munir and Indrajeet Shukla, in an order of August 21, dismissed the petition filed by a Class 11 student of Tagore Public School in Prayagraj.

In her plea, the student argued that wearing the scarf was an essential religious practice protected by her fundamental rights under Articles 14 and 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. She had previously worn a headscarf at the same school from Class 6 without objection, she said.

The fact that the student had worn the scarf for several years did not create an enforceable right to compel the school to relax or alter its uniform policy, the High Court said.

"We have perused the photographs from various classes relating to the petitioner. Except for her, no other girl student is donning the headscarf, even those belonging to the same religious community as the petitioner. Wherever this issue has arisen, the High Courts have been unanimous in opinion that wearing a headscarf is not essential part of the Islamic faith, in the absence of which faith would be jeopardized," the court said.

No factual foundation had been laid nor material placed on record to establish that donning headscarf was an essential part of religion for a Muslim female, the High Court further said. The court relied on the judgments of the Bombay and Karnataka High Courts concerning hijab.

It held that the dispute was principally about compliance with an institutional dress code rather than interference with the student's freedom of faith.

"The school in this case does not seek to curtail the petitioner's freedom of faith at all. All that they require is conformity to institutional discipline, of which a uniform is an essential part," it said.



GROUP ATTACKS READING SESSION OF MALALA YOUSAFZAI'S BOOK IN AHMEDABAD; THREE ARRESTED

A reading session of Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai's memoir 'I Am Malala' turned violent in Gujarat's Ahmedabad city after a group of people identifying as right-wing activists attacked the participants, police said on Friday.

The police have arrested three persons in connection with the attack that occurred at Vastrapur Garden on Thursday evening, an officer said.

Vastrapur police station Inspector G.M. Chaudhary said that a group of nearly 20 people, including women, had gathered at the public garden for the reading and were confronted by an armed group of 18 to 20 individuals, claiming to be from the Bajrang Dal and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), over their choice of book. She said that when the readers were leaving the garden after the session, around 18 to 20 people arrived at the site and angrily demanded to know why they had read Ms. Yousufzai's memoir.

An altercation ensued, leading to a scuffle in which two people were injured; the attackers were armed with sticks, the official said.

"An FIR has been registered, two of the accused were known to the victims. Apart from them, six individuals have been identified, and three have already been arrested," she said.

A few weeks ago, a private school in Ahmedabad was forced to drop books by Ms. Yousafzai and Holocaust survivor Anne Frank from its mandatory reading list after protests from right-wing groups.

'Incurable disease'

Meanwhile, Congress leader Pawan Khera on Friday took a swipe at right-wing activists who assaulted participants of the book reading session, saying ignorance, combined with a dash of communalism, is an incurable disease.

WHY THE J&K GOVT IS STUCK IN A QUOTA QUAGMIRE

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on August 14 warned of Gen Z-like protests if his Cabinet's proposal to tweak the reservation system in the Union Territory wasn't acted upon.

Key Takeaways:

- The Cabinet had sent its submission on the reservation policy to the Lieutenant Governor in November last year.
- The issue of 'rationalising' the reservation system has become a hot button issue in the UT.
- Before the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status on August 5, 2019, 43% seats in government jobs were reserved for different categories, such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), residents of areas along the Actual Line of Control (ALC) and the International Border (IB), residents of backward areas, those physically challenged, and former service personnel.



- But in 2024, L-G Manoj Sinha announced an amendment to the J&K Reservation Act 2004, barely a month before the 2024 Parliamentary elections. Reservation was enhanced from 43% to 70% in government jobs. The jump was because Special Tribe (ST) status was given to the Pahari community. ST categorisation for the Paharis had always been opposed by the Gujjars and Bakerwas, who hold the status. To not annoy the Gujjars, the administration announced increasing the ST quota from 10% to 20%. This led to sharp criticism from those not covered under any reservation, as they were left with only 30% of the jobs to compete for.

- In their 2024 Assembly election manifesto, the two principal political parties of the UT, Omar Abdullah's National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), promised to revisit the issue. Wary of the potential electoral fallout, both framed their stance as "rationalisation of reservation".

Do You Know:

- For the Omar Abdullah government, pushback is coming from within as well as the public. In February, in response to a motion by People's Conference leader Sajad Lone, the government presented numbers in the Assembly that showed significantly more reserved category certificates going to people in Jammu than in Kashmir.

- Before that, in October 2025, an MP from Omar's own party, Aga Ruhullah Mehdi, sat on protest with people from unreserved categories outside the CM's residence.

- The government then set up a cabinet sub-committee, which filed its report in October 2025, recommending capping reservations at 50%. The Cabinet accepted it and in the next month, sent the file to Lok Bhawan (L-G's residence) for clearance. Omar has now said that the Lok Bhawan had raised queries on the report, which his government responded to, but there has been no movement since.

- In March 2024, soon after Parliament brought in more groups under STs in J&K, Lt Governor Manoj Sinha amended the J&K Reservation Rules, 2005, enhancing the ST-reserved seats/jobs from 10% of the total to 20%. Alongside, reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC) was also increased, with 15 new groups added to the OBC list. This meant that total reservations increased from 43% to 70% of the total in government jobs/seats, leaving only 30% in the general category, though a majority of the J&K population falls in this category.

- Youths hit the streets against the increase in quotas, with National Conference MP Aga Ruhulla Mehdi joining them against his own party's government. Recently, he warned that he would join the protests again after Parliament's Winter Session if there was no review of the quota policy.

KERALA IS NOW OFFICIALLY KERALAM

The Union home Ministry has notified 'Keralam' as the new name for the State effective Tuesday. In a gazette notification issued on Tuesday, the home ministry said, "in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of Section 1 of the Kerala (Alteration of name) Act, 2026, the Central government hereby appoints the 25th day of August, 2026, as the date on which the provisions of the said Act shall come into force." earlier this month, President Droupadi Murmu gave assent to the bill.

**Key Takeaways:**

- In June 2024, the state assembly unanimously passed a resolution urging the Union government to take steps under Article 3 of the Constitution to change the state's name to Keralam. This was the second such resolution passed by the assembly, after the earlier one in August 2023.
- The assembly argued that “Keralam” is the name of the state in Malayalam, while “Kerala” is the name used in English and listed in the First Schedule of the Constitution.
- The Constitution explicitly gives Parliament the power to alter the name of a state.
- Under Article 3, a Bill seeking such a change can be introduced in Parliament only on the President's recommendation. If the proposal affects a state's area, boundaries or name, the President refers the Bill to that state's legislature and gives it an opportunity to express its views. The state legislature's view, however, is ultimately not binding on Parliament.
- In Kerala's case, after the Union Cabinet approved the proposal in February 2026, the President referred the proposed Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026 to the state assembly. The assembly unanimously agreed with the Bill. The Bill was subsequently introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 10 and passed by voice vote on August 11. The Bill must now be passed by the Rajya Sabha and receive the President's assent before the change from Kerala to Keralam becomes law.

Do You Know:

- There are several theories regarding Keralam's etymological roots.

—One of the earliest known mentions of the word occurs in Emperor Ashoka's Rock Edict II, dated to 257 BCE. The edict reads: “Everywhere in the dominions of King Priyadarsin, Beloved of the gods, as well as those of his frontier sovereigns, such as the Chodas [Cholas], Pandyas, Satiyaputra, Ketalaputra [Keralaputra]...” (translated by epigraphist D R Bhandarkar).

—Keralaputra, literally “son of Kerala” in Sanskrit, refers to the dynasty of the Cheras, one of the three main kingdoms of southern India.

—German missionary and linguist Hermann Gundert, who compiled an early Malayalam-English dictionary, noted a relationship between the Canarese (Kannada) word “keram” and “cheram”, referring to the coastal land between Gokarna (in Karnataka) and Kanyakumari (Tamil Nadu, India's southern tip). Another proposed derivation is from the Old Tamil root “cher”, meaning to join, and “alam”, meaning a region or land.

- Malayalam-speaking populations were historically spread across different political entities, including the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, and the Malabar district of the Madras Presidency.
- The demand to unite the Malayalam-speaking regions gained momentum under the Aikya Kerala, or United Kerala movement of the 1920s.
- After Independence, the princely states of Travancore and Cochin were integrated in 1949 to form the Travancore-Cochin State.
- The reorganisation of states on linguistic lines subsequently paved the way for a Malayalam-speaking state. Following the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission under Syed Fazl Ali, the modern state of Kerala came into existence on November 1, 1956.



- Malabar district and Kasargod taluk were included in the new state, while four southern taluks of Travancore—Tovala, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilayankode—and some parts of Shenkottai were excluded and eventually became part of Tamil Nadu.

- In Malayalam, the new state was called Keralam. In English and the Constitution, it remained Kerala.

CM'S GOING ABROAD: THE RULES AROUND POLITICAL CLEARANCE

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's visit to the US has been cancelled after the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) denied "clearance from political angle", his office said on Friday.

Key Takeaways:

- For a foreign trip, public servants need something called "political clearance" from the External Affairs Ministry.

- This is required not only for public servants but any government servant for a foreign trip. The MEA gets hundreds of requests for political clearance every month from ministries, secretaries, bureaucrats and other officials.

- The decision to grant or deny clearance is based on multiple factors, such as the nature of the event, the level of participation from other countries, the kind of invitation that has been extended, and also India's relations with the host country.

- The system is meant to ensure that official foreign visits do not have diplomatic or foreign-policy implications that have not been assessed by the government.

- Since 2016, political clearance applications can be made on the MEA website epolclearance.gov.in. These are processed and clearance is issued after coordination among various ministry divisions, which is done through a dedicated 'Coordination Division'.

Do You Know:

- Chief Ministers, ministers of state governments and other state officials, as mentioned earlier, also need clearance from the Department of Economic Affairs. For Union ministers, after getting political clearance from the MEA, additional clearance is needed from the Prime Minister, whether the trip is official or personal.

- Lok Sabha MPs need clearance from the Speaker, and Rajya Sabha members from the Chairperson (Vice President of India). For officers of various ministries up to Joint Secretary level, clearance is given by the minister concerned, after political clearance. For those above that rank, the proposal needs approval of a screening committee of secretaries.

IT IS WRONG TO CANCEL TELANGANA CM'S US VISIT

Instead of heading to Boston as planned on Sunday, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy abruptly flew back to India from London — he was denied permission by the Ministry of External Affairs for the US tour, which led to the cancellation of the second leg of his foreign trip. Undoubtedly, denying permission lay in the MEA's remit. Before it accords political clearance, the visits of chief ministers and other dignitaries are assessed by the ministry for criteria such as the "purpose" and "level" of scheduled meetings. And yet, it is unseemly that the MEA should

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weaponise the rulebook's small print to cut short CM Reddy's trip. Apparently, the CM's itinerary included possible meetings with New York City mayor Zohran Mamdani and US Vice President J D Vance — while the NYC mayor is seen at some levels below the Telangana CM, a meeting with the US Vice President did not fit the trip's stated purpose, which was to attract investment into Telangana, including educational partnerships. This is a narrow-minded approach that does not behove the external affairs ministry of a country like India, which prides itself on its growing confidence on the world stage, and on building global knowledge hubs like Hyderabad. Moreover, by curtailing an Opposition chief minister's foreign trip, the government looks small and heavy-handed, sending a dispiriting signal to the world — and within the country.

The denial of permission to CM Reddy can be seen as part of a dismal pattern of antagonism, and the near breakdown of dialogue, between government and Opposition at home. This is so even as Reddy, the second CM of a newly carved out state, who began his career in the ABVP, has been seen to tweak the script — in the past, he has struck a note of pragmatism and cordiality vis-à-vis the government of Narendra Modi. In the aftermath, the political to-and-fro has seen the recycling of tired and opaque spectres and prejudices — the BJP in Telangana has insinuated that the MEA decision was meant to cut short engagement with “anti-India” and/or “anti-BJP” elements, that are out to destabilise “national security”.

After Operation Sindoor in May 2025, the Modi government dispatched seven multi-party delegations, which included prominent leaders of the Opposition, to foreign capitals. They were tasked with making India's case to the world while projecting national unity. The subject, then, was terror, but the message was more generally heartening: That whatever be the political differences within, India's ruling establishment trusted and included the Opposition in its dealings with the world. CM Reddy's abbreviated trip now points to an unfortunate and unflattering backsliding.

OBC CREAMY LAYER CANDIDATES IN '25 CIVIL SERVICES EXAM: GOVT SEEKS SC DIRECTIONS

The Centre on Monday sought “clarifications and appropriate directions” from the Supreme Court on the applicability of its March 11 judgment ordering the consideration of claims by nearly 100 OBC candidates who were selected in Civil Services Examinations (CSE) since 2016 but rejected by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) on the basis of creamy layer criteria.

Key Takeaways:

- The petition, filed by the DoPT, comes even as sources told The Indian Express that the government had been preparing to implement the verdict, with verification of documents of affected candidates already completed.
- The Centre's clarification plea comes just ahead of the start of the Foundation Course for the CSE-2025 batch, tentatively scheduled to begin at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie this week.
- In its appeal, the government said that the March 11 judgment “altering settled position (on creamy layer) was rendered five days after the final result of CSE-2025 already stood declared”.
- It cautioned that any delay in finalisation of the category-wise merit and allocation list would have a cascading effect on the training schedule, batch strength, logistics arrangements, the



training calendar fixed by the respective academies, cadre allocation for IAS and IPS officers, and the seniority and pay fixation of the incoming batch vis-à-vis subsequent recruitment cycles.

- The government stated that “a mechanical or unqualified application of the ratio of the said judgement, with retrospective effect, to the already-concluded selection process of CSE-2025, would result in a peculiar and acute anomaly amounting to discrimination inter se candidates of the very examination cycle sought to be benefited”.
- The Centre emphasised that its appeal for clarification and appropriate directions was concerned solely with CSE-2025, whose selection process “stood substantially concluded prior to the pronouncement of the judgment and is presently at the terminal stage of service allocation”. However, in its appeal, the DoPT does not mention the applicability of the Supreme Court judgment from next batches.

Do You Know:

- The Centre has argued that SC’s March 11 judgment came five days after the final result of CSE-2025 was declared. Delay in finalisation of the category-wise merit and allocation list would have a cascading effect — from training to seniority and pay fixation of the incoming batch.
- The matter traces its origins to a DoPT letter of October 14, 2004, clarifying an Official Memorandum (OM) of September 1993 on the creamy layer criterion for OBCs. The 1993 OM had excluded income from salary and agricultural sources from the income/wealth test used to determine creamy layer status. However, the 2004 clarification said the salary income of employees in public sector undertakings (PSUs) and the private sector would be a criterion.
- On March 11 this year, hearing an appeal by one of the candidates, Rohith Nathan, a Division Bench of Justices P S Narasimha and R Mahadevan ruled that income cannot be the sole criterion for determining the creamy layer among OBCs. The Court said: “The object of excluding the creamy layer is... not to create artificial distinctions between equally placed members of the same social class... unequal treatment of similarly placed OBC candidates would not only be legally erroneous but constitutionally impermissible.”
- It further held that treating the children of those employed in PSUs or private employment as excluded from reservation benefits solely on the basis of salary income, without reference to the nature of their posts (Group A, B, C or D), “would certainly lead to hostile discrimination between parties who are similarly placed and would amount to equals being treated unequally, thereby attracting the rigour of the equality doctrine under Articles 14, 15 and 16”.

UGC EQUITY RULES BEING RECONSIDERED: CENTRE TO SC

The Centre told the Supreme Court Thursday that it is reconsidering the University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations aimed at preventing caste discrimination in higher education institutions.

Key Takeaways:

- Notified on January 13 but stayed by the Supreme Court on January 29, the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026 snowballed into a political issue after it drew objections from general category groups over their perceived exclusion and from sections of Dalit and OBC communities opposed to the court stay and any rollback.



- “It is being reconsidered,” Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant. The bench was hearing a clutch of petitions that primarily challenge the definition of “caste-based discrimination” in the regulations.
- In the eye of the storm is regulation 3(1)(c), which defines caste-based discrimination as discrimination on the basis of caste or tribe against members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes.
- Petitioners have argued that this excludes general category students and faculty from specific protection against caste-based discrimination. At the same time, the regulations’ broader definition of “discrimination” covers unfair or differential treatment on the ground of caste against any stakeholder.
- Although the Supreme Court stayed the regulations days after the notification and revived the 2012 framework, there is concern within the BJP that the issue may lead to disquiet among Dalit communities, particularly in UP where Assembly elections are due next year. Some among the Dalits are also opposed to bringing the OBCs under the protective umbrella.

Do You Know:

The regulations, notified in January, were stayed by the Supreme Court which revived the 2012 regulations until further orders. The regulations stem from a 2019 petition filed in the Supreme Court by the mothers of Payal Tadv and Rohith Vemula, who died by suicide over alleged caste-based discrimination in 2019 and 2016, respectively. They had sought the enforcement of robust anti-discrimination mechanisms across higher education institutions.

MARATHI LANGUAGE MANDATE FOR CABS, AUTOS IS A WRONG TURN

Coming at a time when public transport is plagued by pressing issues of affordability and accessibility, the implementation of the Marathi language requirement for auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers in Maharashtra is both irrational and unconstitutional. It is part of a larger backsliding into narrow linguistic politics. This has been evident in the state for some time, from the back and forth on the three-language-policy in schools, the Hindi “imposition” bogey whipped up by the Shiv Sena (UBT), to the incidents of hooliganism unleashed by the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, which has cast itself as a “protector” of Marathi pride. The state transport department has justified the new move on the ground that drivers should be able to understand basic instructions and communicate with passengers in the state’s native language. Nine years after the Bombay High Court set aside an attempt to make proficiency in Marathi compulsory for auto-rickshaw permits, the latest move raises the same fundamental question: Why should linguistic assimilation be necessary for employability?

The government has said that drivers found lacking functional knowledge of Marathi will first receive a notice, giving them a month to learn the language. If they fail, their driving licence and Public Service Vehicle (PSV) badge may be suspended for up to three months, with repeated violations resulting in permanent cancellation of licences. These penalties are part of the Maharashtra Motor Vehicle (Third Amendment) Rules, 2026, notified on August 12, with the language proficiency deadline earlier extended from May 1 to August 15. The amended rules extend the language requirement to app-based cab drivers and vehicle permit holders. The language mandate ignores what makes Mumbai work. Dictating linguistic proficiency, making livelihoods dependent on it, tilts the field against migrants whose labour sustains urban



economies. Transport systems, particularly in constantly expanding megacities like Mumbai, depend on flexibility, scale, and the willingness of workers to follow opportunities wherever they may be.

More fundamentally, it undermines the constitutional guarantee of freedom of mobility, which gives citizens the right to reside and settle in any part of India and practise any profession or occupation there. The choice before the state is clear: Pursue inclusive growth while securing constitutional freedoms, or indulge insular impulses that shrink possibilities of growth and cramp individual liberties. Maharashtra's language mandate is a turn in the wrong direction. It must be rolled back.

CANCEL WITH CAUTION, LIVELIHOODS ARE AT STAKE

The protests against compromised public examinations in Jharkhand, on since late July, brought the Hemant Soren government to the negotiating table almost immediately. Nearly all their demands have been met. To be sure, Jharkhand, like many other states, needs to do much more to ensure the integrity of its public examination system. In fact, governments across the country must confront the crises of education and employment that have given these tests outsize importance. But the blanket cancellation of appointments, while it helps the government under pressure to appear responsive, can also be a slippery slope. It skirts vital distinctions and short-circuits due process. It can end up doing injustice to those who competed in good faith and cleared the exam fairly. Overnight, the 2,000 individuals appointed after clearing the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission-Combined Graduate Level (JSSC-CGL) examination found themselves without employment.

Those who cleared the exam had already suffered from the unconscionable delays. Recruitment for JSSC-CGL posts began with a notification in 2015-16. In 2024, the Jharkhand High Court ordered that status quo be maintained amid allegations of a paper leak. In December 2025, the court lifted the stay and asked the government to appoint successful candidates. Now, those candidates are again in limbo, creating, ironically, a new group of protesters. Outside Jharkhand Mantralaya, Vikas Kumar Sharma told this newspaper, "Never in our wildest dreams did we imagine that the office where we worked in the morning would have us standing outside its gates by evening ... as protesters."

Even before the protests gathered steam, the Jharkhand government had cancelled the state Public Service Commission exam, ordered a CID probe and arrested a director of TSR Data Processing Private Limited (TDPL) — all exams conducted by TDPL stand cancelled. The cancellation of exams that have undergone judicial scrutiny is arguably a blunt instrument that scores political points without addressing the deeper issues that have to do with dysfunctional systems and dwindling employment. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that those who got jobs after stringent tests, through a process that was upheld by the court, are not discriminated against. Due process and the credibility of the testing system are at stake. For the protesters, too, the current moment calls for a pause. From Jantar Mantar in Delhi to Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium in Ranchi, it has been an arduous journey, in the course of which the young and those left behind have demanded accountability and reform. They have pushed the powerful to listen. This momentum must lead to meaningful reform. It would be tragic if it is frittered away.



WHEN DELHI UNIVERSITY CHOOSES TO SHRINK DELHI'S PAST

The removal of an elective paper on the Delhi Sultanate from Delhi University's newly notified postgraduate History syllabus, along with several long-taught papers on gender, religion and political structures in ancient India, does students a disservice. It does so not just by narrowing the choice made available to them but also by undermining their ability to engage critically. In recent years, syllabus changes have travelled steadily from schools to colleges and universities, with chapters and subjects rationalised or removed without sufficiently persuasive explanation. Reform is, of course, both desirable and necessary. But the University's explanation for the omissions — that they are intended to achieve greater balance and regional representation under the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 — sits uneasily with the NEP's stated aim of fostering considered judgement. Higher education should complicate what students have learnt at school, place events in wider contexts and expose them to competing interpretations and historiographical perspectives. The Delhi Sultanate paper opened a window to the political formations of the 13th and 14th centuries. Its omission renders connections to a rich past more tenuous.

It is difficult to approach History as a study of discrete episodes. It is a continuum, informed, enriched and complicated by what comes before and after. The Delhi Sultanate occupies a vital place in medieval history because alongside the story of powerful dynasts, it offers insights into the transformation of Delhi into a political centre — the evolution of state institutions, patronage networks, the movement of people and ideas, and the events, freedoms and unfreedoms that eventually shaped Mughal and colonial histories. This intricate tapestry cannot be reduced to neat siloes. If neglected regions, communities and perspectives need greater space, the answer should be to widen the field.

That is also the broader argument of the NEP: To make education more multidisciplinary, flexible and capable of encouraging students to think independently. DU should keep that ambition in sight. At a time when debates over curricula risk turning history into a proxy battlefield for contemporary anxieties, the best defence is not a narrower syllabus but greater intellectual choice. A storied university such as DU should trust its students to navigate the past in all its complexity.

NITI AAYOG: DEGREES LIKE BA, B.SC, B.COM HAVE 'WEAK JOB LINKAGES', NEED REFORMS

Amid a renewed push to tweak the skilling architecture in the country, NITI Aayog has flagged that unemployment among graduates remains much higher than the national average, and over-reliance on generic degrees such as BA, B.Sc, and B.Com, which seldom lead to direct jobs, is contributing to the problem.

Key Takeaways:

- Making the case for moving towards specialised, job-linked programmes in high-growth sectors such as green industries, electric vehicles, and greater focus on apprenticeships, the think tank said that over 90% of graduates in India are employed in roles not aligned with their qualifications.
- "India's higher and technical education system faces a fundamental disconnect between what is taught and what the labour market demands. Curricula in most institutions remain outdated and misaligned with evolving industry needs, resulting in degrees, diplomas and certificates that do



not consistently translate into employability,” the NITI Aayog said in a report titled ‘Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat’ released on Saturday. Citing data from the Economic Survey 2024-25, it said, “Only 8.25% of graduates are employed in roles aligned to their qualifications.”

- Educated unemployment in the country remains high, with 13% among all graduates and 20.4% of graduate women unemployed, far above the national unemployment rate of 3.2%, it said. Compounding this is the overwhelming inclination toward generic degree programmes with weak job linkages, NITI Aayog said. “Of the 3.4 crore students enrolled in undergraduate programmes, 1.13 crore are in B.A. alone, and combined enrolment in B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com exceeds 2 crore,” the report said.

