**8th August to 14th August**

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**Indian Express**

**1. BCG analysed plan to ‘relocate’ Gazans to Somalia: What Financial Times’ report found**

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) reportedly drew plans to analyse how Palestinians in Gaza could be shifted to other countries, including Somalia, under a project to “redevelop” a region which has long seen conflict over land and identity.

The *Financial Times* reported the story on Thursday (August 7), citing people familiar with the work. It said the consultancy firm created a spreadsheet “on behalf of Israeli businessmen who were sketching plans for the redevelopment of Gaza after the war between Hamas and Israel.” The *FT* first reported on the plan last month.

BCG CEO Christoph Schweizer earlier said the entire episode had been “reputationally very damaging” for the firm. It came just a few months after US President Donald Trump held a press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying the US will “take over Gaza and…do a job with it too”. He added that America will “own” Gaza and turn it into the “Riviera of the Middle East”.

Here is what to know about BCG’s role, the fallout, and the massive criticism that followed.

**What exactly did BCG do on Gaza?**

According to the *FT*’s investigation, BCG was contracted for around seven months for the “relocation” project, at roughly $4 million (around Rs 35 crore). “One scenario estimated more than 500,000 Gazans would leave the enclave with “relocation packages” worth $9,000 per person, or around $5bn in total,” it said. Gaza’s total population is around 2 million.

The advisory firm Tony Blair Institute (TBI), founded by the former UK Prime Minister, also saw two staff members participate in message groups and calls as the project developed.

Additionally, BCG was involved in establishing the Israel- and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. The GHF, which began operations in late May, has been criticised for failing to provide aid comprehensively and for the deaths of Palestinians who attempted to secure aid from its centres.

Just this week, UN experts described it as an “utterly disturbing example of how humanitarian relief can be exploited for covert military and geopolitical agendas in serious breach of international law.” They also mentioned “The entanglement of Israeli intelligence, US contractors and ambiguous non-governmental entities”.

BCG was originally engaged by Orbis, a US-based security contractor, for a feasibility study for the aid operation. This was done on a pro bono basis, meaning the clients were not charged for it. Orbis prepared the study on behalf of the Tachlith Institute, an Israeli think-tank.

The latest *FT* report said that Somalia and the breakaway region of Somaliland were on the list of locations for “relocating” the people of Gaza, along with the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Jordan. It is in line with recent media reports of the US and Israeli governments sounding out countries in East Africa about taking in Palestinian refugees.

**What was the BCG’s response?**

The BCG said the two partners involved with the GHF initially began the work on a pro bono basis and “then carried out subsequent unauthorized work”. The company disavowed this work and said they were not paid for it.

On the reconstruction plan work, it said the company’s role was being “misrepresented”. “Two former partners initiated this work, even though the lead partner was categorically told not to,” it added, disavowing the work.

The TBI also asserted that it “saw” the slide deck but “didn’t create it”. The deck in question was a slideshow on potential projects, such as an “Elon Musk Smart Manufacturing Zone” on the Gaza-Israel border, where US electric vehicle companies would build cars for export to Europe.

It also included the “Gaza Trump Riviera & Islands”, serving as “world class resorts along the coastline and on small artificial islands similar to the Palm Islands in Dubai”.

**And what was the fallout?**

Following the newspaper’s July report, the international NGO Save the Children suspended its 20-year partnership with BCG. The UK Parliament’s Business and Trade Committee further asked the BCG CEO to respond to its questions, seeking the details of the plan.

The company also came under fire for participating in a plan for displacing Palestinians, many of whom are currently internally displaced within Gaza as a result of Israeli shelling. The Riviera suggestion also took the world by surprise when Trump announced it, as it would have violated long-standing UN resolutions supporting the Palestinian right of self-determination (which India has also backed at the United Nations), and international law, including against ethnic cleansing.

The GHF, meanwhile, has continued to attract severe criticism over its functioning, as images and video from Gaza show emaciated people due to Israel blocking aid delivery. NGOs and relief agencies, such as Doctors Without Borders or Médecins Sans Frontières, and UN experts have called for the GHF’s closure. MSF said in a statement, “In MSF’s nearly 54 years of operations, rarely have we seen such levels of systematic violence against unarmed civilians.” It described the GHF-run food distributions in Gaza as sites of “orchestrated killing and dehumanisation”.

Further, there is not much progress on Trump’s Riviera plan, but Israel has increasingly indicated plans to occupy all of Gaza. According to the BBC, Israel’s security cabinet met on Thursday to make a decision, with its military forces currently controlling three-fourths of Gaza.

**2. Can Abu Salem walk free soon? Here’s what the Maharashtra government and the courts have said**



Gangster Abu Salem, who was extradited to India from Portugal in 2005, has been trying to make the case for premature release from prison. But the state government told the Bombay High Court this week that he has to serve out a term of 25 years as per the conditions of his extradition from Portugal – which means that he cannot be released before 2030.

India had assured Portugal that Salem would not be given the death penalty or jail term exceeding 25 years if he was found guilty in cases that were pending against him.

In 2015 and 2017, Salem was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of builder Pradeep Jain and the 1993 Bombay blasts, respectively. On what basis is Salem seeking release?

**To recall, what were the circumstances in which Abu Salem was brought back to India?**

Abu Salem, or Abu Salem Abdul Qayoom Ansari, was named as an absconding accused in the first chargesheet filed by Mumbai Police in the Bombay blasts case on November 4, 1993.

The police claimed that Salem had been given the task of transporting and concealing weapons, and was linked to the conspiracy to execute the blasts. On March 12 that year, a dozen bombs went off across Mumbai in a terrorist attack coordinated by Dawood Ibrahim and his gang, killing 257 people.

Salem remained a wanted accused in the blasts case as well as the 1995 murder of Jain, a Mumbai-based builder. He was said to have fled the country, and remained absconding as the trial against the other accused began and ended.

It was only in 2002 that investigators had a breakthrough, and Salem was detained in Lisbon, the capital of Portugal. He was said to have undergone plastic surgery to change his appearance, but his identity was established on the basis of his fingerprints that were available in police records.

A year later, the Portuguese government consented to India’s request for Salem’s extradition on the basis of documents and evidence that were made available on his alleged role in crimes in India, including the 1993 terrorist attack. Salem appealed against the government’s order in courts in Portugal, and L K Advani, then deputy Prime Minister, gave an assurance that he would not be given the death penalty or a prison term of more than 25 years.

On November 11, 2005, Salem was extradited to India. He was put on trial for the murder of the builder, and the 1993 blasts case. He was found guilty of murder and criminal conspiracy under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and sections of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

**On what basis has Salem asked to be released from jail now?**

For the past few years, Salem, who is lodged in a jail in Maharashtra, has been knocking on the doors of various authorities, including the trial court, Bombay High Court, and the Supreme Court, asking for the date on which he would be released.

He has been claiming that he is entitled to benefits that a prisoner gets, including remission. Remission is a reduction in the jail term based on grounds including the nature of the offence and good conduct, and as part of special schemes, etc.

Salem has claimed that based on the time he has spent in jail, he is entitled to 3 years and 16 days of remission. Also, given that he had been detained in Portugal from September 2002 onward, he has spent more than 25 years in jail, and should have been released on March 31, 2025.

Based on these calculations, Salem has written to Portuguese authorities on various occasions, claiming that the conditions of his extradition have been violated. He has also written to the Maharashtra Prison Department, the state government, and the courts.

Back in 2017, Salem had sought remission under a special scheme introduced by the state to mark the 125th birth anniversary of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. He had said that his case was “entirely different” from that of other convicts, as the agreement between Portugal and India guaranteed “pardon, reprieve, respite or remission”.

**And what have the courts ruled in this matter?**

\* Salem had approached the Supreme Court in 2018 with his plea on early release. In 2022, the court said that considering the gravity of his offences, no special privileges could be extended to him.

The court also said that his contention that the period of his detention should be considered to have started in 2002 when he was first detained could not be accepted, as he was convicted of entering Portugal on a fake passport and had been punished in that country.

The court said that in keeping with the assurance given to Portugal, once Salem completed 25 years in jail, which would be in 2030, the Union of India would consider the matter.

\* Last year, Salem approached the trial court in Mumbai, asking for the tentative date of his release, and a calculation of his remission as per prison rules. The court rejected his plea in December 2024 after the CBI submitted that as per the order of the Supreme Court, he could be released only in 2030.

\* Salem then approached the Bombay High Court, where the Prison Department and Home Department of the state submitted in May that he had actually been in prison for 19 years.

The Home Department also submitted that since Salem is a convict in two cases, under the anti-terror law, TADA, his life imprisonment would not be calculated as a 14-year prison term.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs too filed an affidavit in May, saying that as a TADA convict, Salem’s life imprisonment was for 60 years – however, to honour the assurance given to Portugal, the question of his release would arise on November 10, 2030, after he had served 25 years.

The Union of India would abide by the assurance at the appropriate time, subject to remedies which may be available, the affidavit said.

In July, the High Court admitted Salem’s plea seeking remission and early release, but said that he was yet to complete the 25-year term, and that his plea would be heard in due course.

This week, the state informed the court in an affidavit that Salem does not have a “palatable history”, citing the criminal offences he had been convicted of. It said that given his criminal record, Salem was a “Category 8” prisoner who would have to spend 60 years in jail before being considered for release.

However, as per the agreement with the Portuguese, Salem would not be put in jail for more than 25 years, the state said. But these 25 years would be “actual imprisonment”, and would not include remission. Therefore, he cannot be released before 2030.

**3. What is gerrymandering and why Democrat lawmakers fled Texas**



**Gerrymandering Texas 2025:** Lawmakers fleeing the state, the President threatening to get the FBI involved, and other states planning retaliatory moves — Texas, the second largest state in the US, is in the middle of a massive political standoff. At the heart of it is ‘gerrymandering’, which the Republicans in the state are resorting to with an eye on the midterm elections next year.

What is gerrymandering, and why has it turned into a political flashpoint?

**Why have Democrat lawmakers left Texas?**

Texas Republican leaders, backed by US President Donald Trump, recently moved to redraw the lines of electoral districts in the state. Basically, the effort is to create districts where Republican voters are concentrated in a way that gives that party an advantage.

Usually, this redrawing happens every 10 years, after the census. But Texas is going for a rare — though legal — mid-decade redrawing, to help the Republicans win more seats in the midterm polls. “I won Texas. I got the highest vote in the history of Texas, as you probably know, and we are entitled to five more seats,” Trump recently told CNBC.

The Texas House requires two thirds of legislators to be present for a vote. The Texas House of Representatives in Austin has 150 seats and Democrats hold 62 of them. To stop the vote, 57 Democratic state lawmakers left Texas, scattering across the country and denying the legislature the required quorum.

**What is gerrymandering?**

Gerrymandering is the redrawing of voting districts in a way that benefits one party over another.

As stated earlier, after every national census, states adjust their electoral maps to account for population changes. But how those lines are redrawn depends on state laws. And in many states, it’s politicians who control that process.

So, instead of creating fair, competitive districts, parties in power often redraw maps to give themselves an edge, sometimes a big one.

**How does it skew democracy?**

Think of it as politicians choosing their voters, rather than the other way around. There are two main tactics:

**Packing**: Concentrating voters from the opposition party into a few districts, so they win big there but have no influence elsewhere.

**Cracking**: Splitting opposition voters across many districts so they cannot form a majority in any one of them.

Both strategies reduce the power of certain votes and make elections less competitive overall.

For example, in North Carolina, the overall vote share between Democrats and Republicans is relatively even. But Republicans currently hold 10 out of 14 congressional seats largely because of how the districts have been drawn.

**Where does the word ‘gerrymandering’ come from?**

The term dates back more than 200 years. In 1812, Elbridge Gerry, then the governor of Massachusetts, approved a voting map with one district so oddly shaped, critics said it looked like a salamander. A newspaper dubbed it the “Gerry-mander” and the term stuck.

Ironically, Gerry (whose name was pronounced “Gary”) didn’t even support the redrawing idea, and signed the Bill because his party wanted him to. But the political fallout lasted far longer than his career.

**Is gerrymandering legal?**

Yes.

In 2019, the US Supreme Court ruled that courts couldn’t block gerrymandering done to help a political party. The majority opinion said it wasn’t the judiciary’s role to referee partisan power struggles in this way.

However, there are limits. Gerrymandering that reduces the voting power of racial minorities is prohibited under the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But even those protections have been compromised in recent years through a series of court decisions.

**Can Democrats keep blocking this vote?**

Only as long as they stay out of reach.

By fleeing the state, they have denied the House the quorum it needs to operate. But that tactic comes at a steep cost, literally. Each absent lawmaker is being fined $500 a day. If they don’t return, those penalties could exceed $3 million by the end of the year.

**Have Democrats indulged in gerrymandering?**

Yes, when they have the chance.

In Illinois, for example, Democrats won 14 out of 17 House seats in 2024, despite only narrowly beating Republicans in the popular vote. But in states like California, Democrats have voluntarily handed redistricting over to independent commissions. This move, meant to make elections fairer, limits their ability to gerrymander. Republican states with similar commissions have often overridden them.

In light of the Texas drama, Democratic Governors of states like California and Illinois have said they would look at mounting a similar attempt in their states.

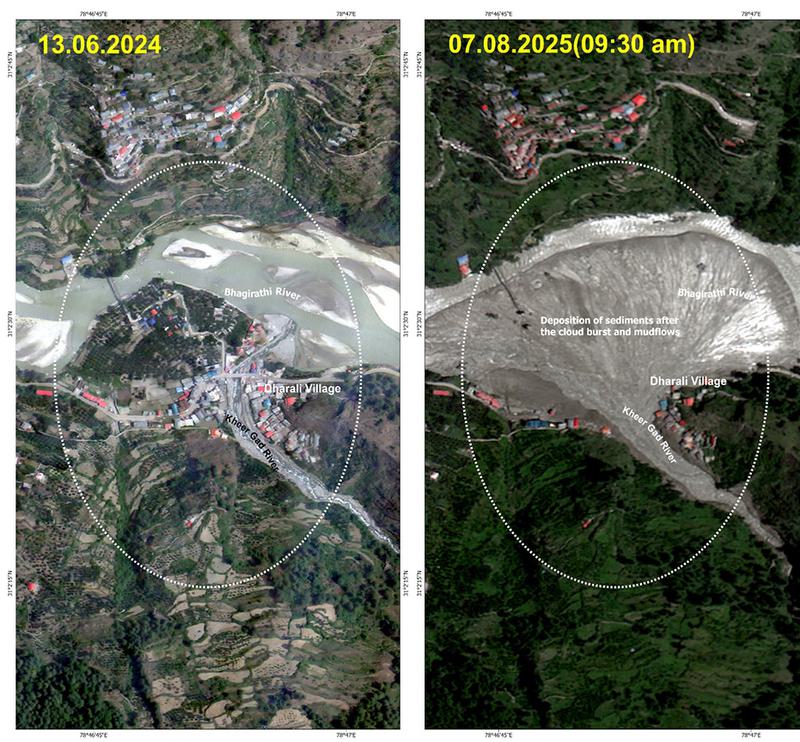
**How does this affect the US midterms?**

Midterm elections almost always deliver losses for the sitting president’s party. If that trend holds, Trump and the Republicans are likely to face headwinds in 2026. Gerrymandering is one way to blunt those losses.

But if voter sentiment shifts strongly, even the most carefully drawn maps cannot hold back a wave. Democrats only need a few more seats to flip the House and even aggressive redistricting might not be enough to stop that.

**The Hindu**

**1. Uncertainty prevails over the cause of Uttarkashi flash flood**



Days after heavy rain triggered a flash flood and an avalanche of debris that deluged Dharali in Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, uncertainty prevails over what caused the disaster.

As of Thursday, rescue and relief operations in Uttarkashi have delayed scientific investigations into the cause of the disaster.

“We are planning a reconnaissance, but, currently, accessing the sites is difficult. Rainfall data that we have from the India Meteorological Department suggests that this was not a cloudburst,” Vineet Kumar Gahalaut, Director, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehradun, said. “It is possible that there is a glacier lake overflow or heavy rain triggering a landslide of accumulated silt and debris,” he said.

**Challenges persist**

While cloudbursts are not unexpected given the prevailing monsoon conditions, they are challenging to forecast, and confirming them requires specific instruments, including a doppler weather radar (DWR) that can image them, as well as an automatic weather station (AWS) that can provide hourly data on rainfall, temperature, wind, and humidity. There are three DWRs in Uttarakhand, but even between them, they leave vast stretches of the Upper Himalayas unmapped. Data from the AWSs is not publicly shared.

Rainfall data from the IMD only indicates eight-hour or 24-hour rainfall data. On August 5, the day of the deluge, rainfall data for Uttarakhand showed, for instance, that Haridwar (Haridwar district) reported 30 cm of rainfall over the previous 24 hours; Narendranagar (Garhwal Tehri district) reported 17 cm; Rishikesh (Dehradun district) 14 cm; Jolly Grant (Dehradun district) 13 cm; and Kotdwara (Garhwal Pauri district) 12 cm. While this is significant rain, it is not known whether this was concentrated over a short duration or averaged over a day.

“While the data we have so far does not indicate a cloudburst, I cannot entirely rule it out,” M. Mohapatra, Director-General, IMD, said. “It is theoretically possible there was a cloudburst in the upper reaches [of the Himalayas] where we do not have instruments. Satellite imagery and other remote sensing could provide some answers, and I believe that the National Disaster Management Agency is coordinating some investigation on it.”

**2. How groundwater contamination is fuelling chronic illnesses**

Groundwater contamination in India has escalated into a national public health crisis; fluoride contamination, arsenic exposure, nitrate contamination, uranium, and heavy metals all affect drinking water and cause widespread health consequences; a bold, coordinated, and multi-dimensional strategy is the need of the hour.

Despite India’s rivers and seasonal monsoons, it is groundwater that sustains most of the nation’s domestic and agricultural needs. Over 85% of rural drinking water and 65% of irrigation water come from below the surface. However, the rapid and often unregulated extraction of this vital resource has triggered a growing yet largely invisible crisis: groundwater pollution. Once considered nature’s purest reserve, groundwater is now contaminated with nitrates, heavy metals, industrial toxins, and pathogenic microbes — posing a silent but grave threat to millions.

The 2024 Annual Groundwater Quality Report by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) reveals alarming findings. More than 20% of samples from 440 districts were contaminated with nitrates, largely due to the overuse of chemical fertilizers and leaching from septic systems. Excessive fluoride was detected in over 9% of samples, causing widespread dental and skeletal fluorosis — particularly in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Arsenic levels in parts of Punjab and Bihar far exceeded the World Health Organization (WHO) limit of 10 g/L, increasing the risk of cancer and neurological disorders. Districts in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan reported uranium concentrations above 100 ppb — attributed to phosphate fertilizers and unregulated groundwater withdrawal.

Over 13% of tested samples also exceeded safe limits for iron, contributing to gastrointestinal and developmental disorders.

These figures are not mere statistics — they reflect systemic neglect and policy inertia.

**Groundwater death zones**

In Budhpur, Baghpat (Uttar Pradesh), 13 people died within a fortnight this year, from kidney failure and related complications — allegedly linked to toxic discharges from nearby paper and sugar mills contaminating local borewells. In Jalaun, residents reported petroleum-like fluids from hand pumps due to suspected underground fuel leaks. In Paikarapur, Bhubaneswar, sewage seepage from a faulty treatment plant led to the mass illness of hundreds.

These are not isolated incidents. These events reveal a disturbing pattern of weak enforcement, institutional apathy, and the public invisibility of a growing underground disaster.

Groundwater contamination in India has escalated into a national public health crisis. Studies by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and WHO India have documented widespread health consequences due to toxic substances in drinking water.

Fluoride contamination affects 230 districts across 20 States. Around 66 million people suffer from skeletal fluorosis — a debilitating condition that causes joint pain, bone deformities, and stunted growth, particularly in children. In Rajasthan, over 11,000 villages have reported cases. In Jhabua (Madhya Pradesh), fluoride levels exceed 5 mg/L, with 40% of tribal children affected. Unnao (Uttar Pradesh) has recorded over 3,000 skeletal deformity cases.

The 2024 CGWB report found that 9.04% of 15,259 samples groundwater samples exceeded the WHO’s 1.5 mg/L fluoride limit. Sonebhadra (Uttar Pradesh) reported a 52.3% prevalence rate, and levels in Shivpuri (Madhya Pradesh) reached 2.92 mg/L. Effective interventions include defluoridation, improved nutrition, and provision of safe drinking water.

Arsenic exposure is concentrated in the Gangetic belt — including West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Assam — and leads to skin lesions, gangrene, respiratory problems, and various internal cancers. A study conducted in Bihar, published in *Nature Scientific Reports* in 2021, reveals that elevated blood arsenic levels make 1 in 100 individuals highly vulnerable to cancer, including cancers of the skin, kidney, liver, bladder, and lungs, as well as other secondary cancer types.

In Ballia (Uttar Pradesh), arsenic concentrations reached 200 g/L — 20 times the WHO limit — linked to over 10,000 cases of cancer and other diseases. In Bhojpur and Buxar districts of Bihar, similar impacts have been observed. While arsenic is geogenic, its mobilisation is worsened by groundwater over-extraction, mining, and irrigation. The 2024 CGWB report identified unsafe arsenic levels in 29 districts of Uttar Pradesh, with Bagpat recording 40 mg/L — 4,000 times above the safe threshold.

Nitrate contamination is rampant in northern India and poses a severe threat to infants. When baby formula is mixed with nitrate-laced water, it can cause “blue baby syndrome” (methemoglobinemia). The 2023 National Health Profile recorded a 28% rise in hospital admissions from acute nitrate toxicity over five years, particularly in Punjab, Haryana, and Karnataka. Today, 56% of districts exceed safe nitrate levels.

Uranium, once confined to select geological zones, is increasingly detected due to excessive groundwater extraction and fertiliser use. A study by the Central University of Punjab in the Malwa region found uranium levels in groundwater exceeding the WHO threshold of 30 g/L, posing serious risks of chronic organ damage and nephrotoxicity. The results showed that 66% of samples posed health risks for children and 44% for adults.

Heavy metals — lead, cadmium, chromium, mercury — enter groundwater from unchecked industrial discharges, causing developmental delays, anaemia, immune system issues, and neurological damage. The ICMR-National Institute for Research in Environmental Health (NIREH) found dangerously high blood lead levels among children near industrial clusters in Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) and Vapi (Gujarat).

Contamination from leaking septic systems and sewage infiltration has triggered repeated outbreaks of cholera, dysentery, and hepatitis A and E. In Paikarapur, Bhubaneswar, over 500 residents were recently affected by a waterborne disease outbreak tied to sewage-contaminated groundwater.

**Why the crisis persists**

The crisis is rooted in a fragmented regulatory system. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, scarcely addresses groundwater. The CGWB lacks statutory authority, and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) are under-resourced and technically constrained.

Industries operate with minimal oversight, and sanitation infrastructure, especially in rural and peri-urban India, remains deficient.

**Key structural issues include:**

Institutional fragmentation: agencies such as the CGWB, the CPCB, the SPCBs, and the Ministry of Jal Shakti operate in silos, often duplicating efforts and lacking coordination for integrated, science-based interventions.

**Weak legal enforcement:** While the Water Act exists, its enforcement — especially on groundwater discharge — is inadequate. Regulatory loopholes and lax compliance embolden polluters.

Lack of real-rime, publicly-accessible data: Monitoring is infrequent and poorly disseminated. Without early warning systems or integration with public health surveillance, contamination often goes undetected until after serious health outcomes emerge.

Over-extraction: Excessive pumping lowers water tables and concentrates pollutants, making aquifers more vulnerable to geogenic toxins and salinity intrusion.

India’s groundwater crisis calls for a bold, coordinated, and multi-dimensional strategy that integrates regulation, technology, health, and public participation. Some key reforms that need to be instituted are a national groundwater pollution control framework, modern monitoring infrastructure, targeted remediation and health interventions, waste reforms and citizen-centric groundwater governance.

India’s groundwater crisis is no longer about quantity — it is about safety and survival. Groundwater pollution is silent, invisible, and slow — but its damage is irreversible. Unless urgent, collective action is taken, we risk learning the value of clean water only when the well runs dry. And in doing so, we will pay the price not in rupees, but in lives and lost futures.

**3. Mending Ties: India and the Philippines are showing intent in improving their relations**

The state visit of Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to India that ends on Friday, and his meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi provided a hard power edge to the two countries, with historical-cultural ties between them, by signing a Strategic Partnership Agreement. On his first visit to India since taking office in 2022, Mr. Marcos has taken a strong position against Chinese incursions in the West Philippine Sea, and has been keen to engage India more closely. Coinciding with his visit, the Indian Navy held its first joint maritime exercises with the Philippine Navy in the South China Sea area. The drills were criticised by China. India has consistently supported the 2016 UNCLOS tribunal arbitration award in favour of the Philippines, calling on China to respect the multilateral order in the Indo-Pacific, and Mr. Marcos appreciated this. Moreover, while India has signed dozens of such Partnership Agreements worldwide, for the Philippines, India is only its fifth Strategic Partner — after Japan, Vietnam, Australia, and South Korea.

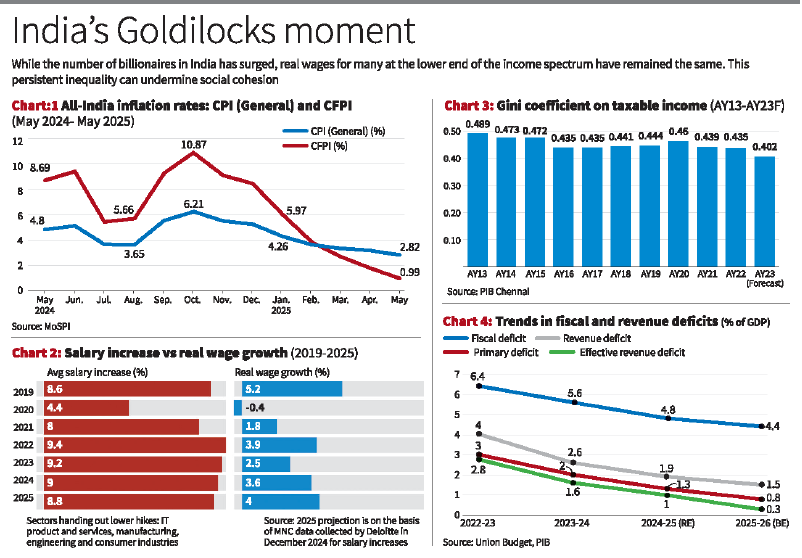
The Philippines is also the first export destination for the BrahMos missile, and Mr. Marcos is understood to have expressed interest in buying more Indian military hardware. The two sides signed agreements to enhance strategic cooperation, including an exchange of Terms of Reference for all three services and the Coast Guard. They also agreed to free up visas and begin direct flights. There is no substantial bilateral trade at present — $3.3 billion in 2024-25 — but investments are growing as technology and pharma companies have tied up in many areas.

The Marcos-Modi meetings sent out a more comprehensive message for India’s ties with South East Asia. The Philippines is the incoming chair for ASEAN in 2026, and the coordinator for the ASEAN-India comprehensive strategic partnership. The invitation to Mr. Marcos was also a way of easing relations that have been riled by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal’s unnecessarily abrasive remarks in June, where he called many ASEAN countries the “B-team of China”, and mocked the 2009 ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA).

The government has since moved to fast-track talks to revise the AITIGA, with talks in Delhi next week. India and the Philippines have separately discussed launching talks for a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), indicating India’s intention to keep negotiating for a more liberalised trade regime globally even as it faces the brunt of the U.S.’s tariffs and penalties. The visit is a reminder that India’s interest in peace and security in the Indo-Pacific is not restricted to the Quad grouping, and that it is mindful of strengthening ties with all the countries in the region, especially as it essays the current geopolitical turbulence with bigger global powers.

**4. Is the Indian economy perfectly balanced?**

A few weeks back, India’s Finance Ministry declared the Indian economy to be in a “Goldilocks situation” — a rare alignment of moderate growth, subdued inflation and supportive monetary conditions. Analysts too, taking a narrow, quarterly view of the Indian economy conceded, marking this as a “mini-Goldilocks moment” for its macroeconomic position, spurred by 7.6% GDP growth, peaking interest rates and stable corporate earnings. A few other macroeconomic observers pointed out that India exiting FY2024 as a $3.6trillion economy with an underlying growth of over 7.6% projects a buoyant macroeconomic backdrop for 2025.



Yet beneath the veneer and hyper-optimistic outlook lies a more complex reality for India’s macroeconomic position. More astute observers of the Indian economy with historical data, question this so-called golden equilibrium which disguises underlying structural imbalances.

**Inflation and stagnant wage growth**

A closer look at Chart 1 reveals a nuanced story behind headline price stability. While the Consumer Price Index (CPI) indeed showed a commendable deceleration, falling from 4.8% in May 2024 to 2.82% by May 2025, hinting at inflation within the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) comfort zone, the path to this point and the underlying dynamics, warrant significant scrutiny.

Throughout much of 2024, the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) consistently ran significantly higher than general inflation. For instance, in October 2024, when CPI (General) peaked at 6.21%, CFPI surged to an alarming 10.87%. Even in August 2024, with CPI at 3.65%, CFPI stood at 5.66%. This persistent divergence is critical because food accounts for nearly half of the consumption basket of an average Indian household, particularly within lower-income groups. High and volatile food inflation, driven by factors like unseasonal rains, supply chain disruptions and global commodity price fluctuations, severely erodes the purchasing power of the common citizen.

Economists like Dr. Pronab Sen have argued that policymakers such as the RBI should focus on core inflation rather than headline CPI inflation, because core inflation excludes volatile food and fuel prices and better reflects the sustained burden of price increases across essentials like housing, education, transport, and personal care.

For an average family, the meaning of 10% food inflation is a direct and painful cut in real income, forcing them to either compromise on dietary quality, incur debt or drastically reduce other essential expenditures. The eventual dip in CFPI to 0.99% by May 2025, while welcome, must be viewed in the context of the preceding periods of severe pressure. The volatility itself creates uncertainty and hinders household budgeting and savings, directly countering the stability implied by a “Goldilocks” environment.

This inflationary pressure on essentials directly impacts the everyday reality captured in Chart 2 which delivers one of the most compelling arguments against the “Goldilocks” perception. This data powerfully illustrates the chasm between nominal salary hikes and the actual improvement in purchasing power. For instance, in 2023, while the average salary increase was a respectable 9.2%, the real wage growth stood at a mere 2.5%. More critically, in 2020, real wage growth turned negative, registering -0.4%, even as nominal salaries saw a 4.4% rise. Even the 2025 projection of 4% real wage growth against an 8.8% average salary increase indicates that half of the nominal gain is still being eroded by inflation. This numerical gap translates into a tangible daily struggle. A 9% salary hike sounds promising, but if inflation is 7%, their actual ability to buy goods and services only increases by 2%.

This “silent squeeze” diminishes household savings, forces families to cut back on discretionary spending, and can lead to increased reliance on debt, particularly for those in sectors like IT product and services, manufacturing, engineering, and consumer industries, which usually hand out lower hikes.

**Income inequality**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and various labour economists have consistently pointed out challenges vis-à-vis job quality and stagnant real wages in many emerging economies, including India. Without substantial and sustained growth in real wages, the consumption demand, which is a critical driver for the Indian economy, remains constrained, undermining the foundations of a truly buoyant and broad-based economic recovery.

This unevenness in economic gains also finds reflection in Chart 3, which offers a glimpse into income distribution. The Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality, shows fluctuations over the decade, starting at a high of 0.489 in AY13, dipping to 0.435 in AY16, and forecasted at 0.402 for AY23. While a declining Gini coefficient on taxable income might suggest some improvement, it is crucial to recognise the limitations.

Taxable income primarily captures the formal sector and those above a certain income threshold, potentially missing the vast informal sector and the broader distribution of wealth. A recent essay by ORF authors Garima Nain and Ria Kasliwal describe India’s post-pandemic economy as a multi-speed or K-shaped recovery, where certain segments, particularly the affluent and those in specific industries, thrive, while others lag.

While the number of billionaires in India has surged, real wages for many at the lower end of the income spectrum have remained the same. This persistent inequality can undermine social cohesion, limit access to quality education and healthcare for a large segment of the population, and ultimately stifle long-term inclusive growth. When a significant portion of the population feels left behind, despite robust GDP numbers, the notion of a universally beneficial “Goldilocks” state becomes deeply questionable.

Adding to these domestic pressures, Chart 4 showcases the government’s fiscal position and its trajectory. While there’s a clear commitment to fiscal consolidation, with the fiscal deficit projected to decline from 6.4% in 2022-23 to 4.4% in 2025-26 (budget estimate), and the revenue deficit decreasing from 4% to 1.5% over the same period, the absolute levels of these deficits remain substantial.

The primary deficit, which indicates the current year’s borrowing excluding interest payments on past debt, is also projected to fall from 3% to 0.8%. However, for a developing economy like India, sustained high deficits can pose several macroeconomic challenges. They necessitate significant government borrowing, which can potentially crowd out private investment by increasing demand for funds and putting upward pressure on interest rates. This could deter private businesses from investing and expanding, thus limiting job creation and overall economic growth.

Furthermore, a high public debt-to-GDP ratio (which stood at around 81% for the general government in 2022-23, significantly above the fiscal responsibility and budget management Act target of 60%) implies a substantial portion of future revenues will be diverted to servicing this debt. For the average citizen, this translates into reduced fiscal space for critical public spending on social sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure, or potentially higher taxes in the future to manage the debt burden.

**Complicating the goldilocks narrative**

Taken together, these critical indicators, volatile food inflation eroding purchasing power, persistent income disparities despite growth, stagnant real wages for the majority, and a tight fiscal space, paint a picture far more complex than the harmonious “Goldilocks” narrative suggests. The so-called macro sweet spot is not universally experienced, and therefore, its underlying fragilities are becoming increasingly apparent. The socio-economic realities on the ground, consistently analysed by a broad spectrum of economists, reveal that the journey towards inclusive and sustainable prosperity for all Indians remains an uphill climb.

Indeed, for those willing to look beyond the headlines and delve into the granular data, the myth of the macro sweet spot is cracking open.

The allure of a “Goldilocks” economy, while comforting, risks obscuring the lived realities of millions. True economic equilibrium transcends mere GDP numbers or headline inflation targets; it’s fundamentally about how these aggregate statistics translate into tangible improvements in daily lives.

When real wages stagnate against rising costs, when growth disproportionately benefits a select few, and when the government operates under significant fiscal constraints, the promise of a “just right” economy rings hollow for the common household. India’s true economic strength will not be defined by fleeting perceptions of balance, but by its capacity to foster genuinely inclusive growth, bolster real incomes, and build robust fiscal resilience for all its citizens. It is in addressing these profound challenges, rather than embracing a superficial sweet spot, that India’s sustainable economic future lies.

**PIB**

**1. Parliament Clears Coastal Shipping Bill, 2025 to Boost India’s Coastal Economy**

In a historic moment towards boosting the Coastal Economy of the country, the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2025 was passed by the Rajya Sabha today. This historic act is set to unlock the tremendous and vast potential of India’s 11,098 kms long strategic coastline, spanning nine coastal states and four union territories. The bill was proposed for adoption by the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW), Sarbananda Sonowal.

The Bill, which was earlier passed by the Lok Sabha on April 3, 2025, seeks to simplify and modernise the legal framework governing coastal shipping, replacing Part XIV of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 with a new-age, progressive legislation aligned with global cabotage norms.

Introducing the Bill in the Rajya Sabha, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal stated that the legislation is central to India’s ambition of *“increasing its coastal cargo share to 230 million metric tonnes by 2030, while strengthening the maritime sector’s contribution to Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat.*”

*“This is not merely a legal reform but a strategic enabler of economic growth, employment, and logistics efficiency. The Bill reduces regulatory burdens, enhances competitiveness of Indian vessels, and aligns with the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji’s long-term vision to make India a global maritime hub,”* the Union Minister said.

The Coastal Shipping Bill, 2025 comprises six chapters and 42 clauses. It introduces a simplified licensing system for coastal shipping and lays down the framework for regulating foreign vessels engaged in coasting trade. Additionally, the Bill mandates the formulation of a National Coastal and Inland Shipping Strategic Plan to guide future infrastructure development and policy direction.

The legislation also provides for the creation of a National Database for Coastal Shipping, enabling real-time access to authentic and regularly updated data. This database will keep potential investors informed about the government’s development plans and policy priorities in the sector, promoting transparency and confidence.

