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BJP weighs structural changes in organisation

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CLAIMS OF MISUSE

SC seeks Centre, States' reply to Aadhaar plea

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Moving from war to deal

Perspectives on the crisis, its implications, and diplomacy prospects

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Women in Blue eye second straight win

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INSIDE

'Instead of Israel, Syria can deal with Hezbollah'

EVIAN

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday said he had suggested to Israel that Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa should deal with Lebanon's Hezbollah militia as the Israeli campaign was causing too many casualties. » PAGE 14

Savarkar filed 10 mercy pleas, his kin tells court

MUMBAI

Sailyahi Savarkar, the grandnephew Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, told a special MP/MLA court in Pune that the right-wing ideologue had submitted 10 clemency petitions to the British government seeking reduction of his sentence. » PAGE 4

RSS must answer Karnataka govt.'s queries: Priyank

BENGALURU

After RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat dismissed Karnataka Home Minister Priyank Kharge's questions on transparency, the Minister on Tuesday said, "The RSS cannot say that it will not reply because they are being asked by the Karnataka government." » PAGE 4

Probe the theft of Ram Temple donations: Cong.

LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress leaders on Tuesday demanded a time-bound investigation by a sitting judge of a High Court into donations missing from the Ram Mandir Trust, alleging "organised plunder" of hundreds of crores of rupees by the BJP and RSS. » PAGE 5

India's rainfall deficit 35% as monsoon stalls

Central India faces a 61% rain deficit as monsoon falters; govt. directs crop-wise contingency plans

Centre places around 200 districts under priority monitoring; weekly reviews of El Niño ordered

Deficit is significant in a year forecasters globally have warned will likely be a 'Super El Niño' year

Jacob Koshy
A.M. Jigeesh
NEW DELHI

Over a week past the monsoon's normal arrival date, the rain clouds have yet to reach Mumbai, driving India's nationwide monsoon deficit to 35% as of Tuesday.

The shortfall in rainfall is concentrated in the regions the monsoon has failed to revive – Maharashtra, the Konkan coast, and the adjoining regions of central India – where its northward progress has been stalled for several days.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) statistics show that apart from northwest India, which has received 5% more rain than normal for this time of the year, all other regions are in the red, including east and northeast India (-43%), central India (-61%), and the southern peninsula (-14%).

Meanwhile, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, chairing a review of kharif preparations on Tuesday, directed States to identify districts facing low or uneven rainfall and to draw up crop-wise contingency plans, so that affected farmers could be "immediately provided with alternatives, advice, and assistance."

The Union government has placed 130 to 200 districts under priority monitoring, ordered weekly El Niño reviews, and is encouraging a shift towards cotton and pulses.

'Better placed'

Mr. Chouhan has maintained that seed and fertiliser stocks are adequate and that reservoir storage – at 30.4% of capacity in May, against a 25.1% average in previous El Niño years – leaves the country better placed than in earlier seasons with rainfall deficiency.

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An analysis of the IMD's all-India June rainfall departures for El Niño years since 2000 shows no consistent early-season signal. In June 2015, during one of the strongest El Niño events on record, rainfall was 14% above normal. June 2002 and June 2004, both years that ended in drought, recorded near-normal June rainfall of around 2% and 1% above normal respectively, with the deficits arriving only in July and later.

Only in 2009 (47% below normal) and 2014 (44% below normal) did June rainfall fall as sharply as it has this year. In 2023, the most recent El Niño year, June closed about 8% below normal, within the IMD's normal range.

An El Niño event – the periodic warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean that tends to suppress the Indian monsoon – establishes itself only in the spring and exerts its influence mainly in the middle and later part of the season.

"June rainfall and the pace of onset, by contrast, are governed largely by local and regional factors," according to D.S. Pai, chief forecaster at the IMD's Regional Meteorological Centre in Chennai.

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This year, the monsoon set in over Kerala on June 4, just three days behind its normal date, but its advance up the west coast has since lost momentum. Dr. Pai explained that the monsoon moves in pulses, and the first pulse, having reached the outskirts of Mumbai, did not sustain itself. Instead, an "anticyclonic circulation" to the city's north, combined with a westerly push from mid-latitude weather systems, has prevented the monsoon from establishing itself, he told *The Hindu*.

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The warnings have been building. IMD's first-stage forecast in April pegged seasonal rainfall at 92% of the long-period average, its May-end update lowered this to 90% and assigned a 60% probability to a deficient year – the agency's most pessimistic pre-season call since 2018.

Hanging clouds

While a monsoon deficit in June is not unusual, it assumes additional significance in a year which has been globally forecast to witness a 'Super El Niño'

Rainfall departures for El Niño years since 2000:

	June	Whole southwest monsoon
2002	-17%	-19% (below LPA*)
2004	-14%	-14% (below LPA)
2009	-47%	-22% (below LPA)
2015	-14%	-14% (below LPA)
2023	-8%	-9% (below LPA)

*Long Period Average

Source: IMD

The beautiful game

Global celebration: College students in Kozhikode, Kerala, take part in a fan event for the FIFA World Cup 2026, dressed in jerseys of various football teams and holding the national flags of Brazil, Argentina, Portugal, and other tournament participants . PTI

Ex-Minister Vijayabaskar quits as MLA, exits AIADMK

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI/PUDUKOTTAI

In yet another blow to the AIADMK, Viralimalai MLA and former Health Minister C. Vijayabaskar resigned from the Tamil Nadu Assembly and quit the party on Tuesday. He submitted his resignation to Speaker M.C.D. Prabhakar. The Speaker said in a statement that he had accepted the resignation.