- In the report, the NITI Aayog also said that 8.7 crore individuals (11% of the population outside the labour force) aged between 15 and 29 fall under the NEET category (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Subsequently, in a clarification issued Tuesday, the Aayog said “the category of NEET in the report refers to those not seeking employment...therefore, it cannot be read as a measure of joblessness or as an addition to the unemployment rate. The unemployed represent an entirely separate category, drawn from a different population base than that used for the NEET estimate.”

- Higher unemployment among educated youth was also flagged in the State of Working India report by Azim Premji University released earlier this year. The report showed that unemployment among graduates below the age of 25 rose from 35% in 1983 to 39% in 2023, and unemployment among graduates between the ages of 25 and 29 also rose from 12% in 1983 to 20% in 2023.

Do You Know:

- The NITI Aayog said that vocational skilling and alternative educational pathways in India suffer from a deep-seated social stigma that actively discourages youth from pursuing technical training, Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and diploma programmes, which are widely perceived by parents, peers, and students as low-trust or “second-tier” pathways.

- Salary data from Boston Consulting Group (BCG’s) Higher Education Survey, cited in the NITI report, shows that individuals pursuing a generic undergraduate degree without skilling earn an average starting salary of Rs 22,000 per month, with annual growth of 3.2%, compared to Rs 29,000 per month at the same growth rate for a generic undergraduate with skilling.

- NITI Aayog flagged that a core limitation of many existing skilling programmes is weak outcome orientation. Programmes often prioritise enrolment and completion over placement, progression, or income outcomes, while delivery formats remain inflexible and poorly aligned to the needs of different learner segments. As a result, pathways into in-demand jobs remain weak, and participation remains limited, the report said.

- NITI Aayog said that going forward, standalone skilling programmes need to shift decisively from top-down, supply-driven offerings to demand-driven, outcome-linked and industry-backed models. The report said that general employability and entrepreneurship skilling need to be done at scale, covering digital literacy, financial literacy and workplace readiness.

- The report flagged the need to redesign generic university courses (B.A., B.Sc., B.Com.) into industry-aligned applied specialisations, such as B.A. Hospitality, B.Sc. Applied Technology, and



B.Com. Analytics; scale Apprenticeship Embedded Degree Programmes (AEDP) and Work-Integrated Degree Programmes (WIDP).

WHY GOVT JOBS ARE FEW: THE NARROW SELECTION PIPELINE

The dream of a “sarkari naukri” holds a powerful draw in India. Every year, crores of people apply for a far fewer number of job vacancies in the central and state governments.

Key Takeaways:

- Behind this appeal — among youth, technocrats, and even those in professions such as medical and engineering — are economic realities such as the lack of private jobs, social psychology and career benefits that private-sector employment can rarely match. The lack of systemic support for entrepreneurship also makes government jobs a secure haven. The recent protests over paper leaks and government exams, especially in Jharkhand, are a reflection of this appeal.
- Besides technocrats and government staff such as doctors, the government workforce is primarily divided into three groups (Group A, B and C). There was earlier a Group D category (peons) as well, but it has been merged with Group C. Retirement is a regular process, and so is the creation of new posts and the filling up of existing ones.
- According to data from the Department of Expenditure’s website, the total number of employees in the Union government — including Union Territories and missions abroad — as on March 1, 2023, was 30.62 lakh, against a sanctioned strength of more than 40 lakh. This is just the number of permanent employees — contractual employees and consultants are not included in this figure.
- The Union government spent Rs 2.95 lakh crore on the salary of these employees in 2023-24. More than 80% of this figure went towards defence, railways, postal services and home affairs. While there is no accurate figure of all government employees of centre and states, it is estimated that this number is more than 1.5 crore — including the civil administration, armed forces, police, healthcare workers, teachers and others.

Do You Know:

- Central government recruitments are carried out by agencies such as the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Staff Selection Commission (SSC), the Ministry of Defence (including the Army, Navy and Air Force), the Ministry of Railways, public sector undertakings and universities, among others. Every year, several crore people attempt to enter the central government service through one of these routes. Only around 1.20 lakh make it each year.
- The Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, which comes under the Prime Minister, formulates policies pertaining to recruitment, regulation of service conditions, and deputation of personnel. It also advises all central government organisations on issues pertaining to personnel management. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), one of the departments under this ministry, frames policies and oversees recruitment for the central government.
- While recruitments for Union Territories are made by central government agencies itself, the recruitment for three all-India services (IAS, IPS, Indian Forest Service or IFoS) have a centre-state nature — the UPSC allots recruits state cadres and they work under state governments. A limited percentage of officers are always on central deputation to serve under the Union government.



RETRACTIONS ALONE DO NOT PROTECT INDIA'S SCIENTIFIC RECORD

Once a journal publishes a research paper, other researchers can keep citing that work and build on it to produce more research. Sometimes, this continues even after the journal has retracted the original paper because it contains a mistake or, as is increasingly the case, it was produced by fraudulent means.

So simply withdrawing a faulty paper does not correct the research record: the work based on it also needs to be checked and, if necessary, undone.

According to Sabuj Bhattacharyya, an expert on research ethics at the Institute for Stem-cell Science and Regenerative Medicine, Bengaluru, retractions have increased substantially over the last four decades. In 2025, his team analysed data on life-sciences papers retracted between 1981 and 2023 and found that the reasons for retraction included non-compliance with ethical standards, plagiarism, data-related concerns, and publication misconduct.

In a 2026 study, research scholar P.R. Devanath and associate professor Rupesh Kumar of Tumkur University, Karnataka, analysed more than 12,000 citations of papers funded by the Indian government and later retracted. They found that 30% of the citations had been incurred after a paper was retracted. They also identified a “cascading retraction effect” in which some retracted papers continued to be cited by studies that were themselves later retracted. Nearly 64% of those second-generation papers were also authored by the same groups.

Not all post-retraction citations necessarily endorsed the retracted findings, but many also did not acknowledge the paper's retracted status. Some retracted papers also continued to appear in patents. Dr. Devanath said one important reason is a lack of awareness, particularly among early-career researchers with limited training in responsible citation practices.

Retraction is part of how science corrects itself — but the correction often comes long after a paper has entered the scientific literature, according to Partha Pratim Majumder, former National Science Chair with the Science and Engineering Research Board. By the time a study is withdrawn, other researchers may have built on its findings. He said there is no foolproof way to ensure researchers are quickly informed when a paper is retracted.

Bhaskar Mukherjee, professor and head, Department of Library and Information Science, Banaras Hindu University, also said retractions often receive little institutional attention in India. So journals rarely notify an author's institution while researchers themselves often avoid discussing retracted papers.

Gagandeep Kang, adjunct professor of microbiology at the Christian Medical College, Vellore, said better communication alone is not enough. The more important question is whether the scientific system learns from each retraction. A reactive system, she says, removes a problem paper but does little to understand why it passed scientific scrutiny in the first place.

She added that a stronger research integrity system would identify whether the problem was fraud, an honest error or failure of replication — and use those lessons to make peer review, data-sharing practices, and institutional accountability better.

Mr. Devanath and Prof. Kumar also recommended dedicated research support offices, checks for retracted references during peer review, and regular training in responsible research practices.



That said, ever-stronger research practices may not resolve the problem. Achal Agrawal, founder of the independent research-integrity effort India Research Watch, said that as AI systems increasingly draw on published research, retracted studies may continue to influence AI-generated responses unless those models are also updated to flag retracted papers.

Scholars agree that the way retractions happen at present also raises thorny challenges to preserving the integrity of the scientific record.

In fact, Dr. Majumder said when a retraction can be said to have achieved its purpose is itself “very difficult” to determine. A retraction is meant to inform other scientists that the data and inferences reported in a study are incorrect. Because that information spreads slowly, he said he believes a retraction will have broadly achieved its purpose when about 90% of researchers in that field are aware of it, although complete awareness is impossible to ensure.

“When errors in science are inadvertent, the errors get corrected when the experiment is repeated by the scientist who committed the error or by another scientist. Thereafter, the erroneous results of the experiment do not influence scientific practice,” Dr. Majumder said. That process, however, may never occur in every case. According to Dr. Majumder, no scientist may be willing to study the same problem addressed in a retracted paper and generate correct data and inferences. “Therefore,” he added, “the scientific record may never be corrected.”

NOTICES TO ACTORS: WHAT LAW SAYS ON SURROGATE ADS

Maharashtra’s Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued show-cause notices to Hindi cinema actors Shah Rukh Khan, Ajay Devgn, and Tiger Shroff last week, alleging that their advertisement for Vimal Elaichi amounts to surrogate advertising for Vimal Pan Masala.

Key Takeaways:

— Surrogate advertising is a form of marketing used to promote products banned or limited from advertising under government regulations — such as alcohol, tobacco, and pan masala — by promoting another product under the exact same brand name, logo, or visual style to ensure brand awareness in the minds of consumers.

— The notices ask the three actors to explain their role in the ad, which in the FDA’s assessment, creates an association with the Vimal Pan Masala brand — a product currently prohibited in the state — and could amount to its indirect promotion.

— The latest action reportedly marks the first instance of the regulator examining surrogate advertising even as it ramps up its crackdown on gutkha and pan masala containing tobacco or nicotine.

— Maharashtra has prohibited gutkha and pan masala containing tobacco or nicotine since 2012 under Section 30(2)(a) of the Food Safety and Standards (FSS) Act, 2006. The prohibition is renewed annually, with the current renewal in force since July 13, 2026.

— The notices state: “Upon examination of the said advertisement, it prima facie appears that the advertisement promotes the Vimal brand, which is mainly associated with Pan Masala, a product prohibited for manufacture, storage, transportation, distribution and sale in the State of Maharashtra for a period of one year, with effect from the date specified in the Prohibition Order



dated the 13th July, 2026, issued by the Commissioner of Food Safety, Maharashtra State, under Section 30(2)(a) of the FSS Act, 2006.”

— According to the FDA, the Vimal Elaichi ad’s presentation, dialogue, product name, and market context raise a “serious question” over whether it constitutes indirect or surrogate promotion of a prohibited tobacco-related product.

— The regulator said given all three actors appear as brand endorsers, their direct participation is liable to be examined under the following provisions of the FSS Act:

- Section 24, which restricts misleading and deceptive food advertisements, and
- Section 53, which provides for a penalty of up to Rs 10 lakh for anyone who is “party to the publication” of a misleading food advertisement.
- It also cited the Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations, 2018.
- The FDA has also cited Section 21 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, which empowers the CCPA to direct discontinuation or modification of a false or misleading advertisement, and to impose upon the endorser of such an advertisement a penalty of up to Rs 10 lakh, and up to Rs 50 lakh for every subsequent contravention.

Do You Know:

- The CCPA, under the Department of Consumer Affairs, had notified the “Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements for Misleading Advertisements” in 2022 to curb misleading advertisements and protect consumers.
- The CCPA was established under Section 10 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, for regulating matters relating to violation of the rights of the consumers, unfair trade practices and false or misleading advertisements which are prejudicial to the interests of public and consumers and to promote, protect and enforce the rights of consumers as a class.
- Under Section 2(28) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, misleading advertisement is defined as “in relation to any product or service... an advertisement, which —
 - I. falsely describes such product or service; or
 - II. gives a false guarantee to, or is likely to mislead the consumers as to the nature, substance, quantity or quality of such product or service; or
 - III. conveys an express or implied representation which, if made by the manufacturer or seller or service provider thereof, would constitute an unfair trade practice; or
 - IV. deliberately conceals important information.”

PROFESSOR USED AN ENDOSCOPIC CAMERA TO LEAK QUESTION PAPER IN CHHATTISGARH, SAY POLICE

A professor at a private college in Chhattisgarh’s Durg district and five students from the same institution were arrested for their alleged roles in the leak of an Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (IGKV) entomology question paper, police said on Saturday.



Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime and Cyber) Smruthik Rajanala told The Hindu that 38-year-old Yogesh Sonkesariya, a professor at Bharti Agriculture College in Durg, had allegedly used an endoscopic camera to capture images of the question papers that he received in a sealed envelope and then shared them with his fellow accused before the exam, which was scheduled to be held on August 20.

The officer alleged that the accused were also involved in leaking the question paper of another examination that was scheduled for August 7.

On August 20, an agricultural entomology exam — AENT 221 [Pest Management in crops and stored grains-I(Rabi Crops)] — for second-year students of B.Sc. (Agriculture), was cancelled after it was alleged that the question paper had been leaked. The exam was written by 1,500 students enrolled in different colleges affiliated with IGKV, a government-run university here.

The Deputy Commissioner said Mr. Sonkesariya had received the set of question papers in a sealed envelope on August 17.

“He then inserted an endoscopic camera into the envelope through a tiny hole and captured the contents... The question paper was a one-page document with all the content printed on the same side. He then used glue to cover the opening through which the camera was inserted,” said Mr Rajanala.

After the examination was cancelled, the university administration filed a police complaint, saying that the Agriculture College and Research Centre at Kawardha received an email at 8.41 a.m., in which it was claimed that the paper had leaked. Other officials received the email at 8.54 a.m.

The complaint added that students and their representatives also informed the university through WhatsApp that some purported questions from the paper were circulating.

Based on the complaint, a case was registered against unidentified persons under the Chhattisgarh Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2008, and Section 316 (criminal breach of trust) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

A team of more than 100 police personnel, including members of the Anti-Crime and Cyber Unit as well as personnel from the Telibandha police station, was formed to probe the paper leak.

HOW CAN STATES USE DISASTER FUNDS FOR HEATWAVES?

On August 4, the Ministry of Home Affairs told the Lok Sabha that heatwaves and lightning had been added to India's list of notified natural calamities, taking the total list to 14.

The change follows a recommendation by the Sixteenth Finance Commission (FC-XVI) and operational guidelines issued on June 30. Along with the 2024 amendment to the Disaster Mitigation Fund guidelines, the update means heatwaves are now eligible for the full State Disaster Risk Management Fund pool.

Disaster finance in India

Under Article 280 of the Constitution, the Finance Commission recommends arrangements for disaster management funds. The FC-XVI recommended ₹2.04 lakh crore for State disaster funds in the five years between 2026-27 and 2030-31, nearly 28% more than the previous Commission's allocation.



Of the total fund, ₹1.6 lakh crore goes to the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) and the rest to the State Disaster Mitigation Fund (SDMF). The SDRF is meant for response, relief, and reconstruction immediately following a disaster; the SDMF is meant to fund interventions to reduce the risk of a climate event from turning into a disaster, in the longer term.

These funds are available to all States. The FC-XVI has determined the inter-State distribution using a formula comprising a disaster risk index, which takes into account the frequency and intensity of different hazards along with exposure and vulnerability and expenses incurred by States during the previous commission's tenure. The FC-XVI recommended ₹79,406 crore for national disaster funds over the same period and which States can seek when a disaster is severe enough to exceed their own resources, like Kerala did following the Wayanad landslides in 2024.

Heat has thus far occupied an awkward position in the disaster finance system. A State could notify a heatwave as a 'local disaster' and use the SDRF — but only up to 10% of its annual allocation and after setting separate norms such as the amount of compensation for loss of lives or damage to crops. Other notified disasters such as floods and cyclones faced no such ceiling. The new notification removes this asymmetry.

India's exposure to extreme heat is growing. The author used 35 indicators across climate change, exposure, and vulnerability to estimate that more than 57% of Indian districts, home to roughly three-fourths of the Indian population, face high- to very-high heat risk. The number of hot days per year has increased. The incidence of very warm nights and relative humidity has also risen, reducing the human body's ability to recover after hot days.

What States can fund

The National Disaster Management Authority has asked all States, districts, and cities to develop heat action plans (HAPs), which map heat risk and vulnerability and identify short-, medium-, and long-term interventions. Thus far, 300 cities and districts across 23 heatwave-prone States have HAPs.

Implementation, however, has lagged because of limited technical capacity, competing priorities, and inadequate funding. A 2023 review of HAPs also found that 79% of the plans asked city departments to self-allocate funds.

The new Central notification provides States with two clearer financing options. Under the SDRF, they can provide relief and compensation for heat-related losses. And through the SDMF, they can finance longer-term risk reduction such as cooling shelters and early-warning systems. The respective State Disaster Management Authorities and State Emergency Operations Centre will be the nodal agencies responsible for both funds' corpus.

CENTRE EXPANDS CURBS ON COLD, COUGH MEDICINES

The Union Health Ministry has imposed restrictions on the manufacture, sale, and distribution of all fixed-dose combinations (FDCs) containing chlorpheniramine maleate and phenylephrine hydrochloride, mandating a clear warning that these medicines shall not be used to treat children below four years of age.

Last year, the Centre restricted certain FDCs containing the two ingredients, subject to the same age-specific warning. The latest notification extends the requirement to all formulations



containing these two ingredients. The decision follows recommendations of an expert committee and the Drugs Technical Advisory Board.

The move comes amid tightened scrutiny of cough-and-cold medicines in young children. The combination of chlorpheniramine maleate, an antihistamine used to reduce symptoms such as a runny nose and sneezing, and phenylephrine hydrochloride, a decongestant intended to relieve nasal blockage, has long been used in cold and allergy preparations.

Young children are particularly vulnerable to dosing errors and adverse effects from multi-ingredient medicines. Chlorpheniramine can cause marked drowsiness or, paradoxically, excitability, while phenylephrine can affect heart rate and blood pressure.

The government noted that the use of combinations containing chlorpheniramine maleate and phenylephrine hydrochloride may pose risks to children below four years of age and that safer alternatives are available.

At the same time, evidence that such combinations substantially improve uncomplicated colds in children is limited. Manufacturers have been directed to prominently display the warning, "Fixed Dose Combination shall not be used in children below four years of age," on the label, package insert, and promotional literature associated with these formulations.

India had already required warnings on certain formulations in 2023 and formally restricted the combination in 2025; the latest notification extends the restriction to all such FDC formulations for children below four.

Internationally, countries including the U.S. and Australia, have also adopted age restrictions or other safeguards for paediatric cough-and-cold medicines.

FERTILITY HOSPITAL IN RAJASTHAN FACES ACTION OVER 'BLUE FOETUS' AD

The depiction of a blue-coloured foetus in a newspaper advertisement prompted health authorities in Rajasthan to take action against a fertility hospital on Tuesday for allegedly promoting sex selection before birth. The State government also warned against the practice, which is prohibited by law.

Blue is commonly associated with male children in advertising, retail marketing and cultural conventions.

"As blue colour is associated with a male child, the department viewed this as a prima facie indication of promoting sex selection services," Ms. Rathore said.

The State government suspended nine registration certificates covering assisted reproductive technology (ART) clinics, ART banks and surrogacy clinics operated by Neelkanth Hospital with immediate effect until further orders.

Ms. Rathore said the action had been initiated under the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021. Three of the centres are in Jaipur, two in Jodhpur and one each in Bhilwara, Udaipur, Kota and Ajmer.

"There is a complete statutory ban on any form of sex selection and sex-selective ART procedures. The State government will ensure strict compliance with the legal provisions by all institutions involved in ART and surrogacy," she said.



Founded in 2003, the hospital has mentioned on its website that it has treated over 25,000 couples since its inception and describes the fertility care as “ethical, advanced, and patient-focused”.

The hospital did not respond to The Hindu’s queries.

NEW-AGE FIRES

Fire accidents in ICUs need better and more evacuation facilities

Not too long ago, India’s fire accidents typically occurred in industrial facilities, large offices, mass gatherings, firecracker units and railway compartments, caused by faulty machinery, weak safety procedures and careless use of flammable materials. While these risks persist, what has got added to the country’s poor record in fire safety in the last 15 years or so is residential buildings, hotels and hospitals, especially Intensive Care Units (ICU). Electrical fires now seem predominant, often caused by increased appliance use, overloaded electrical systems and poor maintenance. ICUs are especially vulnerable with their oxygen-rich environments. This month, back-to-back accidents at neonatal ICUs in Amravati, Maharashtra, and Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, claimed the most vulnerable: newborn babies. The Amravati fire was put out in 30 minutes, but the smoke was too much for the three babies admitted because of complications. A faulty ventilator is suspected to be the cause. In the NICU at Chhindwara District Hospital, a short circuit in a warmer triggered a fire and three babies, just days old, suffered burns. Over the past 15 years, ICU fires, including the one in Jhansi in 2024, in which 18 newborns died, have not served as a wake-up call. The Amravati fire shared many features with previous incidents.

Perhaps the best way to respond to these new-age fires would be to treat ICU accidents as a distinct category. ICUs are sealed compartments where smoke fills up very quickly. In an NICU, where patients cannot self-evacuate, evacuation drills are essential. A best-case setup would have three independent exits, with at least two allowing horizontal evacuation, automatic sprinklers, independent power lines for large equipment, oxygen cylinder bed supports, and fire drills every two years. A well-designed ICU also locates oxygen outlets away from sockets. Following a Delhi NICU fire, the National Neonatology Forum called for mandatory fire safety certification for NICU-equipped hospitals, regular power audits, analogue addressable alarms, and an evacuation protocol — now RACE or Rescue, Alarm, Confine, Extinguish/Evacuate. The 2026 National Guidelines on Fire and Life Safety in Healthcare Facilities can be a useful starting point for ICU-NICU safety. Beyond all this lies an issue in power quality: electrical harmonics. NICU equipment is packed with electronic components that draw distorted current, which can silently overheat neutral wiring, transformers, and loose connections without tripping a breaker. Post-fire reports citing generic “short circuits” or “technical faults” may well be missing this harmonic-driven degradation, a largely unaudited risk factor.

NUCLEAR POWER OPERATOR PLANS NEW DESIGN UNIT TO SUPPORT PVT PLAYERS

Months after the country’s tightly regulated nuclear power sector was opened to private participation, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) plans to set up a new design vertical which will provide technological support to private players and state governments seeking to deploy indigenous nuclear reactor technology.

Key Takeaways:

- The proposal for the new vertical is currently under process, The Indian Express has learnt.



- With the draft rules under the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act — it was enacted in December 2025 — now released and expected to provide greater clarity on the legal framework around licensing for new nuclear projects once notified, the state-owned company plans to streamline its functions through the new vertical.
- This vertical will be a gateway for entities seeking access to pressurised heavy-water reactor (PHWR) technology and technical expertise, including technology support, design reviews and quality assurance.
- The move comes amid growing interest in PHWRs among prospective public and private sector entrants as a preferred technology for the initial phase of India's nuclear capacity expansion, given its established domestic supply chain and ecosystem.
- Currently, NPCIL implements PHWR-based nuclear power projects through indigenous technology developed in India. The country has a nuclear power capacity of 8.7 gigawatt-electric (GWe), all of which is run and operated by NPCIL.
- Earlier, the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), in its roadmap for achieving 100 GWe nuclear capacity by 2047, had also identified PHWRs as a prime candidate for adoption by other public sector undertakings and private companies.
- It suggested that the proposed agency could be established under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), with experts drawn from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research and other specialised DAE units.

Do You Know:

- Domestic PHWRs are considered the most viable nuclear option, at around Rs 18 crore/MWe, for the price-sensitive Indian power market. Imported Russian, French and US technologies cost a lot more. Established design standards and a mature domestic supply chain are being flagged as key advantages for deployment of PHWRs in the initial phase of nuclear expansion.
- Industry insiders said foreign reactor technologies such as light water reactors (LWRs) or pressurised water reactors (PWRs) are more expensive than indigenous PHWRs. Some estimates peg the cost of Indian reactors at around Rs 18 crore per megawatt-electric (MWe), compared with about Rs 34 crore per MWe for Russian reactors, while reactors from France and the US are estimated to cost much more.

HOW INDIA'S NEW NUCLEAR RULES COULD FAVOUR OLD NUCLEAR ENERGY PARTNER RUSSIA

Russia's nuclear sector advantage in India could only get more pronounced if the draft rules issued by the Department of Atomic Energy for the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act are anything to go by.