Once implemented, the Bill is expected to significantly enhance supply-chain security by increasing Indian ships’ participation in domestic cargo movement. *“Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, we are working on a mission mode towards building an Atmanirbhar Bharat. In the same spirit, this bill aims to reduce India’s dependence on foreign vessels, thereby preventing the outflow of foreign exchange. In doing so, it will catalyse local economic development, generate employment opportunities across coastal regions, and strengthen ease of doing business for Indian shipping operators”,* Sarbananda Sonowal further added.

*“With the passage of the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2025, India takes a decisive step towards building a seamless, efficient, and globally competitive coastal and inland shipping ecosystem. This landmark reform will unlock the immense potential of our coastline, enhance supply chain resilience, and drive economic growth in line with our national vision of Viksit Bharat,”*said  the Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

With the passage of the Coastal Shipping Act, 2025, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways has successfully secured Parliamentary approval for all three critical marine legislations — the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2025, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025, and the Coastal Shipping Act — paving the way for a modern, efficient, and self-reliant maritime ecosystem in line with the vision of *Viksit Bharat* and *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.

*“Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, our ministry has undertaken historic legislative reforms to modernise India’s maritime sector. With the passage of all three landmark bills — the Merchant Shipping Bill, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, and the Coastal Shipping Act — we are laying a strong foundation for a future-ready maritime ecosystem that supports Atmanirbhar Bharat and propels us closer to the goal of Viksit Bharat,”*said Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

With the passage of this landmark legislation, India moves a step closer to building an integrated, efficient, and globally competitive coastal and inland shipping ecosystem.

**9th August**

**1. After Trump doubles tariff, India’s strategy: Remain quiet, don’t give in, wait it out for now**

US President Donald Trump may have doubled the tariffs on India to 50 per cent, but New Delhi is not alarmed or unduly perturbed; rather the government seems to be prepared to wait it out for the next few weeks or more — deal with his increasing frustration by remaining calm.

Simultaneously, it has taken an unequivocal call that Trump cannot tell India not to trade with Russia or distance itself from BRICS.

“These are India’s sovereign decisions. We will never sacrifice our sovereignty,” said a source aware of the developments. “We are willing to negotiate on tariffs and trade with the US, but Trump has continuously shifted the goalpost. Buying defence spare parts or oil from Russia, which is India’s all-weather and consistent friend, or being a member of a global grouping like BRICS – these are issues which are not related to trade with the US and are non-negotiable,” the source said.

India is one of the first few countries to have kick-started talks with the US on a trade agreement, and an interim deal was expected before August 1.

“We were progressing really well and were very close to a deal,” said another source. “Yes, there are red lines given the nature of our economy. Agriculture and dairy concern the livelihoods of a large population of poor farmers; there is little to no flexibility in opening up these sectors,” the source said.

“But our negotiators are taking part in the talks with the US in good faith and with authority – when we concede on a particular subject, we stick to it. It has not been the same on the part of the US. It has happened that US officials agreed on some issue, but then changed their stance due to lack of political clearance; at times, they have been apologetic about this too… Having said this, the negotiations have been very constructive; we were within striking distance of an agreement. But diplomatic and non-trade issues have cropped up,” said another source without elaborating on the specifics of the trade negotiations.

What has kept New Delhi guessing is why Trump is ratcheting up the pressure given the pivot India-US relations took two decades ago and the arc of the strategic cooperation between the two countries.

“One explanation is that he is quite frustrated that India is holding up… unwilling to bend, when many other countries have,” said a top political functionary aware of the negotiations between India and the US.

One of the two sources quoted above said there could be another reason why Trump is irritated. “The US President has repeatedly said he helped bring peace between India and Pakistan – that he stopped the war. We never acknowledged it, because it is absolutely not true. In fact, the government has denied it,” the source said.

From New Delhi’s perspective, countries negotiating with Trump fall under two categories. First, countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan which couldn’t really put up stiff resistance, and did not stand up to his pressure tactics; they are learnt to have given huge concessions, including possibly political conditions. Then, there are countries like China and Canada; they speak up, openly challenge and even retaliate.

“India has found its own way – the middle way to resist. We do not criticise in public, but we stand up and do not buckle under pressure, all of this without making much noise,” the sources said, describing it as “quiet non-submission.”

High tariffs by the US will hurt exports, but taking the economy in a very static sense, imports are seen to be far more critical than exports today. “Exports can, should and will power the economy in the coming years. We will wind our way through this carefully…,” one of the sources said.

**2. What to expect from the Trump-Putin meeting**

Where does the Russia-Ukraine war stand? Which side would be happier if the war ended today?

Currently, Russia is winning, and Ukraine will be unhappy under all circumstances. Although Russia is yet to fully capture the four oblasts (Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson) that were constitutionally incorporated into Russia in 2022, most experts agree that if the current tempo of the war is sustained, they will get there by the end of the year.

After losing Crimea in 2014, Ukraine has lost another 20% of its territory, and may lose more land in the coming months. Ukraine has neither the economic power nor the human resources to turn the tide of the war.

Russia may be challenged if NATO enters the war but that could lead to a quick escalation to the nuclear level. This is why NATO, while supporting Ukraine’s war efforts, has been very careful not to cross certain red lines. This is unlikely to change.

In this context, what does a meeting between President Donald Trump and President Vladimir Putin aim to achieve?

The two leaders will enter the meeting with very different expectations.



Trump will hope to extract some kind of a promise from Putin — at the very least of a ceasefire that will halt the fighting. Trump believes he has the personality and the leverage to get Putin to agree to whatever he wants.

But Russia’s President is unlikely to agree to any deal unless he is given guarantees that Ukraine will never become a member of NATO and will not receive any security guarantees from the West. Moreover, Putin will insist that the territories his forces have captured, including Crimea, be recognised as Russian.

**Is Putin likely to receive these guarantees?**

During his presidential campaign and in the first months of his presidency, Trump indicated that he was willing to consider several of Russia’s demands.

The US President does not see Ukraine as a part of NATO, a grouping that he personally doesn’t appear to be too invested in. Trump and members of his administration had also indicated that they were not averse to Ukraine ceding territory to Russia to end the war.Trump does not consider the war in Ukraine to be a legacy that he has to continue. Given that Ukraine is not that strategically important to the US, Trump does not see the war as a path to achieving American dominance in world affairs. In fact, he was trying to push Ukraine into accepting these demands, as his public bust-up with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the White House made clear.

But with the so-called peace deal not coming together, Trump, who sees himself as a great peacemaker, is irritated. The pro-Ukrainian lobby in the US has had time to work on him, and the President seems to have had a change of heart since the end of May. The President also seems to have been cornered by his own rhetoric. Having signed agreements with Ukraine, talked about the country’s sovereignty, and reopened arms supplies, he will find it difficult to walk back to his older position.

Nevertheless, the Russians have said that Trump’s envoy Steve Witkoff had during his talks with Putin on August 6 presented an “acceptable” offer for peace. This is an indication that the US appears to be seriously considering Russia’s concerns about Europe’s security architecture.

**Can Trump’s secondary sanctions compel Putin to agree to a deal?**

Trump undoubtedly is using these secondary sanctions as leverage to get Russia to the negotiating table.

The problem for Russia is that these secondary sanctions affect other countries, such as China and India. Russia has survived a lot of sanctions and, in a sense, built a sanctions-proof economy. But Russia will suffer if — and this is still a big if — it is unable to sell its natural resources or trade with the world. A substantial part of its budget comprises taxes on exported natural resources including oil and gas.

At the same time, from a Russian perspective, they are fighting an existential threat. Ukraine becoming a part of NATO, meaning that Western countries could put their weapon systems and people on Ukrainian soil, is a red line for Russia. Given this aim, it is unlikely that Russia will compromise due to economic pressure.

Putin may indeed agree to a ceasefire, but he will only do so if it suits Russia’s interests. Given the stakes for him and the state of the war, he is very much in the driver’s seat.

**Where does this leave Ukraine?**

Zelenskyy had hoped that by signing the critical minerals deal with the US, the Americans would be forced to enter the war to protect their own interests in the minerals covered under the deal. But Trump’s likely meeting with Putin indicates that the deal alone is not enough for the US to commit to war.

The Ukrainian President has been calling up various European leaders and trying to get himself invited to the Trump-Putin meeting. He is worried that Putin may be able to persuade Trump to accept some of the positions that Russia has been voicing from the beginning of the war — which the American President himself does not appear to be fundamentally against.

**What are the implications for Europe, whose leaders have framed the war as an existential threat to the continent?**

There is not a shred of evidence that any European leader can provide about Russia’s aggressive intentions towards even the Baltic countries, let alone Western Europe. This is a scare that European elites created and ingrained in people’s minds as a distraction from the situation on the continent.

Europe is facing a recession. The European Union, at least Germany, which has long been the locomotive of the EU’s development, is facing deindustrialisation. There are fundamental issues with the economic model that the EU had going: they were buying cheap energy from Russia to make products to sell to the world, particularly China. Now, they are being squeezed at both ends. The war has stopped the flow of Russian gas to Europe, and the Americans are pressuring the EU to restrict its interactions with China.

As the European economies struggle, it is the European elites — and not Europe itself — who face an existential crisis. If they were to back out of supporting Ukraine now, they would definitely not survive in power, especially with far right parties already posing serious challenges to traditional political elites. Europe’s elites are, in effect, stuck: they cannot help Ukraine win the war, but ending it by acquiescing to Russian demands will be an unacceptable defeat.

**For India, what does a Trump-Putin meeting entail?**

India is caught in Trump’s attempt to exert leverage on Russia. His “extra” tariffs have put India in a difficult position. To use a phrase used by former National Security Adviser J N Dixit, India will need to do a “complicated Bharatnatyam dance” to extricate itself from this situation.

The US is our largest trading partner. It is also one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus that offsets, at least partially, the deficit we have with China and Russia.

India is not a fully export-oriented economy, and the tariffs, as they are structured, provide India with some wiggle room. For example, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals and IT products are exempt from the tariffs imposed for import of Russian crude. India has to decide whether ceasing to buy cheap oil from Russia is worth the hit that American tariffs will entail.

This is also about the country’s image. If India gives in to Trump’s demands it is likely to be perceived as “weak” and its image as a global leader is likely to be hit. This also will have to be part of the calculations on how India should proceed.

In this difficult situation, the best would be if Trump and Putin were to agree on a roadmap to peace next week. Such an agreement would likely make the threat of additional tariffs irrelevant.

**3. AgustaWestland scam accused Christian Michel’s plea rejected: When can an undertrial be freed from prison?**

****Christian Michel, accused in the AgustaWestland case, in court. (File/PTI)

What if an undertrial prisoner has spent more time in jail than the maximum punishment for the offence that he has allegedly committed? Will they be automatically released from prison?

This is the point of contention raised in a Delhi court by accused Christian James Michel, an alleged middleman in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper “scam”, while arguing for release. The court on Thursday (August 7) rejected Michel’s plea.

**The case**

In 2010, AgustaWestland International Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Italian state-backed defence major Finmeccanica (now known as Leonardo) signed a Rs 3,726.96 crore contract to supply 12 AW-101 helicopters to the Indian Air Force (IAF). Eight of these helicopters were to be used to transport VVIPs such as the President, the Prime Minister, the Vice President and others, while four were to be used for other purposes.

In 2011, an investigation by the Italian attorney general’s office into alleged unethical dealings by Finmeccanica widened to include IAF’s deal with AgustaWestland. The Italian probe accused former IAF chief Air Chief Marshal S P Tyagi, through his cousins, of receiving bribes to change the terms of the tender that allowed AgustaWestland to win the Indian contract.

James, a highly placed defence consultant, was allegedly one of the middlemen who facilitated the bribes to get the deal done. According to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), James had bribed IAF officers, Defence Ministry officials, bureaucrats and politicians.

There are currently two investigations against Michel, one by the CBI and the other by the Enforcement Directorate. While he has been granted bail in both cases, Michel has refused to furnish bail bonds citing “security reasons”. He has been imprisoned in Delhi’s Tihar jail since 2018.

**Section 436-A of CrPC**

Michel had argued in court that he is entitled to be released under Section 436-A Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973.

Titled ‘Maximum period for which an under trial prisoner can be detained’, the section states that an undertrial prisoner cannot be held in prison for a period exceeding the maximum period of punishment for his offence. Release in such a circumstance is a statutory obligation, and thus automatic.

The section also states that a person who has spent at least half of the maximum period of imprisonment specified for his particular offence may be released, provided the offence does not carry the penalty of death. In this situation, however, the release of the undertrial is not automatic but subject to the court’s discretion after it hears the public prosecutor.

Section 436-A was inserted in the CrPC in 2006, due to concerns that many undertrials were being detained for periods well beyond the maximum stipulated for their offence.

Today, three in four prisoners (around 4.4 lakh persons) in India’s jails are undertrials, 9% of whom (some 39,000) have spent more than three years in prison, according to the National Crime Records Bureau’s latest report.

Nine in ten prisoners in Delhi courts are undertrials, and there are close to 410 prisoners (2% of prison population) in Delhi’s jails who have spent more than 5 years in jail.

Section 436-A is often the last resort for many undertrials to be freed from prison.

**Michel’s case**

Michel cited Section 436-A of the CrPC in court, arguing that he has already served the maximum prescribed sentence of seven years in the alleged offence of corruption in the CBI case.

The CBI, however, [opposed Michel’s plea](https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/agustawestland-chopper-scam-accused-michel-cant-be-released-cbi-ed-tell-delhi-court-10169900/)saying that he also has a case under Section 467 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) (‘Forgery of valuable securities and wills’) which carries a maximum punishment of life imprisonment. This, the Bureau argued, made him ineligible for release.

“After charges are framed minus 467 of the IPC, he has to plead guilty. Only then can my Lords say that his sentence is over. Otherwise he has to approach a constitutional court (the High Court or the Supreme Court) by way of writ,” Senior Advocate and Special Public Prosecutor D P Singh, representing the CBI, had told the court.

Michel’s lawyer Aljo K Joseph, on the other hand, also sought refuge in Article 17 of the Extradition Treaty between the Government of the Republic of India and the United Arab Emirates, the country from which Michel was extradited in December 2018.

“The person to be extradited shall not be tried or punished in the requesting State (in this case India) except for the offence for which his extradition is sought or for offences connected therewith, or offences committed after his extradition…,” the section states.

Aljo argued that Section 467 of the IPC was not among the sections that his client’s extradition was sought on, and hence should not be counted while considering Michel’s release.

The court, however, rejected this argument. “Considering the allegations under Section 467 of the IPC which entails life imprisonment, it cannot be said that the accused has already undergone the period of maximum punishment prescribed for the alleged offences,” Special Judge Sanjay Jindal said.

**Need for reform**

Out of 511 sections in the IPC, there are over 70 that have life imprisonment as the maximum sentence for the offence. These are the only offences in which release will not be automatic for an undertrial prisoner irrespective of the time they have spent in judicial custody.

However, researchers have for long argued that many offences in India are “over criminalised”. For instance, life imprisonment is not only the maximum punishment for heinous offences, but also for some relatively less egregious offences.

These include having possession of forged court records or public register, counterfeiting a device or mark used for authenticating documents or possessing counterfeit marked material, fraudulent cancellation, destruction of will, authority to adopt, or valuable security and importing, exporting, selling, delivering or using as genuine, forged, or counterfeit coin, government stamp, currency-notes or bank-notes.

‘The State of the System’, a database of all criminal offences across Central laws compiled by Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, points out that more than 75% of all crimes are defined under laws that regulate areas beyond core criminal justice, such as shipping, taxation, financial institutions, and municipal governance, and that 73% of all crimes are punishable by jail terms ranging from one day to 20 years.

**4. Why PM Modi spoke of farmers, livestock rearers & fisherfolk amid US trade talks**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday that his government would never compromise the interests of India’s *kisaan* (farmers), *pashupaalak* (livestock rearers) and *machhuaare* (fisherfolk), even if it entailed his paying a*vyaktigat roop se bahut badi keemat* (very heavy personal price).

Both the occasion – an international conference to commemorate the birth centenary of the Father of India’s Green Revolution M S Swaminathan – and the context – the stalled trade talks between India and the United States – suggested that the Prime Minister was responding to pressure from the Donald Trump administration to open up the country’s market to American farm produce.

Modi did not refer to the deadlocked negotiations or to Trump, including the US President’s unilateral action to impose a 50% tariff on Indian goods imported into the US.

But the Prime Minister’s clear identification of *kisaan*, *pashupaalak* and *machhuaare*, and placing their interests as his government’s *sarvochch praathamikta* (topmost priority) suggests clearly that the signal was to the US side that there are red lines as far as agriculture is concerned.

**What are the concerns specific to the three primary agricultural producer-stakeholders that have hindered the finalisation of the India-US bilateral trade agreement?**

**Farmers**

As far as the *kisaan* go, the main issue has to do with the US pressure on India to open up its domestic market to genetically modified (GM) soyabean and maize (corn). Both crops are widely grown in India – on some 13 million and 12 million hectares respectively.

However, average per-hectare corn yields in India, at around 3.5 tonnes, are a fraction of the 11 tonnes in the US. In soyabean, too, Indian average yields are just over 0.9 tonnes, as against the 3.5 tonnes in the US.

This difference is to a significant extent on account of American farmers cultivating GM varieties that can tolerate the application of herbicides such as glyphosate and glufosinate, or resist attacks by specific insect pests.

Indian farmer organisations, not surprisingly, fear that allowing imports of GM maize and soyabean from the US would lead to a crash in domestic prices. They consider such opening to be unfair, when the planting of GM crops (other than cotton) is not permitted in India.

The US also wants India to allow imports of ethanol for use as bio-fuel. Currently, only ethanol produced from domestically grown sugarcane, maize, and rice is used for blending up to 20% with petrol.

Sugar mills have opposed any move to import maize for bio-fuel purposes. They say that this will ultimately hurt India’s *ganna kisaan* – sugarcane farmers.

**Livestock rearers**

Coming to *pashupaalak* – there is all-round opposition from the Indian dairy industry to the imports of milk powder, butter oil, and cheese under any free trade agreement, whether with the US, the European Union, New Zealand, or Australia.

India levies 30% import duty on cheese, 40% on butter, and 60% on milk powder.

There is also the requirement – which the US claims is premised purely on religious and cultural grounds – that all imported dairy products should be derived from animals not fed on any formulation produced from the internal organs, bone meal or tissues of animals.

Any reduction of import duties, leave alone the relaxation of these non-tariff barriers, is unlikely in the present context.

**Fisherfolk**

In the case of *machhuaare*, the threat has less to do with imports and more with exports. India’s seafood exports to the US were valued at $2.48 billion in 2024, and a 32.5% growth has been posted in the first six months of this calendar year.

Given that the US is a major market, particularly for frozen shrimp, the latest Trump tariff of 50% can hugely impact aqua farmers in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu. This is more so when much lower tariffs of 10-20% have been put on competing countries such as Chile, Ecuador, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

**5. How to reduce risks from glacial lake bursts and carry out effective rescue operations**

The breaking of a glacial lake accompanied by heavy rain is suspected by some experts to have caused the flash flood in Dharali village in Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand on Tuesday (August 5).

Glaciologist Anil V Kulkarni, a distinguished scientist at Divecha Centre for Climate Change at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, has told *The Indian Express* that satellite images from September 2022, a non-winter month, showed evidence for past lake formations in the area from where the Kheer Ganga river, which caused the flood, originates.

If another lake had indeed formed recently, it could have been breached due to movements in glacier mass, Dr Kulkarni said.

Officials at the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) said they were looking at the possible detachment of a glacial snout (the ‘nose’ of a glacier where it breaks) that could have carried massive quantities of debris downstream.

More than 60 people are still reported to be missing as rescue operations entered the fourth day on Friday.

In October 2020, the NDMA, which is headed by Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](https://indianexpress.com/about/narendra-modi/), had issued detailed guidelines on ways to deal with disasters caused by what is technically referred to as a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF).

**What are GLOFs, and how vulnerable are the Himalayas to these phenomena?**

According to the NDMA, the retreat of glaciers as a result of climate change that is occurring in most parts of the Hindu Kush Himalayas has given rise to numerous new glacial lakes, breaches in which can cause Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs).

A GLOF occurs when a large mass of water dammed by a glacier or a moraine is released suddenly. When glaciers melt, the water in these glacial lakes accumulates behind loose naturally-formed “glacial/ moraine dams” made of ice, sand, pebbles, and ice residue. Unlike earthen dams, the weak structure of the moraine dam leads to its abrupt failure, which can release millions of cubic metres of water in a short time, causing catastrophic flooding downstream. Peak flows as high as 15,000 cubic metres per second have been recorded during such events.

Since glaciers in the Himalayas are in a retreating phase, glacial lakes are growing, and pose a potentially large risk to downstream infrastructure and life.

The National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) had completed a project during 2011-15 on “Inventory and Monitoring of Glacial Lakes/ Water Bodies in the Himalayan Region of Indian River Basins”, sponsored by the Climate Change Directorate of the Central Water Commission (CWC). It was observed at the time that there were 352, 283, and 1,393 glacial lakes and water bodies in the river basins of the Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra respectively.

**How can the risks from GLOFs be reduced?**

The NDMA guidelines say that risk reduction has to begin with identifying and mapping such lakes, taking structural measures to prevent their sudden breaches, and establishing mechanisms to save lives and property in times of a breach.

According to the NDMA, potentially dangerous lakes can be identified on the basis of the condition of lakes, dams, associated mother glaciers, and topographic features around the lakes and glaciers.

The identification of these lakes are based on field observations, processes and records of past events, geomorphological and geotechnical characteristics of the lake/ dam and its surroundings, and other physical conditions.

NDMA has recommended the use of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) imagery to detect changes in water bodies, including the formation of new lakes, during the monsoon months. It has said that methods and protocols could be developed to allow all-year remote monitoring of lake bodies from space as a complement and a precursor to ground-based early warning systems at critical lakes.

Structurally, the management of the situation requires a reduction in the volume of the water in the lake. This can be done through controlled breaching, the construction of an outlet-control structure, pumping or siphoning out the water from the lake, and making a tunnel through the moraine barrier or under an ice dam.

One such landslide that occurred along the Phuktal river, a tributary of the Zanskar river, on December 31, 2014 about 90 km from Padum in Kargil district of Ladakh, led to the blockage of the river and eventually a potential flood situation on May 7, 2015.

The NDMA created an Expert Task Force drawn from various organisations, which, along with the Indian Army, used controlled blasting and manual excavation to clear the landslide debris and channel the water from the dammed river.

**How well is India prepared to handle situations such as these?**

According to NDMA, while the Central Water Commission (CWC) has done some work on the identification of such lakes, work on building a robust early warning system (EWS) and a broad framework for infrastructure development, construction, and excavation in vulnerable zones is still continuing.

“In contrast to other countries, there are no uniform codes for excavation, construction, and grading codes in India. Restricting constructions and development in GLOF/ LLOF prone areas is a very efficient means to reduce risks at no cost,” the NDMA guidelines said.

According to the NDMA, no construction of habitation should be allowed in the high-hazard zone. “Existing buildings are to be relocated to a safer nearby region and all the resources for the relocation have to be managed by Central/ State governments. New infrastructure in the medium hazard zone have to be accompanied by specific protection measures,” it said.

NDMA has also emphasized that land use planning which avoids the hazards and minimizes the risks is the most effective and economical way to reduce losses caused due to landslides.

“There are no widely accepted procedures or regulation in India for land use planning in the GLOF/ LLOF prone areas. Such regulations need to be developed concerning the increased risk of future GLOF/LLOF events. …There should be monitoring systems prior to, during, and after construction of infrastructure and settlements in the downstream area,” it has said.

**What is the status of India’s Early Warning Systems (EWS) for such situations?**

One of the most promising options for efficient and effective disaster risk management is the implementation of EWS.

The number of implemented and operational GLOF EWS is still very small, even at the global scale. In the Himalayan region, only three cases – two in Nepal and one in China – have been reported where sensor- and monitoring-based technical systems for GLOF early warning have been implemented.

However, India does have a remarkable history of successful warnings in relation to Landslide Lake Outburst Floods (LLOFs) dating back to the 19th century.

In 1894, after a landslide in Gohna in today’s Uttarakhand dammed the main river, the engineer in charge estimated on July 5 of that year that the lake would overflow the dam in mid-August – which eventually happened.

Despite the devastating impact of the flood, including washing away of most of the buildings along the river and severe destruction in the town of Srinagar (Uttarakhand), no deaths were reported, thanks to the precise prediction of the event and related efficient dissemination of the early warning to the population. This was made possible by the installation of a telephone line between the lake and downstream towns such as Chamoli, Srinagar, etc.

**What are the guidelines for rescue operations in case of a disaster?**

\* Apart from calling in specialised forces such as the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the Indian Army, the NDMA has emphasised on the need to have trained local manpower.

“Experience has shown that over 80 per cent of search and rescue is carried out by the local community before the intervention of the state machinery and specialised search and rescue teams. Thus, trained and equipped teams consisting of local people must be set up in GLOF and LLOF prone areas,” the NDMA has said.

These local teams, it has said, will assist in planning and setting up emergency shelters, distributing relief packages, identifying missing people, and addressing the needs for food, health care, water supply and sanitation, education, etc. They will also be useful in identifying the most vulnerable people who may need special assistance following the disaster.

\* The NDMA has also called for comprehensive alarm systems. “Since GLOFs are very fast processes, an evacuation must be executed within a very short time, [which] requires an alarm infrastructure, clear protocols for all involved actors, and capacitation of the involved population and authorities. Besides classical infrastructure [such as] acoustic alarms by sirens, modern communication technology using cell phones can [be used],” the NDMA has said.

\* Specialized heavy earthmoving and search and rescue equipment should be made available to help clear debris and carry out search and rescue operations. It has also asked for motor launches, country boats, inflatable rubber boats, life jackets, lifebuoys, and similar equipment.

Acknowledging that earthmovers cannot at times reach the disaster spot due to inaccessibility or roads being washed away, the NDMA has asked for “innovative methods using locally available natural resources” to be used.

“It is important to innovate and design lighter machinery, which are more suitable to be carried in the mountains in a disassembled form,” it has said, adding that the disassembled parts can be carried in a helicopter and assembled at the spot.

\* It has asked authorities to build temporary shelters for the local people in raised locations to ensure resilience to landslides and floods.

\* Emergency medical response should be provided by Quick Reaction Medical Teams (QRMTs), mobile field hospitals, Accident Relief Medical Vans (ARMVs), and heli-ambulances in areas that cannot be accessed by roads.

“They will be activated to reach the affected areas immediately, along with dressing material, splints, portable X-ray machines, mobile operation theatres, resuscitation equipment and life-saving drugs, etc,” it has said.

\* It has also suggested the psychological counselling of victims, apart from the dissemination of accurate information following the disaster through press conferences and the use of mass media.

**The Hindu**

**1. Israel set for full control of Gaza City after security vote**

Israel’s military will “take control” of Gaza City under a new plan approved by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s security cabinet, touching off a wave of criticism on Friday.

Nearly two years into the war in Gaza, Mr. Netanyahu faces mounting pressure to secure a truce to pull the territory's more than two million people back from the brink of famine and free the hostages held by Palestinian militants.

**‘Security perimeter’**

Under the newly approved plan to “defeat” Hamas, the Israeli army “will prepare to take control of Gaza City while distributing humanitarian assistance to the civilian population outside combat zones”, the Premier’s office said Friday.

Before the decision, Mr. Netanyahu had said Israel planned to seize complete control of the Gaza Strip, but did not intend to govern it.

“We don’t want to keep it,” the Premier told *Fox News* on Thursday, adding Israel wanted a “security perimeter” and to hand the Palestinian territory to “Arab forces that will govern it properly without threatening us”.

Mr. Netanyahu’s office said the cabinet had adopted “five principles”, including Gaza’s demilitarisation and “the establishment of an alternative civil administration that is neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority”.

The plan triggered swift criticism, with China, Turkey, Britain and the UN’s rights chief as well as numerous Arab governments issuing statements of concern.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid denounced the cabinet’s move as “a disaster” that could result in “the death of the hostages, the killing of many soldiers... and lead to diplomatic bankruptcy”.

The main campaign group for hostages’ families also slammed the plan, saying it amounted to “abandoning” the captives.

“The cabinet chose last night to embark on another march of recklessness, on the backs of the hostages, the soldiers, and Israeli society as a whole,” the Hostage and Missing Families Forum said.

An expanded Israeli offensive could see ground troops operate in densely populated areas where hostages are believed to be held, local media have reported.

**‘Sacrificing hostages’**

Gaza residents said they feared for the worst, as they braced for the next onslaught. Hamas on Friday said the “plans to occupy Gaza City and evacuate its residents constitute a new war crime”.

It warned Israel that the operation would “cost it dearly”, and that “expanding the aggression means sacrificing” the hostages.

**2. Trump signals pause in trade talks with India over Russian oil**

After doubling tariffs on India to 50% over Russian oil imports, U.S. President Donald Trump has indicated that he may even pause trade talks between the two countries until the oil issue was “resolved”.

Speaking to journalists at the White House on Thursday, Mr. Trump responded to a specific question about whether there would now be an increased pace in negotiations for the bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

“No, not until we get it resolved,” Mr. Trump replied in what appeared to be a reference to his demand that India cancel its oil imports from Russia until the war in Ukraine ends.

A team of U.S. negotiators are due to travel to India on August 25 for the next round of BTA talks, that were launched when Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Washington in February this year.

Despite five rounds of face-to-face talks in Delhi and Washington, and more discussions over video conference, the negotiators were unable to agree to a “mini-deal” ahead of Mr. Trump’s August 1 deadline for global tariffs. As a result, Mr. Trump announced 25% tariffs on the import of Indian goods last week, and then followed it up with another 25% on Wednesday.

**3. Centre gave only ₹607 crore for hospitalisations worth ₹3,990 crore, says Selja**

Expressing concern over what she described as the worrying state of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana in Haryana, Sirsa Lok Sabha MP Kumari Selja on Friday said the Centre had released only around ₹600 crore for the scheme so far against hospitalisation worth ₹3,990 crore approved since the inception of the scheme.

Around 700 private hospitals in Haryana have already suspended treatment to the beneficiaries under the scheme from August 7 over outstanding dues running into several crores, she said.

Addressing a press conference in Chandigarh, Ms. Sejla said as per the data provided by Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Prataprao Jadhav in the Lok Sabha, Haryana has 1.35 crore Ayushman card holders and the State has approved 26.25 lakh hospitalisations worth approximately ₹3,990 crore. The Centre, however, has released only ₹607.73 crore to Haryana since the scheme’s inception, with costs shared between the Centre and State in a 60:40 ratio.

As per National Health Authority rules, the private hospitals empanelled under the scheme were required to be paid within 15 days for in-State treatments and within 30 days for out-of-State cases, said the Sirsa MP. Ms. Selja criticised the State’s reduced health department budget, which is ₹622 crore less than the previous year, while the government was still announcing plans for new medical colleges in every district.

In a press statement earlier this week, the State Health Agency said the Health and Family Welfare Department of Haryana had settled and paid the claims submitted by the empanelled hospitals till the first week of May. A total of ₹2,900 crore was disbursed to the hospitals since the inception of the scheme. During the current financial year, an amount of ₹240.63 crore had been received from the State and Central governments till July 16.

**4. Fix the flaws: Voter registration problems demand systemic solutions by the ECI**

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has levelled serious allegations of “criminal fraud” against the Election Commission of India (ECI), by claiming that over one lakh fake votes were created in the Mahadevapura Assembly segment of the Bangalore Central Lok Sabha constituency in order to ensure a victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2024 general election. His detailed presentation outlining five categories of alleged electoral malpractices demands careful examination, not wholesale dismissal.

The Congress leader’s documentation reveals troubling patterns: voters registered multiple times within the same constituency, identical Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers across different States, and improbably large numbers of voters listed at single addresses. While identical EPIC numbers across different States are not a significant issue — the ECI addressed these anomalies earlier this year — his claim that party workers found booth slips showing multiple votes by the “same person” in a single booth represents a serious violation of the “one person, one vote” principle, if verified. Mr Gandhi claimed that these discrepancies were not limited to Mahadevapura but were part of a calculated modus operandi to help the BJP in marginal constituencies across the country.

The Congress party had made similar allegations about massive increases in electoral registrations prior to the Maharashtra Assembly election, claiming that these had contributed to the unexpected victory of the BJP and its allies, though without elaborate proof of erroneous registrations as seen in Mahadevapura. Mr. Gandhi’s analysis stops short of proving that these discrepancies directly enabled the BJP’s victory. The BJP won the Mahadevapura Assembly seat in 2023 with a margin of approximately 44,500 votes. The increased margin, to over 1,14,000 votes, in 2024 happened even though the total accretions in the electoral roll were around 52,600 electors and the actual voter count increased only by around 20,000. Establishing a causal link between electoral roll errors and poll outcomes requires more than circumstantial correlation. The leap from documenting registration flaws to alleging deliberate fraud orchestrated by the ECI in collusion with the BJP remains unsubstantiated.

The ECI has adopted an unnecessarily defensive stance by demanding that evidence be submitted ‘under oath’ — a requirement that legal experts suggest may not apply in this situation — and attributing electoral discrepancies to the failure by political parties to raise concerns during registration. More problematic is the ECI’s practice of releasing voter information in bulky image PDFs rather than structured, searchable text formats, which hinders verification efforts by political parties and civil society organisations. The ECI’s approach to voter registration relies heavily on self-declarations and lacks robust verification mechanisms. The Mahadevapura controversy highlights the urgent need for comprehensive electoral roll reform through door-to-door verification, the most reliable method.

The ECI’s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in Bihar appears to respond to critics about electoral roll problems. In theory, this should help maintain more accurate rolls. However, rushed implementation and problematic identity verification requirements risk creating new issues related to legitimate voter deletion. Data already show higher deletions among women electors than men in Bihar. Considering that most out-migrants are males, the higher deletion of women electors could indicate that marginalised electors — particularly those who are illiterate (literacy rate of women aged 15-49 years in Bihar was 55% in 2019-21, according to the National Family Health Survey) — have been erroneously excluded in the enumeration process for the draft SIR roll.

The broader challenge extends to multiple aspects of electoral administration: lax implementation of campaign finance regulations and the Model Code of Conduct, tallying VVPATs from only small samples rather than statistically significant proportions, inadequate technical safeguards for symbol loading in VVPATs, and the unwillingness to submit the EVM’s technical safeguards to independent expert verification. The ECI’s resistance to retaining CCTV footage from polling booths, delays in publishing final turnout figures, and evolution into an institution viewing criticism as an attack represent a troubling departure from democratic norms. The fundamental issue underlying current electoral controversies is the erosion of institutional trust.

The ECI’s credibility depends not merely on technical soundness but also on public confidence in its impartiality and transparency. The process of appointing Election Commissioners needs to follow the Supreme Court’s recommendation to include the Chief Justice of India in the selection panel, currently side-stepped by the government. Mr. Gandhi’s allegations fall short of establishing deliberate fraud. But his party’s findings perform a valuable democratic function by highlighting systemic flaws. The appropriate response requires comprehensive voter roll auditing, enhanced transparency in data sharing, improved technical safeguards including comprehensive audit trails of EVM commands and security protocols for symbol loading, stronger enforcement of electoral regulations, and consultations with political parties. The ECI must embrace the principle that democratic institutions grow stronger through scrutiny. The alternative — continued erosion of confidence in electoral processes — poses far greater risks to democratic governance than any specific allegation of malpractice.

**5. Russia launches construction of Kazakhstan’s first nuclear facility**

Russia on Friday launched work to build the first nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan, the world’s biggest uranium producer and vast Central Asian state where Moscow, Beijing, and Europe are all vying for influence.

Russia has historically been the sole dominant player in the region and is trying to maintain its leading position, while China has invested billions of dollars as part of its “Belt and Road Initiative”.

**‘Strategic choice’**

In a joint statement, Kazakhstan and Russia’s nuclear agencies said that they had started “engineering surveys to select the optimal site and prepare project documentation for the construction of a large-capacity nuclear power plant”.

“This project is Kazakhstan’s strategic choice and a driver of long-term economic growth for the region and the country as a whole,” said the head of the Kazakh nuclear agency, Almasadam Satkaliev.

China is set to build two more plants in the resource-rich country, with the details to be revealed by the end of the year, Kazakh authorities said.

Kazakhstan supplies 43% of the world’s uranium and is the third-largest supplier of raw uranium to the European Union.