Associated with the AIADMK since college days, he is the fifth MLA from the party to resign from the Assembly after the 2026 election.

FULL REPORT ON » PAGE 3

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with leaders of G7 members and other countries in Evian, eastern France, on Tuesday. AFP

World suffers from a shortage of trust, PM Modi tells G7 leaders

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

With a message that trust was in short supply globally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday participated in a session with the Group of Seven (G7) countries and others on "Forging New Partnerships and Rebuilding International Solidarity".

In addition to the G7 and India, other partner countries – Brazil, Egypt, Kenya, and South Korea – participated in these discussions along with the World Bank and African Development Bank. Mr. Modi met U.S. President Donald Trump for the first time since February 2025 at the meeting.

The host country France's intention for the session was to build a fairer and more effective system of international partnerships. Some of the sessions have reportedly been branded in a way that would hold Mr. Trump's interest.

Mr. Modi summarised his messages to the gathering on social media. "Mutual trust is the most important strategic asset today. But, sadly, today, the world does not suffer from a shortage of resources...it suffers from a shortage of trust," he wrote on X.

Mr. Modi said the future of partnerships was based on re-building trust and urged countries to move beyond the donor-recipient paradigm and work as equals in the development context. India has, in recent years, sought to play a leadership role for middle income and poorer countries.

"Emphasised that the Global South has immense expectations from the world. More than support, it seeks partnership," Mr. Modi wrote, adding that he had highlighted India's efforts in Africa during the G7 session, including its focus on training, water, agriculture, energy, and capacity building.

India, however, did not sign its name to a communique on restructuring the development finance ecosystem which the G7 and Kenya and South Korea supported, while putting its name to a call for coordinated response to the Bundibugyo ebola outbreak and a roadmap to fight cancer.

Videos showed Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump shaking hands before the meeting, during which they sat next to each other.

TALKS WITH CANADA, U.S. » PAGE 4

Govt. orders blocking of Telegram app till NEET re-examination

Aroosi Deep
NEW DELHI

At the National Testing Agency (NTA)'s request, the Centre is blocking the messaging app Telegram in India until Monday, in what the NTA described as a "response to the organised use of the platform by cheating rackets to defraud candidates appearing for the NEET (UG) 2026 re-examination scheduled on 21 June 2026."

On Tuesday evening, a few hours after the government's order, at least one telecom operator had already blocked access to the service, and the app's listing was taken down from Google Play and Apple's App Store. This is the first time that a messaging app operating at such a scale is being blocked in India by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, even for a limited period.

The NTA emphasised that this blocking was "collaborated and bounded in time," and that it would be lifted later.

The agency said that several Telegram groups were advertising fake test papers for the upcoming NEET and defrauding candidates willing to pay for them.

Telegram founder Pavel Durov criticised the blocking, saying it "punishes" over 15 crore "ordinary Telegram users in India", blaming the app even temporarily, he said, "is a mistake".

"The leaks just moved to other apps", Mr. Durov added. While it is unclear what he was referring to, the NTA on the day kept dismissing the legitimacy of certain screenshots purported to be that of the upcoming NEET exam's question paper.

"Over the past few weeks, we removed hundreds of channels sharing leaked exam materials and related scams in India. We are also making the 'edited' label more visible to prevent backdating scams," he said.

"Acting on inputs received continuously from NTA, from State law-enforcement agencies including the police forces of Bihar, Gujarat and Rajasthan, and from its own continuous monitoring of public channels and platforms, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Ministry of Home Affairs, has secured the prompt take-down of a substantial number of Telegram channels, groups and bots whose names and content openly advertised their fraudulent and misleading purpose," the agency said.

There are several Telegram groups circulating everything from pirated links to real-time news updates from established organisations; the platform has attracted many users as it offers features such as integrating bots into the platform, not typically found on other popular platforms such as WhatsApp and Signal.

In a video message, NTA Director General Abhishek Singh said, "To all parents, I say, please protect your child from financial fraud and from the panic these rackets are designed to create. NTA is committed to a fair, secure and credible examination, and to act against every person involved in spreading these scams."

Additionally, many groups, the NTA said, were editing past messages with recent exam paper questions, to fake their capabilities in obtaining question papers in advance.

In separate directions, the IT Ministry said that it had ordered Telegram to disable message editing as well until June 30, to shut off "this avenue of fabrication for the post-examination window in which such artefacts have historically been deployed."

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IAF FERRYING NEET PAPERS » PAGE 6

India's rainfall deficit 35% as monsoon stalls

- Central India faces a 61% rain deficit as monsoon falters; govt. directs crop-wise contingency plans
- Centre places around 200 districts under priority monitoring; weekly reviews of El Niño ordered
- Deficit is significant in a year forecasters globally have warned will likely be a 'Super El Niño' year