**Key Takeaways:**

- The rules specifically state that foreign nuclear technology sourced for a nuclear power plant or reactor in India must mandatorily have its design certified or approved by the regulatory body in its country of origin and must already be operational there or in another foreign country.
- “The technology intended to be imported or acquired domestically does not adversely affect the interest of India, does not constitute an unreasonable risk to public health and safety and is in conformity with the national policies framed under the Act,” the rules read. This could be a big factor when it comes to the small modular reactor (SMR) sector, an area where India is keen to step up its presence.
- Russian nuclear company Rosatom State Corporation, a state-owned company based in Moscow that specialises in nuclear energy and non-nuclear energy products, has made a strong pitch for deploying its small modular reactors (SMRs) for targeted applications in India, alongside efforts to position its large new-generation atomic power reactor-based projects as the cornerstone of bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the field of nuclear energy. It has a clear edge over its Western competitors.
- While it is already building conventional nuclear projects in India, Russia has a lead in the nascent field of SMRs, which are advanced nuclear reactors that have about a third of the generating capacity of most traditional nuclear power reactors but can produce a large amount of low-carbon electricity.
- Currently, two SMR projects have reached the operational stage globally, including an SMR named the ‘Akademik Lomonosov floating power unit’ that has two modules of 35 MWe (megawatt electric) and started commercial operation in May 2020.
- The Lomonosov is a non-self-propelled power barge that doubles up as a floating nuclear power station and is docked in Pevek harbour, providing heating for the Arctic port town of Pevek and supplying electricity to the regional Chaun-Bilibino power system. It is designated as the world’s northernmost nuclear power plant.
- The other operational SMR is a demonstration project called HTR-PM in China that was grid-connected in December 2021 and is reported to have started commercial operations in December 2023.
- Other global companies that are in the fray for SMR leadership include New Jersey-based Holtec International, Rolls-Royce SMR, NuScale’s VOYGR SMR, Westinghouse Electric’s AP300 SMR and GE-Hitachi’s BWRX-300. But nearly all of these reactors are in the design certification phase and are yet to be cleared by their domestic regulators, and none of them are operational yet. So, in effect, that clause could be a problem for most of these players if they seek to make an India entry.

Do You Know:

- SMR technologies are aimed at supplying clean electricity to remote regions with limited grid infrastructure, as well as to individual industrial enterprises. India is looking at SMRs as a solution for localised applications, such as energy-hungry data centres, and for quickly scaling up baseload capacity.



- Before SHANTI, India's nuclear liability framework rested on the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, which established a no-fault regime. Victims of a nuclear incident did not have to prove negligence, only damage.
- The 2010 Act also included Section 17(b), which gave the operators a right of recourse against suppliers, i.e., if an accident occurred because a manufacturer had supplied defective equipment, the operator who had paid out compensation could recover that amount from the supplier. The provision also covered "supply of equipment or material with patent or latent defects or substandard services."
- SHANTI repealed the 2010 Act. Under Section 11, the operator is liable for nuclear damage, but Section 13, read with the Second Schedule, fragments that liability by reactor size.
- The protections written into SHANTI were the product of a decade of pressure from foreign reactor manufacturers and governments backing them.
- In SHANTI's Statement of Objects and Reasons, this is framed as a matter of economic necessity. India has set a target of 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047. To reach it, the government determined that private and foreign participation were unavoidable and that a "pragmatic civil liability" framework was required to bring that capital in. The liability structure, caps on operators, no statutory exposure for suppliers, and residual liability absorbed by the state are the price of that participation.

PANEL TO REVIEW NUCLEAR LIABILITY CAPS EVERY 5 YEARS

Liability caps for nuclear operators under the SHANTI Act will be reviewed every five years by an expert group, which can recommend changes to the graded limits, according to the Act's draft rules released by the Department of Atomic Energy.

Key Takeaways:

- Rule 78 of the draft rules, which were released on August 14, provide for the Centre to form a group of experts in specific domains — nuclear science and engineering, actuarial science, insurance and law, along with public-interest representatives — to review the "maximum limits of operator's civil liability for nuclear damage" and propose amendments to the act's second schedule.
- The second schedule of SHANTI act introduced graded liability caps based on the size of a nuclear installation, replacing the earlier flat cap of Rs 1,500 crore under the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 (CLNDA).
- Under the new framework, operators of reactors above 3,600 megawatt-electric (MWe) face a maximum liability of Rs 3,000 crore, while those between 1,500 MWe and 3,600 MWe face a cap of Rs 1,500 crore. The limits fall to Rs 750 crore for reactors between 750 MWe and 1,500 MWe and Rs 300 crore for those between 150 MWe and 750 MWe.
- For reactors up to 150 MWe, fuel-cycle facilities other than spent-fuel reprocessing plants, and transportation of nuclear material, the liability is capped at Rs 100 crore.
- The review mechanism is not entirely new. Section 6 of the now-repealed CLNDA also allowed the Centre to periodically review the operator's liability and notify a higher amount. The draft



SHANTI Act rules, however, explicitly provide for a defined time period for an expert group to undertake the review and recommend amendments to graded caps.

- This comes as the issue of liability cap has also reached the Supreme Court, following a petition which challenged the act for allowing “private sector and foreign companies to operate nuclear power plants in India, [and] has also capped the liability of these operators at an absurdly low level and exempted the supplier from any liability,” in violation of the Constitution.

Do You Know:

- One of the most contentious changes is the dilution of the operator’s “right of recourse” against nuclear equipment suppliers in the event of an accident.
- According to Section 17 of the CLNDA, the operator of a nuclear installation, after paying the compensation for nuclear damage, shall have the right to recourse where (a) such right is expressly provided for in a contract in writing; (b) the nuclear incident has resulted as a consequence of an act of supplier or his employee, which includes supply of equipment or material with patent or latent defects or sub-standard services; and (c) the nuclear incident has resulted from the act of commission or omission of an individual done with the intent to cause nuclear damage.
- The SHANTI Act retains provisions (a) and (c) but omits provision (b), which previously exposed nuclear equipment vendors to long-term and uncertain liability risk in the event of a nuclear accident.
- This provision was repeatedly flagged by foreign nuclear equipment vendors as a deterrent to investing in India’s nuclear sector as it exposes them to long-term and uncertain liability risk in the event of a nuclear accident.

NASA’S MOON BASE: WHAT INDIA WILL GAIN BY JOINING

The invitation to join NASA’s Moon Base programme can be an important turning point in the history of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), one that can potentially put it on an entirely different trajectory.

Key Takeaways:

- The invitation itself was not surprising, considering that India has already signed the Artemis Accords, and entered into a strategic partnership with the United States on human spaceflight missions. Yet, given the extremely volatile relationship between the two countries in the last couple of years, this initiative to forge a closer partnership on space is a refreshing move.
- In scale and ambition, the Moon Base programme can be compared only to the Apollo missions. In terms of its impact on humanity and the future of the planet, it could turn out to be far more consequential.
- The Moon Base programme is about creating a permanent research station on the Moon, one that can be inhabited by astronauts, and robots, for prolonged periods of time. The base, to be built in stages over several years, is meant to facilitate lunar research, and allow exploration and exploitation of lunar resources.



— It will possibly be the most challenging engineering exercise ever undertaken, requiring several trips to the Moon by crewed and robotic missions. It could also be the costliest scientific project ever.

— NASA is in no position, and does not want, to execute this entirely on its own. Its budget has been slashed significantly under the Donald Trump administration, while most of its hardware production is now happening in the private sector. So, it is seeking partners, both in the international community as well as in the private industry, to collaborate with.

— The countries that have signed on to the Artemis Accords have, in a way, already shown a willingness to join such a collaboration. There are 70 nations in that club now, including some major space-faring countries like Japan, India, South Korea, and Israel. Several European countries are also in the group.

— India has traditionally been extremely reluctant to join any such group. But with Artemis Accords, it has made its choice very clear. It was one of the early signatories to the Accords, joining as the 27th nation in 2023. There is no official confirmation as of now, but it is very likely that ISRO would accept the offer of collaborating on the Moon Base programme.

— It makes eminent sense for it to do so. ISRO has its own plans for human spaceflight missions, setting up a space station, and even landing humans on the Moon. Joining the Moon Base programme offers the opportunity for it to gain valuable experience in planning and executing complex missions like these, and leapfrog in technology development.

— ISRO has demonstrated its capabilities in executing such missions on its own as well, but that would require time and huge amounts of money.

— Space exploration is reaching a stage where a 10-year gap in technology development can leave a nation fairly well behind. Besides, it would not make economic sense to reinvent the wheel. As it is, ISRO's current plans to have an independent human spaceflight programme, a Moon landing programme, and also a full-fledged space station, are extremely ambitious. It is, no doubt, extremely important to have these capabilities. But it is difficult to imagine that India would have the scientific and economic rationale for running these sustainably on its own.

— The plan for setting up the Bharat Antariksh Station is a case in point. While ISRO must have the technology and capability to build such space infrastructure, it is extremely unlikely that India would have, in about a decade's time, a scientific ecosystem hungry enough to need an entire space station for its own use all year round. It will have to be a shared infrastructure, just like the International Space Station is right now.

— The concerns about India joining what appears like a US-led bloc might be overstated. The Artemis Accords are not like a geopolitical or military camp. Space, as of now at least, is not adversarial. If the US lands on the Moon ahead of others, it does not get to control the area or the resources. It does not harm the interests of China or Russia, which are attempting to do the same thing through their own partnership.

Do You Know:

— The Artemis Accords, established by the US and seven partner countries in October 2020, are a set of 13 principles that seek to promote peaceful and cooperative exploration of space.



— The signatory countries agree to abide by these principles that are mostly a reiteration of established international law on space exploration, like a commitment not to use space for military purposes, a promise to cooperate on matters of safety of space assets and astronauts, and a willingness to share scientific data from space missions. India joined the Artemis Accords in 2023.

FROM SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TO GEOPOLITICS: WHY INDIA NEEDS A CLEAR 'ARCTIC NARRATIVE'

The recently released report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, titled "India's Role and Presence in the Arctic and Antarctic Regions", comes close on the heels of India's Arctic Policy issued in 2022.

Key Takeaways:

- It is seminal for more than one reason: while it covers both polar regions, its most significant implications concern India's future engagement with the Arctic, a region whose strategic importance is growing at a far faster pace than India's capacity to engage with it.
- Such engagement has long been viewed through the lens of scientific research. While science continues to underpin our presence, the Arctic now extends beyond exploration. It is evolving into a hub where climate change and geopolitics converge.
- India has stronger credentials in the Arctic than is often acknowledged. Few realise that India, as part of the British Dominion, was among the original 14 signatories of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty. The treaty entitles an Indian to visit Svalbard — a Norwegian archipelago located between mainland Norway and the North Pole — without a visa and to engage in commercial ventures.
- More than a century later, India remains one of only two developing countries with a permanent scientific presence in the region, through the Himadri research station in Ny-Ålesund, Svalbard. The report, however, highlights a concerning gap between India's ambitions and its capabilities.
- The first pillar of such a narrative must be climate security. India's dependence on the monsoon remains profound. Agriculture still accounts for roughly 18% of its gross domestic product and supports more than half of its population. Nearly 70% of India's annual rainfall comes from the southwest monsoon.
- The Arctic is a major contributor to global sea-level rise. If current trends continue, entire low-lying island states — such as the Maldives — face existential threats. Large parts of Bangladesh and significant stretches of India's coastline could experience recurrent flooding and displacement. By some estimates, more than 250 million people living in vulnerable coastal regions of South Asia could be affected by mid-century. For India, this is not merely an environmental issue but one of national security. Large-scale climate-induced migration from neighbouring regions could create unprecedented humanitarian, social, and security challenges.
- The Arctic's geopolitical significance is equally compelling. Two of India's closest strategic partners, the US and Russia, are Arctic nations. China, India's principal long-term adversary, has invested heavily in Arctic infrastructure, research, and shipping despite being an extra-regional state. The Arctic is increasingly emerging as a battleground for major powers, with maritime access, energy security, and critical mineral supply chains intersecting.



- India also maintains friendly relations with the other six Arctic nations. While the recent India-Nordic Summit has enhanced cooperation with Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, relations with Canada have seen notable improvement.

Considering few countries enjoy such widespread goodwill within the Arctic region, the question is whether India is prepared to engage at a scale commensurate with its interests.

- The committee's recommendation regarding a dedicated Polar Ambassador also deserves special mention. In terms of engagement, India's present challenge is structural: responsibility for Arctic affairs is fragmented across multiple divisions within the Ministry of External Affairs. The eight Arctic states and Arctic Council-related matters are handled by four different territorial and functional divisions, making a coherent whole-of-government Arctic engagement difficult.

Do You Know:

- India, along with 12 other countries, is Observers to the Arctic Council. So are 13 intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary organisations like the UN Environment Programme, and the UN Development Programme, and 12 other non-governmental organisations.

- The Observers are not part of the decision-making processes, but they are invited to attend the meetings of the Council, especially at the level of the working groups.

- The Observer status is granted to entities that support the objectives of the Arctic Council, and have demonstrated capabilities in this regard, including the ability to make financial contributions. The renewal of Observer status is a formality. The status, once granted, continues till there is a consensus among the members that the Observer was engaging in activities that run counter to the objectives of the Arctic Council.

- India had been given the Observer status in 2013, along with five other countries — China, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. Prior to this group, only France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom were granted Observer status. In 2017, Switzerland too became an Observer.

- India is one of the very few countries to set up a permanent station in the Arctic for the purposes of scientific research. The polar regions offer some unique opportunities to carry out research related to atmospheric and climate sciences that cannot be done anywhere else.

The Himadri research station, located in Ny Alesund, Svalbard in Norway, about 1200 km south of the North Pole, was started in July 2008. The Goa-based National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCOAR) is the nodal organisation coordinating the research activities at this station.

- The station has been used to carry out a variety of biological, glaciological and atmospheric and climate sciences research projects in the last one decade, with over 200 scientists from a number of institutions, universities and laboratories having accessed the facilities at the station.

- Himadri came on the back of India's three-decade experience of carrying out scientific research in the polar regions of Antarctica which began in 1981. India's first permanent station in Antarctica was set up way back in 1983. In 2010, Indian scientists undertook a scientific expedition to the South Pole as well. India is now among the very few countries which have multiple research stations in the Antarctic.



- The Arctic region is very rich in some minerals, and oil and gas. With some parts of the Arctic melting due to global warming, the region also opens up the possibility of new shipping routes that can reduce existing distances. Countries which already have ongoing activities in the Arctic hope to have a stake in the commercial exploitation of natural resources present in the region.

HOW THE 1946 NAVAL UPRISING HASTENED INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITISH RULE

As India celebrates its 80th Independence Day, it's worth recalling the Royal Indian Navy mutiny of 1946, which rattled the British and hastened India's independence from colonial rule.

Key Takeaways:

- Over eight decades ago, on February 18, 1946, more than a thousand sailors or "ratings" of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) in Bombay revolted against British rule, which then cascaded into a larger uprising involving Indian personnel in other naval bases across British India. As India celebrates its 80th Independence Day on Saturday (August 15), it's worth recalling the series of events that unfolded in February 1946, known as the "Royal Indian Navy mutiny".
- Although the eventual surrender of the Indian rebel sailors meant that the insurrection ultimately failed, Commodore Srikant Kesnur (Retired), an Indian Navy veteran and naval historian, told The Indian Express that the 1946 mutiny was the "last war of independence", which rattled the British and hastened India's independence from colonial rule.
- You had the Royal Indian Navy (RIN), which was established on October 2, 1934, as a very small force. This came to be set up out of the Royal Indian Marine for close coast operations, with blue-water missions being largely left to the (British) Royal Navy.
- When World War II started, from less than 2,000 people, the RIN grew to almost 30,000 people because of the requirements of war. (There was) a similar huge increase in the number of ships. Small ships came to be commissioned, bought or repurposed rapidly, so the RIN expanded hugely. Often, people were trained at short notice or for shorter durations and sent into war.
- Notwithstanding all this, the RIN performed very well in different theatres. So, immediately after the war, there were expectations that having come out as victors, one would be rewarded in some way. There was the expectation of freedom and independence — and perhaps at the naval and unit level, people who had been inducted in a contingency now being recognised for their service and being given longer tenures in the Navy or being aided in getting a job in the civilian world.
- The most pressing immediate circumstances before February 18 — when the spark got lit — is that on December 1, 1945, Navy Day was to be celebrated. It was supposed to be a big event. But the night before (November 30), some sailors on the HMIS Talwar, which is a shore establishment (a naval base built on land) but also the Navy's signal training centre located in Bombay, hoisted brooms and buckets and wrote slogans like "Down with the British" and "Quit India" to signal a kind of dissatisfaction against the British. And that shocked them.

Do You Know:

- The RIN strike came at a time when the Indian nationalist sentiment had reached fever pitch across the country. The winter of 1945-46 saw three violent upsurges: in Calcutta in November 1945 over the INA trials; in February 1946, also in Calcutta, over the sentencing of INA officer Rashid Ali; and, in that same month, the ratings' uprising in Bombay. In his short book, 'The Indian



Naval Report of 1946', Percy S Gourgey, a former lieutenant of the Royal Indian Naval Volunteer Reserve, wrote that the chain of events led to the "mounting fever of excitement affecting the whole political climate".

- One of the triggers for the RIN strike was the arrest of a rating, BC Dutt, who had scrawled "Quit India" on the HMIS Talwar. The day after the strike began, the ratings went around Bombay in lorries, waving the Congress flag, and getting into scraps with Europeans and policemen who tried to confront them. Soon, ordinary people joined the ratings, and life came to a virtual standstill in both Bombay and Calcutta. There were meetings, processions, strikes, and hartals. In Bombay, labourers participated in a general strike called by the Communist Party of India and the Bombay Students' Union. In many cities across India, students boycotted classes in solidarity.

- The RIN revolt remains a legend today. It was an event that strengthened further the determination among all sections of the Indian people to see the end of British rule. Deep solidarity and amity among religious groups was in evidence, which appeared to run counter to the rapidly spreading atmosphere of communal hatred and animosity.

However, communal unity was more in the nature of organisational unity than a unity among the two major communities. Within months, India was to be devoured by a terrible communal conflagration.

TRACING ASHOKA IN UJJAIN: WHAT NEW DIG AT VAISHYA TEKRI CAN REVEAL

Madhya Pradesh has begun a push to excavate monuments linked to Mauryan-era emperor Ashoka, beginning with Vaishya Tekri.

- The Madhya Pradesh government has begun restoring Buddhist monuments linked to the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, starting with a fresh excavation at Vaishya Tekri in Ujjain. In his 2011 paper, *Aśoka and Buddhist Nuns: Early Buddhism in Ujjain and Malwa*, academic Peter Skilling wrote: "The largest stupa, popularly called Vaisya Tekri, is about 350 feet at its base and 100 feet high. Nearby is a smaller stupa, called Kumbhar (or Kumhar) Tekri. Both are relatively undisturbed, except for the unfortunate fact that a power line runs between them, and a giant pylon squats rudely on Kumbhar Tekri's shoulder."

- But academic Himanshu Prabha Ray, in an interview with The Indian Express, urged caution, noting that the excavation report is decades old and that its interpretation was shaped by earlier accounts, particularly Alexander Cunningham's writings on Ashoka. While acknowledging the mound's impressive size and its reported comparison with the Great Stupa at Sanchi, Ray said, "I think we are jumping the gun. We need to investigate further beyond the 1938-39 excavation."

Do You Know:

- Ujjayini (modern Ujjain), on the banks of the Sipra, a tributary of the Chambal, was the capital of Avanti and an important commercial centre. Historian Romila Thapar, in *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, notes that Ujjain was a major crossroads, linking trade routes to western coastal ports such as Broach and Sopirā, as well as to Pataliputra. "Ptolemy refers to it as Ozone."

- Ashoka was sent to Avanti as viceroy by his father, Bindusara. Unlike his brief sojourn in Taxila, he is believed to have spent about a decade in Avanti, with Ujjain as his headquarters. Thapar adds, "We feel that he was sent to Taxila for a special purpose and after having completed his work there, he was then appointed to the viceroyalty at Ujjain in recognition of his work."



- Historian Nayanjot Lahiri describes Ujjain as the “Greenwich of India” in Ashoka in Ancient India (2015), because Hindu astronomers reckoned the prime meridian of longitude from the city. She suggests that Ashoka arrived there around 282 BCE, roughly a decade before the death of his father, Bindusara. “By the time Ashoka got there, it was an urban centre of respectable antiquity, having flourished along the Sipra river for 300 years or more before it became the Magadhan prince’s place of functioning,” she notes.
- On his way to Ujjain, Ashoka stopped in Vidisha, where he met Vedisadevi, the daughter of a merchant. “Her name was Devi and the romance began in the city of Vidisha, where her father was a prominent merchant. Soon enough, Ashoka married Devi and moved on to Ujjayini,” writes Lahiri. Thapar, however, believes Devi was ‘not legally married’ to Ashoka, since historical records do not mention it. The couple later had a son, Mahinda, and a daughter, Samghamitta.
- Interestingly, local traditions in Sri Lanka connect Vaishya Tekri with Devi. According to Lahiri, “It is locally known as the Vaishya Tekri (‘Vaishya caste’s mound’) since Devi was the daughter of a merchant, this being a characteristically Vaishya occupation.”

SUSHRUTA’S CONTRIBUTION TO MODERN RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

Every family gathering in India eventually includes someone who confidently declares that ancient Indians had plastic surgery, test tube babies, and perhaps even airplanes. With every cup of chai, the claims become bigger. By the end of the evening, it sounds as though every modern scientific discovery had already been made in ancient India thousands of years ago.

The problem is not that these claims are completely false. The problem is that they mix genuine achievements with exaggeration. Ancient India really did make important contributions to medicine. These achievements are well documented and respected by historians. But the story also has another side. It shows how a civilisation can produce remarkable medical knowledge and then slowly weaken the very people who created and preserved it.

Shushruta and reconstructive surgery

One of the greatest achievements of ancient Indian medicine appears in the Sushruta Samhita. This text describes reconstructive surgery, especially an operation to rebuild a damaged or amputated nose using a flap of skin taken from the patient’s cheek. The instructions are so detailed that modern surgeons recognise the procedure as practical and effective.

The importance of this technique became clear much later. In 1794, a British “Gentleman’s Magazine” described a successful nose reconstruction performed by an Indian potter in Pune using this traditional method. European surgeons studied the technique, improved it, and eventually made it part of modern reconstructive surgery. This is a genuine Indian contribution to world medicine. It does not require myths or exaggerated claims to make it impressive.

The Sushruta Samhita also described cataract surgery, the removal of bladder stones, and techniques for extracting arrows from wounds. These were major achievements for the ancient world. Surgery was extremely risky before modern anesthesia and antiseptics. Any physician who attempted such operations needed great skill and careful observation. Ancient Indian surgeons deserved recognition as some of the most innovative medical thinkers of their time.



Emphasis on observation and explanation of heredity

The text also encouraged the study of human anatomy through direct observation. Sushruta advised students to examine the human body by allowing it to decompose slowly in flowing water. The softened tissues could then be carefully removed to expose the organs underneath. His purpose was clear. A physician should not depend only on what teachers had said but should learn by observing the body directly. This emphasis on observation is one of the basic principles of scientific medicine.

Another important medical text, the Caraka Samhita, offered an early explanation of heredity. It suggested that a child developed through the combination of the father's seed and the mother's field. It also proposed that softer tissues came mainly from the mother, while harder parts such as bones and teeth came from the father. This was not genetics in the modern sense. It did not resemble the discoveries of Gregor Mendel or modern biology. However, it was still a thoughtful attempt to explain inheritance through natural causes instead of supernatural ones.

Why this medical tradition did not continue to grow

Given these achievements, an obvious question arises. Why did this medical tradition not continue to grow and develop? The answer is uncomfortable. The problem was not a lack of intelligence or creativity. Instead, it was connected to the way society viewed physicians.

The scholar Patrick Olivelle, who studied the Dharmashastra tradition, showed that physicians occupied a low and often stigmatised position in Brahminical society. The Manusmriti even advised that a twice-born Brahmin should avoid accepting food from a physician or inviting one to important ritual meals.

There were several reasons for this attitude. Physicians regularly dealt with sick, bleeding, and dying people. As a result, they were considered ritually impure. They also earned money by treating illness, which caused some religious texts to place them alongside occupations viewed with suspicion, such as butchers and moneylenders. In addition, medicine was linked with the Atharvaveda, a text that included healing practices but was also associated with magic and ritual. This further reduced the social status of physicians.

This created a strange contradiction. The same civilisation that produced Sushruta and Caraka also treated physicians as socially inferior. Medical knowledge was respected, but the people who practised it were often viewed with suspicion. The healer was necessary, yet considered impure.