But it struggles to generate enough electricity for domestic consumption, and nuclear power is a sensitive topic in the country following Soviet-era nuclear tests that exposed 1.5 million people to radiation. Construction of the first nuclear plant — to be built near the half-abandoned village of Ulken on Lake Balkhash — is set to take several years.

Russia’s Rosatom said that the reactor will have a 60-year lifespan, with the option to extend that for another 20 years.

France and South Korea also competed for the rights to secure the contract to build the station, but Kazakhstan said it had chosen neighbouring Russia and China, which “objectively had the best bids”.

Across the region, Russia also plans to build a nuclear plant in Uzbekistan and wants to build a small reactor in Kyrgyzstan.

**PIB**

**1. Cabinet approves Rs 30,000 crore as compensation to Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies for losses in Domestic LPG**

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, has approved compensation amounting to Rs.30,000 crore to the three Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (IOCL, BPCL & HPCL) for the under- recoveries incurred on sale of domestic LPG.  The distribution of the compensation within the OMCs will be done by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The compensation will be paid in twelve tranches.

Domestic LPG Cylinders are supplied at regulated prices to consumers by the public sector Oil Marketing companies namely, IOCL, BPCL, HPCL.

The international prices of LPG remained at high levels during 2024-25 and continue to remain high. However, to insulate consumers from fluctuations in international LPG prices, the increase in cost was not passed on to consumers of domestic LPG which led to significant losses for the three OMCs. Despite the losses, the Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies have ensured continuous supplies of domestic LPG in the country at affordable prices.

This compensation will allow the OMCs to continue meeting their critical requirements such as crude and LPG procurement, servicing of debt, and sustaining their capital expenditure, thereby ensuring uninterrupted supply of LPG cylinders to households across the country.

This step also underlines the Government’s commitment to protect consumers from volatility in global energy markets while maintaining the ﬁnancial health of these PSU OMCs. It also reaﬃrms the objective of ensuring the widespread availability of clean cooking fuel to all consumers of domestic LPG, including those under flagship schemes like PM Ujjwala Yojana.

**2. Asmita platform**

India’s star footballer Manisha Kalyan was the cynosure of all eyes at the Achieving Sports Milestone by Inspiring Women (ASMITA) under-13 league for girls here at Nehru Stadium on Friday. Manisha, the only Indian footballer to have played in the UEFA Champions League for women, said ASMITA is a “rare platform for young girls to realize their football dreams.”

“I am still dreaming of playing in the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics and after we qualified for the AFC Women’s Asian Cup in Australia next year, our belief has been bolstered. You now have a platform like ASMITA and the more quality matches you play, the better you will get,” the 23-year-old Manisha told the eight teams taking part in the Guwahati leg of ASMITA, aimed at scouting talent at the grassroots level across India.

Manisha, from Punjab, was present alongside two emerging talents from Assam – Rekha Kataki and Dosomi Rowtia. Both Rekha and Dosomi are products of the ASMITA league and are making their presence felt in Assam football in a major way. While Dosomi has made it to the national camp, Rekha has captained North East United Football Club in the Indian Women’s League Division 2.

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“Football is in the genes of the people of the North-East. I grew up watching Bala Devi and now 11 of my colleagues in the senior national team are from this region. This only shows how much talent is present here. Maybe, five years from now, one of these kids will play for Assam and then India. Just work hard and only think about football. The ecosystem is surely developing and with the government’s support, we can only do better,” said Manisha.

ASMITA’s sports activities are growing each year. In the North-East alone, football leagues have increased five-fold since the 2022-23 season. In 2024-25, 25 different football leagues were played under the Sports Ministry’s ‘Sports for Women’ scheme with 1615 girls taking part. This financial year 2025-26, 852 ASMITA leagues have been planned in 15 sports disciplines, targeting more than 70,000 women athletes in all States/ UTs of the country.

Sports in North-east India is a focus area for the Sports Ministry. The Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, has already announced that a North-East-specific Games will be added to the Khelo India calendar.

“That will be a great addition. This region is contributing not only to football, but to all sports, and to give them more exposure is the right way to go,” said Manisha, who has played professionally in Cyprus and Greece. She is the only Indian woman to have scored a goal against Brazil in an international football tournament in November 2021.

ASMITA (Achieving Sports Milestone by Inspiring Women) is part of Khelo India’s gender-neutral mission to promote sports among women through leagues and competitions. As such, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) supports National Sports Federations in conducting Khelo India women’s leagues across multiple age groups at both zonal and national levels. Started in 2021, ASMITA leagues not only aim to increase the participation of women in sports but also to utilize the leagues as a platform for the identification of new talent across the length and breadth of India. The financial year 2024–25 saw significant expansion in the reach of ASMITA and deepened its impact across the country.

A total of 550 leagues were conducted across 27 sports disciplines, reaching women athletes in 34 States and Union Territories, and over 450 cities. This extensive outreach enabled participation of 53,101 athletes, further reinforcing ASMITA’s objective of inclusive and grassroots-driven sports development. This financial year 2025-26, 852 ASMITA leagues have been planned in 15 sports disciplines, targeting more than 70,000 women athletes in all States/ UTs of the country.

**10th August**

**Indian Express**

**1. Why Goa legislators want bull fighting to be legalised**

During a discussion in the state Assembly last week, legislators across party lines demanded the legalisation of bull fighting in Goa. The MLAs said that bull fighting, locally referred to as *dhirio* or *dhiri*, is an integral part of Goa’s cultural fabric.

**A traditional ‘sport’**

In the book *Goa, Cradle of My Dreams* (1988) Nora Secco de Souza described Goan bull fighting as a “less complicated” and “less colourful affair” than its Spanish counterpart “for there are no flamboyant matadors [in *dhiri*]”. These bull fights have traditionally been held in paddy fields and football grounds of Goa, with village shepherds bringing in their animals.

*Dhiri* was a “part and parcel of every Church fest” and villagers from miles around would gather to witness the popular sport in which “two thorough-bred bulls fight each other”. “Sole actors are two carefully selected and trained bulls who have been brought to the fighting pitch by several secret ministrations,” the book said.

The bulls “charge [at each other] and the clash of their heads sound like the falling of a gigantic tree struck by lightning,” de Souza wrote.

A bull fight begins with two bulls dashing at each other and locking horns. They head-butt each other and repeatedly charge and retreat, provoked by trainers standing behind. The bull that gets pushed out of the arena first or turns and runs away loses the fight, unlike in Spain where the animal has to die for the fight to end. A fight can be over in a few minutes or stretch for more than an hour.

“It is a straight fight till one bull falls or flees. Often a bull is seriously injured,” said one bull owner who was previously involved in the practice. Bulls can even be gored to death at times. Agitated bulls may also charge at spectators, causing grievous injuries.

Bull fights have been taking place in Goa for generations, going back to the time of the Portuguese, former Nuvem MLA Radharao Gracias told *The Indian Express*.

“The economy was largely agrarian in those days. So, it was a custom to organise such fights after the harvest season. It was a form of entertainment. People would discuss the fights for days,” he said.

The bulls often had names such as (Mike) Tyson and Rambo (the famous Sylvester Stallone character), and had a devoted fan following, Gracias said. In those days, Taleigao, near Panaji, hosted the biggest annual bullfight after the harvest feast on August 21, drawing more than 5,000 spectators. Several dignitaries and politicians would be in attendance, and would often patronise these fights.

“There was a coconut breaking competition and a bullfight. These were like popular derbies in Europe. You went there to be seen,” said Gracias.

**A ban ‘only in the books’**

In September 1996, Xavier Fernandes from Cana-Benaulim was killed by a “violent” bull at a fight organised at Ambaji-Fatorda. After the incident, the NGO People for Animals filed a petition in the High Court of Bombay at Goa contending that bull fights were occurring illegally in contravention to the provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.

The High Court subsequentlly found bullfights to be illegal and said they “cannot be permitted to be organised”. The Court directed the state to take immediate steps to ban “all types of animal fights including bull fights and ‘*dhirios*’ in the state of Goa”.

Nonetheless, bull fights continue to be organised clandestinely especially in coastal villages of Benaulim, Colva, Fatorda and Betalbatim in South Goa and coastal belt in North Goa. To evade police action, a fight’s location is shared on select WhatsApp and Facebook groups only a few hours before it is set to take place.

“Now, they are popular for betting. The ban is only in the books. The Goan diaspora in Europe too places bets on fights,” Gracias said.

In 2021, a contempt petition was filed in the High Court, alleging that bull fights were taking place despite orders of the court. In April this year, a bull died during a bullfight in a paddy field in Betalbatim. In January, a spectator was gored to death at a bull fight near Benaulim.

Till June 30, police had registered six cases under Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act for organising bull fights.

**Clamour for legalisation**

Supporters and bull fight aficionados argue that bull fights are a traditional “sport of Goa”. “There is no cruelty. It is a sport where the strength of bulls is put to test. It is like boxing. It can be regulated. The horns of bulls can be capped, but a ban goes against the tradition,” Francis, a resident of Taleigao, told *The Indian Express*.

Goan politicians have long called for legalisation. “If *dhirio* are brought within proper purview of law, it can be a tourist attraction. It can be a good source of revenue for tourism and for farmers who raise such bulls,” then Goa Chief Minister Laxmikant Parsekar had said in 2015. At the time, a House committee was also formed to examine the issue.

Former Goa CM Francisco Sardinha told *The Indian Express*, “I am totally in favour of legalising bull fights. All the animal species fight before procreation or mating. Do the bulls not head-butt otherwise at all? They always fight. There is no cruelty. In boxing, humans fight for supremacy, it’s the same…*Dhirio* used to the culture of villages and people seem to enjoy them.”

In 2023, AAP MLA from Benaulim, Venzy Viegas sought an amendment to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act to exclude *dhirio*, along the lines of a similar legislation passed by Tamil Nadu, which excludes the traditional sport of *jallikattu* from the ambit of the law.

But animal rights activists continue to vocally oppose legalisation efforts.

“Bullfighting involves pitting two bulls against each other in a violent and often bloody confrontation. The animals are hit and goaded into fighting until one is deemed the winner. The goal is to incite violence between the animals for entertainment and often gambling. These events subject the animals to significant physical and psychological harm, including fractures, puncture wounds, and severe stress,” Meet Ashar, legal advisor and director of Cruelty Response, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) India, told *The Indian Express*.

“There are consequences when a society encourages cruelty to animals… We must be extremely concerned about anyone who finds this violence entertaining,” he said.

**Latest developments**

Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party MLA Jit Arolkar on July 31 demanded the framing of a law to legalise and regulate bull fights. He recounted a recent incident when a woman from his constituency called him for assistance in finding her son a job, but mentioned that the more pressing concern for her was her bull, which had not been in a fight for two years and had been “sitting idle”.

“The practice dates back to the Harappan civilization and evidence suggests that such fights were held for sport and entertainment. The owners often care more for their bulls than for their children. They get pedicures done for bulls,” he said.

AAP’s Viegas reiterated: “It is an opportunity for the state to generate revenue. We may even consider building a stadium for the sport.”

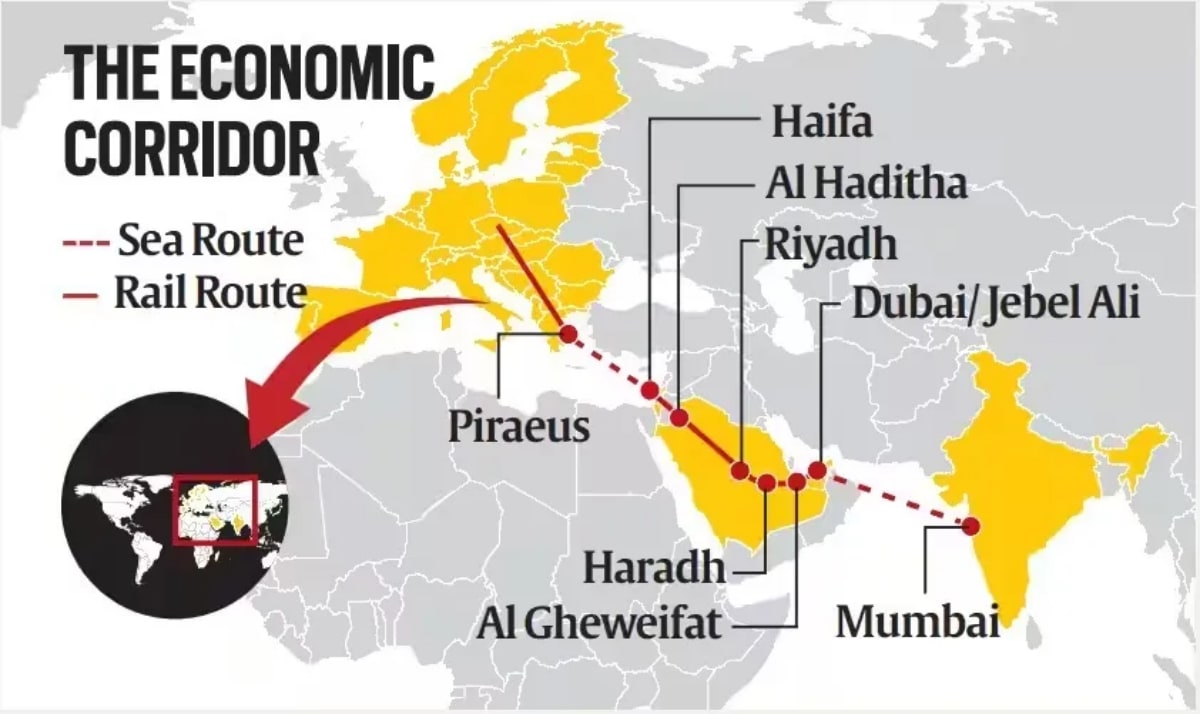
Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said the state will “examine” the issue and “see what can be done”.

**2. How Israel’s Gaza war has thrown future of IMEC up in the air**

Earlier this week, India’s National Security Council Secretariat hosted envoys and officials from the United States, UAE, Saudi Arabia, France, Italy, Germany, Israel, Jordan and the European Union, to discuss progress on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

The IMEC was announced during the G20 Summit held in New Delhi in 2023 “to stimulate economic development through enhanced connectivity and economic integration between Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe.”

The IMEC comprises two corridors — India-Gulf and Gulf-Europe.

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Its eastern leg will carry container traffic from India’s western ports to the UAE, from where high speed freight railway will carry goods across the Arabian peninsula (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan) uptil the port of Haifa in Israel.

The second leg will see cargo being shipped from Haifa to ports in Greece and Italy, from where Europe’s well-established train networks will take goods to their final destinations across the continent.

Overall, the IMEC is expected to cut shipping time from India to Europe by about 40% when compared to the Red Sea route. But since being announced, progress has been limited.

**Sound idea born in rare geopolitical window**

In September 2023, during India’s G20 Presidency, the IMEC’s conceptualisation and agreement was a testament to a remarkable period of stability in the Middle East.

Years of conflict along ideological and geopolitical lines (Qatar-GCC, Iran-Saudi Arabia, Arab states-Israel) had given way to normalisation agreements and rapprochements that prioritised regional economic growth. The Arab normalisation with Israel, which Saudi Arabia was set to join, was yielding enough geo-economic gains for Arab states to overlook the Palestine question and perhaps even explore minilateral arrangements with Israel (on the lines of the I2U2 with India).

This rare geopolitical window allowed India and its Middle Eastern, American, and European partners to envision a new corridor between India and Europe.

The economic underpinnings of the idea remain firm. The EU is India’s largest trading partner with bilateral trade in FY 2023-24 at $137.41 billion, and non-oil trade between India, the UAE and Saudi Arabia has increased significantly in recent years. The IMEC itself was meant to be more than a trade corridor. Its implementing partners would lay cables for “electricity and digital connectivity”, pipes for “clean hydrogen export”, to “increase efficiencies, reduce costs, enhance economic unity, generate jobs, and lower greenhouse gas emissions.”

From the perspective of trade facilitation and accessibility, the IMEC was meant to address several issues that continue to persist till date, including no corridor-wide tariff standardisation and low financial integration among corridor partners, lack of corridor-wide insurance, and widely differing port capacities. The ambitious cross-Saudi/UAE railway meant to transit goods between the corridor’s sea-legs was also significantly under-developed.

However, these presented benign modality and sustainability challenges which could be mitigated through commitment and investment from all stakeholders. Indeed, in September 2023, participants explicitly agreed to meet within sixty days “to develop and commit to an action plan with relevant timetables.”

Less than a month later, the Middle East plunged into an unprecedented conflict that continues till date, and the intended stakeholder meeting never occurred.

**Gaza poses fundamental challenges**

The underlying economic logic of the IMEC remains. However, its challenges have evolved from reconcilable to fundamental. The single most important issue is Israel’s increasingly unpopular war on Gaza, which has killed at least 61,000 people thus far.

The IMEC’s cornerstone is the ‘Middle East-Europe’ connection, between Jordan and Israel. Unlike in 2023, Jordan-Israel relations are presently at a significant low, and are worsening due to the Israeli-American push for Jordan to absorb more of the Palestinian population.

Similarly, the potential for Saudi-Israel normalisation is much lower today than in 2023. Riyadh has doubled down on the need for Israeli concessions towards Palestine while Israel’s appetite to concede a Palestinian state is at a historic low. In fact, Israel is presently focused on formally re-occupying and potentially re-settling the Gaza Strip, despite intensifying global opposition.

The direct downstream impact of Israel’s seemingly endless war is the worsening of even those challenges which could be mitigated through reconciled trade practices between stakeholders.

For instance, while the Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping (which carries the bulk of Europe’s trade) vindicated the need for the IMEC as a more secure alternative, the expansion of Israel’s war (into Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and with Iran) bodes high insurance premiums for any trade transiting the region.

That said, the corridor remains vital for Israel even as it continues to hinder its implementation. For Israel, the IMEC represents the pinnacle of its economic integration into a region where it has historically fought for acceptance and recognition.

In September, 2024, Benjamin Netanyahu held up a map at the UN showing states on the IMEC route as “blessed” with those in Iran’s Axis as “cursed” — reflecting the IMEC’s role as an invaluable adhesive to bind Israel with the Arab world, minus Palestine.

**Future of IMEC up in the air**

While the western leg of the corridor is unlikely to materialise in the near future, the IMEC’s eastern leg benefits from the strategic partnerships that India has forged with the Arab states.

While India’s economic and strategic relationship with the UAE has the most depth, India is Saudi Arabia’s second largest trading partner and both states have had a strategic partnership since 2010. These partnerships have yielded several instruments to bolster connectivity. For instance, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi both also allow the use of UPI for fund transfers and remittance payments, improving the potential for digital connectivity along the IMEC route.

Consequently, for India, progress on the IMEC corridor is very much possible. This is despite internecine issues between Arab states over trade modalities. The Saudi need to undercut the Emirati economic dominance of the region continues.

For example, in 2021, Riyadh imposed new tariffs specifically on those GCC states that have “free zones” offering preferential tax and customs treatments. Objectively, this is standard economic competition between two Gulf powerhouses competing for influence and investments. But for a broader corridor that requires a common vision, this is a strong hindrance.

In the long term, for the IMEC to be realised in its originally envisioned form, a secure and stable Middle East is an imperative. This implies that if the IMEC was seen as the fruit of the region’s unprecedented stability in 2023, the regional architecture that brought about this stability will have to be recreated.

Since that architecture failed to endure, it is now evident that as long as principal issues such as that of Palestinian statehood are not addressed, any regional connectivity plan will inevitably be susceptible to renewed conflict. Global recognition of the unsustainability of Israel’s war is now apparent with more Western states both recognising the Palestinian state as well as reconsidering the terms of their support to Israel. Germany’s decision to halt weapons shipments that Israel can use in Gaza, in response to Israel considering a broader re-occupation of the Strip, is a case in point.

Given both its scale and scope, the IMEC is essentially now a ‘day-after’ plan — waiting for the resolution of the Middle East’s oldest conflict. Until then, efforts like the August meeting in New Delhi can only focus on modalities and trade facilitation, with implementation being contingent on conflict resolution.

**3. Why Punjab’s seed dealers are concerned about the govt’s move to make sale of spurious seeds a non-bailable offence**

****Farmers goes back after purchasing seeds from Punjab Agricultural University in Ludhiana in 2023. (Express Photo by Gurmeet Singh)

Days after the Punjab government gave its nod to introduce The Seeds Bill 2025 to make the sale of spurious seeds a non-bailable offence, seed dealers across the state have raised concerns about the move and submitted a memorandum to the Governor. The dealers have alleged that the Bill would unfairly target those who sell pre-sealed, certified seeds.

Here is a look at the concerns of the state’s seed dealers.

**But first, what does The Seeds Bill 2025 say?**

The Bill essentially makes amendments to The Seeds Act, 1966, which regulates the quality of certain seeds for sale and matters related to it across the country, including in Punjab.

The Bill seeks to amend Section 19 of the Act to increase the fine and penalty for selling spurious seeds.

In an official statement, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said, “There has been no amendment to Section 19 of the Seeds Act 1966 since its inception due to which the fines and penalties have no deterrence… So the Cabinet gave its nod to enact a Bill to amend the Seeds Act and insert Section 19A for contravention of Section 7 of the Seeds Act, enhancing the fine and penalty, and making it cognizable and non-bailable.”

According to the Bill, the first offence by a company will invite a punishment of one to two years and a fine of between Rs 5 and Rs 10 lakh, and a punishment of two to three years and a fine of between Rs 10 and Rs 50 lakh for a repeated offence.

“Similar misdeed by a dealer/person will invite a punishment of six months to one year and fine of Rs 1-5 lakh for the first offence and a term of 1 to 2 years and fine of Rs 5-10 lakh for repeated offence,” the statement said.

For an individual or dealer, the punishment for the first offence will be six months to one year of imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1 lakh to Rs 5 lakh, while the term will be one to two years with a fine between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh for repeat offences.

Currently, the penalty stands at a mere Rs 500 for the first offence, and Rs 1,000 along with a prison term of up to six months for repeat offences.

**Why are Punjab’s seed dealers concerned about the Bill?**

There are around 25,000 licensed seed dealers in Punjab, apart from government and semi-government bodies such as universities, cooperative societies, IFFCO (Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited), and KRIBHCO (Krishak Bharati Cooperative Ltd), which also sell seeds.

Private dealers argue that they buy sealed, certified seeds from government-approved manufacturers or packagers, and sell these sealed packets directly to farmers without any tampering or repackaging.

Therefore, they are not responsible for manufacturing, breeding, or certification of the seeds, according to seed dealers. Quality assurance is the responsibility of the seed producers, who could be companies, universities, government departments, and farmers (as big companies also engage farmers in their seed growing process), not the retailers, dealers have said.

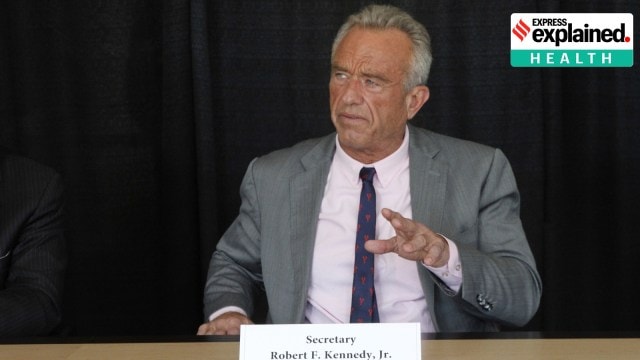
The outcome of the crop, they argue, also depends on weather, soil, human effort, and farming practices, not just the seed itself.

Mohinder Singh, President of the Seed, Pesticides and Fertilisers Association, Punjab, told The Indian Express, “When the seed is grown, its germination and DNA tests are conducted, after which the government’s certification authority issues a certificate at the time of packaging. Then, a principal certificate is issued to the dealers for its sale, which is added to the seed dealers’ license by officials of the Agriculture Department. This means that every seed that reaches a seed dealer is under the watch of the government.

He also said, “If there are any black sheep among us, they should be punished stringently, but the proposed amendment can be misused against honest dealers in general.”

Seed dealers have also said that treating the sale of spurious seeds as a non-bailable offence would lead to harassment and arrests of dealers without evidence or inquiry. They argue that the provision can also be misused by competitors.

**4. Why US funding cuts on mRNA vaccine research are significant**

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US Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr has cancelled half a billion dollars in grants and contracts for developing mRNA vaccines, the Department of Health and Human Services said on Tuesday (August 5). A total of 22 contracts with university researchers and private companies to develop new applications for mRNA technology have been terminated.

The announcement has dismayed researchers who study infectious diseases, and consider mRNA technology the best option for protecting people during a pandemic. Note that mRNA vaccines helped end the COVID-19 pandemic and saved millions of lives across the world.

Here is a look at why Kennedy has cancelled the funding and what the impact of the decision will be.

**But first, what is mRNA vaccine technology?**

Vaccines train our immune system to respond to pathogens. For instance, traditional vaccines use inactive or weakened versions of a virus to get the immune system to recognise the virus, and create tools to fight it.

mRNA vaccines, on the other hand, give instructions to the body to produce a fragment of a virus, which then kickstarts the immune response.

The biggest benefit of mRNA vaccines is that they can be developed within months and quickly altered as the virus changes, unlike traditional vaccines that can take years to develop and test.

That’s why researchers have been excited about them since they were first deployed to fight against SARS-CoV-2 — the virus that causes COVID-19. Several studies across the world are currently underway to find ways to use this technology to fight other diseases.

**So why did Kennedy cut the funds?**

Despite the advantages of mRNA vaccine technology, vaccine sceptics such as Kennedy have long distrusted it. Kennedy once called COVID shots “the deadliest vaccine ever made”.

On Tuesday, he posted a video on X, explaining his decision, and falsely claimed that mRNA vaccines did not protect against respiratory illnesses such as COVID and the flu, and that a single mutation in a virus renders the vaccine ineffective.

“As the pandemic showed us, mRNA vaccines don’t perform well against viruses that infect the upper respiratory tract,” he said in the video.

Kennedy did not provide any evidence to support his claim. Jennifer Nuzzo, director of the Pandemic Centre at Brown University, told *The New York Times*, “By issuing this wildly incorrect statement, the secretary is demonstrating his commitment to his long-held goal of sowing doubts about all vaccines… Had we not used these lifesaving mRNA vaccines to protect against severe illness, we would have had millions of more Covid deaths.”

**What can be the impact of the decision?**

Researchers have said that Kennedy’s decision would slow down mRNA research, which leaves not only the US but also the whole world more vulnerable to future pandemics.

While it is impossible to tell when the next pandemic will occur, there is a consensus among scientists that it will definitely happen, especially in the era of globalisation and human encroachment into new environments.

Michael Head, a global health researcher at the University of Southampton, told *The Guardian*, “Globalisation and the mixing of people and animals make things more challenging. And so a pandemic will happen at some point. We just don’t know when.”

The significance of mRNA vaccine technology also goes beyond tackling infectious diseases. For example, US researchers are trying to use the technology to treat cancers such as skin and colon cancers.

Researchers are also looking for mRNA vaccines against other diseases, including Lyme disease, dengue fever, and AIDS.

**The Hindu**

**1. Women’s forum urges Assam to drop plan to arm civilians**

The Nari Nagarik Manch, an apolitical forum of women in Assam, has urged the State government to revoke its decision to grant arms licences to “indigenous people in sensitive areas”. The collective warned that the move, apparently intended to empower communities feeling threatened by a perceived demographic invasion, would escalate tensions in Assam after years of armed extremism and violence. At a meeting of the forum held in Guwahati on Saturday, about 30 women from different walks of life unanimously resolved to launch a sustained campaign against the May 28 State Cabinet decision on issuing arms licences.

**2. What happens to ‘missing names’ on Bihar SIR list?**

**The story so far**

The Election Commission (EC) has completed the first phase of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar by publishing the draft voter list on August 1. However, 65 lakh names have been removed from this list for various reasons, and the fate of lakhs who have been included on the draft list without submitting verification documents is also up in the air. As poll officials scrutinise forms and conduct inquiries on claims and objections in preparation for the publication of the final list on September 30, the Supreme Court is hearing objections to the SIR process filed by Opposition parties and civil society groups, with the next hearing set for August 12.

**What happened in the first phase of SIR?**

In the month after the EC launched the Bihar SIR process on June 24, booth-level officers (BLOs) carried out house visits, distributing pre-printed enumeration forms. Voters not included on the 2003 electoral rolls were required to submit documents proving the date and place of birth of themselves and their parents. As it became clear that many voters could not provide any of the EC’s 11 approved documents — which did not include more commonly available documents such as Aadhaar, voter ID cards, or ration cards — the EC issued an advertisement on July 6, urging people to submit their forms before the deadline even if they could not provide supporting documents, leaving it to the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to process the forms on the basis of local investigations or other evidence. All those who submitted their forms before the deadline were included on the draft roll published on August 1.

**Who are the ‘missing names’ in the draft?**

The existing electoral rolls just before the SIR process began contained the names of 7.89 crore registered voters. The draft rolls published on August 1, however, only contain 7.24 crore names, indicating a dip of more than 65 lakh. The ECI accounted for these 65 lakh “missing names” by explaining that 22.34 lakh people on the earlier list were found to be deceased, 36.28 lakh have migrated permanently to another State, or are untraceable, and 7.01 lakh are duplicate voters who have been found registered in multiple locations. Patna saw the highest number of such cases, with 3.95 lakh voters not included on the draft list. On July 13, the EC said a large number of people from Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar were found during the house-to-house verification exercise and that they would not be included in the final electoral roll. *The Hindu*analysed the deleted names by comparing the draft roll with a list published by the EC in January 2025, which shows a drop of 56 lakh names, including 31 lakh fewer women voters and 25 lakh fewer men, which is unusual given that majority of migration outside the State is by men. Analysis indicated that more deletions may have occurred in districts with larger Muslim populations as per 2011 Census.

**How can names be added or deleted?**

Claims and objections to the draft roll can be filed throughout August to correct wrongful inclusions or exclusions. One week into the process, the EC has received 7,252 such claims and objections from individuals. Political parties have claimed that their ground workers too have filed similar claims to correct errors in the draft roll but the EC has denied it. In a plea to the Supreme Court, poll watchdog Association for Democratic Reforms said the full list of names removed from the draft rolls, along with specific reasons for removal, has not been provided to all political parties. EROs are to conduct inquiries on claims and dispose of them within seven days of filing. Each ERO is also expected to display the list of claims daily so that objections can be raised by the public.

**What will happen to those who submitted their forms without documents?**

The SIR order seems to leave such cases to the discretion of the EROs and Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs) who will scrutinise the eligibility of electors based on documents submitted and field reports provided by BLOs. “In case ERO/AERO doubts the eligibility of the proposed elector (due to non-submission of requisite documents or otherwise), he/she will start a *suo moto* inquiry and issue notice to such proposed elector, as to why his/her name should not be deleted,” the order says. “Based on field inquiry, documentation or otherwise, ERO/AERO shall decide on inclusion of such proposed electors in the final rolls. In each such case, ERO/AERO shall pass a speaking order,” it adds. No name can be deleted from the draft roll without such a speaking order, the EC said.

**3. The professor who rose to power**

Muhammad Yunus was born in Chittagong in southeast Bengal at the height of the Second World War when the Japanese captured Myanmar and threatened parts of eastern India. By the time he turned three, Japanese bombers flew over the skies of Chittagong where they would release anti-British pamphlets. One day, a Japanese bomb fell nearby and demolished a part of his house, forcing the whole family to shift to a village. Uncertain circumstances at home inculcated the importance of dialogue and compromise within him. Over the past year, as the Chief Adviser to the interim government of Bangladesh, Mr. Yunus, 85, has displayed some of the skills he gathered during his early life.

In his latest nationally televised speech delivered on August 5, marking the first anniversary of the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government, Mr. Yunus was more emphatic about the promises that he had made upon taking charge on August 8, 2024. Bangladesh was teetering on the brink with an expanding power vacuum after Ms. Hasina fled to India. As Mr. Yunus held his first press interaction on landing at Shah Jalal Airport of Dhaka, there was an air of uncertainty around him and it was not clear if he would be able to hold the government consisting of ‘advisers’ together. A year later, he appears to be the undisputed face of the interim government. To deal with the deteriorating law and order situation and the breakdown in the political system, he promised to hold election in February 2026. “We will step into the final and most important phase after delivering this speech to you and that is the transfer of power to an elected government,” Mr. Yunus said.

**Consensus candidate**

A former professor of economics at Chittagong University, pioneer of microfinancing and winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize, Mr. Yunus was brought in to head the interim administration as the consensus candidate of anti-Hasina movement. He started talking of transfer of power soon after he took charge last August, but it was not clear how that process would be completed amid law and order problems and political instability. His first move was to take his large body of international well wishers into confidence.

Weeks after taking charge as Chief Adviser, he proceeded to New York to introduce the new ruling elite of Bangladesh — the student leaders. He addressed an event supported by the Clinton Foundation where he introduced Mahfuz Alam, one of the key mobilisers of the anti-Hasina uprising, to former U.S. President Bill Clinton. Mr. Alam and other student advisers made up the inner circle of Mr. Yunus, who demanded Hasina be brought back from India. Tensions rose in bilateral ties in the subsequent months. When a flood ravaged eastern Bangladesh in the end of August 2024, Bangladesh blamed India for releasing river water, and Mr. Yunus summoned the Indian High Commissioner.

**Ties with India**

Mr. Yunus first visited India in his teens when he travelled through India to Karachi in West Pakistan as a boy scout to participate in a jamboree. He has fond memories of that visit that he wrote in his autobiography, *Grameen Bank O Amaar Jibon*. But Bangladesh’s relations with India under his leadership were marked by a series of disruptions. Late last year, Mr. Alam made social media statements depicting large territories of India as part of Bangladesh. He deleted his Facebook post, but the Ministry of External Affairs of India lodged a strong protest. The next episode came when Mr. Yunus visited China during March 26-29, 2025 when he said India’s northeast, “a land-locked region”, “opens up a huge possibility” for an extension of the Chinese economy” through Bangladesh. This also drew a strong response from India, which on May 17 barred all its land ports from receiving Bangladesh’s apparel exports.

At home, Mr. Yunus had to deal with internal structural challenges. In May, with law and order challenges continuing, Army chief General Waker uz Zaman told his colleagues that the interim government had been conducting affairs of the state without consultation. Two months earlier, Mr. Yunus had promised to hold election by December 2025. But uncertainty prevailed as domestic unrest continued to be a major problem. On the night of May 21, Gen. Zaman held a closed-door meeting with his Commanding Officers. “Elections must be held by December and that only an elected government should determine the nation’s course and not an unelected administration,” he was reported to have said in the meeting.

It was a proposal from the National Security Adviser, Khalilur Rahman, to open a “humanitarian corridor” to conflict-hit Rakhine province of Myanmar that triggered the strong response from Gen. Zaman.

The idea behind the corridor was to provide the conflict-hit province and its Rohingya citizens the necessary resources. However, there was no clarity about who would enforce peace in the corridor as peace was crucial for such a conflict zone project. Mr. Rahman has also served an important role in establishing connection between the Yunus-led government and the Donald Trump administration in the U.S.

The Trump administration had initially targeted Bangladesh with a 37% tariff but after negotiation, the duties were lowered to 20%, which is being seen as an achievement for Mr. Yunus. Another success has been his outreach to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Jamaat-e-Islami. The BNP criticised him in May for delaying the election, but Mr. Yunus managed to get the party on his side when he unveiled the “July Declaration” on August 5. Similarly, the Jamaat criticised his plans to allow a UN Human Rights Office in Bangladesh but has more or less stayed with him throughout the past year.

**Words and deeds**

However, the biggest issue before Mr. Yunus is the disjuncture between his remarks and the reality when it comes to holding elections. In his speeches on Id in June as well as on August 5, he promised to hold “inclusive elections that will be the largest in the history of Bangladesh”. Yet, it is clear that the next election will not have participation from the Awami League, which has been banned. Mr. Yunus has repeatedly attacked the Awami League and Ms. Hasina as “defeated fascist forces”. On August 5, he blamed Ms. Hasina for jeopardising the country’s financial health. In turn, the Awami League described Mr. Yunus as a “*razakar*”, a derogatory term used to describe collaborators of Pakistan who attacked Bengalis in 1971.

This anti-Hasina approach has defined much of the promises of justice that Mr. Yunus has made. One of the crucial developments of the past year under Mr. Yunus has been the reconstitution of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) in Dhaka. The ICT, which was originally constituted by the Hasina government in 2010, has now turned against the former Prime Minister and issued arrest warrants against her. Mr. Yunus has accused Ms. Hasina of holding successive rigged elections by excluding major parties. But by excluding the Awami League from the coming elections, Mr. Yunus’s legacy may end up with the same shortcoming.