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2023	-8%	6% below LPA

*LPA: Long Period Average

Source: IMD

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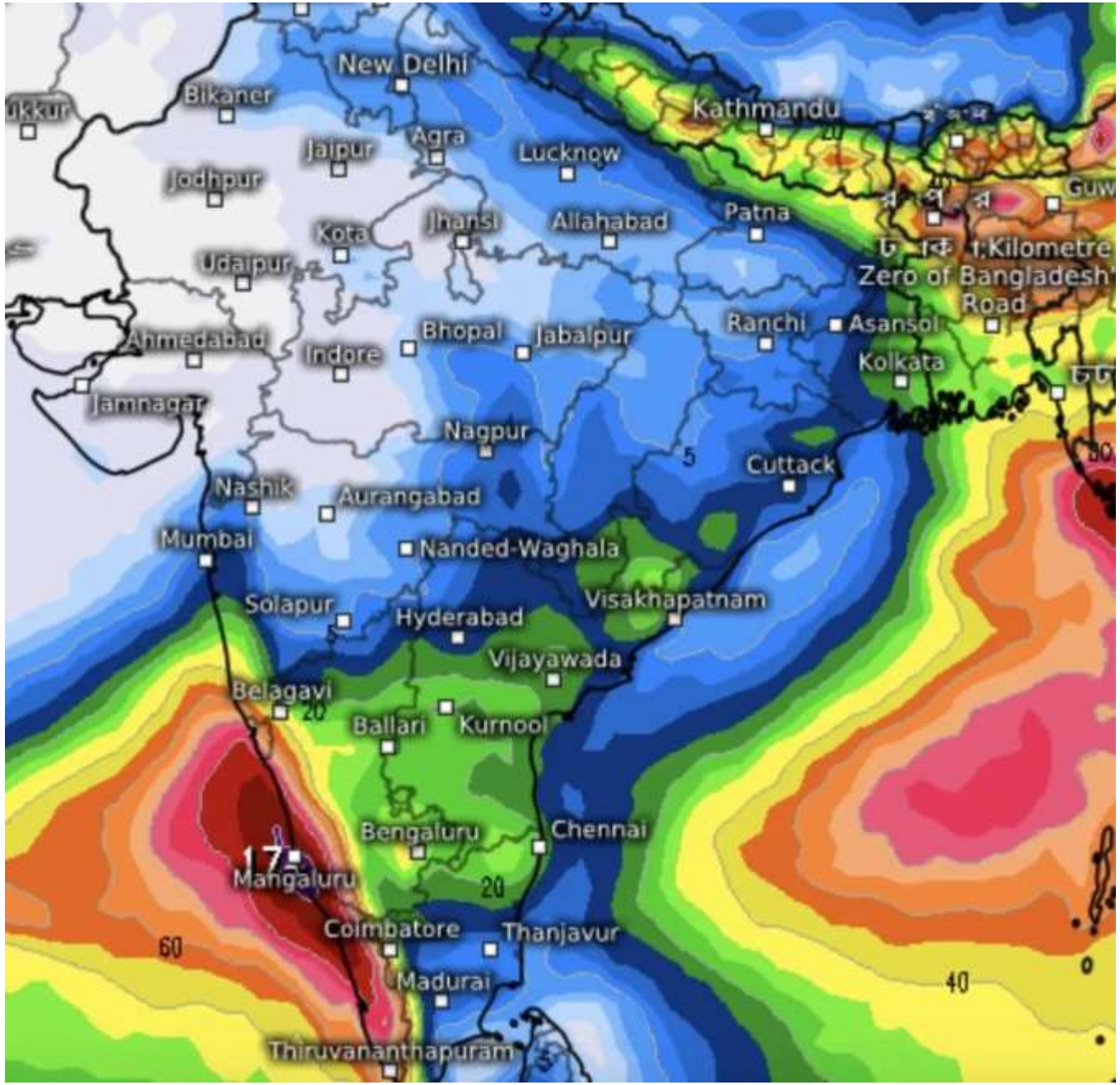
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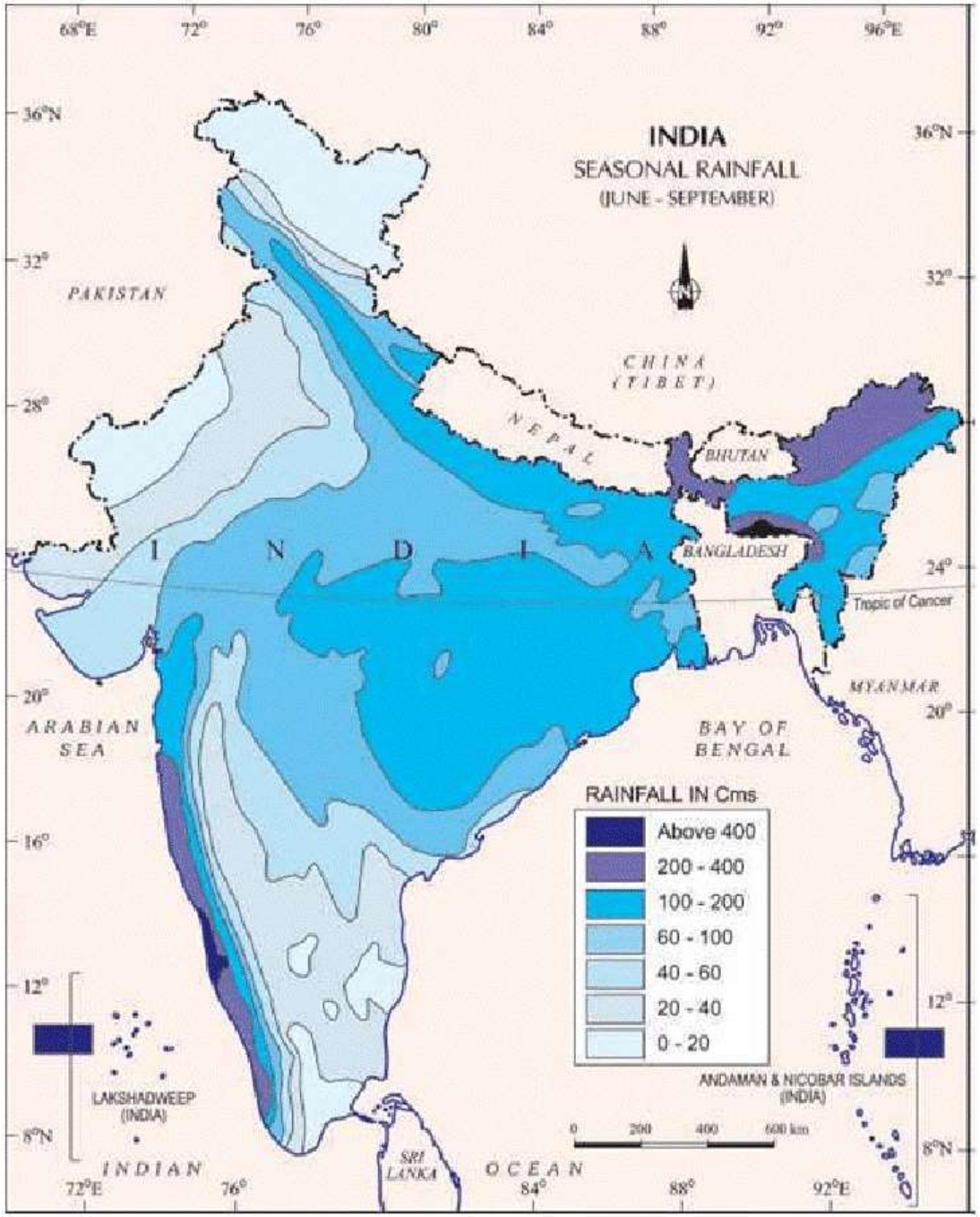
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SEASONAL RAINFALL
(JUNE - SEPTEMBER)
PAKISTAN
CHINA (TIBET)
NEPAL
BHUTAN
BANGLADESH
MYANMAR
Tropic of Cancer
ARABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
INDIAN OCEAN
SRI LANKA
LAKSHADWEEP (INDIA)
ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS (INDIA)
RAINFALL IN Cms
Above 400
200 - 400
100 - 200
60 - 100
40 - 60
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68°E
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8°N