History of ancient Indian medicine is both inspiring and tragic

Over time, this attitude had serious consequences. Surgery gradually passed into the hands of lower caste barber communities instead of remaining a respected scholarly profession. The spirit of careful observation that Sushruta had encouraged slowly declined.

Ancient Indian medicine never developed a detailed understanding of the brain, the heart, or blood circulation. The reason was not a lack of intellectual ability. Rather, the social position of physicians discouraged the kind of practical investigation that medical progress required.

The history of ancient Indian medicine is therefore both inspiring and tragic. It produced remarkable surgical techniques, encouraged observation, and made genuine contributions to world medicine. At the same time, the social system gradually weakened the status of physicians and slowed further progress.



SHORT NEWS

CANADA VOWS RETALIATORY ₹MOVE AS US PUTS 50% TARIFFS ON SOME GOODS

- Canada will impose tariffs on imports from the United States starting September 8, Prime Minister Mark Carney said on Saturday, retaliating against President Donald Trump's new 50% tariffs after the two long-standing allies failed to reach a trade deal.
- The new U.S. tariff took effect just after midnight on about \$20 billion of Canadian goods, including wine, furniture, dairy products, cement, clothing, fishing rods, and hockey equipment.
- They cover just over 5% of Canada's exports to the United States and do not qualify for preferential treatment under the US-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement.

17TH COP OF UNCCD

- The 17th Conference of Parties (CoP) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) took place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 17 to 28 August 2026, under the theme "Restoring Land. Restoring Hope."
- The UNCCD is the only legally binding framework for addressing desertification and the effects of drought. There are 197 Parties to the Convention, including 196 country Parties and the European Union.
- The Conference of the Parties was established by the Convention as its main decision-making body. It consists of governments and organizations like the EU and guides the Convention to address global challenges and national needs. The COP has been meeting biennially since 2001. Notably, UNCCD COP16 took place from 2-13 December 2024 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- Community-Led Restoration of Rangelands: India emphasised on the critical role of rangelands in sustaining pastoralist communities, conserving biodiversity and regulating water and carbon cycles.
- Shift from Drought Response to Drought Resilience: India called for a fundamental shift in the global approach to drought – from reactive relief to proactive, technology-enabled resilience. He also highlighted India's coordinated, multi-institutional approach integrating early warning, mitigation, relief and community resilience.
- India's first guide to grasslands: India launched its first-ever Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONES) of India at the COP 17 to the UNCCD. India's Guide to Grasslands and ONES marks an important step in the direction of strengthening their conservation, restoration, and sustainable management.

WORLD WATER WEEK 2026

Recently, the Ministry of Rural Development participated in the World Water Week 2026, held in Stockholm (Sweden). Organized by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), World Water Week is one of the world's leading platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and innovation on water. The annual event brings together governments, development partners, research



institutions, and practitioners from across the globe to deliberate on emerging water challenges and share knowledge, experiences, and solutions.

PM MODI'S VISIT TO UZBEKISTAN

— Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Uzbekistan from August 29 to 30 on a bilateral visit and is on a visit to the Kyrgyz Republic for the 26th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit from August 31 to September 1.

— Elevating their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership, India and Uzbekistan on August 30 discussed establishing a framework for long-term supply of uranium to India and set a bilateral trade target of USD 5 billion by 2030. India is among the top 10 trading partners of Uzbekistan. Bilateral trade in 2025-26 stood close to USD 1 billion.

— These were the key takeaways after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Tashkent for bilateral talks.

— Modi was conferred Uzbekistan's highest award for foreign leaders, Oliy Darajali Do'stlik Order, which he dedicated to the "enduring bond" between India and Uzbekistan.

— A total of 11 pacts were signed during the visit. Announcement of a grant of USD 1 million for afforestation in the Aral Sea region, 100 Lal Bahadur Shastri Scholarship for Hindi Language Scholarships and a ICCR Sanskrit Chair at Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies were also made.

H-1B VISAS

— Barely two months after a US federal court struck down the Donald Trump administration's \$100,000 charge on new H-1B visa petitions, the administration is trying again. This time, through a formal rulemaking process and under a different provision of immigration law.

— The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has proposed an additional \$103,265 fee on every H-1B petition subject to the annual visa cap.

— The H-1B visa is a temporary (non-immigrant) visa category that allows US employers to hire highly educated foreign professionals to work in 'specialty occupations'. It was introduced in 1990 to help American employers address skill shortages when qualified domestic workers are unavailable. It primarily covers roles in science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), and Information Technology.

— Notably, India remains the largest beneficiary of H-1B visas, accounting for 71 percent of approved applications in 2024, while China was a distant second at 11.7 percent.

JAVELIN ANTI-TANK GUIDED MISSILE

— India has signed an agreement with the US to buy its Javelin anti-tank guided missile system, the US Embassy in India said on August 28.

— The Javelin first entered service with the US military in 1996. It is an anti-tank guided munition with a standard effective range of 2.5 km.



- A single person can carry this missile system and fire it from their shoulder. Alternatively, it can also be fired from a remote launcher mounted on an unmanned ground vehicle.
- According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the missile was designed to tackle heavily armoured vehicles such as main battle tanks and lighter-skinned military vehicles. It is also effective against fortifications, bunkers and helicopters.
- The Javelin is a “fire-and-forget” missile — its infrared guidance system allows it to travel towards a target on its own. This means that operators can fire and quickly move for cover, relocate to another fighting position, or reload to fire again, says a CSIS article.

TRANSFER OF MISSILE TECHNOLOGY TO DEFENCE INDUSTRY

- In a significant step towards building India’s conventional missile force, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on August 25 approved the transfer of technology for all conventional missile systems developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to the Indian defence industry. The decision paves the way for domestic production of these missile systems by private players.
- Officials familiar with the development told The Indian Express that the initiative could start with the DRDO-developed beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) ASTRA, surface-to-air anti-radiation missiles RUDRAM, VSHORADS, anti-tank guided missile NAG as well as short-range missile systems like the Naval Anti-Ship Missile (NASM).
- The broader goal, however, is to allow the Indian defence industry to produce all conventional missile systems, they said. That said, Agni and the K-series missiles will not be included in the technology transfer as they are strategic missiles, the officials highlighted.

ARAVALLI HELICOPTER ENGINE

State-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and France’s Safran Helicopter Engines have signed a deal to jointly develop a new high-power engine for India’s next-generation helicopters. Called ‘Aravalli’, the engine will power the 13-tonne Indian Multi-Role Helicopter (IMRH) and its naval version, the Deck-Based Multi-Role Helicopter (DBMRH).

PAKISTAN FACTOR: WHY WEST ASIA WAR HURT INDIAN AIRLINES MORE THAN FOREIGN ONES

- The West Asia conflict, which resulted in major airspace disruptions in the Gulf region, led to a 9% year-on-year (y-o-y) decline in international air passenger traffic to and from India in the first quarter of the current financial year.
- While the fall in overall volumes was expected, notably, it was entirely driven by Indian airlines as they collectively lost a significant share of international passenger traffic. Overseas carriers, on the other hand, cumulatively made large market share gains, with their combined passenger numbers even higher than the year-ago period.



22 INDIANS ON BOARD 2 SHIPS HIJACKED NEAR YEMEN AND SOMALIA.

- A total of 22 Indian seafarers are on board two ships that were hijacked by armed pirates off the coast of Somalia and Yemen this week, according to sources aware of the developments.
- Sources said that while the shipping companies related to the two vessels are working in close coordination with the government, the seafarers are learnt to be safe.
- The two vessels are Eritrea-flagged oil products tanker Sibu 1, which was hijacked in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Yemen Thursday, and Cameroon-flagged general cargo carrier Lutuf, which was hijacked on Monday (August 17) off Somalia's coast.

EXPANDING FOOTPRINT

India's engagement with Central Asia has been on the rise. Security cooperation has deepened in the wake of Taliban rule in Afghanistan. India has to deal with China's influence in the strategically vital region, establish connectivity projects and meet its growing energy needs. Central Asia has always been seen as Russia's backyard. It has a 20-30% Russian population and the language is also commonly spoken. The region is considered to be extremely rich in mineral and natural resources.

- Kazakhstan has one of the world's biggest reserves of uranium. It has other minerals too: coal, lead, zinc, gold and iron ore.
- The Kyrgyz Republic has gold and hydro-power.
- Turkmenistan has one of the world's largest reserves of natural gas.
- Tajikistan also has huge hydro-power potential and Uzbekistan has gold, uranium and natural gas.

INDIA COURTS WILL DECIDE EXTRADITION OF HASINA, TALKS ON TO CHANGE COURSE

- As the Tarique Rahman government reiterates its request for the extradition of Bangladesh's ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, top government officials in India said such requests have to come before the Indian judiciary and be decided by it, but added that intense discussions were on with Dhaka to move away from such a maximalist position.
- "The decision to extradite will be finally taken by our courts, it will not be a political or diplomatic decision. And what has to be established during the court process is whether the crimes that are alleged to have been committed are also categorised as crimes under the Indian law," a top official told The Indian Express.
- The extradition request cannot be decoupled from the current diplomatic exchanges between Delhi and Dhaka, this official said.

FIRST STATE TO FORMULATE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY POLICY

- After the Supreme Court's order recognising the right to walk on footpaths as a fundamental right, Andhra Pradesh has become the country's first state to formulate a pedestrian safety policy.



— Since roads and footpaths are a state subject, it is incumbent upon state governments to ensure citizens' fundamental right to safe footpaths.

— The Andhra Pradesh Pedestrian Safety & Universal Accessibility Policy 2026, notified on August 7, mandates a three-step system to address the issue — road safety audits, fixing footpath infrastructure (including removal of encroachments) and behavioural change.

— The policy also invokes section 198A of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, under which officials, contractors, and consultants can be fined Rs 1 lakh if infrastructural or design failures cause pedestrian death or disability.

AFT UPHOLDS ACTION AGAINST BRIGADIER OVER J&K CUSTODIAL KILLINGS

— The Chandigarh Bench of the Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) has upheld the Indian Army's decision awarding "severe displeasure" to Brigadier P Acharya in connection with the 2023 killing of three civilians during alleged custodial torture by Rashtriya Rifles troops he was commanding in Jammu and Kashmir's Topa Pir area in the border district of Poonch.

— The Bench asserted that "emotions cannot override military discipline and the legal obligation to treat the civilians humanely" for troops involved in follow-up operations after having lost their brothers-in-arms.

— There are two types of punishments in the Army — Disciplinary Action for acts of indiscipline, primarily when the individual is directly involved, and Administrative Action for lapses or actions that should have been avoided.

— 'Severe Displeasure' is an Administrative Action taken based on the findings of a court of inquiry, after which a show cause notice is given. The reply to the show cause notice is taken into cognisance before action is taken.

— 'Severe Displeasure' is a serious punishment that potentially impacts career growth, though it does not impact pay and allowances or any other privilege of the officer. It is restricted to officers and not given to other ranks.

GORKHA STATE DEMAND

— The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has constituted a high-level committee following a key meeting of Gorkha leaders with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and West Bengal government representatives in Siliguri.

— Tasked with preparing a framework for a "permanent political solution" to the Gorkha issue, the committee will address a contentious demand whose origins can be traced back over 100 years.

— The Gorkhas' movement for a separate administrative identity is among the oldest of its kind in India. Darjeeling and its adjacent areas — including Kalimpong, Kurseong, the Terai, and the Dooars — are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct from the rest of West Bengal. Because the region's population primarily speaks Nepali and possesses distinct physical features, residents frequently face racial profiling and are wrongly labelled as citizens of Nepal or China.



— This persistent alienation has fueled a deep-seated identity crisis, driving the demand for a separate state to affirm their identity as Indian citizens.

— But its origins go further back. The movement began in 1907, when the Darjeeling Hillmen's Association, led by Sonam Wangyel Laden La, submitted a formal petition to the Minto-Morley Reforms Committee seeking to separate Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri from Bengal.

CHIPFLATION

— The global artificial intelligence (AI) investment boom has created an acute shortage of the memory chips used in the manufacture of everyday consumer electronics. This has led to manufacturers raising rates they charge to such an extent that years of price hikes that occurred in the past for products such as smartphones and TVs have taken place in just six months in 2026.

— According to Consumer Price Index (CPI) data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), prices of a variety of consumer electronics goods in July were up 3-5% compared to January.

— Back in June, analysts at American investment bank Morgan Stanley had coined the term 'chipflation' to describe how "AI's appetite for memory chips is boosting the cost of everything from data centers to smartphones, with consequences that may reach far beyond the tech industry."

— The global AI boom has led to key chipmakers making the more in-demand and advanced chips used in data centres sprouting up all over the world. What is being sacrificed are DRAM (Dynamic Random Access Memory) and other chips used in everyday electronics goods such as refrigerators, washing machines, ACs, smartphones, laptops, TVs, and earphones. The result of the supply shortage of the chips essential to consumer electronics is a massive rise in their prices.

IT RESILIENCE INDEX

— Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on August 24 introduced an IT Resilience Index (ITRI) for market infrastructure institutions — entities such as clearing corporations and exchanges that enable trading in financial markets.

— SEBI's ITRI for market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) quantifies cyber readiness and turns it into something tangible.

— The index has nine parameters — availability and security have a weightage of 20%, integrity, governance, reliability and monitoring, modularity and flexibility, and business continuity have a weightage of 10% each, while scalability and an "others" parameter with miscellaneous requirements have a weightage of 5% each.

— The framework, which will come into effect from early 2027, will also include an "early warning system" and continuous monitoring to flag risks early. "MIIs shall compute ITRI on a half-yearly basis within a period of 60 days from the end of each half-year and submit the comparative analysis of two consecutive half-years (on a rolling basis) and corrective action," SEBI's circular said.



STATE OF THE ECONOMY

- The Indian economy is showing resilience amid a fragile global environment marked by geopolitical tensions, renewed US tariffs and persistent trade uncertainties, according to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) 'State of the Economy' article.
- While these external headwinds continue to pose risks to global trade and the growth-inflation outlook, buoyant domestic demand, a recovery in manufacturing and services activity, improving monsoon conditions and a rebound in capital inflows are providing support to India's growth momentum, the RBI article said.
- The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee kept the key repo rate unchanged at 5.25% in its meeting on August 5. The panel marginally raised its growth forecast for FY27 to 6.7% from 6.6% and lowered its inflation projection to 5% from 5.1%.
- However, members of the MPC indicated that as headline inflation is projected to peak to a level as high as 5.9% in Q3 2026-27, a "case for a hike may emerge" during the course of the year, according to the minutes of the MPC meeting released last week.

MULTI-LANE FREE FLOW (MLFF)

- In a step to decongest highways, especially near toll plazas, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) launched its ambitious Multi-lane Free Flow (MLFF) or barrier-less tolling system in May.
- In MLFF, vehicles do not need to stop at the toll gate to pay the user fee. The high-performance Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) readers and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras installed at the toll gate gantry read the FASTag and Vehicle Registration Number (VRN) to deduct the toll amount even at speeds of up to 100 kmph.
- However, if the FASTAG account has insufficient balance or is invalid, faulty or non-functional, highway users are issued an e-notice for non-payment of the user fee immediately after crossing the toll gate. The toll amount must be paid within 72 hours, failing which defaulters have to pay double the toll amount.

RAJGHAT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

- After 70 years, 22 boxes containing material excavated from Rajghat in 1957, documented, and handed over to the museum of Banaras Hindu University's Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology (AIHC), were opened recently.
- In it are more than 10,000 artefacts—including painted black pottery believed to be nearly 3,000 years old—along with thousands of photographs documenting archaeological sites and sculptures across India.
- Rajghat, located on the north-eastern edge of Varanasi near the confluence of the Ganga and Varuna rivers, is one of the most important archaeological sites in the middle Ganga Valley.
- The first archaeological remains at the site were discovered in 1939 during the expansion of the Kashi railway station and were subsequently sent to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for examination.



— The excavations unearthed remains of ancient settlements, including structures believed to be houses, terracotta objects, seals and several other artefacts. These findings helped researchers trace the development of human settlement at Rajghat over several centuries.

— Notably, archaeologists have divided the history of the site into six cultural periods, beginning around 800 BC and continuing up to the medieval period.

INTISMERAN

— A new personalised cancer vaccine, administered along with a popular immunotherapy drug Keytruda, has been shown to reduce the risk of death owing to recurrence and spread of skin cancer.

— Developed by pharmaceutical giant Merck and the mRNA vaccine company Moderna, intismeran is the first such therapy to show meaningful clinical benefits.

— The therapy is designed by identifying the mutations in a patient's tumour sample: together, these identifying proteins — called neoantigens — act like the fingerprint of their cancer.

— Neoantigens are essentially proteins that are found only on the cancerous cells, which the body's immune system can be trained to recognise. These neoantigens vary from person to person, meaning they become an identifier for their cancer but also necessitating personalised vaccines.

— The vaccine consists of synthetically developed mRNA that encodes for these proteins. mRNA, or messenger RNA, is a single-stranded molecule that carries genetic instructions from DNA in the cell nucleus. By telling the cell which proteins to make, it acts as a molecular blueprint. Each treatment consists of mRNA coding for 34 such neoantigens. Once administered, the body generates these proteins and presents them to the immune system.

— The idea behind the therapy is the same as any other vaccine: teach the immune system to recognise the cancer's fingerprint so that it can mount an effective response whenever it spots these mutated cells.

INDIA'S FIRST NON-GMO, HIGH-EXPANSION POPCORN MAIZE HYBRID SEED

On August 24, Vice-President C. P. Radhakrishnan launched India's first non-GMO, high-expansion popcorn maize hybrid seed at Musunuru in Eluru district of Andhra Pradesh.

BLACK-NECKED STORKS

— The bird known in Western folklore for 'delivering babies' has brought good news in Gujarat as well. In the Khijadia wetland of Jamnagar district, black-necked storks have shown signs of breeding and raising families with committed parental care.

— According to a recent study carried out by researchers at the Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation, an autonomous body under the state forest department, four pairs of black-necked storks were found raising two fledglings each in 2024-25.



— The black-necked stork is known for its scattered breeding populations. In Gujarat, Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary and its surrounding landscape have long been recognised as important habitats for the species. However, detailed information on its breeding ecology has remained limited.

— The sanctuary, which lies along the Central Asian Flyway, covers 510 hectares with 233 species of birds in it. Black-necked storks are also found in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Assam besides Gujarat.

— It is diurnal and feeds in shallow wetlands rather than specifically deep waters.

LAKE ONTARIO

— US President Donald Trump on August 27 signed an executive order to rename Lake Ontario, situated on the US-Canada border, as “Lake America”. The order said the lake was a “tremendous asset to the United States and part of our Nation’s heritage.”

— In response, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney wrote in a post on X that the name Ontario (also the name of a Canadian province) comes from the indigenous Wendat people.

— Lake Ontario is part of the Great Lakes system, along with Lake Superior, Michigan, Huron and Erie, spanning the US-Canada border. According to the US National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the lakes system holds about 90% of the freshwater in the US and approximately 20% of the world’s freshwater supply. Forty million people across the two countries depend on it for clean drinking water.

— Notably, the name change will apply to how the US officially refers to the lake, but it will not affect how Canada or the rest of the world choose to call it. No single global organisation is tasked with ensuring uniformity among names of water bodies, and the decision to use a certain name is often based on historical precedent.

DOLMA LA PASS

Dolma La Pass is a high-altitude mountain pass located in the Kailash region of Tibet, along the traditional Kailash–Mansarovar pilgrimage route. The pass is located within the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

**BUSINESS AND ECONOMY****BRICS ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS OPPOSE EU'S CARBON BORDER TAX**

BRICS environment and climate ministers Tuesday opposed the European Union's (EU) Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) or Carbon Border Tax, calling it a unilateral, punitive, discriminatory and protection measure that is not in line with international law.

Key Takeaways:

- They reiterated that developed nations must urgently scale up climate finance, especially for climate adaptation. CBAM is an import levy on carbon-intensive goods like steel, iron, fertilisers, aluminium and cement. The tax was aimed as a measure to reduce the carbon footprint of imported goods, but the step has been seen as a trade barrier by developing countries.
- Rolled out on October 1, 2023, with a reporting-only phase, CBAM was entirely effected from January 1, 2026, when importers were asked to purchase and surrender CBAM certificates tied to carbon emissions embedded in their goods.
- In the 'Adaptation and climate resilience' part of the joint statement, member nations "expressed concern" that measures like CBAM "undermine efforts by countries, specifically the developing countries", aimed at addressing the adverse impacts of climate change, increased adaptive capacity, and resilience. The meeting, chaired by India in New Delhi, brought together environment and climate ministers and senior officials from Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Ethiopia.
- In a joint statement issued at the conclusion of the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' meeting, the bloc of nine developing economies has also urged wealthy nations to deliver on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) reached at the COP (Conference of Parties) 30 held in Belem, Brazil, to triple adaptation finance to developing countries by 2035.
- The joint declaration document invoked the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" (CBDR-RC), underscoring that all cooperation commitments — from forest fire protocols to circular economy standards — remain voluntary and calibrated to each country's national circumstances. It marked the culmination of a year of technical work by the BRICS Environment Working Group and its Contact Group on Climate Change and Sustainable Development. India formally handed over hosting duties for the 13th edition to China, which will lead the meeting in 2027.

Do You Know:

- According to the World Bank, "a carbon tax directly sets a price on carbon by defining a tax rate on greenhouse gas emissions or – more commonly – on the carbon content of fossil fuels". It is a type of carbon pricing, and the other type of carbon pricing is the emissions trading systems (ETS). The CBAM is a form of carbon pricing system.
- The CBAM or Carbon Tax was first introduced by the European Union in 2021. It taxes certain products coming in from other countries based on their carbon emissions footprint in their production process. For instance, if the imported steel was produced through a process that entailed higher emissions than the emissions standards for that product in Europe, it would be taxed.



- CBAM allows industries in Europe to remain competitive while continuing to maintain high environmental standards. It prevents these industries from relocating their production to countries where the production might be cheap owing to less strict emission norms, a situation described as carbon leakage. In the process, it hopes to contribute to reducing global emissions.

WHY INDIA IS STRUGGLING TO ACQUIRE CRITICAL MINERAL ASSETS ABROAD, EXPAND FOOTPRINT

India's efforts to secure critical mineral assets overseas are facing a series of hurdles, ranging from high asset valuations, volatile mineral prices, financial constraints, to socio-political risks in resource-rich countries.

Key Takeaways:

— Incorporated in 2019, the government's flagship overseas acquisition vehicle, Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) — a joint venture of National Aluminium Company Ltd., Hindustan Copper Limited, and Mineral Exploration & Consultancy Limited — is mandated to identify, explore and acquire overseas critical mineral assets to help meet India's growing demand for these strategic resources.

— However, barring some progress in Argentina, KABIL has struggled to expand its overseas footprint in other mineral-rich countries, including Australia, Vietnam, Mali, and Chile, as proposed investments in critical mineral extraction projects have either stalled or fallen through.

— In Argentina, KABIL has so far acquired five lithium brine blocks in Catamarca province. It is also evaluating seven additional greenfield lithium blocks in Catamarca and is in discussions for two more lithium projects in Jujuy province.

— In December 2024, a consortium comprising KABIL, Coal India Ltd (CIL), Oil India Ltd (OIL), and ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) submitted a non-binding offer (NBO) of \$184 million to acquire 10% equity stake each in the Mt Marion and Wodgina lithium mines in Australia. The proposed transaction involved acquiring a 20% stake in the holding company, Mineral Resources Ltd, which owned 50% stakes in both mines.

— After the process was reopened, the consortium submitted a revised NBO of \$233 million in September 2025, seeking to acquire a 20% stake in each of the two mines. This would have entailed acquiring a 40% stake in Mineral Resources Ltd.

— But the assets were ultimately acquired by South Korean steel and chemical major POSCO, which paid \$765 million for 15% stake each in the Wodgina and Mt Marion mines, equivalent to a 30% stake in Mineral Resources Ltd.

Do You Know:

— As India has little processing capacity and is 100% import-dependent for some key critical minerals such as cobalt, lithium, nickel, rare earth elements (REEs) and silicon, it has been aggressively expanding collaborative efforts. China controls 90% of global critical mineral processing.

— On 20 February 2026, India became a signatory to the U.S. – led Pax Silica initiative. India and the United States are also partnering under the Forum on Resource Geostrategic Engagement (FORGE) initiative.