**PIB**

**1. India’s First-of-its-Kind State-of-the-Art Animal Stem Cell BioBank and Laboratory at NIAB, Hyderabad**

**Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology, Earth Sciences, MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr. Jitendra Singh today inaugurated India’s first-of-its-kind State-of-the-Art Animal Stem Cell Biobank and Animal Stem Cell Laboratory at the National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB), Hyderabad.**

**The Minister also laid the foundation stone of a new hostel block and Type-IV quarters at NIAB, approved by the Department of Biotechnology at a total cost of ₹19.98 crore. The infrastructure will cater to the needs of research scholars, faculty, and staff, fostering a vibrant academic and innovation ecosystem.**

**The cutting-edge facility of Animal BioBank , spread over 9,300 sq ft and constructed at a cost of ₹1.85 crore, will focus on regenerative medicine and cellular therapies for livestock. Equipped with a stem cell culture unit, 3D bioprinter, bacterial culture lab, cryostorage, autoclave rooms, advanced air handling systems, and uninterrupted power backup, the laboratory will advance research in disease modelling, tissue engineering, and reproductive biotechnology.**

**With support from the National Biopharma Mission (NBM) of DBT–BIRAC, the facility will be expanded to enable biobanking of animal stem cells and their derivatives.**

**The Minister hailed PM Narendra Modi's futuristic vision which had enabled the rolling out of Biotechnology BioE3 policy , thus giving India the advantage of being an early initiator in this area.**

**In addition, during the programme, Dr. Jitendra Singh launched five innovative veterinary diagnostic tools designed to revolutionise animal health management and support the ‘One Health’ approach:**

1. **Rapid Detection of Brucellosis – A field-deployable, DIVA-capable diagnostic kit for early and accurate detection of *Brucella* species.**
2. **Mastitis Detection Technology – A cost-effective on-site diagnostic assay for subclinical and clinical mastitis in dairy cattle.**
3. **Antimicrobial Sensitivity Testing Device – A portable tool providing results within two hours to promote responsible antibiotic use.**
4. **Toxoplasmosis Detection Kit – A sensitive and specific test for *Toxoplasma gondii* infection in animals.**
5. **Japanese Encephalitis Detection Kit – An indigenously developed rapid strip for large-scale surveillance in animals and humans.**

**The Minister emphasised that these innovations will boost agriculture-linked GDP, enhance livestock productivity, and pave the way for an “Evergreen Revolution” in the animal husbandry sector.**

**Addressing the gathering, Dr. Jitendra Singh said “I’m glad the entire Department of Biotechnology, under the leadership of Dr. Rajesh Gokhale, is contributing to making India future-ready. We will not lag behind when the next industrial revolution—driven by biotechnology—takes over. The economy will shift from manufacturing to regenerative and genetic processes, and India has already initiated this transition. This is one of the best times, with enabling support from policymakers, particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who understood the long-term relevance of initiatives like the Bio E3 policy.”**

**He added that the recently announced ₹1 lakh crore RDI fund under AnusandhanNational Research Foundation Fund (ANRF) will give a special boost to private sector R&D, enabling India to move from the world’s fourth-largest economy towards the top rank.**

**Dr. Jitendra Singh highlighted that the Department of Biotechnology uniquely integrates the plant, animal, and human worlds under one umbrella. He cited India’s contributions to space-based experiments, including collaborations with the Department of Space, and envisioned emerging fields such as space medicine and space physiology.**

**On the agricultural front, he said“These releases mark a new phase of animal-based agricultural productivity—an ‘Evergreen Revolution’. With 18% of GDP from agriculture and 60% of our workforce depending on it, innovations in veterinary health will have a transformative impact. One rupee spent on agricultural research yields a return of ₹13, and linking industry partners from day one ensures these technologies reach the ground.”**

**He stressed the need for awareness among farmers about diseases like brucellosis, mastitis, and toxoplasmosis, noting that many livestock owners remain unaware of diagnostic and therapeutic option.**

**On the sidelines, Dr. Jitendra Singh interacted with farmers, underscoring Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s priority for farmer welfare and rural prosperity. He urged livestock owners to adopt modern diagnostic tools and disease prevention measures, highlighting that early detection not only saves animal lives but also boosts farm incomes.**

**He also commended Director NIAB Dr. Taru Sharma for her role in establishing India’s first animal stem cell biobank, remarking that,“We had such facilities for human stem cells, but hardly any for animal cells. The best of NIAB, and the best of Indian biotechnology, is yet to come.”**

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**11th August, 2025**

**Indian Express**

**1. What’s driving Japan’s population fall, with record decline of 900,000 people in 2024**

The year 2024 saw Japan’s total population decline by more than 908,000 people to around 120.65 million (or 12 crore), according to recent official data. A *DW* report stated that while this was the largest population drop since 1968, it was also the 16th straight year in which the Japanese population shrank.

One important trend in this context is the falling birth rate in Japan, or the number of births per 1,000 people in the population over a given period. “Some 686,061 newborns were recorded in 2024, the lowest number since records began in 1899,” *DW* reported. As a result, the total population has contracted in recent years.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba termed the figures a “quiet emergency”, but the country is not alone in witnessing declining birth rates and populations, especially not in its neighbourhood. China has also seen shrinking populations every year since 2022, and announced a subsidy to improve fertility rates. South Korea also has among the lowest birth rates globally, even as the figures have declined in other countries, from India to France. What explains these trends? Can they be reversed, and what is the situation in East Asia?

**First, is Japan an outlier?**

Not exactly, in the sense that a majority of countries are also witnessing declining birth rates and total fertility rate or TFR (the number of children a woman will likely bear in her lifetime).

One popular explanation is the demographic transition theory, which says that as countries move from agrarian societies (that require a high number of workers) to industrialised economies, birth rates fall. Medical, educational and technological advancements improve the chances of survival of infants, and women’s decision-making powers about the number of children they plan to have.

Australian demographer Peter McDonald has further argued that two social and political shifts in the last few decades have also lowered the importance of having children for a good life. First was social liberalism, in which individuals in modern societies re-examined social norms and increasingly focused on individual aspirations.

Second was the withdrawal of the welfare state in major Western economies in the 1980s and 1990s, which led to “loss of trust in others… decline of community…and fear of failure or of being left behind”, he wrote.

However, this shift is being seen not just in the West or industrialised societies. At different levels, it’s in countries with relatively supportive child care policies for parents, like France and Scandinavian nations, and those like Japan, where living costs and work pressure are high.

Social scientists are still trying to understand the near-universal decline, with many stating that it is irreversible beyond a point. The usefulness of monetary incentives is found to be limited, and there is no silver bullet, so far.

**So, what is the situation in Japan?**

Japan often makes headlines in this area because of its particularly low TFRs and birth rates. For example, India’s TFR is 1.98, South Africa’s is 2.22, Brazil and the United States are both at 1.62, and France is at 1.66 (World Bank data as of 2023). Japan’s TFR is at 1.2, South Korea’s at 0.72, China’s at 1 and Singapore’s at 0.97.

The world average was 2.2, just above 2.1 — the TFR needed to maintain the population levels. There are clear benefits to lower TFR, like women living healthier lives, gaining more education and financial freedom, and exercising autonomy about their bodies, as well as parents potentially providing a higher quality of life for each child.

However, a high proportion of the elderly population in a society risks a greater burden on the people in the 15-59 age group, which is considered the working population. Not only would the elderly require caregivers, but funding their healthcare and other needs would lead to increased taxes on the working population.

Demographers have noted some common patterns in many East Asian nations. Urbanisation and modernisation have meant high living costs, making it expensive to raise kids. Rigid traditional gender roles still prevail in these matters.

University of Pennsylvania researchers noted that “Women who *do* decide to marry often find themselves carrying a ‘double burden’ of working *and* managing the majority of household tasks (or ‘unpaid work’), making the prospects of a large family both stressful and unmanageable…” (“Education Fever and the East Asian Fertility Puzzle: A case study of low fertility in South Korea”)

They acknowledged that this is not unique to the region, and argued that the high social pressure felt by parents to invest large amounts of time and money in their children’s education also plays a role. “Korean parents often find it difficult and discouraging to have more than one or two children, despite the fact that desired family size for young adults has hovered around two for the last three decades”, they wrote.

Peter McDonald noted that the economic slowdown in Japan, by the 1990s, with rising aspirations among the youth, impacted marriage and childbearing prospects. Both concepts are generally interlinked in these countries, unlike the West. He wrote that governments have not been able to “attempt to modify the worsening employment conditions of young workers.” This, even as men and women spend long hours working because of high professional pressure.

McDonald argued for making child-rearing a social project, so to speak, with governments and other institutions changing how they view the subject and becoming more accommodating. “While young people are aware that almost inevitably they will reduce their material outcomes if they have children, most are willing to accept the loss so long as it is not overly destructive of their aspirations. In particular, they would like to have confidence that they will have adequate financial resources during the period when children are very young…” he added. (“Explanations of low fertility in East Asia: a comparative perspective”)

Japan has also historically been hesitant to allow immigration, based on ideas of preserving cultural homogeneity. This has changed to an extent in recent years, with immigration allowed for some professionals. However, the rise of a new political party that is critical of immigration indicates there is at least some pushback against the idea.

**2. S-400 hailed for Operation Sindoor role: What is this Russia-made weapon system, how India bought it under US retaliation cloud**

Singh’s praise of the Russia-supplied weapons comes at a time India is facing remarkable heat from the US for its ties with Moscow. Interestingly, when India bought these weapon systems from Russia, the cloud of possible US retaliation was hanging over the deal, but New Delhi went ahead with it.

What makes the S-400 missile system so valuable? What risk of US action was India facing when it made this weapons deal with Russia, and what happened after? We explain.

**What is the S400 missile system?**

The S-400 Triumf, which NATO calls it the SA-21 Growler, is a mobile, surface-to-air missile system (SAM) designed by Russia. Made operational in 2007, it is seen as the most dangerous operationally deployed modern long-range SAM in the world, better than the US-developed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD).

Put simply, its job is to detect any aerial threat in the area it has been tasked with protecting, calculate the threat’s path, and then dispatch a suitable missile to counter the threat.

The S-400 has a multifunction radar, autonomous detection and targeting systems, anti-aircraft missile systems, launchers, and a command and control centre. It can be deployed within five minutes — US-made systems often take longer to deploy — and is capable of firing three types of missiles to create a layered defence.

It can engage all types of aerial targets including aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and ballistic and cruise missiles within a range of 400 km, at an altitude up to 30 km. This makes it more versatile than the American THAAD, which is most effective against ballistic missiles.

The S-400 can also simultaneously track 100 airborne targets, including super fighters such as the US-built F-35, and engage six of them at the same time.

**When, how did India buy S-400s?**

India bought the air defence system in 2018, and delivery began by 2021.

In 2017, US President Donald Trump, in his first term, had signed into law the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Targetting Russia, Iran, and North Korea, the Act had provisions to sanction those who did significant business with these three countries in key sectors, inclduing defence and intelligence.

India’s deal for the weapons, thus, potentially fell foul of the Act. Even today, Trump is trying to punish India for doing business with Russia through tariffs.

However, New Delhi had even then signalled that India would continue to use its strategic autonomy to make purchases for its security goals. Eventually, India was not sanctioned under CAATSA, as Washington was seeking to build on its ties with India to counter China, and also because it wanted to sell more weapons to India. New Delhi has had close defence cooperation with the Soviet Union since the Cold War days, but has continued to buy weapons that suit its needs from across the world, including US-made arms.

**3. How BCCI has continued to resist attempts to bring it under RTI scanner**

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The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) will not be subject to provisions of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, according to the latest version of the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025.

According to the proposed law, only sports bodies that receive financial assistance from the State constitute a “public authority” under the RTI Act. This effectively excludes the cash-rich BCCI, which does not avail direct financial aid from the government.

Over the years, the world’s richest cricket board has pushed back on being labelled a public authority despite recommendations from the Supreme Court, the Law Commission of India and the Central Information Commission (CIC) to bring it under the transparency law.

**The new law & an exception for BCCI**

The National Sports Governance Bill seeks to provide for the recognition of national sports bodies, and regulate their functioning. The Bill essentially aims to align Indian sports governance with the Olympic and Paralympic Charters, and international sporting best practices.

This would bring in transparency and accountability in national sports federations, and open up a number of hosting, collaboration and funding opportunities. Given that cricket will soon be included as an Olympic sport, it is necessary for the government to also bring BCCI under the proposed law.

At the same time, the government is clearly open to making some exceptions.

The initial version of the Bill tabled in Parliament on July 23 would have brought every recognised sports body under the RTI Act. Clause 15(2) of that draft stated that a “recognised sports organisation shall be considered a public authority under the Right to Information Act, 2005 with respect to the exercise of its functions, duties and powers.” This broad definition would have included the BCCI, making its entire functioning, from team selection to awarding contracts, open to public scrutiny.

In a later version of the Bill, which is likely to be debated in Parliament next week, this clause has been tweaked. The new provision states that a recognised sports organisation “receiving grants or any other financial assistance” from the government shall be considered a public authority only “with respect to utilisation of such grants or any other financial assistance”.

This change makes direct government funding the sole criterion for a sports body to be considered a public authority, effectively keeping the BCCI away from RTI scrutiny.

**BCCI & RTI: an old battle**

The BCCI has consistently argued that it is a private, autonomous body and not a “public authority”. Indeed, it is not a sports federation under the Union Sports Ministry: legally, it is an autonomous charitable society registered under the Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act, 1975. It does not take direct financial aid from the government.

This stance has been its cornerstone in resisting attempts to bring it under the RTI Act — it maintains that being financially and organisationally independent of the State places it outside the government’s regulatory framework for public bodies.

This position has been strongly contested by several judicial and quasi-judicial bodies. The Law Commission of India, for instance, its 275th Report in 2018, recommended that the BCCI be classified as a public authority. It argued that the board’s claims of financial independence do not hold up when indirect benefits are considered.

It also pointed out that the BCCI has received significant indirect financial assistance from the government over the years. Between 1997 and 2007, it noted, the board availed tax exemptions to the tune of over Rs 2,100 crores due to its legal status as a charitable institution. The Law Commission argued that this foregoing of revenue, which would have otherwise gone to the national exchequer, is a form of substantial indirect funding.

The report also cited examples of state governments providing land to state cricket associations at highly subsidised rates — such as in Himachal Pradesh, where land for a stadium was reportedly leased for a nominal Re 1 per month.

Beyond finances, both the Law Commission and the Supreme Court, in multiple judgements, have emphasised that the BCCI performs “public functions” that are akin to those of a state body. It selects the national teams that represent India, uses national colours and symbols and exercises a monopoly over the sport with the “tacit concurrence” of the government, according to a Supreme Court judgement from 2015.

**Previous recommendations not implemented**

A Justice RM Lodha-led committee, appointed by the Supreme Court in 2015 to recommend reforms to the BCCI, described the cricket body’s functioning as a “closed door and back-room affair.” It found that critical information, including its constitution and financial details, was not easily accessible, and requests for information were often ignored, underscoring the need for greater public scrutiny.

The committee recommended that the “legislature must seriously consider bringing BCCI within the purview of the RTI Act,” stating that the public has a right to know about its activities. Following this, the Supreme Court in 2016, while hearing the case on the Lodha reforms, referred the issue to the Law Commission of India, observing that since the BCCI performs public functions, there is a clear need for transparency.

The Law Commission, in its 2018 report, concluded that the BCCI should be classified as a “public authority” under the RTI Act based on both its public functions and the indirect government funding it receives. This was followed by a landmark order from the Central Information Commission (CIC) in the same year, which declared the BCCI a “public authority” and directed it to set up mechanisms to handle RTI queries.

However, the BCCI challenged this order in the Madras High Court, which put a stay on its implementation — leaving the matter in a legal limbo.

**What BCCI being under RTI would mean**

Bringing the BCCI under the RTI Act would mean that any citizen of India could file a query and seek information on its functioning. This would go far beyond just financial matters and would cover the entire gamut of its operations.

The public would be able to demand information on the criteria for team selection, details of contracts awarded for broadcasting and infrastructure, the appointment process for officials and coaches and the minutes of its meetings. This would enforce a level of transparency and public accountability that is currently absent, forcing the board to justify its decisions to the public at large, rather than just to its own constituent members.

The Supreme Court, in 2015, has already held that even though the BCCI is not a state institution, it is amenable to writ jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution because it performs public functions. This means that the High Courts can intervene in the BCCI’s affairs if its actions are found to be arbitrary or against the public interest.

**4. How India’s farm exports are faring better than overall goods exports**

India exported goods valued at $437.4 billion during 2024-25, which was 0.1% higher than the $437.1 billion in the previous financial year ended March 31, 2025.

During April-June 2025, total exports, at $112 billion, were 1.7% up over the $110.1 billion for April-June 2024.

Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, on Friday, said he was “quite confident that India will do more exports this [fiscal] year than last year”. This was notwithstanding the likely disruptions to global trade from US President Donald Trump’s tariff attacks, including the slapping of a 50% duty on Indian goods.

What’s interesting, though, is the performance of India’sagricultural produce exports. These registered 6.4% growth, from $48.8 billion in 2023-24 to $51.9 billion in 2024-25. The first three months of this fiscal have posted a further 5.8% year-on-year increase over April-June 2024.

If current trends hold, farm exports could even touch $55 billion in 2025-26, surpassing the previous record of $53.2 billion achieved in 2022-23. Contrast that with the country’s overall merchandise exports, which has witnessed virtually flat growth and with the 2022-23 peak of $451.1  
billion unlikely to be crossed this fiscal.

This newspaper had reported last week that India’s agricultural exports to even the United States has been buoyant, growing by 24.1% in January-June 2025 over January-June 2024.

**What is driving farm exports?**

Between 2003-04 and 2013-14, India’s exports of farm produce soared from a mere $7.5 billion to $43.3 billion.

The accompanying *chart* shows it falling thereafter till 2020-21 and then picking up to hit an all-time-high of $53.2 billion in 2022-23. The latter came on the back of a recovery in global agri-commodity prices: The UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s food price index (base year: 2014-16=100) rose from an average of 96.4 points in 2019-20 to 140.6 points in 2022-23.

The decline in 2023-24 was largely attributable to it being a drought year and the Narendra Modi-led government banning or restricting shipments of a host of commodities – from wheat, rice and sugar to onion – in response to rising domestic food inflation.

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Chart 1

Those curbs have been gradually relaxed, with an easing of inflationary pressures owing to a monsoon-aided agricultural production rebound in 2024-25. A second consecutive above-normal monsoon this year should enable the Modi government to also lift the export restrictions on sugar India’s net exports of the sweetener collapsed from $5.5 billion in 2022-23 to $771.3 million in 2024-25.

Almost all major export items have recorded impressive growth during the first quarter of this fiscal: Marine products, non-basmati rice, buffalo meat, coffee, tobacco and fruits & vegetables, both fresh and processed (table 1).

Indian coffee exporters have benefitted from global ending stocks for 2024-25 depleting to their lowest since 1999-2000, mainly courtesy of subpar crops in Brazil and Vietnam, the world’s biggest producers of arabica and robusta varieties respectively. India mostly exports robusta beans and powder used in instant coffee and espresso blends. Tobacco exports have similarly got a boost from output shortfalls in Brazil and Zimbabwe.

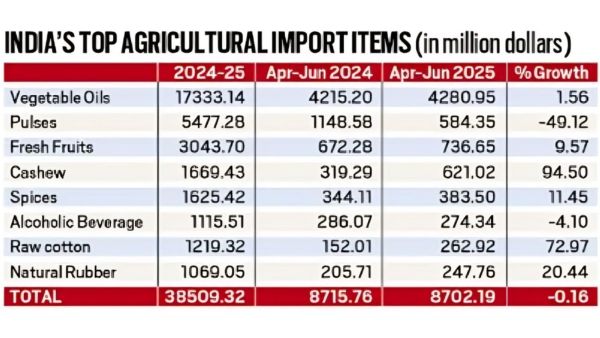
The coming months may well see exports come under pressure, especially due to President Trump’s 50% prospective tariffs on Indian goods from August 27. The maximum impact of it would be on marine products, where the US has a 35% share in India’s exports. In some products such as frozen shrimps and prawns, more than $1.9 billion out of the $4.5 billion worth of exports in 2024-25 went to the US.

The US has clamped a 50% import duty on goods imports from Brazil too. The US accounted for some $2.1 billion out of Brazil’s overall coffee exports of $12.3 billion in 2024. If Trump does not exempt coffee from his 50% tariff, that exportable surplus may then find its way to other markets,  
depressing prices and, in turn, hurt Indian shipments.

**What are the import trends?**

India exports more farm produce than it imports.

While the country had an overall deficit of $282.8 billion in its overall merchandise trade account during 2024-25 (as imports, at $720.2 billion, exceeded exports of $437.4 billion), it was the other way for agriculture. In its case, there was a surplus of $13.4 billion, from exports ($51.9 billion) being higher than imports ($38.5 billion).

****Chart 2.

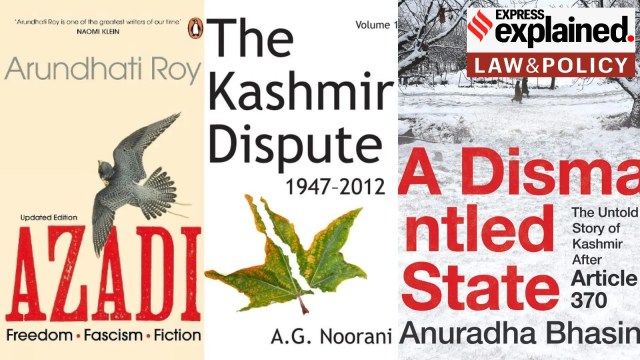
However, it can be seen from the *chart* that the agricultural trade surplus has more than halved from $27.7 billion in 2013-14. The reason: Imports going up at a faster pace than exports.

Unlike exports, India’s farm imports are limited to a few commodities. More than two-thirds of the value of imports in 2024-25 were from vegetable oils, pulses and fresh fruits (table 2). Fresh fruits included almonds, pistachios, walnuts and other tree nuts (worth $1.7 billion, out of which $1.1 billion was from the US), in addition to apples, grapes/raisins, kiwis, figs, pears and dates.

India’s pulses imports scaled a new high of 7.3 million tonnes, valued at $5.5 billion last fiscal. This came as the Modi government slashed import duties, in the wake of the El Niño- drought of 2023-24 whose effects extended up to the end of 2024. Imports of pulses have been less this year, thanks to a bumper domestic crop.

On the other hand, imports of vegetable oils – basically palm, soyabean and sunflower – continue to go up, with domestic production unable to match increasing demand. A similar trend is visible in cotton and natural rubber: Their production has actually dipped from their highs reached in 2013-14 and 2012-13 respectively, forcing more imports to meet domestic consumption requirements.For now, India remains a net exporter of agricultural produce.

**5. J&K Home Department ‘forfeits’ 25 books: What does it mean?**

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The Jammu & Kashmir Home Department issued a notification on August 5, which categorised 25 books as “forfeited”. These include political biographies, historical accounts and academic works set against the backdrop of the region’s politics and history by authors like A G Noorani and Arundhati Roy.

The notification has stated that these works carry “false narratives” and propagate secessionist ideology by “misguiding the youth, glorifying terrorism, and inciting violence”. It also said their continued circulation could influence the youth in ways that encourage alienation from “the Indian state”.

The move came on the sixth anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370, which, until August 5, 2019, granted special constitutional status to Jammu & Kashmir.

**What is forfeiture?**

Forfeiture is the legal mechanism, which, unlike censorship that modifies or withholds content, removes a book or printed materials from circulation entirely within a notified area.

Once a forfeiture order is issued, the material can no longer be printed, sold, or distributed. Police officers are empowered to search premises and seize copies if they have reasonable suspicion that a banned book is stored there.

The effect is immediate, thus making forfeiture one of the most direct tools available to the state in dealing with literature deemed unlawful.

**What does the notification rely on?**

The notification relies primarily on Section 98 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, which allows the state to forfeit any printed material (newspapers, books, documents) containing matter punishable under specific sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023. This includes acts endangering the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India, promoting enmity between groups, matters intended to outrage religious feelings, among others. To act under Section 98, the government must form the opinion that the material meets these criteria, record its reasons and publish them in a notification.

Note that while the Constitution’s Article 19 (1) (a) grants all citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression, Article 19(2) permits “reasonable restrictions” on the exercise of the right. This is permitted in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India; the security of the state; friendly relations with foreign states; public order; or preventing incitement to the commission of an offence.

Forfeiture orders are examined against this constitutional framework. Those affected by such an order, or “any person of interest”, can challenge the notification in the High Court with jurisdiction over the area where it was issued.

**What have courts said on forfeiture?**

The Supreme Court has previously addressed similar provisions. For instance, in State of Maharashtra & Ors vs Sangharaj Damodar Rupawate & Ors (2010), the SC evaluated the validity of a notification issued under Section 95 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Section 98, BNSS) by the Maharashtra government. The notification had directed the forfeiture of ‘Shivaji-Hindu King in Islamic India’, a book written by James W Laine.

The notification said that the book contained derogatory remarks about Shivaji and thus may cause enmity and violence among various communities.

The SC laid down various factors that should be taken into consideration while issuing such a notification. These include whether the government has stated its grounds for opinion, and if those grounds are based on facts. The order of forfeiture should also be justified by the merits of the grounds mentioned.

The apex court also said that the language and the content of the “offending” material should be understood based on the intention of the author, and the subsequent impact on the readers. The government is not required to prove the offence beyond a reasonable doubt, but has the responsibility to show that the ingredients of the offence appear to be present, the court said.

**6. Operation Sindoor’s 300-km kill: How the Indian Air Force may have set a rare record**

In the three months since Operation Sindoor, the Indian Air Force (IAF) had spoken of the losses suffered by Pakistan — but on Saturday came the first concrete detail of a strike that military officers say could be unprecedented in modern air warfare, though such engagements are rarely recorded in public.

During a lecture in Bengaluru, IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh revealed that among the targets destroyed on May 7 was a large Pakistani airborne platform — possibly an ELINT (Electronic Intelligence) or AEW&C (Airborne Early Warning and Control) aircraft — taken down from a distance of about 300 km. He described it as the “largest-ever recorded surface-to-air kill that we can talk about”.

A senior IAF officer later explained that “at 300 km, this would be the longest or farthest ever recorded surface-to-air kill, not quantitatively the largest.” The Air Chief’s qualifier — “that we can talk about” — was a nod to the fact that such engagements are “usually difficult to confirm anywhere globally, since the debris of such an aircraft will fall inside the territory of that country”. Long-range kills, the officer added, are “rarely recorded or announced in public”, either because militaries cannot independently verify them or because the capabilities involved are kept classified.

In this instance, the Air Chief’s public statement likely followed a confirmation through electronic tracking. “We have the electronic means to check a kill. There is a blip on a radar, and that goes off (to show the kill),” the officer said, indicating that radar data had verified the engagement.

**Why it matters**

Long-range kills of this kind are rare. Hitting a target 300 km away demands a long-range interceptor missile (a surface-to-air missile or SAM designed to destroy airborne targets at very long distances, often well beyond visual range), precision tracking that holds steady over long distances and the ability to maintain a firing solution until impact. The IAF acquired this capability only recently, with the induction of the Russian-made S-400 Triumf system.

“Clearly, the S-400 systems have been capitalised fully in the operation,” the above-quoted officer said.The system’s advertised 400 km kill range kept Pakistani fighters beyond the distance needed to launch long-range glide bombs, the IAF Chief said on Saturday adding they were unable to use them because they could not penetrate the system.

**The rarity of a 300 km engagement**

In recent conflicts, the longest publicly acknowledged surface-to-air kills have occurred at relatively shorter ranges. In February 2024, a BBC report cited Ukrainian claims of downing a Russian A-50 spy plane — the second claim in just over a month — more than 200 km from the front line. In February 2022, a Ukrainian Su-27 was reportedly shot down by a Russian S-400 at roughly 150 km. The plane was hit between the Russian cities of Rostov-on-Don and Krasnodar, Ukrainian military sources said, over 200km (124 miles) from the front line.

The systems behind the shot

India has so far received three of its five contracted S-400 units from Russia, deployed along the borders with Pakistan and China. The remaining two are due by 2025–26. Senior officers liken its reach to “a torch that allows you to see what remains kilometres inside, in this case beyond the Indian border”.

Other systems — including the Barak 8 Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) and the indigenous Akash missile — also played a role in Operation Sindoor. Earlier this month, the Defence Acquisition Council approved a comprehensive annual maintenance contract for the S-400.

India had signed the S-400 deal with Russia, a year after the United States passed the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). CAATSA is a US law that allows Washington to impose sanctions on countries that make significant defence purchases from Russia, Iran, or North Korea.

**The Hindu**

**1. Bailey bridge on Gangotri highway nears completion**



**Uttarkashi**

Construction of a Bailey bridge along the Gangotri National Highway, aimed at restoring connectivity to disaster-hit areas of Uttarkashi and facilitating the transport of food supplies, was in its final stages on Sunday.

A Bailey bridge is a structure that can be assembled quickly using pre-fabricated components. Authorities have intensified efforts to deliver relief materials to those stranded after the devastating mudslide in Kheer Ganga on Tuesday, which swept through homes and hotels, leaving a trail of destruction.

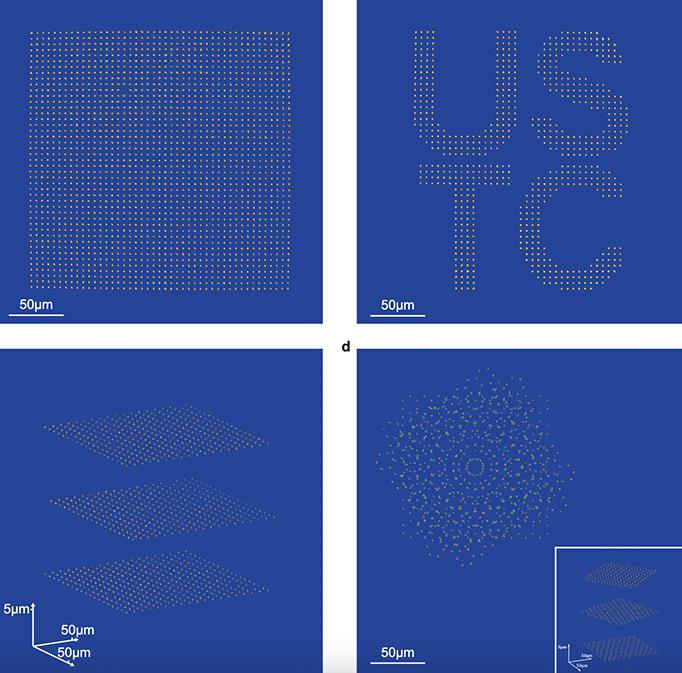
The district administration has confirmed four deaths in the tragedy, the recovery of two bodies, and 49 persons missing since the disaster.

Rescue operations on the sixth day were delayed until 10 a.m. on Sunday due to inclement weather.

Home Secretary Shailesh Bagauli said horses and mules are also being used to transport essential supplies.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami flagged off half a dozen vehicles carrying relief material from Dehradun for Dharali.

**2. In a shot for quantum computing, AI shepherds qubits with lasers**



Clockwise from top-left: nearly defect-free 2D square array with 2,024 atoms; 2D pattern of the letters ‘USTC’ with 723 atoms; trilayer cuboid array with 1,077 atoms; trilayer twisted graphene structure with 752 atoms. arxiv:2412.14647

Quantum computing holds the promise to revolutionise science and technology by solving problems currently beyond the limits of classical computers. A critical step to building practical quantum computers is assembling large arrays of qubits — or quantum bits — with no defects.

On August 8, researchers from China reported significant progress on this front by developing a way to rapidly and reliably create large arrays of neutral atoms. Their findings were published in *Physical Review Letters*.

Neutral atoms, like rubidium atoms, can be trapped and controlled by small laser beams called optical tweezers. These atoms serve as qubits for quantum computing and simulations. Creating arrays with thousands of atoms positioned precisely is vital because it allows for complex quantum operations and error correction. However, placing atoms perfectly in large arrays is a major challenge because atoms are loaded randomly and often with missing sites.

Traditionally, strategies to assemble defect-free arrays involve moving atoms one by one or row by row using movable optical tweezers. This process takes longer with the number of atoms.

The new work has reported overcoming this challenge using artificial intelligence (AI). The AI model quickly calculated the best way to move thousands of atoms simultaneously with precise control of their positions and phases using laser holograms. The process began with an initially random array, where some sites were occupied by single atoms. Then, using an algorithm known as the Hungarian algorithm, the AI found the ideal pairing between loaded atoms and the target positions, minimising the total distance atoms needed to move while avoiding collisions.

Instead of moving atoms directly in one step, each movement was split into about 20 small steps to prevent heating and atom loss.

At each step, the AI model generated a hologram with the optical tweezers that moved all atoms simultaneously and smoothly.

This hologram also precisely controlled both where each atom moved and the phase of the light, which is crucial to avoid disturbances.

In this method, the total time to rearrange atoms was roughly the same no matter if the array had 1,000 atoms or 10,000 atoms.

In their experiments, the scientists assembled two-dimensional arrays of up to 2,024 atoms free of any defects in about 60 milliseconds, substantially faster and more scalable than previous methods.

The AI model was a convolutional neural network that had been trained on simulated laser holograms. It could quickly produce highly accurate holograms that guided the atoms in smooth movements with minimal loss.

**3. Language lessons: The obsession with Hindi is diversion from the needs of school education**

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are planning to implement a two-language formula for school education, as opposed to the push for a three-language policy in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Both States are inclined towards primacy for local languages, Tamil and Kannada, respectively, and then English in school education. Tamil Nadu has already unveiled its State Education Policy (SEP) while a commission has submitted its recommendations for Karnataka’s SEP.

Tamil Nadu has merely reiterated its existing two-language policy, but Karnataka is set to discontinue its three-language policy. The commission has proposed that Kannada or the child’s mother tongue should be the medium of instruction up to Class 5, and preferably till Class 12. Kannada or whatever is the mother tongue and English will be the two compulsory languages. If implemented, this will replace the model that includes Hindi as a third compulsory language. Other recommendations include moving away from NCERT textbooks and developing a Karnataka-specific curriculum and bilingual teaching methods. The Tamil Nadu SEP, which was announced by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin recently, makes Tamil compulsory up to Class 10 across all boards. The NEP proposes a third language which should be Hindi or another Indian language, seen as an attempt to impose Hindi.

The Tamil Nadu SEP also commits to promote critical thinking, digital literacy, climate education, and social justice. Apart from a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) approach, the State also wants to offer special support for tribal students, first-generation learners, and students with disabilities. The government has pledged more support for public education. In fact, uniform high quality public education should be the biggest priority of school education policy for all States and the Centre.

The Centre’s ill-advised focus on language turns unproductive and controversial even though it does not insist on promoting Hindi on paper. The three-language policy is also in disregard for the demand for English language learning, and as a medium of instruction across States, including in the Hindi-speaking regions, and Gujarat and Maharashtra. Education policies have been a major driver of the development outcomes in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and any attempt to forcibly alter them by central policies would do no good to anyone. Tamil Nadu is fighting for the release of ₹2,152 crore in education funds from the Centre that is rightfully its. There is no harm in learning Hindi or any other language, but when perceived as a political project of domination, its promotion causes resistance. The Centre must give up its language obduracy and focus on several critical challenges in school education. It must work with State governments to tackle them.

**4. What are the new rules on chemically contaminated sites? What were the tasks under the Capacity Building Program for Industrial Pollution Management Project?**

**The story so far**

The Environment Ministry has notified new rules under the Environment Protection Act that lays out a process for addressing sites with chemical contamination. Called the Environment Protection (Management of Contaminated Sites) Rules, 2025, they give a legal structure to a process of addressing chemical contamination, that until now was missing despite several such sites already identified across the country.

**What are contaminated sites?**

Contaminated sites, according to the Central Pollution Control Board, are those where hazardous and other wastes were dumped historically, and which has most likely resulted in contamination of soil, groundwater and surface water that pose a risk to human health and the environment. Some of the sites were developed when there was no regulation on management of hazardous wastes. In some instances, polluters responsible for contamination have either closed down their operations or the cost of remediation is beyond their capacity. These may include landfills, dumps, waste storage and treatment sites, spill-sites, and chemical waste handling and storage sites. There are 103 such sites identified across the country. Only in seven sites has remedial operation commenced, which involves cleaning the contaminated soil, groundwater, surface water and sediments by adopting appropriate technologies.