Topic	Details
National Rainfall Deficit	35% below normal
Central India	~61–63% deficit
East & Northeast India	43% deficit
Southern Peninsula	14% deficit
Northwest India	5% above normal
Districts under monitoring	150–200
Main concern	El Niño
Agriculture Minister	Shivraj Singh Chouhan
Monsoon onset	Reached Kerala but stalled later
IMD forecast	90% of Long Period Average rainfall
Probability of deficient monsoon	~60%

2. What is El Niño?

Definition

El Niño is the abnormal warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean.

Impact on India

Impact	Effect
Weak Monsoon	Less rainfall
Agriculture	Lower crop output
Food Inflation	Increase
Reservoir Levels	Decline
Hydropower	Reduced generation
GDP	Rural demand falls

Historically, many drought years in India coincide with El Niño events. CarbonCopy +1

3. Why Has Monsoon Stalled?

According to IMD scientists:

1. Weak First Pulse

The first monsoon surge reached Kerala but lost momentum afterward.

2. Anti-Cyclonic Circulation

Dry air movement north of Mumbai blocked monsoon progression.

3. Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO)

The MJO is currently in an unfavorable phase, reducing rainfall activity.

4. Emerging El Niño

Pacific Ocean warming is suppressing monsoon circulation.

Year	June Rainfall Departure
2002	+2%
2004	+1%
2009	-47%
2014	-44%
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2026	-35%

5. Important El Niño Years in India

Year	Impact
1982	Severe drought
1987	Major drought
2002	Drought
2009	Severe drought
2015	Below-normal rainfall
2023	Weak monsoon, driest August in over a century
2026	Current concern

7. Impact on Agriculture

Most Vulnerable Crops

Crop	Risk Level
Paddy	Very High
Cotton	High
Soybean	High
Sugarcane	High
Pulses	Moderate
Millets	Low

Agriculture is especially vulnerable because almost **50% of India's farmland remains rain-fed.**

Sector	Impact
Agriculture	Lower production
Inflation	Higher food prices
Rural Consumption	Declines
GDP Growth	Slower
Water Supply	Pressure
Electricity	Lower hydropower

Previous Year Exam Questions on Monsoon, El Niño, ENSO, MJO & Indian Agriculture

Year	Exam	Question
2024	UPSC Prelims	Consider the following statements regarding El Niño and Southern Oscillation (ENSO). Which statements are correct?
2024	SSC CGL	El Niño is associated with abnormal warming of which ocean?
2024	CDS	Which climatic phenomenon is known to weaken the Indian monsoon?
2024	UPPCS	How does El Niño affect Indian agriculture?
2023	UPSC Prelims	El Niño is generally associated with which of the following conditions?
2023	UPSC GS-I Mains	Discuss the factors affecting the onset and variability of the Indian monsoon.
2023	RAS Prelims	Which climatic event is linked with below-normal monsoon rainfall in India?
2023	BPSC	What is the relationship between ENSO and Indian monsoon?