CAN INDIA BUILD A STRATEGIC FUEL SYSTEM?

The story so far:

West Asia-related disruptions have exposed a vulnerability in India's energy-security system. India can import large quantities of crude oil, LNG and LPG, but its ability to store, transport and release these fuels during a prolonged disruption differs sharply by fuel. India already operates underground strategic crude-oil storage and two underground LPG caverns, but has no operating underground natural-gas storage facility.

Against this background, the government is considering a decade-long strategic-fuel programme that would add about 28 MT of crude-oil storage, 9 MT of LNG storage and 4 MT of LPG storage. Reuters reports that the proposed reserves are intended to provide nearly two months of crude and LNG demand and about six weeks of LPG demand. The programme remains under consideration and should therefore be treated as a proposed target, not committed capacity.

How much storage does India have today?

India's position varies considerably by fuel. For crude oil, Phase I of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve provides 5.33 MT of underground capacity, with actual storage of about 3.37 MT, or roughly 63-64% utilisation, across Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur. A further 6.5 MT has been approved under Phase II at Chandikhol and Padur. However, execution on the Chandikhol project remains protracted amid ongoing land acquisition requirements and finalisation of commercial PPP frameworks.

LPG has a much smaller underground footprint. The Visakhapatnam and Mangaluru caverns together provide about 0.14 MT of capacity. A proposed 4 MT strategic reserve would therefore represent roughly a 30-fold increase in underground LPG capacity.

Natural gas presents the largest storage gap. India currently has no operational underground gas-storage facility. Its gas-security system instead depends on domestic production, LNG imports, import terminals, commercial inventories and pipelines.

These figures also highlight an important distinction between storage capacity and inventory. A facility has a physical capacity, but the fuel it holds can vary. Not all inventory is necessarily immediately accessible either. During a crisis, the critical measure is therefore not simply how many tonnes can be stored, but how much fuel is available and at what withdrawal rate it can reach consumers.

What does the proposed 9 MT of LNG storage mean?

LNG is particularly prone to confusion because India already has substantial LNG import and regasification infrastructure. A regasification terminal can receive LNG and convert it into natural gas, but its regasification capacity does not constitute strategic inventory.

LNG is stored as a cryogenic liquid at around -162°C , requiring specialised insulated tanks and boil-off gas management. Underground gas storage is different: LNG is first regasified and the resulting natural gas is injected into a depleted reservoir or cavern.

The PNGRB-ICF study provides a useful but narrowly defined stress test. Its 2030 scenario examined how much additional LNG infrastructure would be required to supply priority consumers for 20 days under stress conditions. It estimated a requirement of about 0.56-0.6 MT



of LNG equivalent, achievable with roughly eight additional LNG tanks. The combined cost of the tanks and the associated strategic inventory was estimated at around \$1 billion. This was a scenario-specific estimate, not an assessment of India's overall strategic LNG requirement.

The proposed 9 MT strategic inventory is an order of magnitude larger. Against the ICF projection of roughly 58 MT of annual LNG imports, 9 MT represents about 56 days of imports — hence the description of approximately two months of LNG import cover. It does not mean two months of India's total gas consumption.

The difference is important. A 0.6 MT requirement addresses a 20-day priority-sector stress scenario; 9 MT represents a much broader strategic objective of buffering India against prolonged LNG-import disruption. The associated investment would therefore be substantially larger.

Does all the gas have to be stored as LNG?

No. India could eventually use a portfolio of surface LNG tanks and underground natural-gas storage. Additional LNG tanks would hold inventory directly at import terminals. A separate proposal from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas would require LNG import terminals to maintain storage capacity 10% above their normal operating requirement, with the additional capacity available to the government during supply or price disruptions.

For longer-duration requirements, depleted oil and gas reservoirs, which account for 74% of global working gas volume, could provide much larger volumes of underground gas storage. Salt caverns offer different advantages: faster injection and withdrawal and the ability to cycle inventory more frequently, potentially making them useful for shorter-duration balancing.

But a depleted field cannot simply become a storage site because production has ended. Reservoir characteristics, cap-rock integrity, pressure behaviour, existing wells, cushion-gas requirements and pipeline connectivity must all be assessed. India's sedimentary basins — including Krishna, Godavari, Cambay, Mumbai Offshore and Rajasthan — offer potential locations, but moving from geological potential to usable storage requires subsurface investigation, site selection, engineering, construction, testing, filling and pipeline integration.

Salt caverns face a similar qualification process. Rajasthan's salt-bearing formations have been investigated for solution-mined caverns, but suitability depends on depth, thickness, purity, geometry, groundwater and mechanical properties.

Can India scale its crude and LPG experience?

Crude is the most mature component. India already operates underground crude caverns and has developed the associated engineering capabilities. The U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve illustrates the scale possible with salt caverns, with authorised capacity of 714 million barrels across 60 caverns. But the U.S. system works as an integrated network of caverns, pipelines, marine terminals and refineries. Storage is therefore fundamentally an infrastructure system, not simply an underground space.

LPG is technically proven in India but presents a much larger scaling challenge. A proposed 4 MT reserve would require a substantial network of new caverns or other storage facilities, together with import terminals, pipelines, pumping systems and bottling infrastructure.

The Mangaluru cavern illustrates the complexity. Underground construction requires geological and hydrogeological investigation, rock-mechanics analysis and groundwater management,



particularly where work takes place alongside operating surface facilities. Scaling the system would require sustained capabilities in geophysics, geomechanics, tunnelling, reservoir engineering and project execution.

What happens if the fuel cannot reach India?

Because energy security relies heavily on maritime logistics, including vulnerable chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and long-distance routes from the U.S., India is proactively diversifying both its import sources and shipping capabilities. To reduce reliance on foreign vessels, State-run oil refiners and the Shipping Corporation of India plan to invest \$1.5 to \$2 billion in a joint venture to acquire 59 ships. Simultaneously, Indian Oil is expanding sourcing through new 2027 agreements with Algeria and increased U.S. purchases, while exploring direct stakes in Very Large Gas Carriers to secure greater control over its supply chain.

What about pipelines?

Pipelines provide the final link between imported or stored fuel and inland consumers. PNGRB has recently authorised approximately 1,800 km of new LPG pipelines across six States, involving investment of around \$0.7 billion. These pipelines improve connections between supply sources and inland markets and reduce dependence on road movement, but they do not themselves add strategic storage. Their value lies in improving deliverability.

The same principle applies to natural gas. Underground storage is useful only if it can inject into and withdraw from the gas grid at the required rate. LNG tanks are useful only when regasification and downstream pipelines can move the gas. LPG caverns require connections to bottling and distribution systems.

Who pays for the strategic reserves?

The reported \$42 billion programme, which has yet to be confirmed by the government, combines infrastructure CAPEX with the cost of purchasing and maintaining strategic fuel inventories. Reuters reported that more than half could go towards storage infrastructure, with the balance used to purchase and fill the reserves. Financing would be a challenge and the government shot down reports that a cess would be charged to pay for the reserves.

The financial obligation does not end with construction. Billions of dollars of fuel would need to be purchased, financed and maintained. Stocks released during a crisis would then have to be replenished, potentially when commodity and freight prices are higher. The policy therefore needs to establish who owns and finances the inventory, minimum stock obligations, emergency-release authority, and who bears replenishment and price risk. A commercial-cum-strategic model could reduce the public burden, provided commercially used capacity remains available during emergencies.

Is storage enough to make India energy-secure?

Building 41 MT of combined storage is only part of the equation. A strategic reserve is effective only if India can seamlessly access fuel, transport it inland, and replenish stocks after a release.

Ultimately, energy security relies on an integrated framework: reserves buy time, shipping brings the next cargo, pipelines deliver fuel inland, and governance dictates emergency execution. The ultimate test of India's strategic fuel programme will be its ability to coordinate all these elements simultaneously when a crisis hits.



DID PRESS NOTE 3 RELAXATIONS HELP ATTRACT MORE FDI?

The story so far

The Union government on Friday said that India had received foreign direct investment (FDI) worth ₹4,895 over just the last few months, from companies that have benefitted from recent relaxations made to India's FDI rules.

The aim of the relaxations was precisely to ease the flow of investments that had earlier been locked out of India.

What was the earlier rule?

The Union government had issued Press Note 3 in April 2020, in which it amended India's FDI policy. The existing rule at the time stated that any entity of Bangladesh and Pakistan could invest in India only after securing Government approval. Press Note 3 widened this stipulation to include any country that shared a land border with India. So, this included Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan.

The popular perception is that the government took this decision as a result of border clashes between India and China at Galwan.

However, Press Note 3 was issued in April 2020, before those clashes took place in May.

The reason the change was made was to prevent hostile takeovers of companies ailing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. India and a few other countries had noticed that, early on in the pandemic, Chinese companies were buying up majority stakes in companies in the countries whose stock prices had plummeted due to the pandemic. The FDI restriction was aimed at curbing this.

While the origin of the rule was not directly linked to the border clashes, its extension over the years was certainly a result of the frigid relationship between India and China.

What was the relaxation?

In March 2026, the Centre eased the Press Note 3 restrictions somewhat. It said that FDI from entities would be allowed in India through the automatic route, without needing express government approval, if these entities had less than 10% stake based in countries that share a land border with India.

In other words, companies that had minority and non-controlling stakes held by these land-border countries could invest in India through the easier route.

The government did this because it said that a lot of investment into India had been held up because even companies that had tiny stakes owned by Chinese entities faced stricter restrictions on their investments into India.

"It is expected that the new guidelines will provide clarity and ease of doing business in India, and facilitate investments which can contribute towards greater FDI inflows, access to new technologies, domestic value addition, expansion of domestic firms and integration with global supply chain," the government had said in March when it eased the rules.



What has been the benefit?

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry said on Friday that a total of 29 FDI projects worth ₹4,895.65 crore had been reported to it under its revised framework up to August 10, 2026.

It added that these investments span a range of sectors, including information technology, artificial intelligence, information and communication, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, data centres and transport services, among others.

Further, the investments have come from several countries, including Mauritius, the U.S., the Republic of Korea, Japan, Singapore, Luxembourg, and the Cayman Islands.

In relative terms, this investment amount is not all that significant. For instance, it amounts to less than 1% of the total FDI India received in 2025-26. But it is still early days, and for India and FDI, every little bit helps.

ROOT CAUSES

India's youth crisis is about the absence of jobs, not just examination reform

It has been a few weeks since the youth agitation forced the resignation of then Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. The government conceded the students' demands for examination reform, which found an echo in the Prime Minister's Independence Day address, when he announced free online coaching for competitive examinations using India's digital public infrastructure. MoSPI's survey data bears out why this would be welcome to students — private coaching costs 16% of what an Indian family spends on a child's education, against 12.5% in 2018, and nearly a quarter of that budget by the higher secondary years which is when the student prepares for competitive exams. Cheaper coaching is of limited value as quality professional education remains confined to a handful of institutions. For instance, over 22 lakh candidates appeared in this year's medical entrance exam for about 1.4 lakh undergraduate seats with fewer than 10,000 of them at the top 50 colleges. The situation is similar to the Joint Entrance Examination for engineering colleges. That is perhaps why, for the first time since the All India Survey on Higher Education began in 2011, undergraduate enrolment fell by 93,322 in 2023-24, particularly among young men. The fall was the sharpest in Uttar Pradesh, where The Hindu's analysis found undergraduate enrolment down 1.53 lakh even as diploma enrolment rose 1.38 lakh. An analysis of Periodic Labour Force Survey unit-level data found that of every 100 graduates aged 15 to 29 in 2025, only 26 were in regular salaried employment, and just four had a salaried job with a contract and social security. The youth employment crisis therefore has two ends — in the preparation for jobs, and in jobs themselves. Mere free coaching would address neither.

The structural problems in the Indian economy, despite the government's touting of 6%-6.5% growth, are now too obvious to ignore. Manufacturing, the job sector best placed to absorb India's college graduates, remains at around a sixth of gross value added, nowhere near the quarter of the economy the government has long promised. Meanwhile, the private sector has been retreating from its task as corporate investment has fallen from 17.3% of GDP in 2007-08 to 10.3% in 2024-25, unmoved by the cut in corporate tax from 30% to 22% in 2019. The steps required of the Union government are clear: public investment in industrial capacity, support for industry disciplined by export performance rather than domestic protection, and tempering a regulatory and enforcement zeal that seems to selectively target enterprises, affecting the jobs-



catering medium-sized companies in particular. This route has a better chance of delivering jobs for the youth at the scale needed and as countries such as Vietnam have shown.

RBI'S FOREX SWAP WINDOW ATTRACTS \$72.85 BN TILL AUG 21

With nine days left for the closure of special forex swap facility, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Saturday said the scheme has attracted \$72.85 billion in foreign exchange inflows till August 21, underscoring the strong response to the central bank's measure to augment forex liquidity and support the rupee.

Key Takeaways:

— Data reported by authorised dealer banks to the RBI show that Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank), or FCNR(B) deposits accounted for the overwhelming share of the inflows at \$65.397 billion. This was followed by Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowings (OFCBs) at \$4.86 billion and External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) at \$2.591 billion.

— On August 14, the RBI decided to close its special forex swap facility prematurely on August 31, following an "encouraging response" as against the initial deadline of September 30.

— The swaps against FCNR(B) deposits mobilised under the facility, however, can be undertaken with the RBI till September 11.

— With the dollar-rupee stabilising in the 95-handle, portfolio flows gradually returning, and the various funding windows likely having raised around 70 billion-75 billion in aggregate, equivalent to 10-12% of prevailing foreign exchange reserves, the urgency for policymakers to maintain extraordinary support measures has diminished significantly, said Radhika Rao, ED and Senior Economist, DBS Bank.

— The RBI may have closed the swap facility prematurely, with some suggesting that the high cost of hedging these deposits may have played a role. The potential cost to the RBI could be around 15% of the amount raised. Assuming \$70 billion is raised through the facility, this would translate into a cost of around \$10.5 billion, according to an SBI Research report.

— The RBI had introduced the special USD-rupee concessional swap facility on June 8 to encourage fresh foreign currency inflows through FCNR(B) deposits as well as eligible OFCB and ECB inflows. The facility was aimed at strengthening domestic liquidity and providing support to the foreign exchange market at a time when the rupee and the country's forex reserves had come under pressure.

— The latest inflow data shows that FCNR(B) deposits have emerged as the principal channel through which banks have raised foreign currency under the scheme.

— The RBI offers banks concessional swap arrangements against eligible foreign currency inflows, enabling them to access rupee liquidity while bringing foreign currency into the domestic financial system.

Do You Know:

— FCNR(B) deposits are fixed-term deposits that can be maintained by non-resident Indians, Overseas Citizens of India and Persons of Indian Origin in designated foreign currencies. Unlike ordinary rupee deposits, these deposits allow overseas Indians to retain their savings in



currencies such as the US dollar, pound sterling, euro, Japanese yen, Australian dollar and Canadian dollar.

— Interest earned on FCNR(B) deposits is exempt from income tax in India as long as the depositor qualifies as a non-resident under Indian tax laws.

EX-BUREAUCRAT, FORMER DIPLOMAT, BCG INDIA CHAIRMAN ON RBI BOARD

The government has appointed former senior finance ministry official Annie George Mathew, economist and management consultant Janmejaya Kumar Sinha and former diplomat Syed Akbaruddin as part-time, non-official directors on the Central Board of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for a four-year term.

Key Takeaways:

- As of today, the current strength of the board is 11, including the governor and deputy governors. After today's appointments, it will become 14.
- The appointments were approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet under Section 8(1)(c) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.
- According to an order issued by the Department of Personnel and Training on Saturday, the appointments will take effect from the date of notification and will continue for four years or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
- The three bring experience in public finance, economics, corporate strategy and international diplomacy to the RBI's central board.
- The government had appointed former ISRO Chairman Somnath S and Mahindra group Chairman Anand Mahindra on the central board of the RBI last week. Mathew, 62, is a former Special Secretary in the Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, and is currently a full-time member of the Sixteenth Finance Commission. An officer of the Indian Audit and Accounts Service, she has more than three decades of experience in public finance, financial management, government audit and accounts. She has also served on the boards of public sector financial institutions.
- Sinha, 66, is a prominent economist and management consultant and has held senior leadership positions at the Boston Consulting Group. He has served as chairman of BCG Asia-Pacific and has been associated with several government and regulatory committees, including those relating to financial-sector reforms.
- Akbaruddin, 66, is a former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations and a former spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs. He is currently associated with the Kautilya School of Public Policy in Hyderabad.

Do You Know:

- According to the Reserve Bank of India website, it was established on April 1, 1935 in accordance with the provisions of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.
- The Central Office of the Reserve Bank was initially established in Kolkata but was permanently moved to Mumbai in 1937. The Central Office is where the Governor sits and where policies are



formulated. Though originally privately owned, since nationalisation in 1949, the Reserve Bank is fully owned by the Government of India.

- According to the Reserve Bank of India website, the Reserve Bank's affairs are governed by a central board of directors. The board is appointed by the Government of India in keeping with the Reserve Bank of India Act.

—Appointed/nominated for a period of four years

—Constitution: Official Directors (Full-time : Governor and not more than four Deputy Governors) and Non-Official Directors (Nominated by Government: ten Directors from various fields and two government officials and Others: four Directors – one each from four local boards).

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is a statutory body. It was established on April 1, 1935, under the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, which gives it legal backing and statutory status.

YOUTH DON'T FIND GOVT BANKS 'COOL', BE PART OF THEIR LIVES: FM TO PSBS

Calling on India's public sector banks (PSBs) to up their 'cool' quotient in the eyes of the country's youth without sacrificing the prudence the business requires, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said state-owned lenders should organise a month-long campaign starting October 2 focused on youngsters over the age of 16.

Key Takeaways:

- Addressing senior banking officials on the second day of the PSB Confluence conference in the capital, the Finance Minister said that having grown up with smartphones, the youth today are tech savvy and they expect banking to be simple, intuitive, personalised, and available at all times. And PSBs need to keep pace with these expectations.

- "Pardon me if I say with some liberty, because I take the blame as much as all of you, public sector banks still give the impression of a government bank," Sitharaman said, adding that in her interactions with youngsters under the age of 25, not one named a PSB in which they had an account.

- At the same time, Sitharaman cautioned this was not a recommendation from her to PSBs to "go and do something to make you all appear 'cool' but not bank enough". Saying that she did not want to trivialise the issue, the Finance Minister said banking is "serious business" and a balance had to be struck. "But somewhere, private banks seem to have that picture of being banks but cool enough as well," she said.

- Organised by the finance ministry's Department of Financial Services, the two-day PSB Confluence meeting saw discussions across seven themes relevant to the next phase of growth of the banking and financial sector. After deposit mobilisation, banking for youth, supporting the investment cycle, and global capability centres were discussed on Monday, the focus on Tuesday was on agriculture and horticulture value chain infrastructure, priority sector lending, and reimagining the credit card business.

**Do You Know:**

- The World Economic Forum's Global Retail Investor Outlook Survey revealed that 51% of Indian individuals declare to be struggling to meet their debts and liabilities, far exceeding the global average of 32%.
- Financial inclusion is central to India's vision of equitable development. Over the past decade, India has expanded access to banking, digital payments, credit, insurance, pensions and investment opportunities. Digital Public Infrastructure and citizen-centric reforms have driven this transformation. India has moved beyond universal bank account ownership towards active participation in the formal financial system.
- According to PIB, several indicators highlight the significant progress made in expanding financial access, infrastructure and participation across India.
 - RBI's Financial Inclusion (FI) Index: The RBI's FI Index measures the extent of financial inclusion across access, usage and quality of financial services. It serves as a comprehensive indicator of progress in expanding formal financial services nationwide. The FI Index increased from 43.4 in March 2017 to 70.0 in March 2026, reflecting broad-based improvements across all three dimensions.
 - World Bank Global Findex: The Global Findex Database is the world's leading source of data on financial inclusion. It measures how adults access and use financial services across economies. The Global Findex 2025 highlights India's remarkable progress in financial inclusion. Account ownership has reached 89% since 2011, reflecting significant gains in access to formal financial services and active account usage over the past decade.
 - Banking Access Network: Bank branches remain the foundation of India's formal banking system. They provide savings, credit and other financial services across the country. India has over 1.81 lakh bank branches (17 July 2026). Banking access is delivered through branches, Business Correspondents and India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) outlets. As of 6 March 2026, 99.92% villages in the country are covered with banking outlets within a 5 km radius.
 - India's financial inclusion ecosystem rests on interconnected policy and institutional pillars. They promote universal access and meaningful participation in the formal financial system: Pradhan Mantri Jan – Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) and JAM Trinity.

FOR SMALL TAX PAYERS, GOVT OPENS WINDOW TO DECLARE FOREIGN INCOME, ASSETS

The government has notified a one-time voluntary disclosure scheme, Foreign Assets of Small Taxpayers – Disclosure Scheme (FAST-DS), allowing taxpayers to declare their undisclosed foreign bank accounts, immovable property, jewellery, artistic work, shares, securities or any other asset or income on payment of a specified tax or fee.

Key Takeaways:

- The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has notified the Foreign Assets of Small Taxpayers – Disclosure Scheme Rules, 2026, operationalising the Budget announcement of FAST-DS, effective August 16 with last declaration date on December 31.
- The scheme applies to two broad categories of asset or income — undisclosed foreign income or asset located outside India up to Rs 1 crore in value; and assets located outside India up to Rs



5 crore in value acquired from income accruing or arising outside India by an assessee when he or she was a non-resident, but did not declare them in the tax return on becoming a resident; or assets acquired from income offered to tax under the Income-tax Act but not declared in the relevant schedule in the tax return.

— Under the first category, taxpayers need to pay 30% of fair market value of assets or 30% of undisclosed income as tax and 30% as additional income tax in lieu of penalty in order to get immunity from prosecution. For the second category, immunity from both penalty and prosecution is available with the fee payment of Rs 1 lakh.

— On making a valid declaration and payment under FAST-DS, immunity will be provided from any further tax or penalty, and from prosecution, under the Black Money Act, 2015, in respect of the income or asset so declared, the Income Tax Department said. Also, the income or amount of investment in the asset declared under this scheme will not be included in the total income of the taxpayer under the Income-tax Act or the Black Money Act, it said.

— As per the newly notified rules, a declaration for any asset or income has to be made electronically in Form 1 to the income tax authority under the two categories where the aggregate value of undisclosed income and assets do not exceed Rs 1 crore or Rs 5 crore, depending on the category under which the assets are declared.

— Other than a bank account, the declaration for any asset will not be treated as invalid or void on the grounds of misrepresentation, suppression of facts, or furnishing of false material particulars, only if the variance between the fair market value and the value determined by the assessing officer or any other income tax authority during any assessment or inquiry does not exceed 20%, the rules stated.

— For the scheme, the valuation date is March 31, 2026 and the fair market value of assets proposed to be declared must be computed as on this date.

— The scheme will not apply if any income or asset, directly or indirectly, represents proceeds of crime in respect of which proceedings have been initiated, or are pending, under the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002; or any income or asset relating to an assessment year for which assessment proceedings have already been completed under the Black Money Act, 2015, the Department said.

Do You Know:

— In her Budget speech in February, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said that the government will introduce a one-time, 6-month foreign asset window to address practical issues of small taxpayers like students, young professionals, tech employees, relocated NRIs and others, for disclosing income or assets below a certain size.

THE CENTRE-STATES TUSSLE OVER THE MMDR (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2026

Why in News

Parliament passed the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 on August 13, 2026, and it became law after President Droupadi Murmu's assent. The Act restricts states from imposing levies on



mineral rights and mineral-bearing land — reversing gains states had made after the Supreme Court's July 2024 ruling upheld their power to tax mineral rights. Jharkhand, Odisha, Kerala and other mineral-rich states have opposed the move as a blow to fiscal federalism, and the dispute has now escalated from street protests to a formal Supreme Court challenge.