**Why were these rules necessary?**

The Environment Ministry had, in 2010, initiated a Capacity Building Program for Industrial Pollution Management Project to formulate the National Program for Remediation of Polluted Sites. This consisted of three broad tasks — creating an inventory of probable contaminated sites; developing a guidance document for assessment and remediation of contaminated sites; and developing a legal, institutional and financial framework for the remediation of contaminated sites. While the first two steps have been in place, the last step, regarding a legal codification, remained unfulfilled. The rules that were made public on July 25 were part of this legal codification process.

Under these rules, the district administration would prepare half-yearly reports on “suspected contaminated sites.” A State board, or a ‘reference organisation’ would examine these sites and provide a “preliminary assessment” within 90 days of being thus informed. Following these, it would have another three months to make a detailed survey and finalise if these sites were indeed ‘contaminated.’ This would involve establishing the levels of suspected hazardous chemicals — there are currently 189 marked ones under the provisions of the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016.

If these sites exceed safe levels, the location of these sites would be publicised and restrictions placed on accessing it. Then, the ‘reference organisation’, which would basically be a body of experts, would be tasked with specifying a remediation plan. The State board would also have 90 days to identify the person(s) responsible for the contamination. Those deemed responsible would have to pay for the cost of remediation of the site, else the Centre and the State would arrange for the costs of clean-up. “Any criminal liability, if it is proved that such contamination caused loss of life or damage would be under the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023),” an official told *The Hindu*.

**Are there any exemptions?**

Contamination resulting from radioactive waste, mining operations, pollution of the sea by oil, and solid waste from dump sites would not be dealt with under the provisions of these laws as they are governed by a separate legislation. Another major omission from the rules is the lack of a defined timeline whereby once a contaminated site is identified, a deadline is set by which it must be returned to safe levels.

**5. What is Telangana’s Kaleshwaram project?**

**The story so far**

The Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP), billed as the lifeline of Telangana by the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government, is mired in controversies over the manner in which it has been executed. A barrage forming a major component of the project suffered damages within three years of its inauguration, while two others constructed upstream developed cracks resulting in the charge that the KLIP was a colossal waste of public money.

**What is the KLIP?**

The KLIP is a multi-purpose irrigation project on the Godavari river in Kaleshwaram of Bhupalpally in Telangana. Billed as the world’s largest multi-stage irrigation project, Kaleshwaram’s upstream influence is at the confluence of Pranahita and Godavari. It utilises a canal network of more than 1,800 km. The project was conceived by the BRS government, headed by K. Chandrasekhar Rao, to provide irrigation facilities to over 16 lakh acres in 13 districts of Telangana, besides stabilising the existing ayacut. It aims at storing and distributing 240 thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft) of Godavari water of which 169 tmc ft is proposed to be allocated for irrigation, 30 tmc ft for drinking water to Hyderabad, 16 tmc ft for miscellaneous and industrial uses and another 10 tmc ft for drinking water to villages en route.

**Where was it built?**

The government has constructed barrages across Godavari at Ramadugu, Medigadda, Sundilla and Annaram. The water is stored there to cater to drinking water and irrigation needs. The project was conceived at a cost of ₹71,000 crore initially. The cost escalated to close to over ₹1 lakh crore over a period of time. Finishing works is likely to take few more thousands of crores.

**What is the controversy?**

The project has been mired in controversies right from the beginning as the then government shifted the location from Tummidihatti to Medigadda even after reportedly receiving hydrology clearance for the former location. The shifting of the site was made on the pretext of non-availability of water at Tummidihatti, but an inquiry revealed that the Central Water Commission had estimated the water availability at Tummidihatti to be over 200 tmc ft.

A major allegation that has surfaced in the construction of the project was that the barrages were constructed on permeable foundations rather than strong foundations that can withstand the inflow of heavy quantum of water. The shifting of location, from Tumidihatti to Medigadda, too came under criticism as almost 30% of the works at Pranahita Chevella Sujala Sravanti (PCSS) project, started in united Andhra Pradesh in 2008, at Tummidihatti costing over ₹11,000 crore were completed by then. Another major charge against the BRS Government was that the decision to go ahead with the project was taken solely by Mr. Chandrasekhar Rao. It was alleged that he had not obtained the consent of the State Cabinet before launching work on the project.

The faults in the Kaleshwaram project were exposed during the BRS regime when the piers of the Sundilla barrage sunk, substantiating the claims that the barrage was constructed on permeable foundation. Two other barrages, Annaram and Sundilla, too developed cracks as the government impounded and stored huge quantities of water against technical advice.

**Was an inquiry ordered?**

The constitution of a judicial commission to probe the lapses in the Kaleshwaram project was an election promise of the Congress. Subsequently, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy constituted a one-man judicial commission headed by Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose for a thorough inquiry into the process. Justice Ghose examined over 110 witnesses during the course of his 15 month inquiry and those examined included former CM K. Chandrasekhar Rao, former Ministers T. Harish Rao (Irrigation) and Eatala Rajender (Finance) of BRS government, the latter especially for releasing funds adopting a “negligent and indifferent attitude”. The judicial commission submitted its report on July 31, and subsequently the Telangana government decided to take up a discussion on the Kaleshwaram project in the legislature during the monsoon session. The government plans to explain the lapses to the people in detail and to elicit views of all political parties, including the BRS, on the future course of action.

**How has the BRS reacted?**

The BRS on its part appears to be guarded in its response to the accusations. Mr. Harish Rao, however, defended the project claiming that the project received approvals from several statutory bodies, including the CWC. It also had the approval of the Cabinet, the papers of which have not been revealed by the government. The project was also ratified by the Assembly when Chief Minister Chandrasekhar Rao had made a power point presentation, the first of its kind, on the Kaleshwaram project, elaborating on its salient features.

**6. Armenians caught between hope and distrust after accord with Azerbaijan: Nagorno - Karabaksh Dispute**



Yerevan

The streets were almost deserted in Yerevan on Saturday because of the summer heat, but at shaded parks and fountains, Armenians struggled to make sense of what the accord signed a day earlier in Washington means for them.

The leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, two Caucasian countries embroiled in a territorial conflict since the fall of the USSR, met on Friday and signed a peace treaty under the watch of U.S. President Donald Trump.

In Yerevan, however, few of the people were enthusiastic.

“It’s a good thing that this document was signed because Armenia has no other choice,” said Asatur Srapyan, an 81-year-old retiree. He believes Armenia has not achieved much with this draft agreement, but it’s a step in the right direction. “We are very few in number, we don’t have a powerful Army, we don’t have a powerful ally behind us, unlike Azerbaijan,” he said. “This accord is a good opportunity for peace.”

Maro Huneyan, a 31-year-old aspiring diplomat, also considers the pact “acceptable”, provided it does not contradict her country’s constitution.

But Anahit Eylasyan, 69, opposes the agreement and, more specifically, the plan to create a transit zone crossing Armenia to connect the Nakhchivan region to the rest of Azerbaijan. “We are effectively losing control of our territory. It’s as if, in my own apartment, I had to ask a stranger if I could go from one room to another,” she explains.

She also hopes not to see Russia, an ally of Armenia despite recent tensions, expelled from the region.”

Ms. Anahit also criticises Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for “making decisions for everyone” and for his “endless concessions to Azerbaijan”.

“We got nothing in exchange, not our prisoners, nor our occupied lands, nothing. It’s just a piece of paper to us,” she fumes.

**ARMENIA–AZERBAIJAN CONFLICT**

Armenia and Azerbaijan have been fighting for decades to take control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The Nagorno-Karabakh region is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but the majority of the region is controlled by Armenian separatists which are backed by the Armenian government.

This conflict dates back to the early 19th century. In the beginning of the 19th century, tensions between people of Armenian and Azerbaijan ethnicity began to emerge which resulted in the killing of thousands of people from both sides. In 1917, after the collapse of Russian Empire, the newly independent Azerbaijan claimed this region but Armenian ethnicity population which dominated the province of Nagorno-Karabakh resisted the claim. This resulted in clashes and in 1921, the soviet forces entered this region to bring peace. In 1923, the Soviet government established Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous province of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and detached it from Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. It brought peace to the region for more than six decades.

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In 1988, the ethnic Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh started agitation for the transfer of this region to Armenian jurisdiction. This demand was strongly opposed by the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and the USSR government. When Armenia’s regional parliament voted for the transfer of the region to Armenia, the Soviet government turned down the demand. This followed years of clashes between Armenian separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijanis forces. With the collapse of the USSR, Armenia and Azerbaijan became totally free and the clashes intensified. These clashes are often called the ‘First Nagorno-Karabakh war’. In 1994, Russian brokered a ceasefire but by that time the Armenian separatists had taken control of the region. Armenian separatists call it ‘Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast’ but this self-proclaimed nation is not internationally recognized. Over the years, this region witnessed many clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

In March 2008, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution which reaffirmed Azerbaijan’s claim and demanded Armenian forces to withdraw.

The clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces continued. In 2016, Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a Four-Day war which caused the death of more than hundred soldiers from each side. After this Four-Day war, the ceasefire was mediated by Russia.

Azerbaijan is Muslim majority and Armenia is Christian majority nation. Turkey has very close ties with Azerbaijan, while Russia is allied with Armenia, although it also has good relations with Azerbaijan as well.

In September 2020, fighting again broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan which continued for six weeks. This led to thousands of casualties on both sides. Russia again mediated a ceasefire agreement. It was signed on 9th November by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin. In these six weeks, Azerbaijan forces, backed by Turkey supplied armed drones and other equipment, retook some areas of Nagorno- Karabakh from Armenia. With this war, Azerbaijan has gained some territories from Armenia which Armenia had controlled since 1990. Armenia still controls the majority of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. The status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains unsettled, which means the conflict has only been postponed, not resolved.

**12th August**

**The Hindu**

**1. Delhi stray dogs to be captured and never released: SC**

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the Delhi government and local bodies to immediately capture stray dogs, detain them in pounds created across the National Capital Territory (NCT), and never release them back into public spaces.

A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan said anyone who resists rounding up of stray canines would face contempt action from the Supreme Court.

The top court said authorities should “at the earliest, start picking up strays from all localities, more particularly the vulnerable ones in the city and outskirts. How to do it is for the authorities to decide. If they have to create a force, do it at the earliest.

The foremost and first exercise is to free localities from stray dogs. There is no compromise”.

The court was hearing a *suo motu* case on the increasing instances of stray dog attacks on children, including infants. Addressing the clamour to protect stray dogs, the court asked whether animal rights activists would be able to return children lost to rabid canines to their parents.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the government, supported the court’s decision.

“Have you seen Western movies? There is one called *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. When Ugly is lying in a soap-filled bathtub, his assailant comes to kill him. The man says he had been searching for Ugly for a long time. Ugly shoots him without a word, and says ‘if you have to shoot a man, shoot and don’t talk’... So, no talk. It is time to act and now,” Justice Pardiwala addressed Mr. Mehta and other lawyers for the government and authorities.

The court said the situation with stray dogs was “extremely grim” across the national capital territory, Noida, Gurugram, and Ghaziabad. Justice Pardiwala said the court’s directions were in the best public interest, and to end a menace. The judge remarked in an aside that, hopefully, the directions would not prompt stray dogs to transform into pet dogs overnight.

In a series of directions, the Bench ordered the authorities, including the NCT government, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, and the New Delhi Municipal Council to establish enough dog shelters/pounds to house at least 5,000 stray dogs in the first six to eight weeks.

The dog pounds should be peopled with sufficient personnel. The stray dogs, once they are picked up and brought in, should be sterilised and immunised, the court said.

“Since this is a progressive exercise, shelters have to be increased over time. The action should inspire confidence in the minds of the people, young and old, that they can move around freely on roads, without any fear of being bitten by strays.,” the court said.

**‘Process to be objective’**

“No sentiments should be involved in the entire exercise,” the top court observed in the order.

The dog shelters must be put under CCTV surveillance in order to ensure the dogs were neither released nor taken out. The authorities must maintain a record of strays captured and housed in pounds, and produce the records in court, the Bench said.

“Not a single dog picked up shall be released back on the streets/public spaces. Otherwise, the entire exercise will go futile. If we come to know that this (release of captured dogs) has happened, we shall take stern action. If any person or organisation comes in the way of authorities picking up strays, we shall take strict action. We have only the larger public interest in our minds… infants and young children should not at any cost fall prey to such dog bites leading to rabies,” the court observed.

The Bench directed the authorities to start a helpline to report incidents of dog attacks. “All cases of dog bites are to be immediately reported. Action must be taken to catch, pick up, round up the dog within four hours of the complaint received. Any resistance offered by any individual or organisation would be viewed very strictly and would lead to contempt action. The dog in question would be captured, sterilised and immunised as required by rules and not released under any circumstances,” the court directed.

**2. Virtual split in Akali Dal as its breakaway faction names party president**

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which has been going through a challenging phase over the past few years, faced another setback on Monday as the party faced a virtual split following the rebel faction announcing its new president.

In the meeting in Amritsar of the Akal Takht-appointed committee, which was last year given the mandate to supervise the restructuring of the party, the breakaway faction on Monday declared former Akal Takht acting chief priest Giani Harpreet Singh as its president. Satwant Kaur was appointed chairperson of the Panthic (Sikh) council. The Akal Takht is the highest Sikh temporal seat.

Ever since Sukhbir Singh Badal’s re-election as the SAD president, the rebels had been alleging that the Akal Takht’s verdict of December 2, 2024 – which awarded religious punishments to him and several other party leaders for the “mistakes” committed by the Akali Dal-led government from 2007 to 2017 – was not implemented in letter and spirit. The temporal authority had issued directions to the working committee of SAD to constitute a panel to hold elections for the post of party president and office-bearers, which the rebels pointed out was not adhered to.

Mr. Harpreet Singh was part of the Sikh clergy that had issued the December 2, 2024 verdict. In February, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee had dismissed his services as the *jathedar*of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib.

With rebels staking claim to the party, the exchange of words between leaders of both the camps sharpened. Addressing the meeting, Mr. Harpreet Singh asserted that they were the real Akalis and “we would eventually take the control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committe, the Akali Dal symbol and Akali Dal office”.

Reacting sharply, senior SAD leaders Mahesh Inder Singh Grewal and Daljit Singh Cheema dubbed the faction as an “Agency Dal”. The leaders said the faction of disgruntled elements has added a new chapter to the “old conspiracy to divide and weaken the Khalsa Panth and Punjab” with the floating of a “sponsored outfit of Central agencies with their hand-picked henchman Harpreet Singh as its spearhead”.

SAD, which often claims to be the sole representative of the Sikh community, has over the years seen a gradual decline in fortunes in Punjab, where Sikh identity and issues have long been central to the political discourse.

**3. Rift between two blocs continues in Geneva Plastics Treaty negotiations: Geneva**

The deadlock between two blocs of countries on the best way to contain plastic pollution mirrors a shift in the global plastic and polymer-manufacturing industry, which in recent years has moved out of Europe and drifted towards South and Southeast Asia.

Since 2022, the United Nations Environment Programme has been spearheading efforts to get countries to evolve, by consensus, a legally binding treaty that commits them to address plastic pollution on land as well as in oceans.

However, two broad coalitions have evolved over four sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution here — the High Ambition Coalition (HAC) chaired by Norway and Rwanda, consisting of nearly 80 countries, including members of the European Union (EU), and the Like Minded Countries (LMC), which includes Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, China and Cuba. While the latter is not a formal coalition like the HAC, it is a much smaller group of countries whose interests are aligned because they are all major petrochemical states.

India on Saturday had expressed solidarity with the LMC. Under the current rules of negotiation, countries cannot pass a proposal by a majority vote, and near-unanimous agreement is required.

The fundamental rift between the two is that the HAC says plastic pollution cannot be contained without imposing cuts or capping production of plastic and its constituent, polymer. The LMC says plastic pollution can be addressed through waste management, and imposing production cuts would only cause disruptions in trade, rather than a meaningful reduction in plastic production and use.

An analysis in July by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) tracking the flows of the main chemical constituents of plastic — ethylene, propylene, styrene and their derivatives polypropene, low-density polyethylene, linear low-density polyethylene, high-density polyethylene and polyethylene terephthalate — showed that Asia dominated the global trade in primary plastic polymers, with 11 exporting and 18 importing countries.

**Divergent stance**

In North America, the United States was the largest exporter of these primary plastic polymers, while several European countries served as both importers and exporters. Trade volumes in Africa and South America were negligible. This year, the United States, which is part of neither coalition but had always pitched for a “strong treaty”, said it would not support any proposals for production cuts.

India’s support for the LMC echoes in a submission made by the All India Plastic Manufacturers Association, an industry lobby, to the Chair of the INC 5.2, Ambassador Luis Vayas Valdivieso, on August 5. “We believe that any cap on the production of primary polymers will do more harm than good as its growing needs in a multitude of areas cannot be met with other materials in the quantities needed,” says the submission.

“We ask that the INC focus on helping countries increase their waste management capabilities... and build programmes for behavioural change to eradicate littering.” Independent observers said that the business case for petroleum and polymer refining in major economies was “weak”. “Look at China for instance. Its petrochemical refining is working at 50% capacity. Several major refiners the world over are seeing that margins and demands for polymer products are declining,” said David Azoulay, managing attorney, Center for International Environmental Law, at a seminar.

**4. Landmark study offers new insights into what protects against dengue**

The specific components of the immune response in a human body that protect against a dengue virus (DENV) infection and the subsequent illness remain unclear. Scientists are still trying to understand how natural infection and vaccination protect people so that they can develop better vaccines.

Now, a novel study has revealed important insights into developing strong immunity against DENV, which is otherwise quite complex. Researchers from the US and the Philippines have identified specific antibodies, known as envelope dimer epitope (EDE)-like antibodies, as the key for building broad, cross-serotype immunity following natural infection or vaccination.

The findings, published recently in *Science Translational Medicine*, represent a significant step forward in understanding dengue immunity and could lead to more effective therapeutics.

**Disease burden and dengue vaccines**

Dengue is a major global health challenge caused by any of four DENV serotypes (DENV1 to DENV4). It is the most common vector-borne viral disease, with half of the world’s population at risk, especially in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Americas. According to one large study in 2013, the economic burden of dengue in Southeast Asia is higher than that of 17 other conditions, including Japanese encephalitis, upper respiratory infections, and hepatitis B.

And yet developing a universally effective vaccine has proven difficult thanks to the complex immune mechanisms involved. In DENV cases, the initial immunity after the first infection (a.k.a. primary immunity) paradoxically increases the risk of severe disease rather than conferring protection when a person is infected a second time with a different serotype of the virus. This phenomenon, called antibody-dependent enhancement, occurs when non-neutralising antibodies bind to partially immature virus particles, facilitating their entry into immune cells and worsening the infection. All severe dengue cases requiring hospitalisation result from such second infections.

Since vaccines mimic natural infections, the risk of antibody-dependent enhancement after the first dose is the main challenge for dengue vaccines, which is why they are usually recommended only for individuals with prior exposure to the virus and avoided in dengue-naïve people.

After exposure to at least two different DENV serotypes, a person develops true protection, known as “secondary immunity,” against future disease.

Currently, two primary dengue vaccines are licensed (in some countries): Dengvaxia and QDENGA. These shots are most effective for individuals who have already been exposed to dengue at least oncebeforevaccination. Laboratory confirmation of a previous dengue infection is required for vaccination with Dengvaxia.

**Outbreak in Cebu**

DENV is an enveloped virus, meaning it has a protective outer layer. A key component of this layer is the envelope (E) protein, which is the primary target for the body’s immune response.

The E protein is arranged in pairs on the virus surface, creating complex three-dimensional structures known as quaternary epitopes. EDE is a critical quaternary epitope and an important target for vaccines and therapeutic antibodies.

In June 2017, Cebu province in the Philippines offered at least the first dose of a dengue vaccine to children aged 9-14 years. For the new study, the researchers recruited and followed a cohort of 2,996 such children. Of them, 1,782 received the first dose of the vaccine, and the rest remained unvaccinated. The researchers collected baseline blood samples one month before the vaccination campaign and follow-up samples 17-28 months after the campaign.

There had been an unusually large dengue outbreak in Cebu between the baseline and follow-up sample collection, with most cases caused by DENV2 (61.7%), followed by DENV3 (30%). The researchers measured different kinds of antibodies in the samples: EDE-like antibodies (targetting envelope dimer epitopes); neutralising antibodies (which can block infection by mature, fully formed viruses); and binding antibodies (those that attach to parts of the E protein without necessarily blocking infection).

The study focused on the children who had had evidence of at least two prior DENV infections (those with “secondary immunity”) at the baseline. They followed up with the cohort up to October 31, 2022, to check how many with secondary immunity went on to develop dengue between the follow-up sample collection and the study closure date. All the samples were analysed in vaccinated and unvaccinated children in this subgroup in an attempt to reveal the true predictors of protection.

**More protective against disease**

The study’s findings illuminated the role of EDE-like antibodies in the protective response.

Specifically, the researchers found that EDE-like antibodies were highly prevalent in children with secondary DENV immunity, with 81.8% to 90.1% of participants having detectable levels. This was in stark contrast to individuals with only primary DENV immunity, where EDE-like antibodies were largely absent (detected in only 4% to 12% of cases). This suggests EDE-like antibodies are a hallmark of established immunity against dengue. The magnitude of EDE-like antibodies was also strongly and consistently correlated with broad neutralisation of all four mature DENV serotypes, indicating that these antibodies are crucial for widespread protection rather than just against a single serotype.

The study observed that both natural DENV infection — due to the large outbreak during the study period — and vaccination significantly boosted EDE-like antibodies as well as general DENV-binding and neutralising antibodies. This effect was evident even in children who already possessed strong secondary immunity.

Crucially, higher levels of EDE-like antibodies were consistently associated with lower odds of symptomatic dengue, dengue with warning signs, and dengue requiring hospitalisation. This protective effect was observed across multiple serotypes, demonstrating both serotype-specific and cross-reactive benefits. However, EDE-like antibodies had limited protective effects against viral replication. Thus, they were less protective against new infections but more protective against disease, especially severe disease.

Perhaps the most significant finding was that EDE-like antibodies didn’t just correlate with protection: they statistically explained a substantial portion of the protective effect seen with other mature virus-neutralising and E-binding antibodies. That is, when EDE-like antibodies were factored into statistical models, the protective effect of other antibodies was significantly diminished, while EDE-like antibodies remained strongly associated with protection.

Specifically, EDE-like antibodies explained 42% to 65% of the protective effect attributed to mature virus-neutralising antibodies and 41% to 75% of the effect of general E protein-binding antibodies. This observation strongly suggested that EDE-like antibodies are a primary, underlying determinant of broad, cross-reactive immunity against dengue.

**Limitations and the future**

Although the study had some limitations, such as a relatively small number of dengue cases for assessing protection against all four serotypes and a limited panel of monoclonal antibodies used for characterisation, it nonetheless marked a significant advance in the fight against dengue. The team provided a clearer understanding of the immune responses that truly protect against this debilitating disease. EDE-like antibodies also helped explain how neutralising and binding antibodies contributed to protection.

Further research will be essential to formally validate EDE-like antibodies as reliable indicators of protection for vaccine efficacy trials. If this is validated, researchers will be able to design vaccines that specifically elicit high levels of EDE-like antibodies and thus better protect against dengue.

**5. Vehicle owners deserve support on use of ethanol-blended fuel**

The downsides to ethanol use when compared to petrol are well known, including in the U.S. and Brazil, that have led in ethanol blending. But the engineering behind the safe and efficient use of ethanol-blended petrol, from 5% to 100%, is established too. Ethanol blending began as a response to the oil shock of the 1970s. Ethanol has also been pushed as carbon neutral. For India, however, the clinching argument is import substitution and lower price. The government’s case is that ethanol blending up to 20% can ensure $10 billion being put in Indian pockets every year. But, the benefits will be uneven for farmers, traders and distillers. India’s case hinges on increasing use of C-heavy molasses that are not used for sugar making, using broken rice that otherwise rots in godowns, and on ramping up acreage and productivity of maize that is agriculturally less demanding. These are supposed to set off food security concerns. Once the ethanol economy is fully established, however, it may be tough to prioritise food stocks over the interests of stakeholders in case of shortages and imbalances. Import substitution figures can be dented by import of farm inputs such as fertilizers that have a forex outgo of $10 billion.

Ethanol has an efficiency penalty — it can affect material durability and corrode fuel handling systems. But, global studies have shown that vehicles manufactured as per Euro 2, U.S. Tier 1 and India’s BS 2 norms (in force since 2001) are compatible for ethanol use up to E15. The closed loop fuel control systems mandated to control fuel burning and keeping emissions down in BS 2 can help to mitigate efficiency and durability penalties of ethanol and the upgraded materials in BS 2 can help to reduce corrosion. In addition, as per norms, India’s vehicles sold since 2023 are committed to handle up to E20 although questions arise over the impact on the mass of older vehicles. And what is not helping is that in India there is no choice for consumers. Also, any reduction in price claimed earlier does not seem to be reflected in the bunk. Meanwhile, India has adopted two ethanol-specific norms and is expected to come up with E27, taking a cue from Brazil. While the government insists that its research indicates no harm, what would really help is full disclosure by automakers on their past brands even as they are announcing models that can accept any level of ethanol. For instance, some models sold some five years ago accepted only E5. Manufacturers should indicate possible mitigation routes for such models. And the government must back insurance claims. Transparency should support policy moves.

**6. What will be the impact of Google antitrust case?**

**The story so far**

On August 8, the Supreme Court admitted an appeal filed by Alphabet Inc., the parent company of Google, against a judgment of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). The tribunal had earlier upheld, at least in part, the Competition Commission of India’s (CCI) findings that Google had abused its dominant position in the Android ecosystem to indulge in anti-competitive practices. Alongside Google’s appeal, the Court also admitted related petitions from the CCI itself and the Alliance Digital India Foundation (ADIF), which is a coalition of Indian startups critical of Big Tech dominance. A Bench led by Justice P.S. Narasimha has listed the matter for a detailed hearing in November.

**What has the CCI accused Google of?**

The CCI’s investigation into Google began in 2020, sparked by complaints from app developers and industry groups who alleged that Google was using its market dominance in Android to push its own services and restrict fair competition.

By 2022, the Commission concluded that Google had engaged in multiple anti-competitive practices. Chief among them was the mandatory use of the Google Play Billing System (GPBS) for in-app purchases on the Play Store. This meant that developers had to use Google’s payment processing system, paying a commission that typically ranged between 15% and 30%, rather than integrating their own billing solutions.

The regulator also found that Google exempted its own app YouTube from these billing requirements, giving them a cost advantage over competing services. This, the CCI argued, distorted the level-playing field and harmed both rival developers and consumers.

In addition, the CCI highlighted that the Android licensing model required smartphone makers to pre-install Google’s suite of apps — Search, Chrome, YouTube, and others — as a condition for access to the Google Play Store. According to the Commission, this bundling restricted consumer choice and suppressed innovation from alternative app providers.

Based on these findings, the CCI imposed a fine of ₹936.44 crore on Google and issued a set of behavioural remedies, including directives to decouple Google’s payment system from Play Store access, ensure transparency in billing data, and refrain from using such data to advantage its own services.

**What is Google’s defence?**

Google rejected the CCI’s conclusions, arguing that its practices were designed to enhance user experience, maintain security, and enable a sustainable business model for the Android ecosystem.

The company maintained that Android is an open-source operating system, available for free to device manufacturers, and that Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) are not obligated to install Google’s proprietary apps if they choose to license the core Android platform without Play Store access. It argued that pre-installing a set of Google apps was a matter of efficiency and user convenience, and did not prevent users from downloading competing apps.

On the billing side, Google claimed that GPBS ensured safe and reliable transactions for users, helping to prevent fraud and reduce payment failures. The commission fees, it said, were consistent with industry standards and provided developers access to Google’s global infrastructure, distribution reach, and regular security updates.

Google also argued that exempting certain in-house services from GPBS was not anti-competitive but a recognition of differences in their business models. It pointed out that many leading Indian apps like PhonePe, Paytm, and Hotstar had grown successfully on Android, which shows that the market remained vibrant and competitive.

**What was the NCLAT’s judgment?**

In March, the NCLAT delivered its ruling on Google’s appeal against the CCI’s 2022 order. The tribunal upheld several of the CCI’s findings, agreeing that Google’s mandatory billing policy and bundling of apps amounted to abuse of dominance. However, it reduced the financial penalty from ₹936.44 crore to ₹216.69 crore, reasoning that the original amount was disproportionate to the conduct in question. The NCLAT also struck down some of the CCI’s behavioural directions, holding that certain remedies were either over-broad or lacked sufficient evidentiary basis. In May 2025, following a review petition, the tribunal reinstated two key directions that Google must be transparent about its billing data policies, and that it must not use such data to gain a competitive advantage for its own apps and services.

This partial victory left all parties dissatisfied. Google sought a complete reversal of the findings, the CCI wanted its original penalties and remedies restored in full, and ADIF argued that the tribunal had gone too easy on Google.

**What’s at stake now?**

The case raises fundamental questions about how much control a dominant platform like Android should have over the devices and services it supports, and to what extent regulators can intervene in the name of competition.

For consumers, a ruling in favour of the CCI could mean more choice and potentially lower prices. If developers can bypass GPBS and use cheaper payment systems, they might pass on some of the savings to users. Greater transparency and restrictions on data use could also enhance privacy and fairness in app rankings and recommendations. However, industry observers warn that loosening Google’s control could lead to more fragmentation in Android, with different devices offering inconsistent user experiences.

For smartphone makers, the verdict could influence licensing costs and product flexibility. If the Supreme Court upholds the CCI’s original remedies, OEMs might gain more leeway to pre-install competing services or experiment with alternative Android versions without losing access to the Play Store. This could be especially significant for smaller Indian brands that have struggled to differentiate themselves in a Google-centric ecosystem.

For Indian startups and app developers, the case represents an opportunity to level the playing field against a global giant. ADIF has argued that Google’s policies not only limit payment options but also give it an undue edge in promoting its own apps. A strong pro-CCI ruling could give local companies better bargaining power and distribution access.

For Google, the stakes go beyond India. The country is one of its largest markets by user base, and an adverse ruling here could trigger similar regulatory demands in other jurisdictions. It could also force Google to reconsider its global Android business model, especially if courts require it to unbundle services or open its billing systems.

**What is the road ahead?**

The Supreme Court’s hearings in November will likely examine both the legal interpretation of “abuse of dominance” under the Indian competition law and the economic realities of platform markets. Whatever the outcome, the decision will set an important precedent for how India balances innovation, consumer protection, and market fairness in the digital era. With Android powering over 95% of smartphones in the country, the Court’s ruling will directly influence how hundreds of millions of Indians access apps, make payments, and use mobile services in the years to come.

If the case ends with strong enforcement of the CCI’s original directions, India could emerge as a leading example of robust digital market regulation outside the EU. On the other hand, if the Court sides with Google, it will reaffirm the status quo.

**7. Baloch Liberation Army termed foreign terror group by U.S.**

The U.S. on Monday toughened its terrorist designation of separatist militants in Pakistan’s southwest Balochistan province who were behind a major train attack in March.

The U.S. State Department listed the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) as a foreign terrorist organisation, which makes it a crime in the U.S. to provide support to the group.

Washington had already listed the BLA under the less severe label of specially designated global terrorists, which targets financial resources.

The new step comes as U.S. President Donald Trump increases contact with Pakistan, which was kept at arm’s length by his predecessor Joe Biden, whose administration resented Islamabad’s role in the two-decade war in Afghanistan.

The designation of the separatists “demonstrates the Trump administration’s commitment to countering terrorism,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement.

Pakistani forces have for almost two decades fought an ethnic Baloch separatist insurgency that has killed hundreds of people in the minerals-rich province.

In March, the BLA claimed responsibility for an attack on a train that was carrying 450 passengers. Dozens died in the two-day siege.

Pakistan has repeatedly accused India of involvement in the insurgency, a claim dismissed by New Delhi. The Trump administration last month also designated as terrorists a shadowy group blamed for an April attack in India’s Jammu and Kashmir which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan.

Islamabad is especially sensitive about the militants’ threats to foreign investment, especially by China, which has poured in billions of dollars.

Baloch separatists and rights groups say the military’s heavy-handed counter-terrorism response to the insurgency has included widespread enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

**8. Australia ‘will recognise’ Palestinian state at UNGA**

Australia will recognise a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly in September, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Monday.

“A two-state solution is humanity’s best hope to break the cycle of violence in the Middle East [West Asia] and to bring an end to the conflict, suffering and starvation in Gaza,” he told reporters in Canberra.

“Australia will recognise the right of the Palestinian people to a state of their own. We will work with the international community to make this right a reality.”

He said that Australia’s decision was predicated on reassurances from the Palestinian Authority that there would be “no role for the terrorists of Hamas in any future Palestinian state”.

**‘Shameful’**

Israel’s Ambassador to Australia, Amir Maimon, said the decision was symbolic, rather than “genuine progress towards peace”.

“Let us be clear: this decision will not change the reality on the ground,” Mr. Maimon said.

Just hours earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticised international calls to recognise Palestinian statehood, saying it would “not bring peace, it will bring war”. “To have European countries and Australia march into that rabbit hole, just like that, fall right into it and buy this canard is disappointing,” he said.

**Indian Express**

**1. Why, to tackle the stray dog problem, it is important to make pet owners accountable, too**

The Supreme Court on Monday (August 11) directed the Delhi government, civic bodies, and authorities of Noida, Gurgaon, and Ghaziabad to round up and move stray dogs to shelters, underlining the urgency in tackling the “grim situation”.

A Bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said: “Infants and young children, at any cost, should not fall prey to rabies. The action should inspire confidence that they can move freely without fear of being bitten by stray dogs. No sentiments should be involved.”

For many, the intervention of the top court has come as a major relief. But the intervention may not produce the desired effect without also making pet owners accountable. This is because the plight and the menace of stray dogs in India are a direct consequence of irresponsible pet rearing.

**Status report: Stray dogs and pet dogs**

There are more than 60 million stray dogs in India. Very few of them survive disease and vehicular accidents to die natural deaths. Also, someone is bitten by a dog in India every 10 seconds. This works out to more than 3 million bites a year, of which around 5,000 turn out to be fatal.

Dogs spread more than 60 diseases to people. Rabies alone claims at least two human lives every three hours. More than 15,000 tonnes of dog poop and 8 million gallons of dog pee – a major health and environmental hazard – is discharged on Indian roads and fields daily.

India’s pet dog population was estimated at 30 million in 2024. The population of pet dogs, along with India’s dog food market, has grown at 10-15% per year over the last five years. The size of the Indian pet dog industry, currently worth Rs 300 crore, is projected to double by 2030.

There are upscale dog hotels such as Critterati in Gurgaon, and dog grooming parlours such as Scoopy Scrub in Delhi, Fuzzy Wuzzy in Bengaluru, and Tailwaggers in Mumbai. Companies such as Bajaj Allianz and Future Generali offer dog health insurance.

**Various ideas to tackle strays, all ineffective**

While cherishing their “best friends” at home, Indians have been far less kind to them on the street. Historically, there have been efforts to eliminate the stray dog problem by means including electrocution, poisoning, shooting, or just clubbing them to death.

But long before the killing of dogs became an animal rights issue, it had become evident that short of elimination *en masse*, this would not have a lasting effect on the population of strays. As food becomes increasingly abundant (garbage dumps, and individual and organised feeders), the partial elimination of the stray population reduces the competition for resources and boosts breeding.

Thus came the idea of sterilisation. Since 1992, NGOs such as Chennai-based Blue Cross of India, and various governments have carried out Animal Birth Control (ABC) programmes in several cities. In 2001, the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules were notified under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.

However, unless at least two-thirds of a canine population is sterilised within a small (typically 6-12 months) window, ABC drives fail to have any stabilising effect. With the job left to a few NGOs, every Indian city has struggled to achieve the target that requires neutering hundreds of stray dogs every day for months. But even if that mark is hit, stray dog populations may still continue to increase.

**When pet dogs contribute to stray numbers**

There is no national law in India that requires dog owners to register their pets. A few cities have such rules, but enforcement remains shoddy. It is not mandatory to get pets sterilised or vaccinated either.

Since owners are not accountable for their dogs or their dogs’ pups, hundreds of unwanted pet dogs and pups are abandoned on the street daily. Also, thousands of pet dogs are allowed to roam or break free and breed with street strays.