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Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

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IAF FERRYING NEET PAPERS
» PAGE 6

Topic	Details
Trigger	NEET (UG) 2026 Re-examination
Agency Requesting Action	National Testing Agency (NTA)
Action Taken	Temporary blocking of Telegram
Duration	Until NEET re-exam (21 June 2026)
Ministry Involved	Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY)
Reason	Fake question papers and exam fraud
Additional Action	Telegram channels, groups and bots removed
Other Measure	Message-editing feature disabled till 30 June
States Mentioned	Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat
Cyber Agency	Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)
Telegram Founder Response	Pavel Durov opposed temporary ban

Institution	Role
National Testing Agency	Conducts NEET
Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology	Ordered blocking
Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre	Monitoring cyber fraud
Telegram	Platform allegedly used for fraud

Provision	Relevance
Article 19(1)(a)	Freedom of Speech
Article 19(2)	Reasonable Restrictions
IT Act 2000	Blocking powers
IT Rules 2021	Intermediary obligations
Public Order	Government justification
Examination Integrity	Public interest argument

Stranded at sea: Indian mariner died aboard ship waiting for assistance

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

His name was Nishanth Uirthanathan. In Tamil, his last name means 'he who has come back to life', a reference to Jesus Christ.

On June 8, Uirthanathan, a 38-year-old second officer on *MT Celestial Sea*, died onboard the ship. He is not going to come back to life.

Uirthanathan's home address is listed as Therkupuram in Thoothukudi – a neighbourhood of hardy fishermen for whom fighting a capsized boat at sea is routine. But, Uirthanathan died of sheer weakness.

With 16 Indian crew members, including the master of the ship, one Pakistani electrical officer, and one Indonesian cook, *Celestial Sea*'s problems encompass almost everything that Indian seafarers have faced in the past two-and-a-half months: depleting supplies, problems with owners, distress calls not being attended to, rationing of food and water, long stressful days in the war zone, and the U.S. Navy's hostile manoeuvres.

No medical help was offered to Uirthanathan even though he lay suffering for more than three days, not far from Oman's Duqm port. The master of the ship, Captain Devendra Yadav, said the officer started vomiting and later stopped eating. Though he seemed to get better briefly, he subsequently collapsed and died.

Distress calls: The crew on board *MT Celestial Sea* had sent out urgent messages about depleted supplies. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Urgent messages

All this time, the crew members were sending urgent messages to whoever would listen, including the Marine Rescue Coordination Committee, the manager of the vessel, Romana Shipping Company, and Duqm port authorities who apparently told him he had to get an agent to look after these things.

Three days before the officer's death, the company advised the master to sail to Shinas, Oman, so supplies could be arranged. But the Captain refused.

The vessel was boarded by the U.S. Navy on May 19 while at Khor Fakkan and ordered to leave and go to Duqm, 400 nautical miles away from the Strait of Hormuz, he said. And the Captain didn't want to go back into the area where the U.S. Navy had marked him out.

In shipping, agents are available at every port to take care of such emergencies as well as arrange supplies, facilitate crew sign off-on and so on. The ship manager delayed in finding an agent at Duqm, said Captain Yadav. A helicopter evacuation was promised as Uirthanathan was still alive, but that didn't come either. In Captain Yadav's opinion, Uirthanathan died because of food poisoning, but he didn't forget to add that the entire crew had been subsisting almost exclusively on rice and dhal for many months now – no vegetables nor meat.

Maritime rules across the world specify a healthy, balanced and nutritious diet for seafarers who perform physically tiring and exhausting work every day. There are no Sundays onboard a ship, nor Deepavali or Id.

After Uirthanathan died, his body lay decomposing for another three days in the crew recreation room. The emaciated crew recorded a video and sent it out to draw attention to their ordeal. On Sunday night, Duqm port authorities asked them to come in so that Uirthanathan's body could be removed.

Celestial Sea is a 20-year-old oil tanker that can carry 11,500 tonnes of cargo. The ship had left Singapore nearly a month and a half ago and its ordeal is not yet over.

Cough syrup can't be sold without prescription: govt.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Medicinal syrups, including those used to treat coughs, can no longer be bought without a doctor's prescription, according to a government notification issued on Tuesday. This means that over-the-counter sales of these syrups will no longer be allowed.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare notified the change to the Drugs Rules, 1945, which laid out the regulations pertaining to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

Tuesday's notification directed that the word 'syrups' be removed from the list of items that had been exempted from the provisions of the Act.

The rules had earlier specified that "Syrups, lozenges, pills and tablets for cough" would be exempted, meaning that cough lozenges, pills, and tablets will still be available over the counter.

The amendment follows a draft notification in December 2025 to which the Centre invited objections and suggestions from stakeholders and the public.

The Union Health Ministry notified the change to the Drugs Rules, 1945.

The government said all comments received on the draft rules were considered before the final notification was issued.

Many fatalities

The move comes after fatalities due to cough syrups adulterated with industrial solvents, including the deaths of 24 children in Madhya Pradesh last September. Cough syrups exported from India have been linked to the deaths of more than 140 children in Africa and Central Asia since 2022.