Background / Context

- Constitutional basis: Entry 54, List I (Union List) — regulation of mines and mineral development where Parliament declares it expedient in public interest; Entry 23, List II (State List) — regulation of mines subject to Entry 54; Entry 50, List II — states may tax mineral rights, but subject to any limitations imposed by Parliament through a law relating to mineral development (i.e., the MMDR Act, 1957).
- In *India Cement Ltd v State of Tamil Nadu* (1989), the Supreme Court held that royalty is a tax, and that since the MMDR Act occupied the field under Entry 54 (List I), states lacked competence to separately tax mineral rights.
- On July 25, 2024, a nine-judge Constitution Bench (*Mineral Area Development Authority v Steel Authority of India*) overruled *India Cement*, holding that royalty is not a tax and that states retain the power under Entry 50 (List II) to tax mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, since the MMDR Act does not itself impose a specific limitation on that power. The Court also waived interest and penalty on pre-ruling dues and allowed staggered payment of arrears over 12 years from April 1, 2026.
- This 2024 verdict opened the door for states to raise additional revenue from mining — several began imposing or proposing fresh cesses/taxes on mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, prompting the Centre to bring the 2026 amendment to rein this in.

Key Facts

What the 2026 Amendment Does

- Amends Section 2 so that “regulation of mines” now extends to “and mineral-bearing land” — widening Union control beyond mines to the land itself.
- Inserts a new Section 9D, which bars states from imposing any tax, cess or other levy (by whatever name) on mineral rights or mineral-bearing land without Union sanction, and bars recovery of dues (including those decreed by courts) arising from such levies imposed before the Act.
- Extinguishes unpaid/unrecovered dues arising from state-level levies imposed before the Act commenced — an aggregate estimated at around ₹2 lakh crore across the mining sector, per some estimates.
- Does not apply to minor minerals — states retain full taxing power over these — and the Centre says states will continue to receive roughly 90% of taxes and statutory payments from mining overall.



State-wise Levies and Stakes

- Jharkhand: imposed a mineral-bearing land tax on iron ore, initially ₹100/tonne, later hiked; claims about ₹1.36 lakh crore in coal royalty and land-rent dues from the Centre that the amendment renders effectively unrecoverable.
- Tamil Nadu: imposed a mineral-bearing land tax on limestone at ₹160/tonne.
- Karnataka: has proposed a similar mineral-bearing land levy.
- Odisha: had imposed a ₹22,000 crore penalty (2021-22) on miners for excess mining in violation of environmental clearances, of which ₹16,000 crore was collected before the amendment — the remainder is now unlikely to be recoverable.
- Kerala: has not imposed a specific levy but has raised concerns over the amendment's implications for India's federal structure.

Scale of the Mining Economy (Ministry of Mines, 2024-25 Annual Report)

- Mineral production (excluding Atomic, Fuel and Minor Minerals) was estimated across 20 states, but about 97.70% of the total value was concentrated in just eight: Odisha (43.49%), Rajasthan (16.26%), Chhattisgarh (13.69%), Karnataka (12.42%), Maharashtra (4.76%), Jharkhand (3.26%), Madhya Pradesh (2.78%) and Andhra Pradesh (1.04%).
- Odisha alone produced minerals worth ₹67,955.89 crore — the highest of any state — and mining accounts for 37.59% of Odisha's total projected state revenue for 2026-27.
- Per a CAG report on state finances, states' own non-tax revenue stood at ₹3.3 lakh crore in 2024-25, of which 41% (₹1.36 lakh crore) came from mineral and petroleum receipts — this all-India, all-state figure happens to share the same number as Jharkhand's separate, individual claim below; the two should not be conflated (see Exam Alert).

Investment-Climate Rationale Cited by the Centre

- A FIMI-EY report on States' Best Practices in Mining pegs India's effective tax rate on mining at over 50% of revenues, against 35-40% in other mineral-producing countries — cited by the Centre as the case for rationalising and capping state-level levies.
- Mines Minister G. Kishan Reddy stated the amendment aims to prevent unbalanced, steep state levies from pushing industry to bypass local supply chains, raising transport costs and pollution.

Update

- Odisha government rejected the opposition's demand for a special Assembly session on the issue (August 23, 2026); Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Mahaling said the matter would instead be taken up in the upcoming Monsoon session.
- Political agitation in Odisha escalated through September 2026: the BJD submitted a memorandum seeking President Droupadi Murmu's intervention (September 9) and later threatened an economic blockade across the state if the amendment is not withdrawn (September 14); the Congress said it had been holding month-long, block-to-state-level protests.



- Most significantly, the Jharkhand government formally decided to challenge the MMDR (Amendment) Act, 2026 before the Supreme Court, moving the dispute from political protest to judicial adjudication. Chief Minister Hemant Soren approved the decision, and state Finance Minister Radhakrishna Kishore confirmed preparations were underway to protect the state's ₹1.36 lakh crore claim on coal royalty and land-rent dues (mid-September 2026).

Analysis

The amendment reflects a familiar tension in Indian fiscal federalism: the Centre's push for a uniform, predictable tax regime to attract mining investment versus states' reliance on mineral revenue as a major share of their own resources — especially for mineral-rich but otherwise less-industrialised states such as Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. By extinguishing dues that had just been validated by a nine-judge Bench, the Act is being read by critics as a legislative override of a constitutional court verdict, reopening basic-structure and separation-of-powers questions that are likely to reach the Supreme Court again. States also argue that inserting “mineral-bearing land” into a Union List entry encroaches on “land,” which is a State List subject. On the other side, the Centre's case rests on investment certainty, cost/inflation control, and the claim that states still retain the bulk (about 90%) of mining revenue. A further dimension, highlighted by civil-society voices, is that the environmental and health burden of mining (e.g., chromite pollution in Odisha's Sukinda Valley) falls on local, often tribal, communities — even as the fiscal levers to address it are being centralised.

Boxes

EXAM ALERT

- Royalty vs tax vs cess: post-2024, royalty is NOT a tax; it is a contractual payment. States separately tax “mineral rights” and “mineral-bearing land” under Entry 50, List II — it is this second power that the 2026 amendment restricts, not royalty itself. Do not conflate the two.
- The 1989 case overruled in 2024 was *India Cement Ltd v State of Tamil Nadu* — not *Kesoram Industries (2004)*, which is a related but separate case that referred the matter to a larger Bench.
- Figure alert — do not conflate: the all-India CAG figure of ₹1.36 lakh crore (41% of states' 2024-25 non-tax revenue, from minerals + petroleum, all states combined) coincidentally shares the same number as Jharkhand's separate, individual claim of ₹1.36 lakh crore (its own coal royalty/land-rent dues). These are two unrelated figures.
- Odisha's projected revenue loss is reported variably across sources: Congress cites ₹1 lakh crore cumulative / ₹20,000 crore annual; a former Union Minister cites ₹1 lakh crore retrospective + ₹50,000 crore/year prospective. The Odisha government itself has issued no official estimate — treat all figures as claims, not confirmed data.
- Key dates: SC ruling — July 25, 2024 (nine-judge Bench); Bill passed by Parliament — August 13, 2026; staggered arrear-payment window — 12 years from April 1, 2026.



DO YOU KNOW?

- Odisha's Sukinda Valley (Jajpur district) holds about 98% of India's chromite reserves and has been cited among the world's most chromium-polluted sites; hexavalent chromium from chromite mining is a known carcinogen.
- The 2024 ruling came from a nine-judge Constitution Bench — one of the largest in recent decades, underlining the constitutional weight given to the Centre-State mineral-taxation question.
- The Union government's Critical Minerals Mission, aimed at securing supply chains for minerals used in clean energy and electronics, forms part of the same broader push toward a more predictable, investment-friendly mining framework referenced in this dispute.

QUICK REVISION

- MMDR (Amendment) Act, 2026 (Parliament, Aug 13; presidential assent) bars states from taxing mineral rights/mineral-bearing land, reversing part of what states won in the July 2024 SC ruling (Mineral Area Development Authority case), and extinguishes pending dues (~₹2 lakh crore, nationally).
- Centre's case: states still get ~90% of mining revenue; the move brings tax certainty and curbs cascading cost/inflation effects.
- States' case (Jharkhand, Odisha, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka): erodes fiscal federalism and a Court-affirmed power; disproportionately hits mineral-rich states.
- Latest status: Odisha govt has deferred the issue to the Monsoon Assembly session amid opposition protests (Aug-Sep 2026); Jharkhand has moved to challenge the Act's validity in the Supreme Court (mid-Sep 2026) — the dispute is now headed for judicial resolution.



Comparison Table: Legal Position — Before vs After

Aspect	India Cement (1989)	SC Ruling, July 2024	MMDR Amendment, 2026
Is royalty a tax?	Yes	No — a contractual payment	Not altered
States' power to tax mineral rights	No (field occupied by MMDR Act)	Yes, under Entry 50, List II	Restricted — needs Union sanction
Arrears/back-dues	Not applicable	Recoverable; interest/penalty waived pre-2024; staggered over 12 yrs from Apr 1, 2026	Extinguished if arising from levies pre-dating the Act
Minor minerals	—	—	Unaffected — states retain full power

Comparison Table: State-wise Stakes

State	Levy Imposed / Proposed	Share of National Mineral Value (2024-25)	Stated Stake / Loss Claim
Odisha	₹22,000 cr penalty (2021-22) on illegal mining; ₹16,000 cr already recovered	43.49% (highest)	Loss claims vary widely — no official state estimate (see Exam Alert)
Jharkhand	Mineral-bearing land tax on iron ore (from ₹100/tonne, later hiked)	3.26%	₹1.36 lakh cr claim; has moved Supreme Court
Tamil Nadu	Mineral-bearing land tax on limestone (₹160/tonne)	Not in top 8 states individually cited	Not specified in source articles
Karnataka	Similar levy proposed (not yet finalised)	12.42%	Not specified in source articles
Kerala	No levy imposed	Not among top 8 producers	Federalism concerns raised (CM V D Satheesan)

Current Affairs at a Glance

Event	Date	Detail
SC verdict (Mineral Area Development Authority v SAIL)	Jul 25, 2024	Nine-judge Bench upholds states' power to tax mineral rights; overrules India Cement (1989)
MMDR Amendment Bill passed by Parliament	Aug 13, 2026	Passed by both Houses
Presidential assent / Act notified	Aug 2026	Becomes the MMDR (Amendment) Act, 2026
Odisha special Assembly session demand rejected	Aug 23, 2026	State govt defers issue to Monsoon session
BJD memorandum to President Murmu	Sep 9, 2026	Seeks intervention citing fiscal-rights concerns



Jharkhand decides to move Supreme Court	Mid-Sep 2026	CM Hemant Soren approves legal challenge over ₹1.36 lakh cr claim
BJD threatens economic blockade in Odisha	Sep 14, 2026	Warns action if Act not withdrawn

CORE CONCERNS

The Indian economy looks set for tough times ahead

The slowdown in the growth of India's core industrial sectors in July was not surprising, with other indicators predicting easing demand conditions as well. Growth in the index of core industries (ICI) slowed to 5.4% in July from 6% in the previous month. This was in keeping with the Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, which in July eased to its lowest level since August 2021 due to weak domestic demand conditions. While July's growth in the ICI was the second-highest growth rate in the last seven months, the data nevertheless highlight some concerning aspects of the Indian economy. The first has to do with the fact that a large part of even this slower growth seems to be based on a statistical low base effect. The coal sector, for example, grew at an 11-month high of 7.6% in July, but this was based on a contraction of 12.3% in July of last year. Similarly, the refinery products sector snapped a three-month streak of contraction to grow at 2.7%, but this too was based on a contraction in July 2025. The iron ore sector, however, grew at a very robust 29.5%, albeit slower than a blistering 44.5% in June. This seems heartening regardless of the contractions of 16.4% and 7.1% in June and July of last year, respectively. But the steel sector slowed drastically in July to 2.9% from 5.6% in June and 15.7% in July of last year.

The domestic crude oil and natural gas sectors have been lasting drags on the economy. Both have contracted continuously for at least the last 14 months for which the new series of the ICI has data. India's crude oil imports rose 13.3% in volume terms in July, while Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) imports grew a more marginal 1.5%, showing that the economy's appetite is being whetted from abroad. This external dependence is proving very expensive. High oil prices have meant that the crude oil import bill jumped 41% in July. The 100% tariffs that the United States is preparing to levy on countries such as India that import Russian oil will once again burden Indian exporters. Moving to 20% ethanol-blending has not yet impacted oil imports materially. Within the ICI, the only two bright spots of the economy were the cement and electricity sectors. The electricity sector grew at a robust 9% in July, although this was slower than the two consecutive months of double-digit growth in May and June thanks to the prevalent heatwave conditions in many parts of the country. The cement sector sped up to 13.1%, a welcome acceleration. Such positive trends were few and far between. Overall, the Indian economy looks to be in for a period of slack demand, higher costs, and moderating growth.

BUFFALO MEAT EXPORTS BOOM: READ THE MESSAGE

India's buffalo meat exports are booming, hitting a record \$5.1 billion in 2025-26 and set to cross \$6 billion in the current fiscal year. Credit goes to the industry that has built a market in countries from Southeast and West Asia to Africa and, more recently, Uzbekistan, Russia and Georgia. Moreover, unit value realisations have gone up from sub-\$3,000 to \$4,000-plus per tonne over the last two-three years, amid concerted efforts at raising the product profile of Indian buffalo meat, and not selling it as just a cheaper alternative to regular cattle beef. This has been helped by

4TH FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR



adherence to internationally recognised quality and hygiene standards and exports being allowed only through government-approved abattoirs and processing plants.

But equally important is how the buffalo meat industry has been complementary to India's dairy sector. The buffaloes that are culled are mostly animals not giving enough milk or those that happen to be male. For farmers, the fodder, feed, water and labour that go towards maintaining them has a direct as well as an opportunity cost — in terms of the loss of potential output from not allocating the same resources to more productive bovines. By creating a market for unproductive buffaloes, the meat plants have enabled farmers to replace low-yielding/ageing animals with high-milking/fresh stock. Such regular herd turnover is essential for any viable dairy enterprise. The very fact that the buffaloes going to the slaughterhouse aren't competing for scarce resources with the ones giving milk makes this a more sustainable model. Unlike in Brazil or the US, where cattle are reared separately for milk and beef, here the meat is from "spent" buffaloes that have outlived their usefulness as milkers.

Consumption of milk, especially high-fat, is growing in India on the back of rising incomes. The support to buffalo milk production from meat exports is, therefore, welcome. But buffalo milk yields are lower compared to that from crossbred cows. Their age at first lactation and inter-calving intervals is also longer. To that extent, buffaloes alone cannot supply India's increasing milk requirement from a medium-to-long-term perspective. All the more reason why a scientific approach to culling unproductive animals — whether for breeding and reproductive efficiency or redirecting finite resources to higher-yielding stock — is necessary in cattle, too. The political leadership cannot run away from taking that call.

DIP IN PRODUCTION, STOCKS AT 9 YEAR LOW: SOARING SUGAR PRICES LEAVE BITTER AFTER TASTE

Dussehra is on October 20 and Diwali on November 8. But sugar is already tasting bitter, well before the festival season. According to the department of consumer affairs, the all-India modal retail price, the rate at which most purchases are reported, was Rs 65 per kg on Friday. It was only Rs 45 on July 21 and rose to Rs 50 by July 31.

Key Takeaways:

- Simply put, retail prices of the sweetener — the most vital ingredient in every Diwali mithai and Cadbury Celebrations, Nestlé KitKat or Ferrero Rocher chocolates — have soared by Rs 20/kg in just a month.
- No less significant is ex-factory prices. These rates, which mills realise from selling sugar net of goods and sales tax, were at Rs 57-60 per kg in Uttar Pradesh, Rs 62.5-64 in Maharashtra and Rs 63-64 in Karnataka on August 20. The corresponding price range for the three states stood at Rs 44.95-46.7, Rs 46.2-46.9 and Rs 46.25-47 per kg respectively on August 1.
- The main reason is less-than-expected sugar production and stocks that are at a nine-year low. In early-November 2025, the Indian Sugar & Bio-energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) estimated the domestic production for the 2025-25 season (October-September) at 343.5 lakh tonnes (lt) in gross terms. After factoring in diversion of 34 lt towards ethanol manufacture, the net sugar output was pegged at 309.5 lt.

**Do You Know:**

— The government had originally planned to dispense petrol blended with 20% ethanol only by 2030, but the E20 fuel is now the standard petrol variant available nationwide. Since then, there has been a move to shift to E25 as the base fuel, with a simultaneous push for E85-100 fuels for specialised flex-fuel vehicles (FFVs).

— FFVs are essentially internal combustion engine vehicles engineered to operate on more than one type of fuel — typically petrol blended with ethanol or methanol. These vehicles use a fuel composition sensor to automatically adjust fuel injection and ignition timing based on the blend in the tank, allowing seamless switching between petrol and ethanol and varying degrees of blends.

HOW INDIA'S RS 62.5K CR SCHEME AIMS TO SCALE MOBILE MANUFACTURING, BUILD DOMESTIC BRANDS

After turning India into a major assembly hub for global smartphone makers, the Centre's new Rs 62,500-crore mobile phone manufacturing scheme is attempting to tackle two unfinished parts of the country's electronics story: keeping large-scale production growing after the first smartphone production linked incentive (PLI) scheme has run its course, and creating an Indian smartphone brand that can compete with the foreign companies dominating the domestic market.

Key Takeaways:

— The five-year scheme, which will run from FY 2026-27 to FY 2030-31, has consequently been split into two distinct tracks. The first is designed as a successor to the earlier PLI programme, offering incentives to large manufacturers and electronics manufacturing services (EMS) companies for expanding production, while increasingly linking benefits to the domestic sourcing of components.

— The second sets aside a separate incentive structure for Indian smartphone brands, offering higher support for companies that not only manufacture in the country but also keep their intellectual property, management control, design and research and development capabilities in India. It marks an effort to move beyond India being primarily a manufacturing base for global brands, towards building a domestic handset company with its own technology and brand.

— The first component is the direct successor to the smartphone PLI and is aimed at companies manufacturing at scale, including EMS companies.

— To qualify, a manufacturer must have recorded at least Rs 10,000 crore in turnover in FY 2025-26. For existing brands, sales must increase by at least Rs 5,000 crore over FY26 levels in the first year, with the threshold rising cumulatively to Rs 10,000 crore in FY28, Rs 15,000 crore in FY29, Rs 20,000 crore in FY30 and Rs 25,000 crore in FY31.

— Unlike the original PLI, the baseline itself will also move every year: it will be calculated as the preceding financial year's sales plus 15%. Incentives will then be paid on sales above this baseline, subject to the annual threshold being met. The thresholds are calculated on a brand-wise basis, and the sales counted towards them can include exports.



— One of the more consequential aims of the new scheme is to incentivise the creation of a homegrown smartphone brand, a clear signal that the government's ambition for the electronics sector is moving beyond simply attracting factories and boosting assembly.

RWAS A BARRIER, GOVT MAY LET HIGH-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS COMPILE OWN SPENDING DATA

Two years ago, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) and some Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) had squared off: the latter felt the government's surveys asked difficult questions and sought private details, while the ministry was worried by the rising unresponsiveness from high-income households living in gated societies. Now, the ministry is considering letting these families compile their own data.

Key Takeaways:

- With the next edition of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) expected to begin in mid-2027 and continue for about a year, the ministry is looking at the adoption of “diary-based data collection” for high-income households living in gated societies, instead of a door-to-door survey by field officials.
- In this method, households note down the information themselves, as and when the relevant activity occurs. In the case of the HCES, this would mean jotting down how much is spent in a month on different goods and services, ranging from food items to haircuts.
- The most recent HCES, conducted from August 2023 to July 2024, saw 2.6 lakh households being surveyed from across the country, barring a few inaccessible villages in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The survey sought responses for a total of 405 goods and services.
- While it is called “diary-based data collection”, households may not have to actually note down their expenses in a physical diary. The ministry, which now uses tablets to record responses to its surveys, may employ a system where such households can enter their consumption expenditure details on an online portal, sources said.
- The overall urban non-response rate during the 2022-23 HCES jumped to 9.8%, from 2.8% in the 75th round of the National Sample Survey, conducted from July 2017 to June 2018. In rural areas, the non-response rate increased to 4.1% from 1.5% during the same period. For the most affluent urban and rural respondents, the non-response rate was 11% and 3.9%, respectively. In the 2011-12 survey, the corresponding figures were 3.3% and 1.3%.
- While a diary-based system is “always better”, the problem for MoSPI will be how two data sets compiled through different methods will be “stitched together”, said Pronab Sen, India's first chief statistician.
- Data collected through surveys suffer from what is called a “recall error” — people can make errors in remembering their expenditure details. The diary method minimises this problem as households can write down the information as and when they make the purchase.
- Concerned by the falling participation of high-income households in its surveys, MoSPI held a “brainstorming session” with representatives from more than 75 organisations and housing societies from across the country in September 2024, hoping to find solutions to the issues it faced



— from survey staff not being allowed to enter gated societies, to the lack of awareness on why these surveys are important for policy purposes, often leading to refusal to provide information.

- With the government looking to make its policies increasingly data and evidence driven, a rise in non-response rates can lead to inappropriate conclusions being drawn and decisions not leading to desired results. A rise in non-response rates can curtail the sample size of surveys. If these non-responses are from a certain segment, the final composition of the sample may be different from what was intended, leading to incorrect estimates from the exercise.

- On the other hand, RWAs voiced concern on the sensitive and private nature of some questions, and the apprehension that the details may be shared with other government departments. MoSPI has assured that data privacy is of paramount importance, and the data is anonymised.

Do You Know:

- The HCES gives a measure of how much people spend on various goods and services, tracking the change in consumption patterns across different levels of consumers in rural and urban areas. It is key to understanding not just household consumption behaviour, but also standards of living, well-being and inequality.

- The share of expenditure on different items is also used to update the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket, which forms the basis of one of the most important economic indicators, the headline retail inflation.

- It is this measure of change in prices that the Reserve Bank of India looks at while deciding on interest rates. The central bank's CPI inflation target is 4% in a band of 2-6%.

- In the past, the HCES was conducted every five years. However, after an overhaul of the methods, two back-to-back surveys were conducted in 2022-23 and 2023-24. Going forward, the ministry intends to conduct the HCES every three years or so.

JIO GETS SEBI NOD FOR 38K CRORE IPO, SET TO BE INDIA'S LARGEST LISTING

Jio Platforms Ltd, the digital and telecom business of Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL), is set to enter the capital market with a mega public offer that could redefine the scale of India's initial public offering (IPO) market.

Key Takeaways:

- The company has received clearance from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to proceed with its IPO, which is expected to mobilise about Rs 37,700 crore, or close to \$4 billion.

- The Jio IPO, which is likely to be the largest IPO to hit the market so far, will be a fresh issue of 27 crore equity shares of face value of Rs 10 each at an issue price to be determined through the book building process.

- Of the issue proceeds, Rs 27,500 crore will be utilised to repay debt and the balance will be used for general corporate purposes not exceeding 25% of the proceeds.

- RIL holds 66.43% stake in JPL, while Meta Platforms of the US, founded by Mark Zuckerberg, has 9.98% and Google 7.73%. Not less than 35% of the net issue will be available for allocation to retail individual investors, according to the DRHP.

**Do You Know:**

— The proposed IPO of Jio Platforms has been one of the most closely watched developments in India's capital markets, largely because of the company's dominant position in telecommunications and its rapidly expanding digital ecosystem.

— Jio has over 524 million subscribers across India. Jio's network leadership in 5G continued to attract subscribers with a total 5G subscriber base reaching 268 million as of March 2026. Customer engagement also remains robust with 5G now accounting for 55% of total wireless traffic, the company said.

HOW THE SC RULING REDEFINED 'INDUSTRY'**The story so far:**

A nine-member Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India recently held that the nearly half-century-old interpretation of the term 'industry' will not automatically apply to the Industrial Relations Code (IRC), 2020, which came into force in November 2025 and replaced the legacy Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. This decision effectively severs the new labour regime from an expansive, worker-friendly precedent set in 1978, establishing a clean slate for future labour law disputes.

The scope of 'industry'

To understand the significance of this judgment, one must look back to the historic 1978 ruling in *Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board v. R. Rajappa*.

Authored by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, that seven-judge Bench significantly broadened the definition of Section 2(j) under the 1947 Act.

The 1978 judgment introduced the triple test. Three conditions were to be met for an industry — a systematic activity, employer-employee cooperation, and production/distribution of goods and services to satisfy human wants other than those that are purely religious or spiritual. Profit motive was irrelevant; what mattered in this determination was the nature of the activity, and only "sovereign functions" stood outside it.