In consequence, even as governments and NGOs continue to neuter a few dogs on the street, pet dogs, thanks to callous owners, add to the stray population. This is also why the so-called ‘Indian street dog’ is mostly mongrels of various crossbreeds.

The solution, experts say, is to have ABC drives target pedigreed pets with high breeding frequency. The government could offer incentives to owners to get their pets registered and sterilised. A steep tax may be levied on breeding pets.

**The problem with petting without owning**

Equally irresponsible is the trend of petting dogs outside the home. In all cities, neighbourhood good samaritans feed stray dogs on the streets outside their homes or workplaces. This has the same effect as petting, and turns stray dogs territorial and aggressive. Such feeding has also created monsters of monkeys in many parts of India. Over the decades, governments cutting across party lines have sponsored the feeding of stray dogs by various organisations.

In *The Ecology of Stray Dogs: A Study of Free-ranging Urban Animals* (1973), possibly the most authoritative work on the subject, Alan Beck wrote: “Loose or straying pets and stray (feral) dogs are different. True stray dogs form somewhat stable packs… are more active at night and cautious about people. In general, straying pets have smaller home ranges and [are] active when people are.”

This is why abandoned or proxy pet dogs on the street are more likely to be aggressive towards people who do not pet (or feed) them. Thus, not only do some pet owners contribute to the growing population of strays, they also bear responsibility for many dog attacks on people.

Anticipating resistance from some quarters, the Supreme Court warned on Monday that any individual or organisation coming in the way of implementing its order would face legal action. It may widen its gaze to make pet owners and proxy pet feeders accountable when it hears the matter again after six weeks.

**2. ‘8 lakh’ strays, no govt shelters, Delhi has to redraw its plan**

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With the Supreme Court underlining that stray dogs should not be returned to the streets, the Delhi government has been forced to rethink its strategy on controlling the canine population — estimated at around 8 lakh in the Capital.

According to a senior Delhi government official, the current practice, as per the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023, is to pick up the stray dogs, take them to hospitals for sterilisation, and then release them back on the streets from where they were picked up.

“We have been focusing on the stray dog menace and have held several meetings but now, with the apex court’s order, that becomes irrelevant as the context completely changes… The government will implement the order but it is not possible to pick up the dogs and move them out of the city or to the shelters right now,” the official said.

The official said that as the government does not have any shelter of its own, the implementation of the court order may take longer than eight weeks. While the government has hospitals, all the shelters are currently run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In its order on Monday, the Supreme Court asked the authorities to make shelters to house stray dogs, saying they should first start work on a shelter for 5,000-6,000 dogs in the next six to eight weeks. It sought a report within eight weeks on the creation of infrastructure.

Meanwhile, hours after the Supreme Court’s directions, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) ordered that dogs admitted to its hospitals and other animal sterilisation centres should not be released after recovery. The corporation has also ordered an audit of the existing facilities to house dogs temporarily.

“We have asked the centres not to release the dogs there for sterilisation. We are discussing plans regarding building additional shelters, but this will take time. As of now, we have asked the centres to submit how many dogs they can accommodate. Dogs will also be housed in 77 units of vet hospitals run by the MCD. We will start picking up the dogs according to the available facility,” said Dr S K Yadav, project in-charge, Animal Programme, MCD.

He said the corporation picked up 200 dogs from the Red Fort area ahead of Independence Day celebrations, and these would not be released now. “The estimated population of stray dogs in the city is around 8 lakh. We will follow the SC’s orders,” he said, adding that they would first focus on vulnerable areas like schools, colleges, hospitals and public spaces.

Delhi Development Minister Kapil Mishra is scheduled to hold a meeting with the concerned departments and officials on Wednesday to discuss the matter. “We are fully committed to abide by the orders and directions issued by the Supreme Court. We have been working on this issue proactively, to address it on the ground from day one, studying the legal and technical obstacles that existed in the previous system,” he said.

He said the government would implement the order in a planned manner, keeping both the public as well as the dog lovers in mind. “Our focus, while implementing this order, will be the welfare of animals,” he said.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, meanwhile, said the “stray dog menace” had assumed “gigantic proportions” and assured that her government would bring in a policy soon. “The people of Delhi have been worried about the stray dog menace for years… our only duty is to give them relief… Today, this problem has taken a gigantic form… it is very important for the government to resolve it with honesty and integrity,” she said. “… we are looking into what the previous governments did… Since our government was formed, it is continuously discussing the issue and holding meetings to provide relief to the people,” the CM said.

**PIB  
  
1. Cooperative Election Authority (CEA) and State Cooperative Election Authorities**

Cooperative Election Authority (CEA) held its first consultative meeting with State Cooperative Election Authorities today in New Delhi

The Cooperative Election Authority held its first consultative meeting with State Cooperative Election Authorities today in New Delhi. The meeting aimed to develop a mechanism of dialogue with State Cooperative Election Authorities so that the elections in cooperative bodies are conducted in a free and fair manner and the process becomes more transparent. The meeting was chaired by Shri Devendra Kumar Singh, Chairperson, Cooperative Election Authority which saw participation of the State Election Commissioners from Odisha, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Maharashtra. Shri R. K. Gupta, Vice Chairperson and Shri Alok Agarwal, Cooperative Ombudsman also participated. Shri Anand Kumar Jha, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Cooperation took part in the deliberation.



Speaking on the occasion, Shri Devendra Kumar Singh, Chairperson, Cooperative Election Authority said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji and guidance of Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Shri Amit Shah Government has brought various reforms in the cooperative sector including establishment of Cooperative Election Authority. The Cooperative Election Authority has so far conducted 159 elections since March 2024 and is in the process of conducting 69 more such Cooperative Elections. The Cooperative Election Authority was notified on 11 March 2024 in exercise of the Centre’s powers conferred by section 45 of the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act of 2002 and its amendment in 2023.

Shri Devendra Kumar Singh said that 2025 is being celebrated as  International year of Cooperatives and a lot of reforms have been brought by the Government showing its commitment to the growth of Cooperative sector. He said that the election process in Cooperative Societies need to be streamlined to foster transparency in order to make the elections in cooperative societies free and fair.

The Chairperson, Cooperative Election Authority said that there is a need for standard manuals and codes of conduct for cooperative elections. The discussion revolved around matters relating to framing of Code of Conduct for contesting candidates and Multi-State Cooperative Society (MSCs), to fix upper limit of expenditure by the contesting candidates, publication of handbook for the Returning Officers, election of delegates from member Cooperative Societies who are members in National Cooperative Societies and other agenda received from State. One of the agenda proposed by participating State Cooperative Election Authorities included introduction of Electronic Voting Machine in cooperative election.

Shri Devendra Kumar Singh also brought up the discussion on the matters related to share capital of members, use of symbols for the candidates and use of indelible inks in the cooperative elections and discussion ensued.

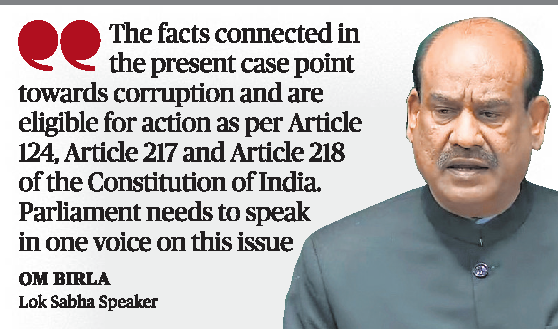
The CEA decided to hold the consultative committee meeting every three months to take forward the reform process in cooperative elections.

The participants from States include, the State Election Commissioner from Odisha (Shri Srikanta Prusty, State Cooperative Election Commission), Bihar (Shri Girish Shankar, Bihar State Election Authority along with Shri Kumar Shant Rakshit, Advisor, Bihar State Election Commission), Tamil Nadu (Thiru Dayanand Kataria, Commissioner, Tamil Nadu State Cooperative Societies Election Commission), Maharashtra (Shri. Anil Mahadeo Kawade, State Cooperative Election Authority Maharashtra and Shri Ashok Gade, Secretary, Maharashtra State Election Authority) and Telangana (Shri G Shrivinas Rao, Commissioner, Telangana Cooperative Election Authority)

**13th August**

**The Hindu**

**1. LS Speaker sets in motion process to remove HC judge**



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday set in motion the process of removing Justice Yashwant Varma of Allahabad High Court by admitting a motion, signed by 146 members, and constituting a three-member inquiry committee to probe the charges against Justice Varma.

The inquiry committee comprises Supreme Court judge Justice Aravind Kumar, Madras High Court Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and senior Karnataka High Court advocate B.V. Acharya.

Justice Varma was repatriated from the Delhi High Court to the Allahabad High Court after burnt wads of currency notes were found at his official residence on March 14. Later, an in-house inquiry of the Supreme Court had indicted Justice Varma.

“The committee will submit its report as early as possible. The proposal [for removal of Justice Varma] will remain pending till the receipt of the report of the inquiry committee,” Mr. Birla informed the House.

He said he accepted the proposal received on July 21 and constituted a three-member panel for the removal of the judge from his post in accordance with Section 3(2) of the Judges (Inquiry) Act 1968.

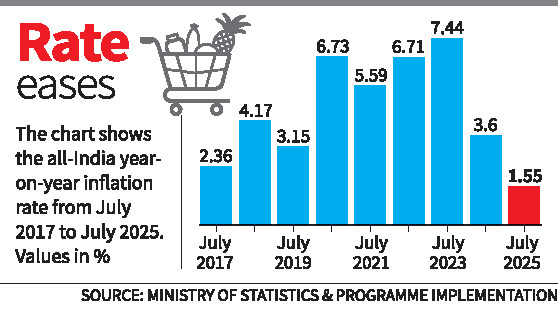
**‘Foundation of trust’**

Mr. Birla said unimpeachable character and financial and intellectual integrity were the foundation of the trust a common person has in the judiciary. “The facts connected in the present case point towards corruption and are eligible for action as per Article 124, Article 217 and Article 218 of the Constitution of India. Parliament needs to speak in one voice on this issue and every citizen of this country should send a clear message about its commitment to zero tolerance to corruption.”

Earlier, then Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna had asked Justice Varma to resign or face impeachment proceedings after receiving the report of an in-house probe committee in March. As Justice Varma refused to quit, CJI Khanna forwarded the report to the President and the Prime Minister for the removal of the judge.

Though Justice Varma had moved the SC against CJI Khanna’s recommendation for his removal, the top court rejected his plea.

**2. Retail inflation hits 8-year low of 1.55% as food prices drop**



Retail inflation in India slipped to 1.55% in July, its lowest rate since June 2017, driven by a drop in food prices. This is below the Reserve Bank of India’s comfort band of 2% to 6%. The Consumer Price Index (CPI), released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Tuesday, showed that inflation has been easing for nine consecutive months.

The rate of inflation in the food and beverages category came in at -0.8% in July, lower than the -0.2% seen in June, and the 5.1% rate in July 2024.

“In the food basket, there was deflation in key items such as vegetables, pulses, spices, and meat,” said Rajani Sinha, chief economist at CareEdge Ratings. “Looking ahead, food inflation is likely to remain contained.” Vegetable and pulses inflation contracted 21% and 14% respectively, driven by a high base and falling prices. Ms. Sinha said the good progress of the monsoon, adequate reservoir levels, and strong *kharif* sowing bode well for agricultural output and food price stability.

Core inflation, which excludes the impact of food and fuel prices, also eased to 4.1% in July 2025 from 4.4% in the previous month, nearly at the RBI’s target of 4%.

The other broad categories in the CPI saw little change from the previous month. The paan, tobacco, and intoxicants category saw inflation remain flat at 2.4% in July. Similarly, the clothing and footwear category saw inflation ease marginally to 2.5% in July from 2.5% in June.

Inflation in the housing segment remained at 3.2% in July, while the fuel and light category saw inflation quicken to 2.7% in July from 2.5% in June.

**High base benefit**

Dipanwita Mazumdar, an economist at the Bank of Baroda, said that a statistical high base will continue to keep the inflation rate down between September and December 2025.

“The current cycle is acting in favour of us when the inflationary impact from tariffs is the centre point of global discussions,” she said in a note. “We expect the downside risk to global growth will largely keep international commodity prices in check. This is expected to partly negate the higher tariff rates in place.” However, she added that India needs to be watchful in case it has to completely stop buying Russian oil in compliance with U.S. President Donald Trump’s demands. “In this case, some diversification towards Kuwait and Iraq would also lend support.”

**3. Gross tax receipts dip 3.9%, amid rise in refunds**

The Union government’s gross direct tax collections contracted 1.9% to ₹7.99 lakh crore in the current financial year 2025-26 up to August 11, 2025, according to data released by the Central Board of Direct Taxes. Higher refunds also meant that net collections contracted 3.9% during this period.

The gross direct tax collections for the previous financial year stood at ₹8.14 lakh crore till August 11, 2024. Notably, the shortfall in gross collections this year comes due to lower collections from the non-corporate tax category, which also includes income tax collections.

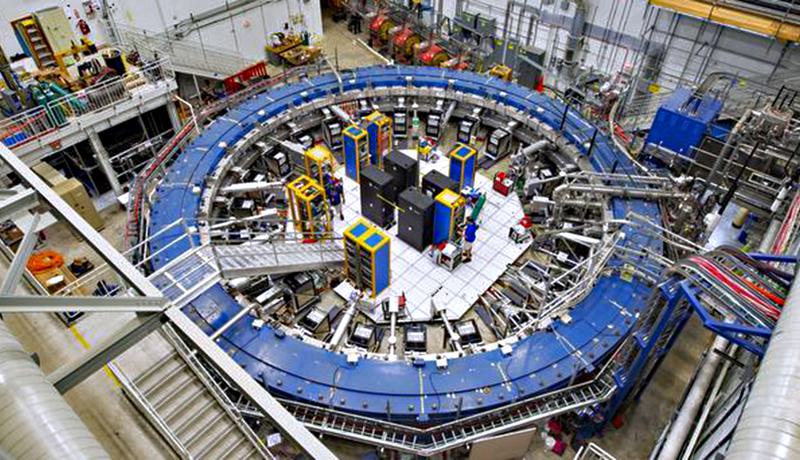
Non-corporate tax collections have fallen to ₹4.43 lakh crore in this financial year so far, down 8.3% from the ₹4.83 lakh crore collected in the same period of 2024-25. This category includes taxes paid by individuals, Hindu Undivided Families, firms, Associations of Persons , Bodies of Individuals, local authorities, and artificial juridical persons.

Gross corporate taxes, on the other hand, have increased to ₹3.33 lakh crore so far this year, up from ₹3.08 lakh crore collected in the same period of 2024-25.

Compounding the contraction in gross collections was the jump in refunds, which increased 9.8% during this period.

“The decline in the net collections is mainly due to the higher volume of refunds issued, especially for the corporate tax,” said Hitesh Sawhney, Partner at Price Waterhouse & Co LLP. He added that tax collections do not always have a “one-way trajectory” of growth and are more dynamic on a month-to-month basis.

**4. Latest muon data narrows gap but leaves physics mysteries unresolved**



**Can you weigh an elephant before and after it picks up a one-rupee coin, and tell the difference?** You can if the measurement is precise. To detect a 4-gram coin on a 4-tonne creature, the scales must come with a resolution of at least 1 part per million (ppm). Precise measurements such as these routinely lead to startling discoveries in fundamental physics. This is what the physicist Albert Michelson meant by “The future truths of physical science are to be looked for in the sixth place of decimals.”

This June, the Muon *g*-2 (pronounced “gee minus two”) Experiment at Fermilab in the U.S. presented its highly anticipated final results. With data collected over three years and with the involvement of more than 170 physicists, the collaboration had measured a unique property of a subatomic particle called a muon with an unprecedented precision of 0.127 ppm, outdoing its stated goal of 0.140 ppm.

Usually, physicists check such measurements against the prediction of the Standard Model, the theory of subatomic particles that predicts their properties. If they don’t match, the measured value would hint at the presence of unseen forces. But in this instance, there are two ways to make theoretical predictions about this property of the muon. One of them is consistent with the Fermilab experiment and the other is far off. Nobody knows which really is right, and an intriguing drama has been unfolding over the last few years with no clear resolution in sight.

**g minus 2**

The muon is an elementary particle that mimics the electron in every trait except for being 207-times heavier. Discovered in 1936 in cosmic rays, its place in the pattern of the Standard Model was, and still is, something of a mystery, prompting physicist Isidor Rabi to remark: “Who ordered that?”

The muon carries non-zero quantum spin, which means it functions like a petite magnet. The strength of this magnet, called the magnetic moment, is captured by a quantity called the *g* factor. In a high-school calculation, *g* would be exactly 2, but in advanced theory its value drifts a tiny bit from 2 due to quantum field effects. It is this so-called anomalous magnetic moment that the Muon *g*-2 Experiment painstakingly ascertained.

Measurements of the *g*-2 of the muon were first made at CERN in Europe and the results were published in 1961 with a definition of 4000 ppm. Over the next two decades at CERN, the precision was improved to 7 ppm. Matters took an interesting trans-Atlantic turn when the Muon E821 experiment at the Brookhaven National Lab in the US took data between 1997 and 2001 and achieved a precision of 0.540 ppm, which was similar to the uncertainty in the theoretical prediction. In other words, the two numbers — the theoretical calculation and the observed value — could be meaningfully compared.

**Contrast with theory**

Nothing seemed to have been amiss in the experiment, so many physicists wagered that the disagreement was a hint of ‘new physics’. Numerous explanations involving theories beyond the Standard Model poured into the literature over the next two decades. At the same time, the theoretical physicists themselves got down to refining the Standard Model prediction itself, which was no mean task.

So stood affairs until Fermilab started measuring *g*-2 in 2017. When it had collected just 6% of the total intended data by 2021, it had already reached a precision of 0.460 ppm, comparable to E821. This first result was in such excellent agreement with E821 data that when the two results were combined, the discrepancy with theory deepened to worrying levels.

But the spectacle didn’t end there. On the very day that Fermilab announced this result to much fanfare, there quietly appeared in *Nature* a new paper in which a group of physicists, called the Budapest-Marseille-Wuppertal (BMW) Lattice collaboration, argued there may be no gap between theory and experiment values after all.

Theorists compute the muon *g*-2 using either (i) Feynman diagrams, a tool that has served calculations in quantum field theory for three quarters of a century, or (ii) the so-called lattice, a supercomputer simulation of spacetime as a discretised grid that represents quantum fields. Both approaches are technically very challenging in this context.

The final results at Fermilab from June are less confusing. They are consistent with their past announcements; it’s their contrast with theory that is unsettled.

**An old friend**

The experimental setup itself was ingenious. A beam of anti-muons is injected into a 15-m-wise ring with a uniform magnetic field. There the antiparticles make circular orbits with a characteristic frequency. Meanwhile, the antiparticles’ spin vectors — a fundamental property of theirs — rotate in the magnetic field and they resemble spinning tops, spinning with a certain spin frequency.

The central conceit is to measure the difference between the frequency of the circular orbits and the spin frequencies. This difference carries direct information on the muon’s *g*-2 value.

Both E821 and Fermilab operated on this principle. This is not impossible. Fermilab reused part of the E821 equipment and thus some unknown defects may have made their presence felt in the Fermilab data as well. This is why it is crucial to have a completely independent measurement by a different experimental approach.

An upcoming effort at the Japan Proton Accelerator Research Complex will do just this.

Uncertainty is an old friend of fundamental physics. It has always borne the promise of an imminent disclosure of a deep secret of nature. We wait now for the next word from theorists and hope that the jury will soon be in.

**5. Those most in need of organ transplantation should not be denied it**

When decisions are based on the principle of natural justice, they serve a particular social purpose or aim to right a specific wrong. The National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization’s (NOTTO) recent advisory, stating that women patients and relatives of deceased donors awaiting transplants will get priority as beneficiaries, walks the path of rewriting a gender trope. There is a gender skew as NOTTO’s decadal data (2013-23) indicates. As per NOTTO, in 2023, women constituted 63% of all living donor transplants, and yet they comprised between 24% (for heart) and 47% (lung) as beneficiaries of organs for transplantation.

In kidney transplants, women were only 37% of the beneficiaries in 2023, while for liver, women’s share was 30%. For pancreas transplant, women totalled up to 26% of total beneficiaries. Analysis in the *British Medical Journal* showed that in the past five years, women contributed to 36,038 of the 56,509 living organ donations in India, and benefited from transplantation in only 17,041 cases. NOTTO, in its advisory, said the recommendation was an attempt to address the gender imbalance among organ transplant recipients; to make provisions for additional points in the allocation criteria for women patients in the waiting.

While certainly laudable in what it sets out to do, this move could well be beset with procedural hassles. Currently, organ allotment protocols do not allow for prioritising any one recipient over another, except on grounds of health. There are, therefore, no provisions to prioritise women and/or near relatives of previous donors. Since the NOTTO advisory, questions have also been raised about whom the definition of ‘near relatives’ should include, and if all families involved in donating cadaveric organs for transplantation (since 1995) would be considered beneficiaries. The primary fear among implementers seems to be that this might become another backdoor way to facilitate out-of-turn allotments, particularly as organ harvesting rackets continue to be busted in India. However, it makes little sense to throw the baby out with the bathwater, particularly when operating with the intent to be more inclusive, in a society shaped by patriarchal norms. It is crucial that NOTTO makes this a participative process, taking along various agencies involved in implementation. While it is important to ensure proper implementation under the Transplantation of Human Organs Act, and widen access to the limited pool of organs, above all, it is imperative that the principle of not denying anyone whose need for an organ is the greatest, based on health parameters, is always adhered to.

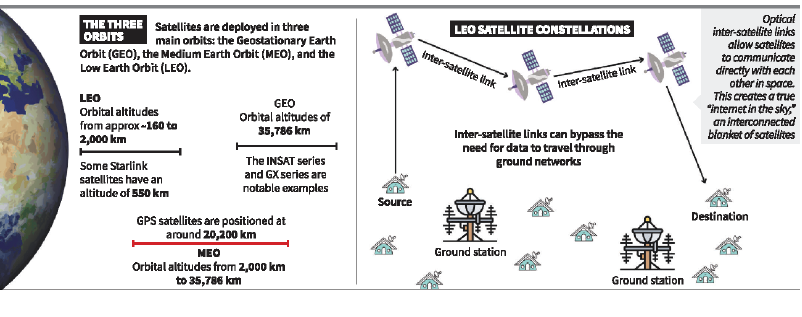
**6. Dogs and laws: Urban local bodies need funding for shelters and sterilisation drives**

The August 11 Supreme Court order represents the most forceful judicial intervention yet on the matter of free-roaming dogs. By directing Delhi and its satellites to collect every street dog within eight weeks, confine them permanently in pounds, and expand shelter capacity at speed, the Court has signalled its willingness to override administrative lethargy. Delhi records roughly 30,000 dog bite cases a year and rabies still kills poor urban residents with patchy access to post-exposure prophylaxis. The Court’s blunt instrument conflicts with the Animal Birth Control Rules 2023, specifically its doctrine of “capture, neuter, vaccinate, release”, and which forbid municipalities from permanently relocating healthy dogs or impounding them for long periods except if a dog is rabid, incurably ill or found to be dangerously aggressive by a veterinarian. The Rules have failed the test of numbers, however. Urban dog populations have continued to swell despite sporadic sterilisation drives because 70% coverage, below which reproduction rebounds, has almost nowhere been reached. The prescription to return dogs to their territories has entrenched packs in the same high-density neighbourhoods where children play and garbage accumulates. The Rules also block municipalities from exploring alternative strategies such as long-term impoundment. Now, if the Rules are intact, municipal officers who confine dogs could be prosecuted; if they obey the Rules, they risk contempt of court.

Policymakers should treat this conflict as an opportunity to confront an outdated legal setup. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 was enacted when India’s urban footprint was modest. Today’s conurbations with dense informal settlements cannot afford such dog populations. Entrenched ideological positions that romanticise “community dogs” and regard confinement as oppression take insufficient account of the dense human ecology. A modern statute should clearly distinguish between sociable dogs that can find homes; aggressive or chronically ill dogs that require euthanasia; and the large residual category that can live in proper shelters — but none on public roads. Cities should impose duties on municipalities, specify minimum staffing and veterinary standards for pounds, and tie fiscal transfers to reductions in morbidity. Urban local bodies also need steady funding, perhaps under the National Centre for Disease Control, to bankroll the construction and operation of shelters and to fund large-scale sterilisation teams. Veterinary education councils should integrate shelter medicine into curricula to ensure a workforce exists to staff new facilities. Without such support, Delhi risks swapping its dog menace with underfunded canine slammers at the city’s edge, invisible but also cruel.

**7. How does satellite internet work?**

In today’s increasingly digitised world, internet connectivity is an absolute necessity, across both military and civilian domains. With Elon Musk’s Starlink about to make its debut very soon in India, internet infrastructure is going to fundamentally change.

**Why do we need satellite internet?**

Ground-based networks use cables and towers. They are the most common form of internet provision, especially in densely populated urban areas. However, they have some limitations. Their reliance on physical infrastructure makes them economically unviable in sparsely populated regions. They are also vulnerable to disruptions from natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. Furthermore, they often cannot meet the demand for on-the-go connectivity in remote locations or for temporary operations.

Satellite internet emerges as a powerful solution to these challenges. Functioning on a global scale, it provides extensive and resilient coverage. This coverage functions regardless of terrain or the presence of terrestrial infrastructure. It can be deployed rapidly to manage sudden demand surges, and also provides connectivity within moving platforms like airplanes and remote sites such as offshore oil rigs. Thus, satellite internet is not merely a backup system. It is a transformative technology with the potential to reshape the digital economy, civil infrastructure, and military strategy.

**What are the features of satellite internet?**

The advent of satellite mega-constellations such as Starlink signals a new era in space-based internet. These comprise hundreds or even thousands of satellites orbiting a few hundred kilometres above Earth. This “internet in the sky” offers a plethora of applications in military operations, disaster response, healthcare, agriculture, and transportation. However, this technology has a dual-use nature, serving both civil and military ends. This introduces complex security dynamics.

Contemporary events underscore this technology’s profound impact. When Hurricane Harvey struck the Texas coast in 2017, it knocked out 70% of cell towers in affected regions. Viasat’s satellite internet became a lifeline for coordinating rescue operations. Similarly, in the Russia-Ukraine war, SpaceX’s Starlink has been pivotal for Ukrainian defence forces. They have relied on it for coordinating troop movements, medical evacuations, and drone operations. Ukrainians even fitted Starlink devices on drones to bypass Russian jamming systems. Satellite internet also enhances operational readiness in isolated conflict zones, as shown by the Indian Army’s use of it on the Siachen Glacier. Conversely, its borderless nature facilitates illicit use. Security forces in India have confiscated smuggled Starlink devices from insurgent groups and drug rackets. These instances reveal that control over satellite internet infrastructure is becoming a new dimension of national power.

**How does satellite internet work?**

A satellite internet network is composed of a space segment and a ground segment. The space segment consists of the satellites in orbit, while the ground segment includes all equipment on Earth that communicates with them. The satellites are the most capital-intensive component. They carry communication payloads for data transmission and have a service life of five to 20 years. Their deployment requires careful planning, especially concerning orbital altitude, which determines the satellite’s capabilities and coverage. Satellites are deployed in three main orbits: the Geostationary Earth Orbit (GEO), the Medium Earth Orbit (MEO), and the Low Earth Orbit (LEO).

**What are differences between satellites deployed in different orbits?**

GEO satellites orbit at 35,786 km above the equator. They match the Earth’s rotation, allowing them to remain stationary relative to a point on the ground. This high altitude allows a single GEO satellite to cover nearly one-third of the Earth’s surface, though not the polar regions. Viasat’s Global Xpress (GX) system is a notable example. GEO satellites are also typically large. They act as “bent-pipes,” simply relaying signals back to Earth without processing them. Their significant drawback is high propagation latency. The long distance signals must travel result in delays, making GEO systems unsuitable for time-sensitive applications like video conferencing or real-time transactions.

MEO satellites operate at altitudes between 2,000 km and 35,786 km. They offer a compromise between GEO and LEO systems. Their latency is lower than that of GEO satellites, but they still require a constellation for global coverage. The O3b MEO constellation, for instance, consists of 20 satellites. However, their latency is often insufficient for many real-time applications, and the satellites remain large and costly to launch.

LEO satellites orbit at altitudes below 2,000 km. Their proximity to Earth results in very low latency. They are also smaller, often table-sized, making them cheaper and quicker to deploy. Their main disadvantage is their smaller coverage area. A single Starlink LEO satellite’s footprint is comparable to an Indian metropolitan city. To achieve global coverage, LEO systems form “mega-constellations”. These are networks of hundreds or thousands of satellites working in unison. Starlink has over 7,000 satellites in orbit, with plans for up to 42,000.

**How do mega-constellations work?**

LEO mega-constellations leverage their numbers to turn limitations into strengths. The smaller satellites are capable of on-board signal processing. This enhances data transmission efficiency, improves signal quality, and allows for greater flexibility. This on-board intelligence simplifies the user terminals on the ground. Terminals become smaller, cheaper, and more accessible to individual households.

A key innovation was the use of optical inter-satellite links. These allow satellites to communicate directly with each other in space. This creates a true “internet in the sky,” an interconnected blanket of satellites. This network can route data globally with minimal reliance on ground stations, reducing latency and increasing efficiency. However, maintaining continuous connectivity is a challenge. LEO satellites move at nearly 27,000 km per hour. They stay within a user’s line of sight for only a few minutes. To ensure uninterrupted service, the network must seamlessly “hand-off” the connection from one satellite to the next. This is achieved with steerable antennas that can track multiple users and ground stations simultaneously, much like moving spotlights on a stage.

**What are the applications of satellite internet?**

For the end-user, modern LEO satellite internet is a major advancement. User terminals are now compact and easy to set up without professional help. However, the service is still more expensive than terrestrial broadband. While terminals cost around $500, and monthly services start at about $50, the cost is often justified for those in remote areas or in industries where connectivity is paramount.

The future promises even greater accessibility. Companies like AST SpaceMobile and Starlink are testing direct-to-smartphone services. This innovation could eliminate the need for separate user terminals altogether. As the technology becomes mainstream, specialised hardware may be integrated directly into devices like smartphones and laptops.

The applications for satellite internet are vast and transformative. In communications, it provides network access to remote areas and enables the Internet of Everything (IoE). In transportation, it will enhance navigation systems, support self-driving cars, and improve logistics. In public administration and disaster management, it can power smart cities, provide early warnings, and coordinate rescue efforts. The healthcare sector can benefit from telemedicine and remote patient monitoring. Agriculture can leverage it for precision farming and crop health analysis. It also has significant applications in environmental monitoring, energy exploration, tourism, and defence.

Therefore, satellite internet presents immense opportunities but also creates complex security and regulatory challenges. Nations now recognise satellite internet as a new dimension of power.

It is imperative for countries like India to develop comprehensive strategies to integrate the technology into national resilience plans. India should also leverage it to bridge the digital divide and foster economic development. Finally, active participation in shaping its international governance is crucial as these mega-constellations will define the next era of global connectivity and strategic advantage.

**8. Firms mull stablecoins under new law, but experts sceptical**

Financial firms from Bank of America to Fiserv are preparing to launch their own dollar-backed crypto tokens now that a new U.S. law has established the first-ever rules for stablecoins, but experts warn the path forward could be anything but simple.

U.S. President Donald Trump on July 18 signed the GENIUS Act into law, setting federal rules and guidelines for cryptocurrency tokens pegged to the U.S. dollar known as stablecoins. This U.S. law, the first designed to facilitate crypto usage, could pave the way for the digital assets to become an everyday way to make payments and move money, experts said. The use of stablecoins, designed to maintain a constant value, usually a 1:1 U.S. dollar peg, exploded in recent years, notably among crypto traders moving funds to and from other tokens, such as bitcoin and ether.

Now, a slate of companies are entertaining own stablecoin strategies to capitalise on the promise of instant payments and settlement that stablecoins offer. Payments on traditional banking rails can take several days to arrive, or take even longer across international borders.

Among the companies considering stablecoins are Walmart and Amazon, the*Wall Street Journal* reported in June. Walmart and Amazon did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

However, the new law will not immediately open the floodgates, experts said. The newfound opportunity to dabble in stablecoins can lead to numerous tricky considerations for firms, both strategic and technical.

Companies have to embark on a lengthy process to deploy own stablecoins, or decide whether it makes more sense to integrate existing stablecoins, like issuer Circle’s USDC, into their business.

Companies first have to decide the purpose of stablecoins. For example, a retail platform could make a stablecoin available to customers to buy goods, which could appeal to crypto-savvy users. Some companies could use them internally for cross-border payments, given that stablecoins can enable near-instant payments, often with lower fees.

How a company plans to use a stablecoin could affect whether it creates a stablecoin or works with a partner.

**Intended use vital**

“The intended use is going to matter a lot,” said Stephen Aschettino, a partner at Steptoe. “Is this something really designed to drive customers to engage with the issuer, or is the issuer’s primary motivation to have a stablecoin that is more ubiquitous?”

For non-banks, stablecoins will bring new compliance costs and oversight requirements, given that the GENIUS Act requires issuers to comply with anti-money laundering and “know your customer” (KYC) requirements.

“Those that already have robust KYC risk management and regulatory change management programmes or working towards implementing these programme elements may have a competitive advantage,” said Jill DeWitt, senior director of compliance and third-party risk management solutions at Moody’s.

One group likely to enjoy that advantage is banks, which are no strangers to screening for sanctions-related risks and verifying the identities of customers.

Bank of America and Citigroup are actively considering issuing their own stablecoins, the CEOs of both banks said in earnings calls last month. Others like Morgan Stanley are closely monitoring stablecoin developments. JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon said the bank will be involved in stablecoins, without giving details.

Banks must weigh many factors before going live with stablecoins, including how holding tokens might hit liquidity needs, said Julia Demidova, head, digital currencies product and strategy at FIS.

**9. U.S. and China delay tariffs by 90 days just ahead of deadline**

China and the United States delayed higher tariffs on each other’s imports for 90 days, hours before a trade truce between the world’s two largest economies was due to expire on Tuesday.

U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Monday that will “extend the Tariff Suspension on China for another 90 days,” according to a post on his Truth Social platform. The White House said its halt on steeper tariffs will be in place until November 10.

China also said it would continue suspending its earlier tariff hike for 90 days, starting August 12, while retaining a 10% duty, according to a joint statement.

While the U.S. and China slapped escalating tariffs on each other’s products this year, bringing them to prohibitive triple-digit levels and snarling trade, both countries in May agreed to temporarily lower them.

As part of their truce that month, fresh U.S. tariffs targeting China were reduced to 30% and the corresponding level from China was cut to 10%.

Those rates will now hold until November — or whenever a deal is cut before then.

In the executive order posted on Monday to its website, the White House reiterated its position that there are “large and persistent annual U.S. goods trade deficits” and they “constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and economy of the United States.”

The order acknowledged Washington’s ongoing discussions with Beijing “to address the lack of trade reciprocity in our economic relationship” and noted that China has continued to “take significant steps toward remedying” the US complaints.

Beijing, meanwhile, said it would “take or maintain necessary measures to suspend or remove non-tariff countermeasures against the United States,” as agreed in Geneva in May.

Since Mr. Trump took office in January, China’s tariffs have essentially boomeranged, from the initially modest 10% hike in February, followed by repeated surges as Beijing and Washington clashed, until it hit a high of 145% in April. Now the tariff has been pulled back to 30%, a negotiated truce rate.

**10. Decoding the National Sports Governance Bill**

The National Sports Governance Bill (NSGB), passed by both houses of Parliament, is a landmark move to revamp and standardise sports administration in India. A day after the Lok Sabha’s approval, the bill was cleared in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday after an extensive discussion.

***The salient features of NSGB:***

**Age and tenure cap:**The bill fixes the tenure limit at three consecutive terms, adding up to 12 years, for the posts of President, Secretary-General and Treasurer in sports bodies.

The age cap has been kept at 70, extending up to 75 at the time of nomination if permitted by the international charter and statutes of the sport concerned.

The strength of the Executive Committee has been capped at 15 to ensure that the financial burden on the federation is not high. The EC would be mandated to have at least two sportspersons of outstanding merit and four women in its ranks. This provision is in line with the international push to ensure gender parity in sports governance and make the athletes prominent stakeholders in the decision-making process.

**National Sports Board:**The National Sports Board (NSB) will have overriding powers to grant or suspend recognition to National Sports Federations (NSFs), and even collaborate with the international federations for athletes’ welfare.