Modi holds talks with Carney at G7; hopeful of trade deal

New Delhi and Ottawa have been negotiating a free trade agreement, with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal visiting Canada last month with a delegation of over 100 industry representatives

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held bilateral talks with his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney on the fringes of the G7 Summit in Evian, France. Discussions covered trade, economy, energy, technology and people-to-people ties, according to Mr. Modi. Prior to the meeting, Mr. Modi said he hoped to accept Mr. Carney's invitation to visit Canada before the year ends, and to complete an India-Canada Free Trade Agreement (FTA) before then.

"In less than a year, it is our fourth meeting, indicating our commitment to strong India-Canada ties. We reviewed the full range of relations between our nations, notably the ground covered since we last met," Mr. Modi said on X. The other three meetings occurred in June last year at the G7 Summit in Kananaskis, Canada and then the G20 Summit in November in Johannesburg.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney on the sidelines of the G7 Summit, in Evian on Tuesday. ANI

'Significant progress'

"We have been openly exchanging views on bilateral relations and international developments, and we are making significant progress as friendly countries," Mr. Modi told Mr Carney on Tuesday, stressing the desire of India to advance technologically. Canada could be a major partner in energy security, Mr. Modi said. Canada is one of the top energy exporters in the world. New Delhi and Ottawa decided to progress their Security Energy Partnership in March this year, under which Canada's Cameco and the Department of Atomic Energy in India signed a CA$1 $2.6 billion commercial agreement for the long-term supply (2027-2035) of uranium.

In 2024, India had been accused by Canadian authorities of orchestrating acts of violence and extortion in Canada, with Mr. Trudeau alleging that Indian agents were behind the killing of a pro-Khalistan individual, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, in British Columbia in three years prior. New Delhi had accused the Canadian government of being soft on anti-India extremism including not adequately protecting its diplomatic personnel and assets.

The two countries have been negotiating a free trade agreement, with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal visiting Canada last month with a delegation of over 100 industry representatives. Faced with U.S. tariffs and multiple jokes about annexation from U.S. President Donald Trump, Mr. Carney has sought to diversify Canada's strategic and economic partnerships, deepening ties with China, India, Australia and Europe.

Modi holds bilateral talks with leaders of U.K. and UAE

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a bilateral meeting with U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer on the fringes of the G7 Summit in Evian, on Tuesday.

"Had a wonderful meeting with PM Starmer in Evian. The last year has been outstanding as far as India-U.K. relations are concerned. The trade deal has opened many avenues of economic cooperation," Mr. Modi said, adding that the conversation focused on further adding momentum to U.K.-India ties.

The deal, while signed, has not yet been operationalised.

The meeting comes as Mr. Starmer's political future is in question - with a byelection on Thursday that could put a potential contender for his post, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, back in the U.K. Parliament. Under Mr. Starmer, the Labour Party underwent a reset and renewal of its ties with the Indian government (especially the Modi government) and Hindu Britons, among whom it was losing traction.

Conversation with Starmer focused on further adding momentum to U.K.-India ties: PM

The Starmer government also finalised and signed a Free Trade Agreement with India in July 2025, after years of negotiations.

PM thanks UAE

Mr. Modi also met with the ruler and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MbZ). The discussions involved ways to strengthen the partnership, as per Mr. Modi.

The Prime Minister said he thanked the UAE for taking care of the Indian expatriate community. The UAE has been hit multiple times by Iran in recent months since the West Asia conflict began at the end of February, with one Indian killed in March.

Court to rule on Nimbalkar murder case on June 20

Chinmay Gaikwad
MUMBAI

A special CBI court in Mumbai will pronounce its judgment in the 2006 murder case of Congress leader Pawanraje Nimbalkar on June 20. The case, which has seen a trial lasting 15 years, involves allegations of a contract killing conspiracy against former NCP MP Padamsinh Patil, the victim's cousin.

Special court judge Satyanarayan Navandar, who had listed the case for judgment on Tuesday, adjourned the proceedings to June 20, stating that he needed more time to complete the judgment.

The CBI has named Mr. Patil as the prime accused. The agency's case states that Mr. Patil paid contract money to eliminate Nimbalkar owing to political and business rivalry.

Mr. Patil, a former Maharashtra Home Minister and a former MP, became an MLA at the time of the murder. He had held multiple Cabinet portfolios during his political career.

The prosecution examined 128 witnesses over the course of the trial. Among them was activist Anna Hazare, whose name surfaced after approver Parasmal Jain confessed that Mr. Patil had also given a contract to kill Mr. Hazare.

Savarkar filed 10 mercy pleas before the British, grandnephew tells court

Chinmay Gaikwad
MUMBAI

Satyaki Savarkar, the grandnephew of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, told a special MP/MLA court in Pune that the right-wing ideologue had submitted 10 clemency petitions to the British government seeking reduction of his sentence. The testimony was part of a criminal defamation case Mr. Satyaki has filed against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

During the hearing of the case in the court of special judge Amol Shinde, Mr. Satyaki said Savarkar was referred to as "veer" in a periodical run by the Gadar Organisation before he was transferred to the Andaman Islands.

Asked about incarcerations of other revolutionaries from the same period, Mr. Satyaki said the likes of Bagindra Bhattacharyya, Dutt, and Ashfaqulla Khan did not file clemency petitions. But Savarkar submitted a mercy petition within the first month after receiving his sentence, he said. Mr. Satyaki told the court that he was not aware of Bhagat Singh and Dutt petitioning the British government to demand treatment as prisoners of war, and to refuse concessions or remission. He agreed that Singh and Dutt stood by their ideology until the end of their lives.