This sweeping definition brought various activities, including hospitals, educational institutions, and municipalities, under the legal definition of an industry. The only exclusions were core sovereign functions of the state, such as defence, judiciary, and law enforcement. For nearly half a century, this judgment had enabled workers across diverse sectors to access legal recourse, enforce labour rights, and engage in collective bargaining against unfair practices.

The crux of the judgment

A five-judge Bench in *State of U.P. vs Jai Bir Singh* (2005) raised a doubt about this definition and a seven-judge Bench sent it to the current nine-judge Bench. The Constitution Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, addressed the question whether the 1978 definition of 'industry' should govern Section 2(p) of the IRC.

The majority held that 'industry' under the IRC must be interpreted based on its own specific text and statutory context, unburdened by the legacy of the 1978 precedent. Chief Justice Kant noted



that while the core principles of the 1978 ruling had stood the test of time, the 1978 judgment would no longer act as the “sheet anchor” for interpreting ‘industry’ under the IRC.

Pending cases under the 1947 Act will continue to be governed by the 1978 Bangalore Water Supply precedent. All future disputes governed by the new Industrial Relations Code will be interpreted afresh.

Differing points of view on the Bench

The nine-judge Bench reflected nuanced positions on the balance between worker protections and modern economic realities.

An opinion authored by Chief Justice Kant, and shared with Justices Satish Chandra Sharma, Alok Aradhe and Vipul M. Pancholi, held that the ‘triple test’ of 1978 Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board case judgment will continue to be applied to pending industrial disputes.

The Chief Justice, however, found that the 1978 verdict could have been articulated differently and set down a “reformulated” triple test, which would operate prospectively. However, the possibility of using the recast triple test to determine if an operation was an industry or not under Section 2(j) of the repealed 1947 Act is non-existent as the new labour law, The Industrial Relations Code 2020, has already come into force. The Bench has unanimously made it clear that ‘industry’ under the 2020 Code will be “interpreted independently” to align with contemporary industrial dynamics, and not be burdened by the 1978 verdict.

Justices B.V. Nagarathna, Dipankar Datta, and Ujjal Bhuyan formed the minority view on the Bench that a re-evaluation of the 1978 judgment was “unwarranted”. Justice Nagarathna cautioned that altering the definition could create uncertainty and disrupt industrial peace.

Justice Nagarathna argued that the 1978 judgment had offered a broad-based definition of ‘industry’. She highlighted that the judgment was a child of its time, when public sector workers were transitioning into private employment due to a changing industrial landscape inspired by privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation of the Indian economy.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi supported the need for the reference to the nine-judge Bench, but expressed his inability to agree to a “reformulated” triple test. Justice Bagchi said an apprehension that the triple test conceived in the 1978 judgment converted any organised activity into an industry was misplaced.

The judge agreed with Justice Nagarathna that even the state could enter into seemingly non-sovereign functions. The concept of ‘sovereignty’ has itself undergone changes with the passage of time. Absence of a profit motive did not take an activity outside the realm of industry, he observed. He said it was unwise to “re-draft” Justice Iyer’s triple test. Justice Datta echoed the need for judicial consistency. Sharing his opinion with Justice Bhuyan, Justice Datta remarked that institutional credibility relies on respecting finality rather than perpetuating doubt over established law.

A step towards a new era

By severing the IRC from the 1978 precedent, the Supreme Court has set the stage for a new chapter in Indian labour law, leaving it to future courts to decide where the lines between employer authority and worker protections will ultimately be drawn.



GROUNDING

Chennai needs more runways, not just new terminals

The Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK)-led government, in dropping the ₹27,400-crore greenfield airport project at Parandur near Chennai, appears to have considered the opposition to the project without weighing the consequences. The decision follows an electoral promise made by Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay, who had visited the protesters in January 2025 to express his solidarity. The government says the move is aimed at protecting the interests of farmers and local residents. It has also cited the presence of waterbodies and has alleged commercial motives behind the site selection under the previous DMK government. Notwithstanding these official reasons, all valid to varying degrees, it became clear from the day Mr. Vijay became Chief Minister, on May 10, 2026, that the decision was merely a formality. In fact, much before the announcement, on August 24, work on the project had come to a halt. However, the move is likely to have adverse consequences for Tamil Nadu. The move risks creating a general perception that Tamil Nadu is unstable in its infrastructure policy, which the TVK government should have avoided, given its goal of making the State a \$1.5 trillion economy by 2036.

While Mr. Vijay has spoken of identifying a new airport site, his proposal for a Terminal 5 at the existing airport is necessary and welcome. However, it is common knowledge that a greenfield airport will take years to materialise, even with unwavering government attention — the idea for a second airport had been under consideration for over 25 years. At one stage, the Union government had wanted it to be developed on a build, operate and transfer mode. Unfortunately, the project was caught in the game of political one-upmanship between the two Dravidian majors. Meanwhile, Bengaluru and Hyderabad have had new second airports since 2008, despite regime changes. Passenger traffic here has grown at Tamil Nadu's expense — at an annual average rate of 10% during 2016-26 compared with 2.4% in Chennai. Parandur received the Union government's final nod in July 2024, after much groundwork. When the State government is not the ultimate authority in airport site selection, it would not be appropriate to attribute motives to the DMK. Land for any mega project has always faced landowner resistance and the TVK regime may experience this while identifying a new site. No development project can take place without disturbing the environment and certain sections of society. Even Amsterdam's busy Schiphol airport sits over an area that was once a lake. At the existing airport in Chennai, a runway was affected by the severe floods in 2015. What policymakers should bear in mind is the need to balance development and climate change challenges. Chennai needs more runways, not just new terminals.

A.P. TO BECOME THIRD SUBSEA HUB ON DATA CENTRE BUILDOUT

As a result of datacentre buildout in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the former's coastline will soon hold new landing stations for subsea cables, which connect global internet with India.

On one hand, Microsoft is participating in a consortium with firms like Lightstorm and Singaporean telco Singtel to land the 3,600 km India-Southeast Asia (I-2SEA) Submarine Cable System, and Google has the globe-spanning America-India Connect system, which will land in Visakhapatnam, where the tech giant's datacentre complex is being built.

"As part of this AI hub... we're bringing in multiple new subsea cables that will land on the coast of Andhra Pradesh around the Vishakhapatnam area," Alexander Smith, a Google executive who



oversees several of the firm's physical infrastructure projects in the Asia Pacific region, told The Hindu in an interview on Thursday.

"That will mean that essentially India will have, after Mumbai and Chennai, a third digital international subsea gateway... connecting India directly with Southeast Asia, so Singapore and a couple of the other main markets, down into Australia and right around into the Middle East and Europe and beyond. So this will... make India and Vizag in particular one of the most connected places in the world," Mr. Smith added.

Lightstorm CEO Amajit Gupta said in an interview with The Hindu in June that I-2SEA "connects Southeast Asia, specifically Singapore and Malaysia, to the east coast of India," and that the cable system, which also connects to Chennai, "provides a brand new corridor to South Asia" from South East Asia, where a lot of infrastructure serving Indian enterprises and consumers continues to reside.

The cable system is set to be ready for service in Q4 2029. Mr. Gupta said that new cable buildout in a fresh location was key to preserving Indian internet connectivity from a strategic standpoint.

On top of the subsea cable landing, both projects require significant infrastructure further inland. "This is a pan-India project," Mr. Smith said.

Google facility

Mr. Smith said that Google's Visakhapatnam facility will focus on inference, with no immediate plans for performing power-hungry training runs. He added that the firm was trying to acquire as much renewable power for the project as possible — pointing out that Google is among the biggest buyers of renewable energy in the world — and that water use minimisation was also on the agenda with air cooling technologies.

He added that the Google facility will focus on inference for domestic enterprises and government agencies, as there has been "pretty deep AI adoption across the delivery of government services at the State levels as well as Union level."

DreamIAS

**LIFE AND SCIENCES****GLOBAL SPACE NORMS FIND A FIRM FOOTING IN INDIA'S NEW RE-ENTRY RULES**

On August 23, India marked its third National Space Day, three years since the Chandrayaan-3 mission's lunar lander 'Vikram' touched down on the moon's south pole region.

Between then and Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace launching India's first privately built rocket to orbit, India has come a long way — even as it is also just beginning to regulate the responsibilities that follow from expanding its orbital footprint.

As part of this endeavour, and days after the success of Vikram-1, the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) released the country's first guidelines on planned re-entry.

A sustainability problem

For many decades, there were few rocket launches and few new satellites in orbit every year, so there were also few re-entries, and most of them simply burned up in the atmosphere with little consequence. But today, low-earth orbit hosts several thousand satellites, with private companies planning for many, many more. Satellite operators are also deliberately bringing satellites down at the end of their operational lives as part of post-mission disposal in great numbers.

A spacecraft returning to the earth has to negotiate many risks, including deviating from its planned path and breaking up into smaller pieces. It may also affect airspace and maritime zones and potentially crash in the territory or jurisdiction of another state.

Here, the idea of sustainability is important. The UN Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities define 'sustainability' as maintaining space activities while preserving the outer space environment for future generations. In this context, re-entry poses a question: how can an increasingly crowded orbital environment remain usable as more objects are launched, operated, and eventually brought back to the earth?

Therefore, re-entry is a physics problem as well as a governance problem. And the new IN-SPACe guidelines are intended to give Indian operators clarity on how the Indian government expects them to solve these problems.

'Conditions of permission'

The guidelines have three important elements.

(i) Accountability — Any Indian entity undertaking a planned re-entry, whether within or outside Indian territory, now requires the IN-SPACe's authorisation. Non-Indian entities seeking to undertake planned re-entry over Indian territory must route the activity through an Indian-incorporated entity, such as a subsidiary, joint venture or partnership, which will be responsible for complying with Indian laws, regulations, and national security requirements.

This has been done because commercialisation creates an accountability gap: i.e. the spacecraft may belong to a private company but the consequences of its return can lie across maritime zones, and jurisdictions. And India has responded by attaching regulatory responsibility to a re-entering entity even before the risk materialises.



Objects designed to survive re-entry or intentionally controlled towards a particular landing or impact area also require separate authorisation. This is what makes a re-entry 'planned'. On the other hand, objects expected to burn up, melt or fragment sufficiently during natural orbital decay do not count as a planned re-entry.

(ii) Risk must be acceptable — The guidelines say the expected casualty risk must remain below 1 in 10,000, supported by survivability and ground-casualty assessments.

As a result, operators have to analyse failure scenarios, fragmentation patterns, ballistic coefficients, de-orbit plans, flight-path angles, and danger zones, and share the results. They must also identify components likely to survive re-entry and hazardous systems such as batteries and pressure vessels.

By requiring quantitative studies and attaching a number to the acceptable risk threshold, the guidelines make sustainability measurable and thus trackable.

(iii) Permissions — Per the guidelines, IN-SPACe will re-verify the latest re-entry parameters approximately three months before the proposed operation. If planned re-entry is decided upon after launch, the operator must apply at least six months in advance. Operators must also obtain an IN-SPACe advisory note to issue warnings to airborne and marine vessels in the re-entry area at least 45 days before the re-entry begins.

If a re-entry site falls within the territorial control of a non-Indian state, including in its exclusive economic zones, the applicant must also submit the relevant clearance or authorisation from that state.

These checkpoints ensure that the regulator has fixed windows and mechanisms to intervene when the re-entry parameters change after the mission has launched or the risk pattern has changed for some reason.

Soft law to domestic rule

For nearly two decades, the international community has developed principles for sustainable space activities. Notable among them are the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee's 'Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines' and the 'Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities' of the U.N. Committee for the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. Article IX of the Outer Space Treaty 1967 also provides an important foundation for environmental responsibility.

However, most of the contemporary sustainability architecture works on guidelines and other similar forms of 'soft law', which operators are not obligated to follow.

The IN-SPACe guidelines solve this problem for India by tying an operator's fragmentation analysis and insurance policies to the national regulator.

The guidelines also address the financial risks that follow from the Space Liability Convention 1972, which places absolute liability on a launching state for damage caused by its space object on the surface of the earth or to aircraft in flight.

The IN-SPACe guidelines, on the other hand, require operators to undertake planned re-entries at their own risk and say they remain liable for third-party damage and claims. They also indemnify



the Government of India and its agencies for liability incurred under India's international commitments while satisfying the applicable third-party insurance requirements.

Taken together, the IN-SPACe guidelines translate international principles into obligations that private operators in India must satisfy before the government gives them permission to act.

RACE AGAINST TIME

Q: What is a launch window?

A: On August 24, China called off the launch of its Chang'e 7 mission to the moon's south pole for the sake of "prudence, reliability and absolute mission success". It will now have to wait until next year for another chance.

All space missions have specific launch windows — periods when the positions and motions of the satellite (on the rocket), the earth, and the target body are properly aligned. The moon orbits the earth once every 27.3 days, so launch windows to the moon open once a month. But if a mission has to go to the moon's south pole region, the window changes.

A spacecraft approaching a point near the moon's rotational pole will have to be orbiting the moon close to a north-south plane. The plane of the moon's orbit is tilted by 5.1° relative to that of the earth's orbit. And the moon's equator is tilted by just around 1.5° relative to the earth. As a result, the desirable trajectory a spacecraft should achieve around the moon will change depending on the moon's position around the earth.

The end goal is to launch the mission such that it achieves this trajectory after expending the least amount of fuel possible. Since the Chang'e 7 mission spacecraft will be powered by sunlight, it also faces a second constraint. The sun doesn't rise high above the horizon at the moon's south pole, so Chang'e 7 will have to land at its designated spot when it is sufficiently sunlit. This is why missing one launch window can mean waiting for several days, weeks or even months for the next one.

WHAT HAS FUELLED THE BACKLASH AGAINST FLOCK CAMERAS IN U.S.?

The story so far

The head of Flock, a maker and operator of surveillance cameras, that works with a range of clients in the United States, issued an apology this month after the Washington Post reported that multiple law enforcement officers had abused his product network, with at least one case involving an officer who misused Flock to stalk his ex-partner through her car's licence plates.

Across the U.S., anger is mounting against the surveillance camera firm, with critics going so far as to disrupt or even destroy the Flock cameras in their communities.

How do Flock cameras work?

Founded in 2017, Flock developed its business with the help of a two-way strategy: the sale of surveillance hardware, as well as surveillance-as-a-service subscriptions. Flock products include licence plate reader (LPR) cameras, video cameras, mobile security trailers, audio detection devices, drones, and software offerings. Instead of just buying and using a single camera, clients can join the Flock network and enable (optional) law enforcement access.



Due to this strategy, Flock's devices can help police officers collect data across wider areas and with more cameras, to detect incidents ranging from stolen cars to gun shootings.

The company's numbers certainly impress. According to its 2026 factsheet, over 2,800 crimes were solved weekly with Flock technology, while over 2,000 missing people have been located. Flock reported that it has partnered with over 6,000 "communities" across 49 U.S. states, as well as "thousands" of law enforcement agencies.

What caused the outrage against Flock cameras?

There are a number of reasons uniting the Americans who are against Flock. These range from the company's reputational challenges and the misuse of its Flock cameras, to the general anger over mass surveillance technologies.

Company founder and CEO Garrett Langley made headlines last year when he referred to a critic's anti-Flock advocacy organisation (called DeFlock) as "terroristic." He apologised for his comments this July, and promised to improve on the company's responses to the public's concerns.

Still, the Washington Post report in August that covered incidents where police officers misused Flock data to stalk women has added yet more fuel to the fire.

Soon afterwards, Flock announced that it was updating its safeguards, and cutting its default ALPR (Automated Licence Plate Reader) data retention period to seven days, unless legally required to keep the images for longer.

On its "Myths vs Facts" page, Flock noted that it does not carry out facial recognition, predictive policing, or demographic profiling. Flock stated that it did not contract with the U.S. agency ICE (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement) or the tech firm Palantir, both of which are associated with mass surveillance. Even so, media outlets have identified Flock cameras as being AI-powered. U.S. lawmakers have also raised questions about the possibility of ICE accessing Flock data.

Despite its outreach attempts, Flock is still facing public fury. One reason for this was a May 2025 report which alleged that Texas officials had used thousands of cameras in the Flock network to track down a woman who had an abortion, as part of an investigation. Flock dismissed these reports last year and stated that it was a missing persons case. However, later findings by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) advocacy group support the original report.

While the verdict was pending, a simplistic version of the events entered the public consciousness: social media users began claiming that Flock had worked with the police to enforce the Texan abortion ban and target a woman.

In recent weeks, protesters have expressed their anger against Flock by blocking cameras, reporting them to DeFlock in order to map them, pressuring clients to end their Flock contracts, or even destroying Flock cameras. For example, a trending Instagram Reel with over 2 million views and 2,69,000 likes taught watchers how to dismantle a Flock camera without being detected by other cameras.

Furthermore, U.S. media outlets reported that in July, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) would not renew its original contract with Flock, due to "serious concerns" regarding civil liberties, privacy, and the data being collected from the cameras.



Does India face a similar dilemma?

Across Indian cities, more law enforcement bodies are experimenting with AI-powered cameras in order to catch traffic rules violators through their licence plates.

While these automated solutions seem encouraging, there has been a lack of human follow-up when it comes to penalising the offenders. Another challenge is in ensuring that the authorities are handling facial recognition data securely and privately.

Meanwhile, the use of CCTV cameras by both police departments and private citizens is rampant, but these surveillance efforts are fragmented.

Unlike with Flock, it is hard to share private camera feeds with the police in real time and derive useful insights from the data. Since they are owned by everyday users rather than leased by a dedicated company, these surveillance cameras are often unreliable and poorly maintained.

However, Indian citizens have become more vocal in calling out the use of smart glasses and AI-powered surveillance vans by the police, such as during the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) demonstrations in July. The potential misuse of facial recognition data to harass lawful protesters is a serious concern in these instances.

THE HUMANOID'S WINNING THE RACE. OR IS IT?

Who would win in a fight, Mike Tyson or a silverback gorilla? It's a question many have asked, including Tyson himself. Back in the 1980s, the boxing legend was strolling through a zoo with his wife when he came across the ape enclosure, where one big silverback was bullying all the others. Tyson tried to bribe the attendant with \$10,000, the story goes, to open the cage so he could fight the animal, but the employee declined. That was undoubtedly for the best — even the greatest human fighter wouldn't last long against a larger, stronger and more vicious animal.

If human athletes shouldn't be judged on their ability to outfight a gorilla, they shouldn't be expected to outrace a machine, either. Given that, what's the need for a brouhaha over two Chinese humanoid robots beating Usain Bolt's 100m world record at the World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing this past weekend? Smartphone maker Honor's robot, Lightning, came second with a time of 9.47s, whereas the winner, Tiangong Ultra, developed by the Beijing Humanoid Robot Innovation Centre, clocked 9.39s, compared to Bolt's 9.58s. Someone on a motorbike, another machine, could have done the same.

That aside, the robot games offered their share of finish-line drama — Tiangong careening into the sidelines, Lightning having to be carried away on the stretcher — and there's no reason these events can't be considered entertaining "sports" in their own right. Will they eclipse human athletic competition one day? Neither horses nor cars have stopped people running. The only thing to remember is this: Like should be compared with like.

HOW AI FIRMS ARE DESTROYING PHYSICAL BOOKS TO TRAIN THEIR MODELS

The story so far

An investigation published this week by the tech outlet 404 Media tracked a shipment of rare books to an Amazon facility in Las Vegas. Instead of packing and mailing them out to eager readers, Amazon employees destroyed the books by cutting off their bindings to scan them. Numerous



other books have met the same fate, according to the report that ignited global outrage and criticism.

Why are AI companies sourcing physical books?

AI companies are trying to access more works of writing in order to further develop their AI models and train them on high-quality datasets rich with original material. As more of the internet grows saturated with AI-generated patterns of language, rare and/or out-of-print books are becoming an attractive option for tech companies looking to scrape data.

According to 404 Media, Amazon did not directly address its destructive scanning practices but confirmed that it bought books to improve its “products and services”.

But the e-commerce giant is not the only company accused of destroying books. Anthropic, the Google and Amazon-backed maker of the Claude family of models, had its own secret ‘Project Panama,’ which it described as “our effort to destructively scan all the books in the world.”

What’s more, a focus on rare books also means that the company that sources the content first can destroy the original and ensure that an AI rival cannot easily train its models on the same text.

Is it necessary for AI companies to destroy books?

If you have ever tried to photocopy a thick or old book, you know that getting a high-quality print is often complicated by the book’s spine. You can press down hard to flatten the book, but this is not safe for rare or delicate volumes.

Archivists, librarians, and researchers use a range of advanced scanners that are designed to digitise physical books without damaging them. Some robotic devices can even lift or flip the pages without human help. Naturally, these solutions are expensive and can be hard to scale.

In destructive scanning, however, the book’s binding is cut off and the pages are rapidly scanned. These books cannot be easily rebound and are usually sent for disposal.

Destroying the print book can also work in a company’s favour. This way, it is harder for authors to accuse the company of promoting piracy. After all, a buyer is legally allowed to destroy the rare book they have bought, even if others would consider this a cultural crime.

By contrast, an AI company can be sued if authors find evidence of it downloading pirated e-books without paying for them. This July, Anthropic received approval to pay \$1.5 billion to settle a class action lawsuit where authors claimed that the Claude-maker illegally used their copyrighted works for its AI products.

In a court order from last June, U.S. district judge William Alsup had noted that Anthropic bought millions of print copies, and “destroyed” each print copy while replacing it with a digital one that it did not share outside the company.

This print-to-digital format change was ruled as fair use.

What has been the reaction to destructive scanning?

Numerous booksellers, authors, creatives, collectors, readers, and academics have naturally reacted with anger and disgust to news reports of AI companies destroying books.



At the same time, there are some who are not overly concerned by destructive scanning, but oppose companies being allowed to destroy rare books to create a digital copy that the public cannot access.

For context, consider that media preservation platforms (such as the Internet Archive) as well as shadow libraries/piracy platforms (like Anna's Archive) have been sued for doing the exact opposite: making digital versions of rare print books available to the public at no cost.

Meanwhile, global booksellers face a dilemma. They stand to profit (at least temporarily) by supplying rare or out-of-print books for destruction. The Guardian reported that sellers in Australia, for example, are more carefully scrutinising bulk orders from buyers or reviewing unusual requests for rarer books, in case they are being bought for destructive scanning.

Elon Musk, whose AI company is developing the Grok family of models and tools, was quick to refute potential accusations of his company destroying rare books.

Even so, the process of building AI models lacks transparency — by design. As AI firms transition from downloading popular books to shredding rare ones, readers and booksellers now fear the world is rapidly losing undiscovered works of literature.

WHAT DOES CHATGPT FOR TEENS ENTAIL?

The story so far:

On August 18, OpenAI launched a version of ChatGPT for teenagers. The company said ChatGPT for Teens will have stronger protections, including restrictions on content related to self-harm, suicide, and sexual content. The launch comes amid claims that AI chatbots have contributed to deaths by suicide among the youth and caused other mental health problems.

What are the key features of ChatGPT for Teens?

ChatGPT for Teens, designed for 13- to 17-year-olds, has features such as parental controls, quiet hours, a study mode, and notifications for situations that require real-world interventions. Most of these safeguards were already present in accounts for minors. Apart from those who identify themselves as minors, OpenAI has said that it will also automatically place users who its system determines to be below the age of 17 under ChatGPT for Teens. The company says it is guided by a commitment to treat teens as teens, and to encourage real-world support.

Apart from restrictions on content related to self-harm, violence, eating disorders, dangerous activities, and explicit sexual or graphic material, it also places emphasis on helping teens study, rather than providing answers.

Can ChatGPT for Teens be used for learning?

As the first generation of children and teens grows up with AI, an increasing number of them uses the tool for learning. ChatGPT for Teens promises to support students working on their lessons. For example, a teen attempting to solve a mathematical equation will not be directly given the answer; instead, the chatbot will go over the equation step-by-step, ask questions, and give hints for solutions.



The study mode, built with inputs from teachers, scientists, and other experts, will use this detailed approach to arrive at answers. Parents and teens can even set specific timings for it to be enabled by default.

What other guardrails are present?

The company says ChatGPT for Teens will “reduce exposure to harmful content while preserving the ability to learn, create, and explore”. The accounts of parents and teens can be linked, and parents can receive notifications in certain high-risk situations. This will alert them if something may be seriously wrong. The alerts will be monitored by human moderators.