The NSB will comprise a chairperson while the members will be appointed by the central government from “amongst persons of ability, integrity and standing.” The appointments would be done based on the recommendations of a search-cum-selection committee, which would have the Cabinet Secretary or Secretary (Sports) as chairperson.

The other members of the panel will be the Director General of the Sports Authority of India, two sports administrators who have each served as the President, Secretary General or Treasurer of a National Sports Body and one eminent sportsperson who is a Dronacharya, Khel Ratna or Arjuna awardee.

**National Sports Tribunal:**According to the Sports Ministry, over 350 cases are still on in various courts of the country over issues ranging from selection to election, significantly hampering the progress of athletes and NSFs.

The National Sports Tribunal promises to end this as it would have “all the powers of a civil court.” It will comprise a chairperson and two other members. The head of the Tribunal would be a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court or the Chief Justice of a High Court.

The central government will have the power to remove the members in case of violations, including financial irregularities and actions prejudicial to “public interest.” The orders of this Tribunal can only be challenged in the Supreme Court.

**National Sports Election Panel:**The panel will consist of retired members of the Election Commission of India, the State Election Commission, retired Chief Electoral Officers of the States or Deputy Election Commissioners with “adequate experience.”

The panel members will act as “electoral officers” to oversee the conduct of free and fair elections to the Executive Committees and the Athletes’ Committee of the sports bodies.

**RTI:**All recognised sports organisations, which are dependent on government funding and support, will be covered under the Right to Information Act, 2005 “with respect to the exercise of its functions, duties and powers.” This ensures that the BCCI, which is not relying on ministry funding, will come under the bill’s ambit. It will have to register itself as an NSF with the NSB as cricket is set to return as an Olympic sport in the LA 2028 Games.

**Government’s discretionary powers:**Any sports organisation wanting to use the word “India”, “Indian”, “National”, or any National insignia or symbols will have to obtain a No Objection Certificate from the government.

The central government, if it considers “necessary” and expedient in the public interest, will have also have the power to “relax” any of the provisions mentioned in the bill.

In addition, the government can also give such directions to the National Sports Board or any other person or entity for the “efficient administration” of the provisions of this bill.

**11. India’s bid for 2030 CWG to get formal approval at IOA SGM**

India’s bid for the 2030 Commonwealth Games will get a formal seal of approval from the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) during the top sport body’s Special General Meeting (SGM) here on Wednesday as the country has emerged favourite to host the multi-sport event.

**Main agenda**

The main agenda item for the SGM at the IOA headquarters is the ‘Approval to submit a bid to Commonwealth Sport for hosting the 2030 CWG in India, including any incidental actions therewith’.

The other two items to be discussed by the SGM are: (a) consideration and passing of the audited statement of accounts for the financial year 2023-24; and (b) appointment of statutory auditor for the financial year 2024-25.

Since it’s an SGM, the discussion will be restricted to the three mentioned agenda items.

India has already submitted an Expression of Interest for the 2030 CWG with Ahmedabad selected as the host city. But the country will have to submit the proposals for the final bid before the August 31 deadline.

**With Canada having pulled out of the race, India’s chances of getting the 2030 CWG have brightened**

A team of officials from Commonwealth Sport, led by its Director of Games Darren Hall, is in Ahmedabad for a three-day visit to inspect the venues and meet Gujarat government officials.

A large delegation of the Commonwealth Sport is expected to visit India later this month.

The General Assembly of Commonwealth Sport will decide the host country in the last week of November in Glasgow.

**The Indian Express**

**1. CBSE’s plan for open-book exams and what it means for students**

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will introduce open-book assessments (OBE) in Class 9 from 2026-27, after a pilot study showed strong “teacher support” for the idea.

The CBSE Governing Body cleared the plan in June. Held in November-December 2023, the pilot was conducted for English, Mathematics and Science in Classes 9 and 10, and for English, Mathematics and Biology in Classes 11 and 12. The move has put the spotlight on OBEs and the debate over their place in India’s classrooms.

**What are open-book exams?**

An open-book exam allows students to use approved resources like textbooks, class notes, or other specified material during an assessment, rather than mainly testing memory.

The challenge lies in knowing where to look, making sense of the material, and applying it to the problem at hand. In a science paper, for instance, the facts might be in front of you, but the real test is linking them together to reach a conclusion. These exams evaluate whether students can interpret ideas effectively, instead of just repeating them.

**What is the history of the open-book examination format worldwide?**

Open-book exams have been around for decades. In fact, Hong Kong introduced them as early as 1953.

A 2004 Hong Kong study by Ming-Yin Chan and Kwok-Wai Mui noted that “first-time OBE takers viewed the format positively but prepared shallowly: students had a positive perception towards open-book examinations.” (“The use of open-book examinations to motivate students: a case study from Hong Kong”)

It found that many students spent only 10 to 15 minutes reading the questions and locating material, usually starting with the instructor’s handouts before moving to one or two textbooks. Some condensed the lecturer’s notes or borrowed “worked-example” books to navigate the paper.

Between 1951 and 1978, studies in the US and the UK allowed textbooks, notebooks and lecture notes in open-book trials. They used formats ranging from short answers to multiple-choice and essays across different university courses.

“The overall findings of these open-book exams were largely the same with a positive impact on internalization rather than memorisation… weaker students did better in open-book examinations and were found to measure different abilities from those measured in traditional examinations,” said a 2022 paper in the Towards Excellence journal by Mamta and Nitin Pillai.

Despite early experiments, OBEs remain rare in high-stakes school exams. Most secondary boards and standardised tests — such as the UK’s GCSEs or the US SATs — still require closed-book answers.

The Covid-19 pandemic changed that temporarily. As universities shifted online, many introduced open-book, open-note or even open-web exams. Many students struggled initially — not because of the subject matter, but because they were not familiar with the format.

**Is the open-book examination a new concept in India?**

Not really. In 2014, CBSE launched the Open Text-Based Assessment (OTBA) to steer students away from rote learning. It applied to Class 9 for Hindi, English, Mathematics, Science and Social Science, and to Class 11 final exams for subjects like Economics, Biology and Geography. Students were given reference material four months in advance.

But by 2017-18, CBSE dropped the initiative, concluding it had not succeeded in developing the “critical abilities” it was meant to promote.

Open-book formats have a stronger presence in collegiate education. The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) approved their use in engineering colleges in 2019 after an expert panel’s recommendation. During the pandemic, Delhi University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Aligarh Muslim University used OBEs, while IIT Delhi, IIT Indore and IIT Bombay ran them online.

Delhi University’s first OBE took place in August 2020; the last was in March 2022. The university returned to physical exams in January 2022 but allowed one more round for students admitted in November 2021.

More recently, Kerala’s higher education reforms commission has proposed using the format only for internal or practical exams.

**What does research say about OBE?**

A Norwegian study published in 2000 reported that students taking OBEs were more likely to look for connections between ideas instead of just recalling facts (“Open-Book Assessment: A Contribution to Improved Learning by Tor Vidar Eilertsen and Odd Valdermo”). The authors said the format pushed them to go beyond simply finding the right page in a book.

At AIIMS Bhubaneswar, research found that medical students reported lower stress in OBE settings. In another India-based online pilot, published by Cambridge University Press and involving 98 students, 78.6% passed. Of the 55 who gave feedback, most described the format as “stress-free,” though many pointed to patchy internet as a major drawback.

At Delhi University, a study by Dhananjay Ashri and Bibhu P. Sahoo found students scored higher in OBEs, even without specific training in the skills the format demands. Research by Mamta and Nitin Pillai at Nirma University argued that real gains require specific training — teaching students how to break down a question, analyse concepts, and apply them, instead of merely looking up answers.

**Why is CBSE approving the OBE now?**

The move is part of a larger shift in the way schools approach assessment. While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 does not name open-book tests, it calls for moving away from rote memorisation and towards competency-based learning. The goal is for students to grasp concepts, understand processes, and explain how they apply them.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT) makes a similar point. It notes that current assessments, at best, “measure rote learning” and, at worst, “create fear.” To change that, it calls for exam formats that can work for different learning styles and give students feedback, while still aiming to improve overall learning outcomes.

**2. When your pet needs a blood transfusion: Govt’s plan to set up a network of blood banks for animals**The Union government is working on ways to facilitate and standardise blood banking and blood transfusion in veterinary care.

The Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying under the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying invited comments from experts, institutions, and the public on draft “Guidelines/ Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Blood Transfusion & Blood Bank for Animals in India” that it prepared last month.

What do the draft guidelines say, and what are the implications for the animal husbandry and dairying sector, as well as pets?

**Why are SOPs needed for blood transfusions in animals?**

India is home to a very large livestock population of 536.76 million, according to the 20th Livestock Census conducted in 2019, and is also seeing a boom in the practice of keeping pets or companion animals.

Livestock include cattle, buffalo, goats, and sheep, as well as animals such as horses, ponies, mules, donkeys, camels, and pigs. India has the world’s largest population of cattle and buffalo, and the second-largest population of goats. The population of companion animals is estimated at 125 million, according to the draft guidelines.

The livestock and companion animal sector plays a pivotal role in the country’s agricultural economy and rural livelihoods. The animal husbandry and dairying sector contributes about 30 per cent of the agricultural GVA and 5.5 per cent of the national economy.

Given this context, there is an urgent need to formalise critical and emergency veterinary care services, including blood transfusion support across species, the draft says. Blood transfusion, it says, is “increasingly recognized globally as a life-saving intervention, essential for managing trauma, severe anemia, surgical blood loss, infectious diseases, and coagulation disorders”.

India, the draft notes, “lacks a national regulatory framework and standardized protocols guiding veterinary transfusion medicine with structured blood banking and transfusion practices”. Most animal blood transfusions are dependent on “hospital-available or client-owned donors, without consistent screening, blood typing, or standard operating protocols”.

According to the government, the SOPs will address this situation “by providing structured, ethical, and scientifically sound guidance on donor selection, blood collection, processing, storage, transfusion procedures, and safety monitoring”.

**How much blood does the average animal carry, and how is animal blood categorised?**

The volume of blood in both humans and animals ranges between 7 per cent and 9 per cent of body weight. Transfusion is required when the volume of blood falls below this level.

Cattle have 55 ml of blood per kg of their body weight, and at an average weight of 300 kg, each head of cattle carries 16.5 litres of blood. Dogs, horses, goats and sheep, pigs, and cats carry blood volumes of 86 ml, 76 ml, 66 ml, 65 ml, and 55 ml respectively.

Like humans, there are a large number of blood groups in animals, produced by species-specific antigens on the cell membrane of their red blood cells. There are 11 blood groups in cattle, 9 in dogs, 8 in horses, and 4 in cats, according to the draft guidelines.

**How will the animal blood banks be stocked?**

As per the draft guidelines, donor animals — whether canine, feline, or livestock — must meet laid-down criteria for being able to donate blood. These include:

General health and suitability: The animal must be clinically healthy with no signs of systemic illness, and be free from tick-borne and vector-borne diseases.

Age and weight requirements: Donor dogs must be between 1 and 8 years of age, with a minimum body weight of 25 kg; cats must ideally be of age between 1 and 5 years, with a minimum body weight of 4 kg, and not be obese; livestock must be selected from among healthy adults on the basis of species-specific clinical norms.

Vaccination and reproductive health: Donor animals must be fully vaccinated, especially against rabies, and should have been regularly dewormed. Female donor animals must not be pregnant or recently lactating.

Frequency of donations: Dogs are eligible for donation every 4-6 weeks, cats every 8-12 weeks. A minimum 30-day interval between successive donations is mandatory, as per the guidelines.

**And where will the veterinary blood banks be located?**

The veterinary blood banks will be hosted at veterinary colleges and universities, referral hospitals and polyclinics, large veterinary diagnostic centres, and multi-speciality animal hospitals operated by the government. The veterinary blood banks will function round the clock, according to the draft.

Under the guidelines, institutions operating veterinary blood banks must maintain the following records for at least five years: donor registration and informed consent forms; donor health screening and testing records; blood collection and labelling forms; component processing logs; inventory, storage, and expiry tracking; transfusion monitoring and reaction management forms; post-transfusion outcome assessments; and waste disposal and biosafety logs.

**By what mechanism will the various components be integrated into a cohesive system?**

The draft document envisages the establishment of a National Veterinary Blood Bank Network (N-VBBN) under the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying. The N-VBBN will provide four core services:

\* Digitally integrated donor registries, which will have details on species, breed, location, and blood type.

\* A real-time inventory management system that will map the availability of whole blood and components across participating centres.

\* A helpline and online portal to connect veterinary clinics, hospitals, and donors in emergency situations.

\* A standardised set of practices, reporting formats, and adverse reaction logs across all registered blood banks.

The draft SOPs also envisage the development of a mobile application for donor-recipient matching, and scheduling and logistics support in the future.

**Can owners charge for blood donations made by their pets or livestock?**

No. The draft document prohibits monetary incentives to pet owners or livestock owners for the donation of the animal blood.

“Voluntary, non-remunerated donation must be the cornerstone of veterinary blood banking. No monetary incentives should be offered to pet owners or livestock keepers,” says the draft.

However, the consent of the owner is mandatory for every donation.

**3. US designates Baloch group as terror organisation: Significance of step**

**US designates BLA terrorist**

The United States has designated the Pakistani separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and its wing the Majeed Brigade as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO), the Department of State announced on Monday (August 11).

The BLA was classified as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) since 2019. The stricter designation comes at a time Pakistan’s army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir is visiting the US, and the two countries have signed a trade deal that could allow US firms to tap Balochistan’s “oil reserves”.

The BLA is among the most prominent flagbearers of Balochistan’s decades-long separatist movement. Pakistan has often accused India of fomenting the separatism, a charge New Delhi has denied.

What is the significance of the FTO tag for the Baloch Liberation Army, and what is the India angle in this? We explain.

**What does a Foreign Terrorist Organisation designation mean?**

“Today’s action taken by the Department of State demonstrates the Trump Administration’s commitment to countering terrorism. Terrorist designations play a critical role in our fight against this scourge and are an effective way to curtail support for terrorist activities,” the statement issued by Marco Rubio, US Secretary of State, said.

In effect, an FTO designation for an organisation — under section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act — makes extending support to it criminal in the US. This support can include everything from logistical to intelligence to financial aid. Assets the organisation owns in the US can be frozen, there can be travel restrictions, and the group and its supporters can be barred from accessing the American financial system.

Also, a tag announcing that the US sees a particular organisation as ‘terrorist’ helps isolate the organisation internationally.

**What are the Baloch Liberation Army and the Majeed Brigade?**

Balochistan borders Afghanistan and Iran. With gas, oil, copper and gold deposits, it is the most resource-rich of Pakistan’s four provinces, but lags behind in development and economic growth. It makes up half of Pakistan’s area, but has only 3.6% of its population.

The struggle for Baloch independence dates back to 1947. In fact, sections in Balochistan observed the ’78th Independence Day’ on August 12.

After the British left the subcontinent, the Khan of Kalat (who claimed sovereignty over the four princely states of Kalat, Lasbela, Kharan and Makran) declared independence. The Pakistan Army forced his accession in March 1948, but ethnic nationalism and the perceived injustice meted out to Balochistan by the Punjab-dominated Pakistani state have fuelled separatist emotions.

By the late 1970s, tribal chieftains or sardaars of Balochistan had largely been co-opted by the Pakistani state. However, in the 2000s, insurgency gained momentum again, after then President Parvez Musharraf allowed China to build a deep water port in the fishing village of Gwadar, and the Pakistan army killed Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, who had been chief minister and governor of the province.

The BLA announced itself in 2005 with a rocket attack on a paramilitary camp in Balochistan Kohlu during a visit by Musharraf. Khair Baksh Marri, a tribal leader, is considered the founder of the BLA. After he died of old age in 2014, the leadership of BLA is believed to have passed to his son Hyrbyair Marri, who lives in London.

“In 2024, BLA claimed it had committed suicide attacks near the airport in Karachi and the Gwadar Port Authority Complex.  In 2025, BLA claimed responsibility for the March hijacking of the Jaffar Express train traveling from Quetta to Peshawar, killing 31 civilians and security personnel and holding hostage over 300 train passengers,” Rubio’s statement said.

The Majeed Brigade operates as the BLA’s specialised suicide wing. It is named after two brothers, both named Majeed Langove, who died fighting for the Baloch cause.

The Majeed Brigade carried out its first suicide attack on December 30, 2011, in which 14 people were killed. After a long hiatus, the group became active again in 2018, attacking a bus carrying Chinese engineers in Dalbandin near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The Majeed Brigade has also attacked the Chinese Consulate in Karachi (2018), the Gwadar Pearl Continental Hotel (2019), and the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi (2020), according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal.

**What is the significance of this step?**

In Pakistan, the FTO designation is being celebrated as a win over India, at a time Donald Trump is penalising New Delhi for its trade with Russia. According to the Pakistani newspaper Dawn, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry termed the designation “a fruit of Pakistan’s successful diplomacy and a “great win” for the country. “He said the groups were “proxies” of India that were sponsored by the neighbouring country and others. “The day is not far when their sponsors will also be on the list of terrorists. This will not only strengthen Pakistan against fighting terrorist organisations, but the stronger Pakistan is against terrorism, the safer the world will be from terrorists,” he said,” Dawn reported.

However, last month, the US had designated The Resistance Front (TRF) as an FTO, which has claimed responsibility for the April Pahalgam attack. India’s Ministry of External Affairs had then said, “The TRF, a proxy of the Pakistan-based terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), has been involved in numerous terror-related activities… The designation of TRF is a timely and important step reflecting the deep cooperation between India and the United States on counter-terrorism.”

**4. How govt, courts have dealt with stray dogs**

The Supreme Court on Monday (August 11) directed municipal authorities to pick up and house all stray dogs in Delhi and parts of the National Capital Region in dedicated shelters within eight weeks.

The directions were given in a case the top court took up suo motu on July 28 after a “very disturbing and alarming” newspaper report about the death of a six-year old girl due to rabies.

“Infants and young children, at any cost, should not fall prey to rabies…The action should inspire confidence that they [children] can move freely without fear of being bitten by stray dogs,” Justice J B Pardiwala said. “If any individual or organisation comes in the way of picking up stray dogs or rounding them up, we will proceed to take action,” he said.

In 2022, the apex court had upheld a [Delhi](https://indianexpress.com/section/cities/delhi/) High Court judgment which said that strays must be tended to and fed within their territories. A provision in the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023, which Justice Pardiwala called “absurd”, states that after immunisation and sterilisation, strays “shall be released at the same place or locality from where they were captured”.

**Stated government policy**

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, which aims to prevent “the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals”, is the primary animal rights legislation in India.

Under the Act, the Centre in 2001 promulgated the ABC (Dogs) Rules. These rules mandated the sterilisation and immunisation of strays by local authorities supported by animal welfare organisations and private individuals. Humane methods were specified for capturing dogs.

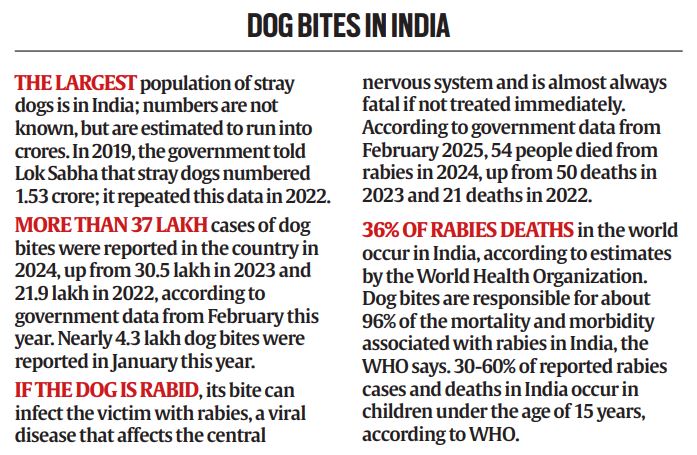
Notably, the rules mandated that dogs be released back into the same area or locality from where they were captured after undergoing sterilisation and immunisation. Euthanisation was only permitted if dogs were critically ill, fatally injured, or rabid.

The government has often reiterated its policy of managing stray dog populations through sterilisation and immunisation.

In 2022, the Animal Welfare Board of India, a statutory body formed by the 1960 Act, issued an advisory which said that “all the RWAs and Citizens of India are requested not to take any kind of adverse action against the feeders of dogs, nor to relocate or resort to poisoning of dogs or other atrocities which is against the law of the land.”

In 2023, the Centre updated the 2001 ABC rules. The 2023 rules were more expansive in their scope to also cover stray cats, and created a three-tiered monitoring structure for immunisation and sterilisation of animals. Maintaining that stray dogs cannot be displaced, the ABC rules reclassified them as “community animals”, and included provisions for community animal feeding.

In April this year, S P Singh Baghel, Union Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying gave a written response in Lok Sabha that stated that “the intensive implementation of the ABC program by local bodies is the only rational and scientific solution to the overpopulation of the street dogs and controlling incidence of rabies”.

****Dog bites in India.

**What courts have held**

A government press release on the 2023 rules stated that they “have addressed the guidelines of the Hon’ble Supreme Court” that has “in various orders specifically mentioned that relocation of dogs cannot be permitted”.

Over the years, HCs and the SC have heard several cases, brought by concerned dog lovers or anti-stray residents welfare associations or citizen groups, on human-canine conflict.

HCs have given conflicting orders in these cases. In 2011, the Kerala HC held that local authorities “cannot kill the stray dogs” and “are bound to follow the 1960 Act and the 2001 (ABC) Rules”. On the other hand, the Bombay, Himachal Pradesh, and Karnataka HCs have separately held that local authorities are not bound by the 2001 rules and have discretionary powers under municipal regulations to kill stray dogs.

The apex court, while hearing appeals against High Court decisions or independent writ petitions, has usually not strayed beyond the regulatory scheme set by the state on such matters.

In November 2015, a division Bench of the SC comprising Justices Dipak Misra and Shiva Kirti Singh held that all municipal and local authorities must comply with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and rules made under it.

“Once that is done, we are disposed to think for the present that a balance between compassion to dogs and the lives of human beings, which is appositely called a glorious gift of nature, may harmoniously co-exist,” the Bench said.

In 2022, a three-judge SC Bench comprising Justices U U Lalit, S Ravindra Bhat and Sudhanshu Dhulia upheld a stray dog-friendly judgment from the previous year in which Justice J R Midha of the Delhi HC had held that street dogs have a right to food and citizens have a right to feed them.

“Animals are sentient creatures with an intrinsic value. Therefore, protection of such beings is the moral responsibility of each and every citizen…,” Justice Midha had said. Notably, he emphasised that since they are territorial animals, dogs must be tended to and fed within their territories.

In May last year, in an order closing multiple stray dog-related cases, a division Bench of the SC comprising Justices J K Maheshwari and Sanjay Karol held that it is best for High Courts or “other forums” to adjudicate independently on any local issues that may come up. Its only directive was that all decisions taken must be in accordance with the “the new Rules (from 2023) putting in place mechanism for preventing the infliction of unnecessary pains and sufferings on animals, more specifically the canines”.

On Monday, Justice Pardiwala said: “…If you pick up a stray dog from one part, you sterilise the dog and put him at the same place, that’s absolutely absurd… Why should that stray dog come back to the locality and for what?”

**5. Delhi govt passes Bill to regulate private school fees: What it says — and why parents are concerned**

The Delhi Assembly passed the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Bill, 2025, last week to curb the increasing commercialisation of school education in the national capital.

The Bill, which Education Minister Ashish Sood tabled, was sent to Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena for his assent.

The move has come three months after Delhi saw widespread protests by parents over fee hikes by several private schools at the start of the academic session in April.

**What does the Bill say?**

The Bill seeks to ensure that all recognised and unrecognised private schools in Delhi are governed under a common structure of oversight regarding school fees. There will be a three-tier fee regulation framework, which includes the School Level Fee Regulation Committee, the District Fee Appellate Committee, and a Review Committee.

Under the first tier, every private school will be required to set up a School Level Fee Regulation Committee by July 15 of each year. This committee is to be chaired by a nominee of the school management and will include the school principal as the secretary. The membership includes five parents, who are drawn by lots from the Parent-Teacher Association, along with three teachers of the school and a nominee from the Director of Education, who acts as an observer to the committee. Of the members, one must hail from a SC/ST or socially and educationally backwards class of citizens, and at least two members should be women. The committee is required to meet at least once a year before 15 August and must unanimously approve the school’s proposed fee for the upcoming academic year. Once approved, the fees can be revised after three years.

The second tier is the District Fee Appellate Committee, which is tasked with grievance redressal. The committee will be constituted in each district of Delhi and will oversee all schools within its jurisdiction. It is chaired by the deputy director of education (DoE) of the concerned district and includes the Zonal DoE as its member-secretary. Other members include a chartered accountant or district accounts officer, two representatives from the school, and two representing the parents.

A challenge to the fee prescribed by the School Level Fee Regulation Committee can only be initiated by filing a complaint by 15% of the parents from the affected school.

Once a case is taken up, the District Fee Appellate Committee can summon witnesses, seek documents, examine evidence, and even appoint commissions for witness examinations.

The third tier is the Revision Committee that is set up at the state level, comprising a chairperson who is “an eminent person with valuable contributions in the field of education”. Its members include a chartered accountant, controller/deputy controller of accounts, a representative of schools, one representative of parents, and an additional DoE. The orders passed by the committee are binding for a three-year period, which aligns with the fixed duration of the approved fee structure.

**What are the penalties under the Bill?**

According to the Bill, a first-time violation may attract fines ranging between one lakh and five lakh rupees, and if the violation is repeated, the fine doubles, ranging between two lakh and 10 lakh rupees. Non-compliance also triggers a graded escalation. In cases of continued non-compliance, the DoE is empowered to suspend or withdraw a school’s recognition, restrict its right to revise fees, or take over its management.

Coercive practices such as withholding exam results, striking off a student’s name from the roll list, and denying participation in classroom activities are penalised under the Bill, attracting a Rs 50,000 fine per student.

However, there are concerns that schools may recover the cost of these fines through school fees, which may further impact the parents.

**Why has the Bill been criticised?**

The Bill has drawn widespread criticism from the parents. One of the key arguments is the lack of any retrospective application to the steep fee hikes imposed earlier this year. No provision addresses the rollback and reassessment of such increases.

Another issue is the composition of the regulatory committees. Parents argue that the School Level Fee Regulation Committee is dominated by school-appointed figures and parents selected by a lottery draw. This has raised concerns about the neutrality of the composition. At the district and state levels, the parent representation thins out even further, with no procedure outlined for the selection mechanism.

The 15% threshold for raising grievances marks a departure from earlier Delhi High Court-mandated mechanisms that allowed individual parents to lodge complaints.

In 1999, following a PIL over steep fee hikes, the court constituted the Justice Duggal Committee, which led to the creation of Fee Anomaly Committees in each district. These allowed individual grievances to be verified and examined by the DoE. The current Bill requires collective action, limiting individual access to redressal.

**6. An eye on CO2 from space could soon shut: why this matters**

The Trump administration has reportedly asked the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to prepare to shut down two major satellites that monitor atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2) and crop health.

It was unclear why the missions were being ended prematurely, NPR, which first reported on the plan last week, said.

NASA told The Associated Press (AP) in an emailed statement that the missions were “beyond their prime mission”, and were being terminated “to align with the President’s agenda and budget priorities”.

Experts have argued that the satellites are still more sensitive and accurate than any other mission, operating or planned, in the world.

**What are Orbiting Carbon Observatories?**

OCOs are a series of dedicated Earth remote sensing satellites that were designed specifically to observe atmospheric CO2 from space in order to better understand the characteristics of climate change.

The first mission, called OCO, of the series failed soon after launch in February 2009, as the launch vehicle’s ‘fairing’, the nose cone that protects the payload, did not separate during the ascent. The extra weight of the fairing prevented the satellite from reaching its orbit.

A replacement satellite, OCO-2, was launched in July 2014. It was built based on the original OCO mission to minimise cost, schedule, and performance impacts.

The satellite not only measures atmospheric CO2, it can also locate its sources and sinks. In addition, the mission tracks crops and crop-growing seasons by measuring the “glow” that plants emit when they photosynthesise.

In 2019, a third mission, OCO-3, was sent to the International Space Station (ISS) to further enhance the observation of atmospheric CO2. OCO-3 was built from the spare components left over after the assembly of OCO-2.

While OCO-3 and OCO-2 do the same job, they provide different perspectives to scientists. This is because OCO-2 flies around Earth in a sun-synchronous polar orbit, which allows it to see any given location at the same time of day. OCO-3, on the other hand, flies aboard the ISS, which orbits Earth every 90 minutes – it can, therefore, observe a location at many different times of day, and add to the dataset of its predecessor mission.

The US government now plans to shut down both OCO-2 and OCO-3 satellites, according to reports.

**Why are the OCO missions important?**

The data collected by the satellites have revolutionised scientists’ understanding of how quickly CO2 is accumulating in the atmosphere. Before the launch of the OCOs, scientists measured atmospheric CO2 mainly through instruments placed at various locations on the Earth’s surface. This did not provide them information about the whole planet. The OCOs changed that.

CO2 is a potent greenhouse gas, and the primary driver of global warming. The data from the OCO missions help scientists and policymakers assess emission reduction efforts, and to develop effective strategies to tackle climate change.

The OCOs also advanced scientific knowledge by paving the way for some surprising discoveries.

For instance, it had been believed for decades that tropical rainforests functioned as the lungs of the planet by clearing out vast quantities of CO2 from the atmosphere. However, data from OCO-2 revealed the significant role that boreal forests – also known as taiga, the coniferous forests in the higher latitudes of the northern hemisphere – play in the absorption of CO2.

The data also showed how natural carbon sinks such as forests could become carbon emitters due to drought or deforestation.

The ability of OCOs to monitor crop health has several benefits. NASA and other agencies have used the data to create high-resolution maps of plant growth around the world.

“That’s useful to farmers, useful to rangeland and grazing and drought monitoring and forest mapping and all kinds of things, in addition to the CO2 measurements,” Scott Denning, a climate scientist at Colorado State University, told NPR.

The data have been used by the US Department of Agriculture and many private agricultural consulting companies to forecast and track crop yields and drought conditions.

**How expensive is it to maintain the OCOs?**

Experts have said that the cost of maintaining OCOs in space is a small fraction of the money that was spent to design and launch the satellites.

It took around $750 million to design, build, and launch OCO-2 and OCO-3, David Crisp, a retired NASA scientist who helped put together the original idea for the OCO mission and led the team that designed, developed, and delivered the mission to the launch pad, told NPR.

Maintaining the satellites in orbit, on the other hand, costs about $15 million per year. This includes the cost of downloading the data, maintaining a network of calibration sensors on the ground, etc.

“Just from an economic standpoint, it makes no economic sense to terminate NASA missions that are returning incredibly valuable data,” Crisp told NPR.

However, Congress might yet vote to preserve the satellites, which are funded through the fiscal year that ends on September 30.

**PIB**

**1. Sickle Cell Disease-free India by 2047**

Sickle cell disease is a genetic blood disease which affects the whole life of affected patient. It is more common in the tribal population of India, but occurs in non tribals too. It not only causes anemia but also pain crises, reduced growth, and affects many organs like lungs, heart, kidney, eyes, bones and the brain. India has the largest density of tribal population, globally. As per Census 2011, India has an 8.6% tribal population which is 67.8 million across the Indian states.

The MoHFW tribal health expert committee report has listed sickle cell disease as one of the 10 special problems in tribal heath that affect the tribal people disproportionately, thus making this an important intervention. Ministry of health under NHM initiated the work on hemoglobinopathies (Thalassemia & Sickle Cell Disease) in 2016 wherein comprehensive guidelines on prevention and management of heamoglobinopathies were released and provision of funds towards screening and management of Sickle cell disease were made. Thereafter, as per the State’s proposals, support is continuously being provided. However, the pandemic reduced the efforts towards prevention through screening and IEC activities. Now, it is felt that a separate scheme/Mission to detect, management, prevention and awareness needs to be initiated.

**Vision:** Eliminate sickle cell disease as a public health problem in India before 2047

The overall aim is to enable access to affordable and quality health care to all SCD patients, and to lower the prevalence through awareness, change of practices and screening interventions.

**Objectives of the Mission:**

* Provision of affordable and accessible care to all SCD patients
* To ensure quality of care for SCD patients
* To reduce the prevalence of SCD

These objectives would be attained through strategies spanning awareness generation, strengthening of screening and testing facilities, strengthening of laboratory services for diagnosis, facilitation of management & treatment, establishing linkages across level of care, inter sectoral convergence towards holistic approach and linkages with social security schemes/benefit packages. Strategy: The strategy emphasizes on THREE pillars:

* Health promotion- Awareness generation & pre-marital genetic counselling
* Prevention: Universal screening and early detection
* Holistic Management & continuum of care-
  1. Management of persons with sickle cell disease at primary, secondary and tertiary health care levels; treatment facilities at tertiary health care facilities
  2. Patient support system
  3. Community adoption

**Beneficiaries:**The program shall be carried out in a mission mode covering the entire population from zero to 18 years of age and shall incrementally include the entire population up to 40 years as a part of National Health Mission and shall focus on universal population-based screening, prevention, and management of sickle cell anemia in all tribal and other high prevalent areas States/UTs of India. While in its initial stage, the mission would prioritize its intervention in high prevalence and tribal states/UT, the plan would subsequently expand to include all states/UTs in a phase-wise manner with an incremental approach. The mission aims to cover 7 crore people with screening, counselling for prevention and care for people with SCD in three and half years.

Initially, the focus shall be on 17 states with higher prevalence of SCD viz., Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar and Uttarakhand. The programme would be in integration with existing mechanism and strategies under NHM to ensure utilization of existing resources and also minimizing the duplication of efforts. For example, established platform of RBSK and Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) would be leveraged to achieve the targets for the Sickle Cell mission.

**PRIMARY Prevention –**

* Awareness Generation & Premarital Counselling
* At INDIVIDUAL/Household level- Individuals with known or detected SCDs would also be encouraged to register on Sickle Cell Disease Support Corner, to bridge the gap between patients and health care services in tribal areas.
* At Community level: Platforms such as monthly Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC)/ Mahila Arogya Samiti (MAS) meetings, Village/Urban Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days (V/UHSND) meetings at Anganwadis, Jan Arogya Samitis in AB-HWC, Arogya Sabha, Self-Help Groups (SHG), youth clubs, parent-teachers meetings in schools, etc., shall be leveraged to sensitize people on the importance of sickle cell disease and screening service available at AB-HWCs.
* Patients Support Groups (PSG)-facilitated by the MPWs/ASHA or other frontline workers to improve treatment compliance and engaging not only those with the disease condition but also family members or care givers.
* Mechanisms to be established at community level for pre-marital and pre-conception screening backed by genetic counselling services. Also, at the level of community, for all individuals detected or known as carrier or patients, extended family screening is to be ensured.
* At Schools: In all blocks with sickle cell disease, Community Health Officers (CHO) at Sub Health Centre – Health and Wellness Centre (SHC-HWC) and Medical Officer at Primary Health Centre – Health and Wellness Centre (PHC-HWC) shall conduct talk sessions and counselling at all schools & colleges including ‘schools tribal residential schools, tribal hostels and Ekalvya Model Residential Schools, for early detection of SCD among school going children.AB-Health and Wellness ambassadors would also be trained information in form of interesting activities which would be either classroom based or as an outreach. o Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS), one of the flagship initiatives of GoI, would be utilized as a platform to undertake and ensure all SCD related interventions at this level.
* At Health Care Facility Level: Counsellors at the primary health care centres will be primarily responsible for providing counselling services to all individuals diagnosed positive with Sickle cell Anemia.
* IEC and Mass media: The Health Promotion strategy recommended by the National Health Policy 2017 emphasizes institutionalizing intersectoral coordination at national and sub-national levels to optimize health outcomes, through constitution of bodies that have representation from relevant non-health ministries. This should be in line with the emergent “Health in All” approach as complement to Health for All, and thus making the base for all planned IEC/BCC activities under this programme,Ministry of Tribal Affairs will play the pivotal role in awareness generation. The mentees and mentors of GOAL (Going Online as Leaders) program run by the MOTA with Facebook will be used as ambassadors for generating awareness on health issues including Sickle cell disease
* Engagement of CBOs/NGOs: NGOs working in the area in the sector of health especially tribal health shall also be utilized for the purpose of mobilization, awareness and providing pre-marital and prenatal screening and counselling services. The NGO involvement framework under NHM may also be referred while engaging with an NGO in these areas.