V.D. Savarkar

Mr. Satyaki informed the court that records of Savarkar's 10 petitions exist in government archives. He said the language in these petitions did not indicate loyalty to the British regime and were forwarded by prison authorities for approval.

He said language used in clemency petitions followed official protocol.

Mr. Satyaki said he was not aware that Savarkar signed such petitions with the phrase, "I beg to remain, Sir, your most obedient servant, V.D. Savarkar." He denied that Savarkar was released after these 10 pleas were filed.

According to him, the British government had the authority to commute or alter sentences in mercy petitions. The reduction or remission of sentences depended on the government's policy.

'All pleas rejected'

Mr. Satyaki said the colonial government had rejected all of Savarkar's clemency petitions. In their replies, the authorities expressed apprehension that Savarkar would rejoin the revolutionary movement if released, he said.

Savarkar's grandnephew said that filing clemency petitions were standard procedures under the British government, adding that other petitioners had filed such petitions and the practice was neither exceptional nor illegal.

The court recorded excerpts from one mercy petition in which Savarkar stated that others sent to the Andaman jail with him be released and he be kept incarcerated and classified as a Class D prisoner facing harsh punishment. The witness said he did not have a report comparing the mercy petitions filed by Savarkar with those made by other prisoners. Mr. Satyaki testified that no prisoner was obligated to submit a mercy petition. The decision to file such petitions depended on the prisoner's preference.

Supreme Court seeks response from Centre, States on Aadhaar 'misuse'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought responses from the Centre and States on a plea alleging misuse of Aadhaar cards issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) as proof of citizenship, domicile and residence.

The petition claimed that "infiltrators and illegal immigrants" are able to obtain the cards and project themselves as "lawful residents", thereby availing benefits to which they are not legally entitled.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice V. Mohana issued notice on the plea filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay.

The petition contended that the continued use of Aadhaar for purposes beyond identity verification is contrary to Section 9 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016, which expressly states that Aadhaar is not proof of citizenship or domicile.

It also relied on an August 2025 UIDAI notification clarifying that Aadhaar serves only as proof of identity and cannot be treated as proof of citizenship, residence or date of birth.

Electoral integrity

The plea also questioned the use of Aadhaar as proof of date of birth and residence in Form-6, the application form for fresh voter registration.

The petition claimed "infiltrators and illegal immigrants" are able to obtain the cards and project themselves as "lawful residents".

Mr. Upadhyay argued that allowing Aadhaar to be used for this purpose could undermine the integrity of the electoral process.

"Aadhaar is not only being used as proof of age, citizenship & domicile for school admission, property purchase, and to obtain birth certificate, ration card, driving licence, but also being used in the application form for new voter registration (Form-6) as proof of date of birth & treated as proof of citizenship, residence or date of birth.

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"Aadhaar is not only being used as proof of age, citizenship & domicile for school admission, property purchase, and to obtain birth certificate, ration card, driving licence, but also being used in the application form for new voter registration (Form-6) as proof of date of birth & treated as proof of citizenship, residence or date of birth. thus, infiltrators & illegal immigrants are obtaining various documents using the Aadhaar," the plea stated.

Referring to what he described as the presence of a "huge number of illegal migrants" occupying "vast tracts of land, particularly along sensitive international borders", Mr. Upadhyay contended that the ease with which such persons can obtain Aadhaar cards enables them to secure other identity documents and eventually seek inclusion in electoral rolls.

"Infiltration is a weapon of political parties to subvert the electoral process for their benefit. West Bengal, Assam and other Northeastern States have been afflicted by cheap political tactics. The infiltrators are helped by either the party in power or the Opposition parties, and are also helped with identity documents such as Aadhaar/ration card. Once they have a plethora of documents, they enrol themselves in the voting list. Thus, the sacrosanct nature of the election process is compromised," the plea stated.

'Complete overhaul'

Accordingly, the petition sought an complete overhaul of the verification framework used in electoral processes and proposed the establishment of a high-powered monitoring committee comprising a retired Supreme Court judge along with cybersecurity and forensic experts to oversee reforms.

It also prayed for a direction "to declare that the use of Aadhaar as proof of date of birth and residence in the application form for new voter registration" is contrary to statutory provisions and therefore liable to be declared "void and inoperative".

The plea also prayed for a direction to declare the use of Aadhaar for voter date-of-birth and residence verification as "void and inoperative".

Cough syrup can't be sold without prescription: govt.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Medicinal syrups, including those used to treat coughs, can no longer be bought without a doctor's prescription, according to a government notification issued on Tuesday. This means that over-the-counter sales of these syrups will no longer be allowed.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare notified the change to the Drugs Rules, 1945, which laid out the regulations pertaining to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

Tuesday's notification directed that the word 'syrups' be removed from the list of items that had been exempted from the provisions of the Act.

The rules had earlier specified that "Syrups, lozenges, pills and tablets for cough" would be exempted, meaning that cough lozenges, pills, and tablets will still be available over the counter.

The amendment follows a draft notification in December 2025 to which the Centre invited objections and suggestions from stakeholders and the public.

The Union Health Ministry notified the change to the Drugs Rules, 1945.

The government said all comments received on the draft rules were considered before the final notification was issued.

Many fatalities

The move comes after fatalities due to cough syrups adulterated with industrial solvents, including the deaths of 24 children in Madhya Pradesh last September. Cough syrups exported from India have been linked to the deaths of more than 140 children in Africa and Central Asia since 2022.