OpenAI will also provide options such as quiet hours that regulate when ChatGPT can’t be used, turning off memory so it doesn’t save and use chats while responding, and removing options for image generation.

For teens, the chatbot will offer periodic reminders to take breaks from using ChatGPT and caution them against uploading sensitive images. It will also provide the option of switching off voice mode to minimise the ability of the chatbot to appear like a person.

“ChatGPT should not use romantic language, encourage emotional dependence, or imply that it has feelings or consciousness,” OpenAI said.

However, the effectiveness of these safeguards remains to be seen. Experts have reservations on whether these actions will be enough to address the dependence of users on chatbots.

Why is this needed?

Concerns over the unchecked use of AI chatbots have been mounting for a while now. There have been several news reports of teens and adults using chatbots for advice on self-harm and/or inflicting violence on others. Several families, including the parents of 16-year-old Adam Raine, who died by suicide last year, have sued OpenAI saying it has contributed to deaths.

There have also been growing concerns about learning losses due to the use of these chatbots. Various studies have highlighted the harm that chatbots cause to critical-thinking skills. Among teens, this can cause lasting damage.

The ability of chatbots to mimic human characteristics and emotions has also led to several users forming relationships with them. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has spoken about how several people, particularly the youth, have an “emotional over-reliance” on ChatGPT.

Governments are also facing pressure to regulate the use of AI chatbots. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission is examining the negative impacts of AI chatbots acting as companions, particularly on children and teens. The U.K. is considering restricting the use of AI chatbots for users under 18. India does not have stand-alone legislation regulating how children use AI chatbots.

META'S \$18 BILLION SETTLEMENT: A BUSINESS DECISION THAT LEAVES ITS CORE MODEL INTACT

Meta Platforms has emerged from its biggest legal challenge in the US with its core business intact. The company agreed on Wednesday to pay up to \$18 billion over a decade — reported elsewhere as \$17.1 billion — to resolve claims brought by 47 states, the District of Columbia and US



territories that it designed Facebook and Instagram to addict children and violated child privacy norms. Meta denied any wrongdoing in agreeing to the deal.

What changes for teenagers

As part of the settlement, Meta will introduce stronger protections for users under 18:

- A default daily time limit of around two hours for teenagers
- Night-time restrictions limiting access roughly from midnight to 6 am
- Reduced notifications and certain features during school hours
- Stronger parental controls, giving parents more visibility into and control over how their children use the platforms
- Tighter age verification to keep children under 13 off accounts not meant for their age group

Why Meta settled rather than fought

Though the headline figure ranks among the largest settlements ever paid by a technology company, it is unlikely to strain a business that earned more than \$60 billion last year. Crucially, the deal leaves untouched the personalised feeds and ad targeting that underpin Meta's profits. It also lets Meta sidestep a potentially lengthy trial that could have surfaced further internal documents on its treatment of young users, according to more than a dozen analysts and legal experts — and removes a regulatory overhang that had been weighing on the stock, which rose about 1% on the news. That reaction reflected relief that the final cost was far below the \$1.4 trillion in penalties the states were reportedly seeking before trial.

Around a month before the settlement, Instagram head Adam Mosseri had told state attorneys general that Meta would appeal any adverse verdict — as it is already doing in a billion-dollar child-safety ruling won by New Mexico — while signalling the company was open to "constructive changes" if a deal could be worked out, according to people familiar with the private meeting.

Underlying the negotiations was uncertainty over Section 230, the US law shielding platforms from liability for user content. Meta had failed to get the case dismissed on those grounds, and a challenge on appeal looked formidable. As Mary Graw, a law professor at the Catholic University of America, put it, the arithmetic favoured a settlement: paying roughly \$1 billion a year for a decade was cheaper than losing at trial — and Meta would likely use the settlement itself to lobby against tougher regulation from Congress.

Pressure on rivals

Some legal experts see a deliberate structure aimed at competitors such as TikTok, YouTube and Snapchat: about 30% of the payout, along with the stricter teen-usage limits, only kicks in if rival platforms accept comparable obligations and payments in settlements of their own.

The backdrop

The settlement follows years of mounting pressure — lawsuits worldwide alleging Meta knowingly fostered addiction and a youth mental health crisis, and scrutiny over sexualised AI chatbot interactions with children. Legal risk that shareholders had long shrugged off drew



renewed attention after Meta warned in April of possible losses from a global backlash against social media among young users, including outright bans in countries like Australia.

The India angle

Indian regulators are watching the settlement closely as concerns over children's social media use increasingly enter domestic policy discussions. The Centre is reportedly weighing interventions such as age-based restrictions, caps on usage hours, and stronger parental-consent requirements — though these deliberations remain at an early stage.

WHAT CHANGES WHEN AI MOVES FROM READING VIRAL GENOMES TO DESIGNING THEM?

The computer did not create a virus. It did not touch a test tube or handle a living cell. What it did may ultimately be more consequential: it helped decide what the virus's genome should be.

Researchers at Stanford University and the Arc Institute used artificial intelligence (AI) to design complete genomes of bacteriophages - viruses that infect bacteria. Of 285 AI-generated designs physically synthesised and tested in the laboratory, 16 produced functioning phages. Some were able to overcome bacterial resistance that defeated the original virus. The phrase 'AI-created viruses' therefore needs qualification. Humans have been synthesising viral genomes and deliberately modifying viruses for decades. What is new is not the physical manufacture of a virus. AI has entered the design stage of biology. For medicine, that creates remarkable opportunities. For biosecurity, it raises equally important questions.

From reading genomes to designing

Bacteriophages -literally "bacteria eaters" -have been known for more than a century and are among the most abundant biological entities in nature. In 1977, one particularly small phage, X174, pronounced roughly 'phi-X-one-seventy-four', became the first complete DNA genome to be sequenced. By the early 2000s, scientists had shown that viral genetic material could be synthesised from known sequence information and used to recover functioning viruses. Humans had progressed from reading viral genomes to writing them. Scientists then became increasingly capable of deliberately altering viruses. The controversial influenza gain-of-function experiments of 2011-12 showed that genetic changes could modify important properties such as transmission in experimental animals. Such research highlighted a dilemma that remains unresolved: the same science that can improve pandemic preparedness may also create biosafety and biosecurity risks.

The Stanford-Arc experiment represents the next step. The scientists already knew the X174 genome and already knew how to synthesise viral DNA and recover functioning phages. What changed was who -or what -proposed the genome. They used Evo 1 and Evo 2, genome language models. The principle resembles a large language model, except that instead of learning patterns in words, Evo learns patterns in DNA. It studies the genetic alphabet - A, C, G and T - across vast numbers of genomes and then generates new genetic sequences. For this experiment, the models were further trained on thousands of bacteriophage genomes related to X174.

AI did not invent a completely unrelated virus from nothing: it generated previously unseen X174-like whole genomes within a known biological framework. Scientists selected some of these sequences, physically manufactured the DNA and introduced it into E. coli. If the genetic instructions were biologically coherent, the bacterial machinery produced new phage particles.



16 designs succeeded. The progression is striking: we learnt to read viral genomes, then to write them, then to modify them. Now AI is beginning to help decide what should be written.

One finding shows why this matters. An AI-designed phage successfully combined a viral protein with other genetic changes in a way that conventional engineering had struggled to achieve. The significance is not simply that AI can propose individual mutations; it may increasingly be able to identify multiple genetic changes that work together across an entire genome, exploring combinations that would be extremely difficult for humans to test one by one.

The medical opportunity

The most immediate application may be phage therapy. Antibiotic resistance is steadily eroding conventional treatment options, while bacteriophages offer another way of killing bacteria. Their major limitation is specificity: a phage effective against one bacterial strain may fail against another, and bacteria can also develop resistance to phages. Traditionally, researchers have searched nature and phage libraries for suitable candidates or modified existing viruses. Generative biology introduces another possibility. Instead of asking only, "Can we find the phage we need?", medicine may increasingly ask, "Can we design the phage we need?"

The Stanford experiment offered an early demonstration. Combinations of AI-designed phages overcame resistance in *E. coli* strains against which the original X174 failed. For clinicians confronting antimicrobial resistance, this is potentially important.

The possibilities extend beyond phage therapy. AI can assist the design of vaccine antigens, antibodies, therapeutic proteins and viral vectors used to deliver genetic treatments. It may eventually help optimise oncolytic viruses that selectively attack cancer cells. The larger revolution is therefore not simply 'AI making viruses'. It is AI becoming capable of designing biological function.

The danger is acceleration

It is tempting to be reassured because X174 is an exceptionally simple bacteriophage, while dangerous human viruses are vastly more complicated. Human pathogens must negotiate receptor binding, host range, tissue tropism, replication, immune escape and transmission. But complexity should not become false reassurance. Human scientists already understand much about these determinants. Decades of virology, reverse genetics and gain-of-function research have linked many genetic changes to viral behaviour.

AI does not need to rediscover virology. Its power lies in integrating what humanity already knows, examining vastly more combinations than humans can explore manually and accelerating the path from hypothesis to experimental design. This is the real biosecurity concern: capability amplification. The relevant question is not whether an untrained individual can ask today's chatbot to generate a pandemic virus. It is whether increasingly capable AI could make a knowledgeable and well-equipped laboratory substantially more effective at designing biological systems.

Future systems may compress months or years of literature review, modelling and experimental planning into much shorter cycles. Combined with increasingly automated laboratories, that acceleration could become profound. Even the apparently modest success rate in the Stanford study deserves this perspective. Only 16 of 285 designs worked, but digital systems can generate enormous numbers of candidates. A low success rate is reassuring only while the number of



attempts remains small. Biosecurity will therefore also have to evolve. Traditional DNA-synthesis screening often asks whether an ordered sequence resembles a known pathogen or toxin. In the age of generative biology, researchers increasingly argue that screening must also consider biological function: not simply whether a sequence looks dangerous, but what it might actually do.

Safety without paralysing science

AI companies are already confronting this dilemma. Claude Fable 5 was initially deployed with strong safeguards around biology, chemistry and cybersecurity. Legitimate scientific work could sometimes trigger a fallback to a less capable model. The intention was understandable, but the experience illustrated the problem: too little restriction creates risk, while too much restriction can obstruct legitimate science.

Those safeguards have since been refined to reduce false-positive biology fallbacks, while more sensitive capabilities remain restricted. This points towards a more practical model: graduated, auditable access in which legitimate researchers can obtain stronger capabilities under appropriate institutional and security controls. Biosecurity also cannot rest entirely on what an AI model agrees or refuses to answer. Safeguards are needed throughout the chain - AI systems, DNA-synthesis providers, laboratories and institutional biosafety oversight.

India must build capability

There is an important implication for India. If frontier AI becomes central to drug discovery, genomics, vaccines, protein engineering and experimental design, access to advanced AI becomes part of national scientific infrastructure. Smaller and specialised models will be sufficient for many tasks. But a country can choose to use a small model because it is sufficient; it should not be forced to use one because somebody else owns the frontier. If researchers elsewhere receive trusted access to highly capable biomedical models while Indian scientists depend on restricted public versions, the resulting disadvantage could accumulate across drug discovery, vaccines, antimicrobial resistance and other fields.

India is already investing through the IndiaAI Mission and indigenous foundation-model programmes. That ambition should include scientific and biomedical AI, secure compute, high-quality datasets and trusted-access frameworks for legitimate researchers. AI sovereignty without biosecurity would be reckless; biosecurity without AI sovereignty could leave us scientifically dependent.

Governing biological intelligence

The Stanford experiment does not show that AI can casually manufacture dangerous human viruses. It shows something more precise: computers are beginning to move from analysing biological information towards proposing biological designs that scientists can physically build. That capability could transform antimicrobial resistance research, vaccines and therapeutics. It could also accelerate harmful biological engineering. The answer is neither prohibition nor unrestricted access, but controlled acceleration -allowing beneficial science to progress while safeguards increase with capability and risk.

The challenge is no longer simply whether AI should be allowed to understand biology. It is how we govern AI when understanding biology increasingly becomes the ability to design it. India must



be capable not only of regulating and consuming that revolution, but of participating in its science and helping shape its safeguards.

ONES OF A KIND

Why do only humans look different from each other?

Humans are one of the species whose individual differences are unusually obvious to humans. We can be told apart by skin colour, hair colour, facial proportions, body shape, height, and many other traits. Our brains also excel at processing faces.

However, we are also very bad at distinguishing individuals of species we don't interact with. We can tell two cats apart but not two sparrows, say. But sparrows — and birds and most animals in general — can recognise individual members of their own species, e.g. using differences in plumage or calls.

Humans can also learn how. After years spent studying chimpanzees, scientists' ability to perceive differences becomes honed to the differences that already exist between individuals. The same goes for other animals. Individual plants of the same species can also have different height, branching patterns, leaf shapes, colours, etc. However, plants lack the evolutionary pressure to advertise their individual identities the way social animals do.

WARMER OCEANS ARE SOUNDING A WARNING

The world's oceans are usually at their warmest in March and April. In March 2024, global sea-surface temperature simmered to a record 21.09 degrees Celsius. That high was surpassed last week. On August 22, a rapidly intensifying El Niño and global warming combined to spike marine temperature to 21.1 degrees Celsius. The new record, along with the upending of the ocean calendar, is a warning: Global heating is moving climate into unfamiliar territory. The last two months' data indicates that what happened on August 22 was not an anomaly. June's average sea surface temperature across the extra-polar oceans was the highest ever recorded for that month. The July record was also surpassed. By July 31, the oceans had heated to 0.04 degrees below the previous all-time high.

The oceans are among the greatest buffers against climate change. According to the IPCC and NASA, oceans absorbed more than 90 per cent of the excess heat generated by global warming and helped to delay its most catastrophic consequences. But this sequestering influence has come at a cost. Warming places stress on marine ecosystems, disrupts food webs. It also affects the oceans' capacity to regulate weather. A heatwave has overwhelmed Europe this summer, several parts of India experienced floods even though the monsoon was erratic, and unseasonal snowfall disrupted life in South America. Ocean warming also contributes to sea-level rise. By the end of 2025, global average sea level was about 11 centimetres higher than in January 1993.

Every climate record strengthens the case for mitigation — cutting fossil-fuel consumption, accelerating the transition to clean energy and reducing greenhouse-gas emissions. That imperative remains important. However, even as emission reduction plans become more ambitious, adaptation to weather vagaries — which has historically played second fiddle to mitigation in climate policy — needs to be on a stronger footing. Even if emissions were brought down sharply, the consequences of past warming will take years to disappear. India, with a coastline of more than 10,000 km, needs to invest in protecting people who live along the shores,



restoring natural barriers against raging waters, improving drainage in urban centres and developing climate-informed agriculture and water management systems. The message from the warming oceans is clear: Improving climate resilience cannot be postponed.

BARREN-LAND FALLACY

Trees provide many benefits, including helping cool the neighbourhood, keeping soil from getting eroded, drawing carbon from the environment and storing it, and supporting many birds, small animals, and insects. However, these effects are beneficial only when trees are in the right ecosystem; otherwise, they can be harmful.

The barren-land fallacy is the idea that land that does not have tree cover is barren land, thus ecologically deficient, and that it will 'evolve' or should be helped to 'evolve' into a forest. The tree-planting drives that happen in India often perpetuate this fallacy by planting trees in the wrong ecosystems. They often also plant trees that are unsuitable for the local conditions, e.g. eucalyptus trees — which draw a lot of water — in a water-stressed area.

Forests are only one kind of ecosystem. Others include grasslands, savannah, scrubland, wetlands, and deserts, plus many naturally open ecosystems. As University of California professor of history and geography Diana Davis has written, "The assumption that the world's drylands are worthless, deforested, and overgrazed landscapes has led ... to programs and policies that have often systematically damaged dryland environments".

To ecologically restore a place does not always mean planting more trees. Instead, it is to do whatever will protect or restore the ecosystem that would naturally occur there. In the same vein, planting trees or regenerating forests is only valuable where forests have been degraded or cleared and where a forest is the native ecosystem.

'INDIAN ROCK YIELDS OLDEST DIRECTLY DATED TRACES OF MICROBIAL LIFE'

Researchers say they have found "compelling evidence" from multiple sources that microbial life existed in what is now eastern India at least 3.5 billion years ago. Typically, these involve finding fossils or traces of organic chemicals but in this case they rely on converging chemical clues, according to a paper that appeared in the peer-reviewed Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The source of discovery is a single carbon-bearing rock in the Singhbhum Craton, which is an ancient, stable block of continental crust in eastern India, spanning parts of Jharkhand and Odisha. It has long interested geologists because it holds some of the oldest rocks in India, recording crust that formed more than 4 billion years ago.

"To our knowledge, (this) is the oldest directly dated rock with a confirmed biosignature," say the authors, who include Trisrota Chaudhuri, of the Geological Survey of India, Kolkata, and Mark Harrison, of the Department of Earth, Planetary, and Space Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles.

The rock — a "black-and-white" banded chert from Bhitardari — pairs a firm age with several independent chemical and structural signs that its carbon was made by living organisms. Chert is a hard, fine-grained rock made largely of silica that can preserve organic matter for billions of years, but cannot be dated directly. So the researchers extracted zircons — hardy crystals that act like natural clocks as they trap uranium that decays to lead at a known rate. Of eight zircons



analysed, four indicated an age of 3,497 million years. Because those zircons appear to be volcanic ash that settled as the chert formed, the team took that to be the rock's age, too.

They then argued the carbon was biological. Its balance of carbon isotopes matches carbon captured by living cells. They also found the material was degraded organic matter rather than later inorganic contamination.

Scientists bother with such questions because the earth formed about 4.54 billion years ago, so a 3.5-billion-year-old trace of life comes from only about a billion years after the planet's birth and may open new hypotheses on evolution. If microbes were already established, life itself must have begun earlier still. That bears on whether life is a freak accident or something that emerges readily on habitable worlds.

Older claims exist, including graphite in 3.7-to-3.8-billion-year-old Greenland rocks, but several have been disputed.

NEW STUDIES PURSUE 'PERFECT' BLEND FOR COFFEE AND HEALTH

Every morning, many of us drink one or two cups of coffee and feel good, refreshed, and ready for the day. Some of us drink one or two more cups at work before lunchtime. Some use pure coffee while others add chicory to it. We prepare the powder using a filter, add milk and sugar, and take a swig.

While many Indians have a fondness for coffee, almost everyone in the U.S. and Europe drinks coffee, and more of it, every day.

Now, what are the effects of drinking coffee? How many cups per day? Should it be black coffee or can it include milk and sugar? And how does this affect our health? These are some questions that have been on our minds — and for which research has offered contradictory answers in the past. Fortunately, a new publication, titled 'Caffeine and Cardiovascular Disease: A Scientific Statement from the American Heart Association', may clear some doubts. The authors of the statement analysed several studies that examined the effects of caffeine, the active molecule in coffee that stimulates the brain and the central nervous system and encourages the body to produce and use more energy.

The statement reported that moderate caffeine intake, especially through coffee, may lower the risks of type-2 diabetes, stroke, heart failure, and atrial fibrillation. However, high doses, especially from energy drinks, may harm cardiovascular health, and unfiltered coffee can also raise LDL cholesterol levels.

Data from the Nurses' Health Study at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Harvard Medical School and an analysis of 3 lakh people from the U.K. Biobank and Health Canada have indicated that drinking four cups a day may lower the risk of developing cancer, type-2 diabetes, heart diseases, and age-related disorders like dementia and Alzheimer's disease. However, analyses also suggest that it would be prudent for pregnant and lactating women to limit their coffee intake to three cups a day.

Drinking hot black coffee is recommended, with little or no additives like sugar or milk. However, a group from Copenhagen, Denmark, pointed out in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Science in 2023 that adding milk to black coffee can be good, as milk contains antioxidants, minerals, and vitamins and allays the bitter taste.



Many people in South India prefer to have pure coffee, i.e. with no additives like chicory, which comes from a perennial herbal plant with coloured flowers. This herb contains no caffeine but a polysaccharide called inulin, which supports digestion and can help control blood sugar.

The benefits of a coffee and chicory blend and their implications for nutrition and health implications were discussed in a recent review paper by a group led by Pushpa S. Murthy at the Central Food Technology and Research Institute, Mysuru, published in the Journal of Food Science and Technology. Chicory contains several compounds that help protect the liver from inflammation, shield the stomach from damage, and may help defend against cancer. Adding chicory to coffee also improves coffee's fragrance and taste.

The optimal blend of coffee and chicory was suggested to be 70:30 or 60:40, coffee to chicory, to strike a balance between taste and benefits. In fact, most coffee sellers across India have these ratios, unless of course, a customer asks for 'pure' coffee. This writer himself used to prefer pure coffee until he read the review article by the Mysuru group!

COW GUT ENZYMES CAN FIGHT PERSISTENT INFECTIONS: IISC STUDY

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have identified enzymes from a cow's gut that can break down the polysaccharide components of biofilms on wounds and medical surfaces, which contribute to persistent infections.

According to IISc, the bacterium *Acinetobacter baumannii* poses threat in healthcare. Biofilms are communities of bacteria that form a physical barrier which reduces antimicrobial penetration and the effectiveness of host immune cells.

In the study, researchers identified specific enzymes from bovine rumen (cow gut) that can break down the polysaccharide components of these biofilms. They used genomic data from rumen microbes to identify enzymes capable of digesting cellulose.

The team found that a specific enzyme named CRhAB (Cow rumen hydrolase against *A. baumannii*) was highly effective against the bacterium's biofilms as well as those of the bacterium *Klebsiella pneumoniae*. This enzyme drastically reduced biofilm formation and substantially suppressed the expression of key biofilm-related genes in the bacteria.

The researchers are also working on a patch-like wound dressing to treat challenging infections such as diabetic foot infections.

INSIDE ONE-SHOT THERAPY TO LOWER BAD CHOLESTEROL

A new experimental therapy from US pharma major Eli Lilly and its subsidiary Verve Therapeutics — involving a single shot infusion that may bust LDL (low-density lipoprotein), or bad cholesterol, at one go and which sharply lowered LDL by 62% for as long as 18 months after treatment in a trial — continues to make waves among cardiologists.

Key Takeaways:

- The therapy works by permanently switching off a cholesterol-related gene called PCSK9 inside the liver, taming LDL forever.



- VERVE-102 is not a traditional drug. It is a form of in vivo (administered directly to the patient's body) gene editing, which allows scientists to alter DNA and modify gene function. Instead of temporarily blocking cholesterol production with medicines, researchers use genetic instructions delivered through an intravenous infusion to permanently alter liver cells from producing it altogether.
- Professor David E Newby, British Heart Foundation Duke of Edinburgh Chair of Cardiology and a co-author of the VERVE-102 phase 1 trial, told The Indian Express, "In traditional treatment, you keep taking the medicine to keep the effect of lowering LDL. In VERVE-102, you make a one-time targeted change to DNA inside liver cells to keep the effect going."
- "The goal is to permanently reduce the liver's ability to produce PCSK9 after a single intravenous infusion. We are hoping that a 'one-and-done' cholesterol treatment could eventually replace conventional medicines," he said.
- The study is exciting because it shows that a concept once considered futuristic — a one-time genetic treatment for lifelong cholesterol control — has begun to enter human clinical testing.
- The challenge now is proving that the benefits of making such a change last a lifetime truly outweigh the risks. For now, it is a promising potential future option for selected high-risk patients, rather than a replacement for existing treatments such as statins, ezetimibe, PCSK9 inhibitors, or inclisiran.

Do You Know:

- LDL is called "bad cholesterol" because high levels make it stick to artery walls and form hard fatty deposits called plaque. These deposits narrow the arteries and block blood flow, elevating the risk of heart attacks and strokes.
- PCSK9 is a protein involved in regulating LDL cholesterol in the blood. Scientists discovered that people who naturally have certain loss-of-function changes in the PCSK9 gene tend to have lower LDL cholesterol throughout their lives and a lower risk of coronary heart disease. This provided an important clue: reducing PCSK9 activity could be a safe and effective way to lower cardiovascular risk.
- That discovery was later supported by drug trials. Medicines such as PCSK9 monoclonal antibodies can substantially reduce LDL cholesterol and cardiovascular events. Traditional medicines temporarily block PCSK9 or reduce its production. Their effects therefore require continued treatment. VERVE-102 is designed to change that battle with daily compliance of drugs.
- In vivo base editing therapy is an advanced genetic approach that directly changes a single DNA letter (base) inside a patient's body without cutting the DNA strands.