**14th August**

**The Hindu**

**1. Govt. tweaks export promotion plan to soften blow of U.S. tariffs**



The Indian government is tweaking its earlier plans for an Export Promotion Mission to make it more targeted towards specific sectors in the wake of the increased tariffs imposed by the U.S. on imports from India, *The Hindu* has learnt.

This would entail reducing the cost of credit for medium, small and micro enterprise (MSME) borrowers in the worst-hit sectors, expediting clearances, and providing them with some sort of export incentives. It is a joint effort across several Ministries and involves detailed consultations with industry stakeholders.

The sectors which will face the brunt of the U.S. tariffs are apparel and textiles, shrimp exporters, organic chemicals, and machinery and mechanical appliances, according to an analysis by the Global Trade Research Initiative.

**To offer greater aid**

“The Export Promotion Mission announced in the latest Budget is being tweaked now to provide more help to particular sectors that are likely to be hit by the [U.S.] tariffs,” a senior government official told *The Hindu*, speaking on the condition of anonymity. “The broad contours are to provide credit guarantees to MSME exporters, speed up their clearances, and there is some discussion on how to provide export incentives,” the government official added.

In the Union Budget for 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced an Export Promotion Mission with a ₹2,250 crore allocation for the current financial year, which would “facilitate easy access to export credit, cross-border factoring support, and support to MSMEs to tackle non-tariff measures in overseas markets”.

The official said that the tweaked Mission would cover these targets as well, adding that the Mission would now include coordination with the Ministry of Textiles and Department of Fisheries, in addition to Ministries of Commerce, Finance, and MSME.

Industry players have also confirmed that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has been in regular touch with them to receive their feedback and inputs. Trade analysts, too, confirmed this.

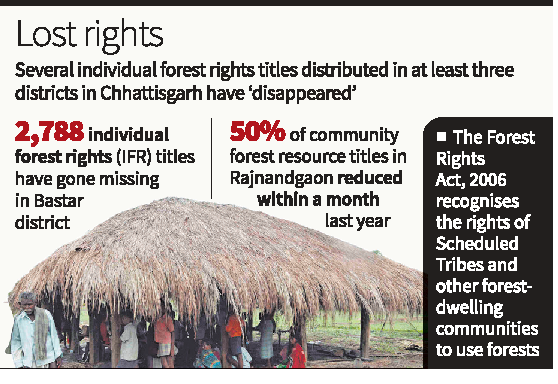
“Internally, authorities are consulting extensively with exporters and sector representatives to fine-tune immediate relief measures and shape a long-term, resilient trade strategy capable of withstanding global shocks,” said Krishan Arora, Partner at Grant Thornton Bharat.

**Focus on MSME exports**

Separately, a Finance Ministry official also confirmed that the Ministry was coordinating with others to come up with a scheme that could address some of the issues being faced by these exporters.

The government had, as far back as January, announced a credit guarantee scheme for the MSME sector, which would cover loans up to ₹100 crore. The Finance Ministry official said that this scheme was being revamped to “focus on the export aspects of these MSMEs’ activities”.

**2. Chhattisgarh govt. cuts thousands of forest rights titles**



Thousands of forest rights titles distributed across at least three districts in Chhattisgarh seem to have disappeared from the records of the State government’s Tribal Welfare Department at various points over the last 17 months, according to documents accessed by *The Hindu* through the Right to Information Act.

State government officials claimed that the earlier, higher figures were faulty, due to “miscommunication and error in reporting”, which has now been corrected.

The data, which was provided in response to an RTI query by *The Hindu*, showed that as of May, a total of 4.82 lakh IFR titles and 4,396 CFRR titles had been distributed across 30 districts of the State.

In Bastar district, for instance, the total number of individual forest rights (IFR) titles as of January 2024 was 37,958, which fell to 35,180 by May 2025, according to the data. In Rajnandgaon district, similarly, the total number of community forest resource rights (CFRR) titles halved within a month last year, from 40 to 20. In Bijapur district, there were 299 CFRR titles distributed till March 2024; by the following month, this was reduced to 297.

These reductions can be seen in the State’s district-wise monthly progress reports on the FRA, sought under RTI. The Centre’s publicly available FRA progress reports only record data at the State level. Some FRA researchers and experts have termed such a decrease as an “anomaly”, as there is no process under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 to withdraw titles which have been granted.

The Act recognises and vests rights to use forests to Scheduled Tribe and other forest-dwelling communities. It allows individuals and communities to get various types of titles over forest areas which they live on, use for their livelihoods, or collect produce from.

**Reporting error**

Responding to questions on the decrease in forest rights titles in some districts, a senior State government official claimed this was because of “miscommunication” between officials working at the gram sabha, sub-divisional, and district levels that had resulted in the need for “correction” of the records. “It may be seen as a reporting error,” the official said.

State officials said that the FRA is not implemented in Raipur, Durg, and Bemetara districts. Central government data on the FRA shows that, as of May 2025, Chhattisgarh accounts for over 43% of the forest area over which FRA titles have been granted.

In the three districts declared free of Naxalism by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs over the last year, FRA implementation has been slow, this data shows.

**3. Netanyahu floats ‘letting’ Palestinians out of Gaza Strip as offensive loom**

Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday revived calls to “allow” Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip, as the military prepares a broader offensive in the territory.

Past calls to resettle Gazans outside of the war-battered territory, including from U.S. President Donald Trump, have sparked concern among Palestinians and condemnation from the international community.

Mr. Netanyahu defended his war policies in a rare interview with Israeli media, broadcast shortly after Egypt said Gaza mediators were leading a renewed push to secure a 60-day truce. The Premier told Israeli broadcaster i24NEWS that “we are not pushing them out, but we are allowing them to leave”.

“Give them the opportunity to leave, first of all, combat zones, and generally to leave the territory, if they want,” he said, citing refugee outflows during wars in Syria, Ukraine and Afghanistan.

In the Gaza Strip, Israel for years has tightly controlled the borders and barred many from leaving. “We will allow this, first of all within Gaza during the fighting, and we will certainly allow them to leave Gaza as well,” Mr. Netanyahu said. For Palestinians, any effort to force them off their land would recall the ‘Nakba’, or catastrophe — the mass displacement of Palestinians during Israel’s creation in 1948.

Mr. Netanyahu has endorsed Mr. Trump’s suggestion this year to expel Gaza’s more than two million people to Egypt and Jordan, while far-right Israeli Ministers have called for their “voluntary” departure.

**Cairo talks**

Israel’s plans to expand its offensive into Gaza City come as diplomacy aimed at securing an elusive ceasefire and hostage release deal in the 22-month-old war has stalled for weeks, after the latest round of negotiations broke down in July. Egypt’s Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty announced that Cairo was “working very hard now in full cooperation with the Qataris and Americans”, aiming for “a ceasefire for 60 days, with the release of some hostages and some Palestinian detainees, and the flow of humanitarian and medical assistance to Gaza without restrictions, without conditions”.

Hamas said in a statement early on Wednesday that a delegation of its leadership had arrived in Cairo for “preliminary talks” with Egyptian officials.

A Palestinian source earlier told *AFP* that the mediators were working “to formulate a new comprehensive ceasefire agreement proposal” that would include the release of all remaining hostages in Gaza “in one batch”.

Mr. Netanyahu said in his interview he would oppose the staggered release of hostages, and instead would “want to return all of them as part of an end to the war — but under our conditions”.

Mediation efforts led by Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. have failed to secure a breakthrough since a short-lived truce earlier this year. News of the potential truce talks came as Gaza’s civil defence agency said Israel has intensified its air strikes on Gaza City in recent days, following the security Cabinet’s decision to expand the war.

**Strikes intensified**

Mr. Netanyahu’s government has not provided an exact timetable on when forces may enter the area, but civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said on Tuesday that air raids had already begun increasing over the past three days.

Israel is “intensifying its bombardment” using “bombs, drones, and also highly explosive munitions that cause massive destruction”, he said.

Mr. Bassal said that Israeli strikes across the territory, including on Gaza City, killed at least 33 people on Tuesday.

“The bombardment has been extremely intense for the past two days. With every strike, the ground shakes,” said Majed al-Hosary, a resident of Gaza City’s Zeitun neighbourhood.

An Israeli air strike on Sunday killed four *Al Jazeera* employees and two freelance reporters outside a Gaza City hospital.

Israel has faced mounting criticism over the war, which was triggered by Palestinian militant group Hamas’s October 2023 attack.

**4. India’s first private constellation of EO satellites under PPP model to be set up**

The Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) on Tuesday announced the selection of the PixxelSpace India-led consortium to design, build, and operate India’s first fully indigenous commercial earth observation (EO) satellite constellation under the public-private partnership (PPP) model.

The Bengaluru-based PixxelSpace India consortium comprises Piersight Space, Satsure Analytics India, and Dhruva Space. IN-SPACe said the PixxelSpace India consortium was selected in a competitive bidding process which involved two more consortia.

It is for the first time in the history of the Indian space sector that a private consortium would invest more than ₹1,200 crore over the next five years to launch a constellation of 12 state-of-the-art EO satellites.

The constellation will deliver Analysis Ready Data (ARD) and Value-Added Services (VAS) for applications in climate change monitoring, disaster management, agriculture, marine surveillance, national security, and urban planning, while also catering to the global demand for high-quality geospatial intelligence.

IN-SPACe said that by generating high-resolution, indigenous satellite data, the initiative will significantly reduce India’s reliance on foreign sources and ensure data sovereignty.

“This initiative signals the coming of age of India’s private space industry in the space sector. It demonstrates the capability of Indian companies to lead large-scale, technologically advanced, and commercially viable space missions,” Pawan Goenka, chairman, IN-SPACe, said.

**5. LG’s nominations without government nod could affect J&K’s electoral process**

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs’ assertion to the J&K High Court that the Lieutenant Governor (LG) can nominate five Assembly members without the “aid and advice” of the elected government overrides democratic accountability. Consequential decisions such as nominating members who have voting rights in an elected assembly must flow from democratic mandate, not administrative discretion. The High Court’s constitutional question could not be more direct: do the 2023 amendments to the J&K Reorganisation Act, allowing the LG to nominate five Assembly members “which have the potential of converting the minority government into a majority government and vice-versa,” violate the Constitution’s basic structure? Rather than addressing this, the Ministry delves into legal technicalities. Its submission argues that nominations fall outside the elected government’s remit, seemingly invoking the *K. Lakshminarayanan vs The Union of India* precedent from Puducherry while claiming the “sanctioned strength” includes elected and nominated members. It even references Section 12 of the 1963 Union Territories Act (voting procedures) as justification for bypassing democratic consultation. When five nominated members could determine government stability in a 119-member Assembly, the issue transcends statutory definitions of “sanctioned strength”. The real question is whether any legal framework allowing appointed officials to potentially overturn the people’s electoral verdict violates the democratic essence of the Constitution.

The amendments inserted Sections 15A and 15B into the 2019 Act, allowing the LG to nominate two Kashmiri migrants (including one woman) and one from the Pakistan-occupied J&K community, besides the existing power to nominate two women, if inadequately represented in the elected Assembly. This effectively creates five nominated seats. The High Court’s framing of this issue acknowledges the stakes involved: this could “convert minority government into majority government and vice-versa”, potentially subverting the electoral process. This concern is not unsubstantiated — in 2021, three years after *Lakshminarayanan*, Puducherry saw nominated members and defecting elected MLAs contributing to the collapse of the Congress-led government. Also, J&K’s trajectory to Union Territory, without consultation with elected representatives, makes democratic accountability even more crucial. The unfulfilled promise of Statehood restoration, acknowledged by the Supreme Court and despite overwhelming support in J&K, reinforces that current arrangements should strengthen democratic governance. The Ministry’s argument that nominations exist “outside the realm of the business of the elected government” also contradicts evolving Supreme Court jurisprudence. In the Delhi services cases of 2018 and 2023, it ruled that the LG should act on elected governments’ aid and advice, with discretionary powers treated as exceptions. Seen in this light, the Ministry’s arguments do not hold water.

**6. A temporary blip in inflation will help, but not by much**

From having to deal with an inflation level higher than the RBI’s comfort band of 2%-6% just two years ago, the government is now in the relatively more comfortable space of inflation coming in lower than that band. July’s retail inflation of 1.55%, the lowest since June 2017, was made possible almost entirely by the contraction in food prices. This is particularly significant because the statistical base effect was low in July. That is, food inflation in July 2024 was itself at a 13-month low. A contraction in prices this July over that figure implies a real reduction in prices rather than a statistical anomaly. The consensus among economists is that this will continue due to improved sowing, a good monsoon, and a favourable base effect as inflation had surged again in the latter half of last year. The other positive was that core inflation, which removes the effect of fuel and food, fell to 4.1%, which is the RBI’s target. On balance, the outlook for inflation looks good, especially due to the monsoon’s progress. There is some risk, especially if India decides to switch away from Russian oil and opts for the somewhat more expensive Gulf oil. But this is unlikely given the government’s assertions that it will prioritise India’s interests. In any case, the Trump-Putin meet could potentially render the latest tariff obstacles inconsequential.

The RBI expects inflation to pick up only from January 2026. But there is no time for complacency. While India is far from being in a persistent low-inflation, low-growth stagnation, it is staring at a growth slowdown. The latest growth in the Index of Industrial Production was at a 10-month low, with capital and consumer goods activity anaemic. Growth in GST revenue slowed to single-digits in June and July. The contraction in gross direct tax collections this financial year is also concerning. Car sales to dealers dropped to an 18-month low in June. UPI transactions, touted in the past as a sign of buoyant economic activity, fell as compared to the previous month thrice so far in 2025. The RBI has retained its forecast of 6.5% growth this financial year, which looks optimistic. Even if the U.S.’s additional 25% tariffs are removed, the initial 25% will themselves likely reduce India’s growth by 0.2 percentage points. India’s growth is not robust enough for it to be blasé about such a loss. Structural problems remain, demand is still weak, and a temporary dip in inflation is in itself not going to help much.

**7. Why does the U.S. President want Intel’s CEO to resign?**

On August 7, U.S. President Donald Trump singled out Intel’s CEO Lip-Bu Tan on Truth Social, posting, “The CEO of INTEL is highly CONFLICTED and must resign, immediately. There is no other solution to this problem”. Mr. Tan, a Malaysian-born, Singapore-raised American citizen, took over the reins of the chipmaker in March, after the departure of former CEO Pat Gelsinger.

**Why was the demand made?**

The U.S. President’s post on Truth Social likely referenced Mr. Tan’s Chinese investments, which numbered in the hundreds, as well as his past leadership position in a company with Chinese military links. In a letter dated August 5, U.S. Senator Tom Cotton wrote to Intel’s Chairman of the Board of Directors, Frank D. Yeary, expressing his concerns. “Mr. Tan reportedly controls dozens of Chinese companies and has a stake in hundreds of Chinese advanced-manufacturing and chip firms. At least eight of these companies reportedly have ties to the Chinese People’s Liberation Army,” Mr. Cotton claimed in the letter. The U.S. senator wanted to know whether the Intel board made Mr. Tan formally take steps to divest from positions that could pose a conflict of interest for Intel’s CEO, and whether Mr. Tan had officially disclosed any other ties to Chinese companies.

**Does he have links to Chinese firms?**

News agency *Reuters* reported that Mr. Tan had made many investments in Chinese companies. Of particular note is Mr. Tan’s investment in the Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp (SMIC). Mr. Tan’s venture capital firm Walden International’s funds exited from SMIC in June 2013 and in January 2021, as reported in an investigation by the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party. SMIC was flagged by the U.S. in 2020 over links to China’s military. Additionally, the report stated that Mr. Tan served on SMIC’s board from 2001 to 2018.

However, Walden International is still invested in funds and companies, including bodies with ties to the Chinese administration, per *Reuters*. Aside from his investments, there are security concerns about Mr. Tan’s time as the CEO of Cadence Design Systems between 2008 and 2021 (overlapping with his time at SMIC). This became a pressing issue after Cadence, a multinational Electronic Design Automation (EDA) technology company headquartered in California, pleaded guilty to resolve charges that it violated export controls by selling EDA hardware, software, and semiconductor design intellectual property technology to a Chinese military university called the National University of Defense Technology. Mr. Cotton noted in his letter that the “illegal activities occurred under Mr. Tan’s tenure.”

“Intel was awarded nearly $8 billion from the CHIPS and Science Act, the largest grant to a single company. Intel is required to be a responsible steward of American taxpayer dollars and to comply with applicable security regulations,” said the Republican senator.

**What was Intel’s response?**

On August 7, Intel published a statement defending the company, its board of directors, and Mr. Tan. “Intel has been manufacturing in America for 56 years. We are continuing to invest billions of dollars in domestic semiconductor R&D and manufacturing, including our new fab in Arizona that will run the most advanced manufacturing process technology in the country, and are the only company investing in leading logic process node development in the U.S.,” stated Intel. However, Intel’s troubles are mounting as the chipmaker faces pressure from investors over slow progress, and the public’s ire over mass layoffs. Mr. Trump’s public call for Mr. Tan’s resignation, which led to a slip in Intel’s shares, will make it harder for the chipmaker to restore its reputation.

**8. RBI prescribes seven sutras for AI adoption in financial sector**

A committee set up by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to develop a Framework for Responsible and Ethical Enablement of Artificial Intelligence (FREE-AI) in the financial sector has recommended the establishment of shared infrastructure by regulated entities (REs) to democratise access to data and compute, and for the creation of an Al Innovation Sandbox.

On Wednesday, the panel submitted its report, which has been uploaded on the RBI website. The report sets a framework to guide on the use of AI in the financial sector, aiming to harness its potential while safeguarding against associated risks.

The committee has developed 7 *sutras*to serve as the foundational principles for AI adoption. Guided by the 7*sutra*s, the committee has recommended a forward-looking approach, containing 26 actionable recommendations under six strategic pillars.

The report envisions a financial ecosystem where encouraging innovation is in harmony, and not at odds, with mitigation of risk, the RBI said.

The 7 *sutras*include Trust is the Foundation, People First, Innovation over Restraint, Fairness and Equity, Accountability, Understandable by Design and Safety, Resilience and Sustainability.

Using the *sutras*as guidance, the committee has recommended an approach that fosters innovation and mitigates risks, treating these two seemingly competing objectives as complementary forces that must be pursued in tandem. This is achieved through a unified vision spread across 6 strategic pillars that address the dimensions of innovation enablement as well as risk mitigation, it said.

Under innovation enablement, the focus is on Infrastructure, Policy and Capacity and for risk mitigation, the focus is on Governance, Protection and Assurance. Under these six pillars, the report outlines 26 recommendations for Al adoption in the financial sector. To foster innovation, the panel has recommended the establishment of shared infrastructure to democratise access to data and compute; the creation of an Al Innovation Sandbox and the development of indigenous financial sector-specific Al models.

To mitigate Al risks, the committee has recommended the formulation of a board-approved Al policy by REs,the expansion of product approval processes, consumer protection frameworks and audits to include Al related aspects and the augmentation of cybersecurity practices and incident reporting frameworks.

**9. Rohith Krishna is India’s 89th GM**

Rohith Krishna S. has always been good in academics. He, however, felt the pursuit of excellence in education slowed down his quest to become a chess Grandmaster. Yet, he kept his focus and, on Tuesday, became the 89th Indian GM. He did that with a win over IM Artur Davtyan of Romania in the final round of the Almaty Masters Qonaev Cup in Kazakhstan to secure six points out of nine.

The 19-year-old, a third-year engineering student in Chennai, knows that his journey has just begun.

Speaking to *The Hindu* from Dubai, Rohith, who will be taking part in the Abu Dhabi International tournament beginning on August 15, said: “Finally achieved the dream of becoming a Grandmaster — one I have pursued since 2013 — has brought me immense relief and joy.

“I will always remember my friends, family, and mentors who stood by me in difficult times, encouraging me to never give up. This is not the end — it is just the beginning of a longer journey ahead.”

Rohith acknowledged the support of his school and college (Sunshine, Velachery, and SSN) — that made the path to becoming a GM relatively smooth.

“At times, I felt the pressure of not achieving the Grandmaster title as quickly as I expected since balancing academics and chess was never easy. However, the support of The Sunshine School and SSN College kept me motivated to excel in both,” he said, thanking the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu for its financial assistance.

K. Visweswaran, head coach of Kameswaran Chess Academy, Chennai, who has been training Rohith since 2019, said his ward wanted to achieve excellence in both academics and chess, and it was a conscious decision.

“He invested two years for school (Std. XI and XII) and one year in college (SSN) to get accustomed to the environment. Rohith looks at life holistically,” he said.

“Rohith is a diligent and patient player. He is tactically sharp and quick to capitalise on the opponent’s mistakes. Now with the GM pressure off his back, he can go for tournament wins,” he added.

**Indian Express**

**1. US trade truce with China: What is the agri trump card that Beijing holds**

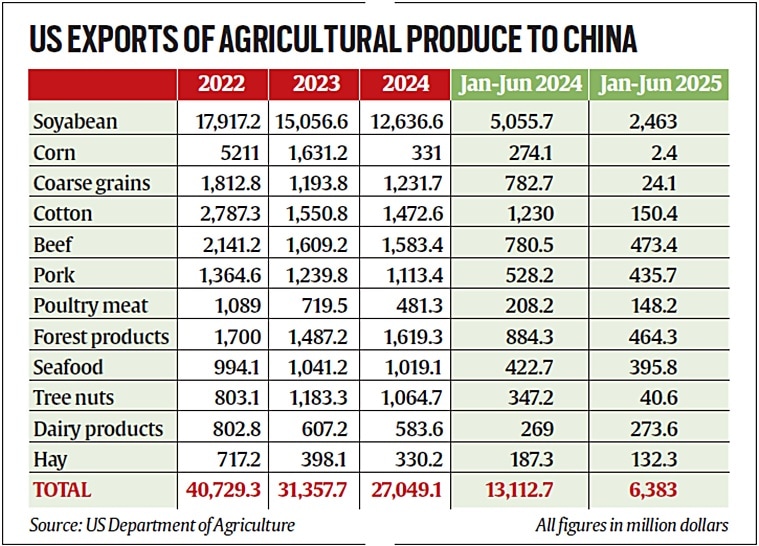
United States President Donald Trump on Monday extended his trade truce with China for another three months until November 10, pausing the triple-digit import duties that the two countries would have levied on each other’s goods.

Trump’s move — “to continue the suspension” of the prohibitive 145% tariff on Chinese goods and keep it at 30% following an earlier executive order dated May 12 — comes in the wake of Beijing’s strong response with retaliatory measures of its own.

That included not just imposing a 125% tariff on US shipments (since lowered to 10%), but also curbing exports of rare-earth metals and magnets, impacting American auto, aerospace, defence, and semiconductor manufacturers.

However, it isn’t just the choking of the supply of critical minerals that China has used as a leveraging tool to bring Trump to the negotiating table. In its ongoing, albeit temporarily halted, trade war with the US, China has also employed a ‘trump card’ in the form of agricultural imports.

The accompanying table shows that the exports of US farm produce to China have more than halved, from $13.1 billion during January-June 2024 to $6.4 billion in the first six months of 2025. It comes on top of declines in the last two years, and is a far cry from the peak of $40.7 billion scaled in 2022.

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**Hitting where it hurts**

The fall in agricultural imports has been led by soyabean, with China importing hardly $2.5 billion worth of the leguminous oilseed from the US in January-June 2025, as against over $17.9 billion in 2022.

That explains why Trump, in a post on his Truth Social platform on Monday, urged China to “quickly quadruple” its soyabean imports from the US. He wrote, “Our great farmers produce the most robust soybeans…Rapid service will be provided. Thank you President Xi [Jinping]”.

Soyabean apart, China has massively reduced its purchases of US corn (maize), coarse grains (mainly sorghum and barley), cotton, beef, pork, poultry meat, and even forest products and tree nuts such as almonds, pistachios and walnuts.

China is a huge importer of agri-commodities. Till two years ago, it was the world’s biggest buyer of soyabean, rapeseed, wheat, barley, sorghum, oats and cotton, and No. 2 for corn (after Mexico) and palm oil (after India).

A lot of these imports — 105 million tonnes (mt) of soyabean, 14.2 mt of barley, 13.8 mt of corn, 11.2 mt of wheat and 8.7 mt of sorghum in 2024 — went to meet the protein and energy requirements of its humungous swine herd and poultry flock.

In 2024, China imported 74.7 mt of soyabean from Brazil and only 22.1 mt from the US. By sourcing more from Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Paraguay and other countries, it is hurting the interest of farmers in the US “corn belt” states stretching from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Missouri to North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas. In addition, there are the beef farmers in Texas and Oklahoma, and the tree nut growers in California, Oregon, New Mexico, and Georgia, who stand to lose from a trade war with China.

Simply put, China is not only leveraging its control over the global rare-earth elements market — from mining and refining to exports — but also its power as an agri-commodities importer to push Trump to continue “productive discussions” with Beijing “to resolve trade disputes and strengthen economic ties”.

**Contrast with India**

While US exports of farm produce to China have plunged by 51.3% in January-June 2025 over January-June 2024, that to India have soared 49.1% for the same period.

As reported in this newspaper, agricultural trade between India and the US has actually been booming.

Based on shipment value trends so far, both exports from the US to India and that from India to the US are set to top $3.5 billion and $7.5 billion respectively. India has, in fact, overtaken China to emerge as the biggest market for US tree nuts, with exports at more than $1.1 billion in 2024 and growing by 42.8% year-on-year to $759.6 million in January-June 2025.  The US, likewise, has a 35% share in India’s seafood exports. In frozen shrimps and prawns, more than $1.9 billion out of the $4.5 billion of Indian exports during 2024-25 (April-March) went to the US.

It’s another thing that despite this robust two-way trade engagement — more so in a sector that has become a sticking point in the ongoing bilateral trade talks — the Trump administration has doubled the tariff on Indian imports to 50%, effective from August 27. That includes a 25% “penalty” for the purchase of Russian oil, which China has also been doing without inviting any such coercive duty.

**2. The spineless foe of nuclear power plants: How jellyfish disrupt these facilities**

One of the largest nuclear power plants in France was forced to temporarily shut down on Sunday (August 10) due to a slimy and spineless adversary: jellyfish.

The incident took place after a “massive and unpredictable” swarm of the marine creature clogged up the plant’s cooling system. It led three of the six reactors at the Gravelines Nuclear Power Station in Northern France to go offline, according to the French nuclear company EDF, which operates the plant. A fourth reactor shut down on Monday.

EDF said that jellyfish “had no impact on the safety of the facilities, the safety of personnel, or the environment”.

This is not the first time that jellyfish have thwarted nuclear plants. Swarms of these invertibrates have caused such disruptions across the world since at least the 1990s — Gravelines itself was disrupted in 1993.

However, experts suggest that the incidents of jellyfish disrupting power generation have been on the rise in recent years. For instance, in 2011 alone, jellyfish paralysed plants in Israel, Japan, and Scotland. In 2013, an invasion of jellyfish halted a reactor in Sweden**.**

**How do jellyfish thwart nuclear plants?**

Nuclear power plants require a constant flow of water to cool their reactors and turbine systems, which is why many plants are typically built near large bodies of water. The plants’ intake pipes have screening areas that have grated barrier systems to remove solid materials and aquatic life, and allow the inflow of water, sometimes millions of gallons every minute.

However, jellyfish pose a unique problem to this system. When a large volume of jellyfish — around a million individuals — gets pulled in by the intake pipes, they entirely cover and clog the screening areas within minutes. As a result, the flow of water is interrupted. This risks overheating and damage to the major plant constituents, such as the turbines, condensers, and boilers, forcing the reactors to shut down.

Such a large number of jellyfish are typically pulled in when these creatures bloom — a rapid, temporary increase in jellyfish reproduction rates — near coastal nuclear power plants. During this process, millions of separate jellyfish clump together into dense groups.

Another issue is that dead jellyfish can turn into a gel and pass through the screens, causing problems deeper in the plant system.

Removing jellyfish from the screens involves complicated and dangerous procedures. If a large population of jellyfish has clogged the intake pipes, it may take up to two days for the workers to clean them (‘Preventing Jellyfish Attacks on Electrical Power Plants in Kuwait: An Innovative Solution’, *The International Journal of Engineering and Science*, 2024). During this process, there is a chance that jellyfish may sting the workers.

**Why are such incidents on the rise?**

The increase in incidents of power disruption caused by jellyfish is primarily due to a rise in their population in recent years, and their ability to adapt to the conditions found in and around coastal nuclear power plants. Several factors are contributing to the proliferation of jellyfish.

CLIMATE CHANGE: Global warming has led to higher ocean temperatures, which, in turn, has resulted in the surge of plankton — the primary food source of jellyfish. With an abundance of food available, jellyfish have been able to increase their population substantially.

Also, these marine creatures breed faster in warmer water. Studies have found that higher temperatures lead to a higher metabolic rate and faster division of cells among jellyfish.

This is what has been happening in the North Sea, from where the Gravelines Nuclear Power Station gets its cooling water, and several jellyfish species are currently thriving. “Because areas like the North Sea are becoming warmer, the reproductive window is getting wider and wider,” Derek Wright, marine biology consultant with the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), told *Reuters*.

OVERFISHING: Jellyfish have proliferated because of overfishing as well. That’s because various kinds of species, such as tuna and sea turtles, that prey on them have been removed from the ecosystem. These species also feed on plankton, and with their reduced population, jellyfish have more plankton to consume and thrive unchecked.

PLASTIC POLLUTION: Unlike other marine creatures, jellyfish can tolerate low oxygen levels in water, which is a consequence of pollution. This has also contributed to the increase in their population in recent years.

Moreover, plastic waste of just a few centimetres can serve as a breeding colony for jellyfish. This brings them close to coastlines and reproduce. The process increases the risk of jellyfish getting pulled in by the plants’ intake pipes, especially during blooms.

As global temperatures continue to soar and marine ecosystems further deteriorate, the population of jellyfish is expected to skyrocket. This would increase the number of nuclear power plant shutdowns due to jellyfish, resulting in power disruption and loss of millions of dollars.

**3. New Income Tax Bill 2025 passed in Parliament: key features, what changes**

New Income Tax Bill 2025 Passed: Parliament on Tuesday passed a new income tax Bill to replace the six-decade-old Income Tax Act, 1961. The new Bill removes redundant provisions and archaic language, and is likely to come into effect from April 1, 2026,

Speaking in the Rajya Sabha, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, “This leaner and more focused law is designed to make it easy to read, understand and implement.”

The new Income-tax Bill, 2025 was first introduced in February, and then sent to a Parliament Select Committee. On August 12, the government introduced a new version, the Income-Tax (No.2) Bill, 2025, incorporating most recommendations of the Committee.

**Here are the key features of the new Bill.**

**Rules about return filing, TCS on LRS**

The first draft of the Bill, introduced in February, had included a provision — Clause 263(1)(a)(ix) — that implied that taxpayers could only claim a refund if they had filed tax returns on or before the due date. The new version has removed this provision.

“The provision represented a significant departure from the established legal position, where refunds could be claimed even for belatedly filed returns. Recognising the potential for this to cause undue hardship and create ambiguity, the newly introduced Bill has completely omitted this restrictive clause,” Amit Maheshwari, Tax Partner, AKM Global, said.

The new Bill also clarified that there will be nil TCS on Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) remittances for education purposes financed by any financial institution, a provision that had gone missing in the earlier version.

**Changes for corporate taxpayers**

The Bill has corrected other drafting errors such as those related to inter-corporate dividend deductions for companies availing concessional tax rates. The applicability of the Alternate Minimum Tax (AMT) for Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) has been aligned with the existing provisions of the I-T Act, by removing the expanded scope that would have included LLPs not claiming specific tax benefits and attracted a higher rate of 18.5 per cent as against the preferential rate of 12.5 per cent.

The Bill has also allowed taxpayers who do not have any I-T liability to obtain a nil-TDS certificate.

Additionally, the Bill has been tweaked to remove ambiguities related to transfer pricing provisions along with changes relating to the carry-forward and set-off of losses. The reference to the beneficial owner has been omitted to align with Section 79 of the Income-tax Act, 1961, along with a clarification of applicability of 30 per cent standard deduction after deduction of municipal taxes while calculating house property income.

The government has corrected the anomaly regarding donations linked to non-profit organisations in line with the recommendation of the Select Committee. Exemption has been allowed to NPOs for 5 per cent of the ‘total’ donation instead of just 5 per cent of ‘anonymous’ donations, as is the case in the existing Act.

**Tax year, digital searches**

The new Bill introduces the concept of “tax year”, which has been defined as the 12-month period beginning April 1. The concept was introduced in the first draft in February. The new Bill removes redundant provisions and archaic language and reduces the number of Sections from 819 in the Income Tax Act of 1961 to 536 and the number of chapters from 47 to 23. The number of words has been reduced from 5.12 lakh to 2.6 lakh in the new Income Tax Bill, and 39 new tables and 40 formulas have been introduced.

The government has, however, retained the contentious definition of “virtual digital space” — the powers to call for information by income tax authorities during surveys, searches and seizures, including email servers, social media accounts, online investment, trading and banking accounts, remote or cloud servers and digital application platforms. Sitharaman said the tax department will bring out standard operating procedure (SOP) for handling personal digital data seized during searches.

**Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill**

Separately, the government also brought in the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2025, which amends the Finance Act, 2025. It has exempted income from dividend, interest, long-term capital gains or other incomes from investments made by the ‘Public Investment Fund of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’ and its wholly-owned subsidiaries, which make investment, directly or indirectly, out of the Fund in India under clause (23FE) of the Income-tax Act.

Saudi’s Public Investment Fund has over $925 billion assets under management and was notified for I-T exemption in November 2022. However, the Fund had faced some restrictive norms related to investments through various subsidiaries. With this amendment, the government has granted complete income tax exemption to Saudi’s Fund by specifying its name explicitly in the Act as has been done earlier for the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA).

The Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill also extended income tax benefits under the market-linked national pension system (NPS) to the guaranteed unified pension scheme (UPS), by allowing tax-free withdrawal of lump sum payments or the accumulated UPS corpus, up to 60 per cent, at the time of retirement.

**PIB**

**1. India Achieves Historic Milestone of 100 GW Solar PV Module Manufacturing Capacity**

India has achieved a landmark milestone of 100 GW of solar PV module manufacturing capacity enlisted under the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) for Solar PV Modules. This achievement reflects the country’s rapid progress in building a robust and self-reliant solar manufacturing ecosystem, aligned with the national vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat and the global imperative for clean energy transition.

Highlighting this achievement, Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy Shri Pralhad Joshi said “ India has achieved a historic milestone -100 GW Solar PV Module Manufacturing Capacity under the Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM) , a remarkable rise from just 2.3 GW in 2014! Driven by the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and transformative initiatives like the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for High-Efficiency Solar Modules, we are building a robust, self-reliant solar manufacturing ecosystem. This achievement strengthens our path towards Atmanirbhar Bharat and the target of 500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030.”

The Government of India’s commitment is to make India self-reliant in solar PV manufacturing and establish the country as a major player in the global value chain. This commitment is supported through a comprehensive set of initiatives, including the PLI Scheme for High Efficiency Solar PV Modules and measures to provide a level playing field for the Indian manufacturers. The catalytic effect of these interventions has resulted in an expansion in solar module manufacturing capacity, from just 2.3 GW in 2014 to over 100 GW today. This reinforces India’s commitment to achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 and contributes meaningfully to global decarbonization efforts.

The ALMM Order was issued by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) on 02nd January 2019. The first ALMM list for solar PV modules was published on 10th March 2021 with an initial enlisted capacity of around 8.2 GW. In just over four years, this capacity has grown more than twelvefold, crossing the 100 GW mark. This remarkable expansion is not just limited to depth of capacity achieved, but by the breadth of the number of manufacturers who has also significantly increased from 21 in 2021 to 100 manufacturers, who are operating 123 manufacturing units currently.

This growth includes contributions from both established companies and new entrants, many of whom have adopted high-efficiency technologies and vertically integrated operations. The result is a diverse and competitive manufacturing landscape capable of meeting domestic needs and serving global markets. The crossing of the 100 GW solar module manufacturing capacity underscores the success of Indian solar PV manufacturing story, and the collective efforts of industry, various State governments, and the Government of India.

MNRE remains committed to further strengthening the solar manufacturing ecosystem through continued policy support, infrastructure development, and innovation. The Ministry will continue engaging with stakeholders to ensure India’s solar journey remains inclusive, competitive, and future-ready.