Topic	Details
Ministry	Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Rule Amended	Drugs Rules, 1945
Parent Law	Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940
Change	Medicinal syrups now require prescription
OTC Sale	Not allowed
Pills/Tablets/Lozenges for cough	Still available OTC
Draft Notification	December 2025
Final Notification	June 2026
Reason	Safety concerns and deaths linked to contaminated cough syrups

What Exactly Changed?

Earlier

Product	OTC Allowed?
Cough Syrups	Yes
Cough Tablets	Yes
Lozenges	Yes
Pills	Yes

Now

Product	OTC Allowed?
Medicinal Cough Syrups	❌ No
Prescription Syrups	Doctor's prescription required
Lozenges	✅ Yes
Pills/Tablets	✅ Yes

Background: Why Did Government Act?

International Cough Syrup Deaths

Year	Country/Region	Deaths
2022-25	Gambia	70+ children
2022-25	Uzbekistan	20+ children
2022-25	Cameroon	Multiple cases
2022-25	Africa & Central Asia Combined	140+ children
2025	Madhya Pradesh	24 children

The issue was linked to contamination with:

- Diethylene Glycol (DEG)
- Ethylene Glycol (EG)

These industrial solvents can cause:

- Kidney failure
- Liver damage
- Death

Savarkar filed 10 mercy pleas before the British, grandnephew tells court

Chinmay Gaikwad
MUMBAI

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Topic	Details
Full Name	Vinayak Damodar Savarkar
Birth	1883
Death	1966
Popular Title	Veer Savarkar
Organisation	Abhinav Bharat Society
Associated With	Revolutionary Nationalism
Famous Book	The Indian War of Independence 1857
Cellular Jail Sentence	1911
Place of Imprisonment	Cellular Jail
President of Hindu Mahasabha	1937–1943

Year	Event
1904	Founded Abhinav Bharat
1909	Linked with revolutionary activities in London
1910	Arrested in London
1911	Sentenced to two life imprisonments (50 years)
1911–1924	Cellular Jail imprisonment
1924	Released with restrictions
1937	Became Hindu Mahasabha President
1966	Death

Fact	Details
First Mercy Petition	1911
Number Claimed in Article	10
Submitted To	British Government
Purpose	Sentence reduction/remission
Historical Debate	One side views them as tactical; critics view them as compromise
Historical Record	Mercy petitions are preserved in archives

Feature	Details
Location	Cellular Jail
Built	1896–1906
Nickname	Kala Pani
Purpose	Isolate political prisoners
Wings	7
Cells	693
UNESCO Status	Not UNESCO, but National Memorial
National Memorial Declared	1979

Revolutionary	Filed Mercy Petition?
Savarkar	Yes
Bhagat Singh	No mercy petition; filed legal/political representations
Rajguru	No
Ashfaqulla Khan	No
Batukeshwar Dutt	No mercy petition in the same sense

Not binary: India can save its forests by winning the war on poverty

Forests with more poor households and communities that depended more on fuelwood were also found to have less diverse tree species, a new study has found. On the other hand, forests where communities had access to alternative livelihoods, such as farming, had more diverse trees species

Ipsita Herlekar

Traditionally, many conservationists and policymakers have seen biodiversity conservation as a choice between protecting nature and meeting human needs. Forests were often seen as places that had to be protected from people, while alleviating poverty and economic development were treated as separate concerns.

A new international study has concluded that this is a harmful view.

In a paper in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, researchers from the University of Notre Dame, the University of Michigan, Yale University, the University of Colorado Boulder (U.S.), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, the University of Manchester (U.K.), the University of Victoria (Canada), and the Indian School of Business analysed data from community-managed forests in the tropics.

The data came from the International Forestry Resources and Institutions network, and spanned 322 community-managed tropical forests in 19 countries from 1969 to 2017.

The dataset's size allowed the researchers to understand both current patterns in forest biodiversity and how they had changed over time. Principally, they found a significant link between people's livelihoods and forest biodiversity.

Forests, people, livelihoods

Forests with more poor households and communities that depended more on fuelwood were also found to have less diverse tree species. The team also found similar patterns in forests in densely populated areas with higher levels of poverty.

On the other hand, forests where communities had access to alternative livelihoods, such as farming, had more diverse trees.

Tree species diversity refers to the number of tree species in a forest; it is an important measure of biodiversity. Forests with more species tend to support more wildlife, are ecologically more stable, and are often more resilient to environmental change.

Overall, the analysis found that a greater dependence on forest resources was associated with lower tree species diversity.

However, the researchers emphasised that poverty is not responsible for biodiversity loss. They pointed out that when people have fewer livelihood options and depend heavily on forests to survive, the pressure on forest resources automatically increases. The way out is to improve economic opportunities.

The fortress model

The study also focused on human-dominated landscapes, which are common in India. Most forests in the country are owned and managed by State Forest Departments. And for decades, this apparatus has followed the fortress model – where protected areas are managed by minimising human activities and restricting access to resources. While this model has allowed the Departments to recover several iconic species and strengthen protection, it has some severe limitations.

Today, many protected areas are increasingly becoming isolated islands surrounded by human-dominated landscapes.

"The forests in these landscapes are smaller in size and bear a heavy burden of extraction," Ashwini Chhatre, associate professor of Public Policy at the Indian School of Business and one of the study's authors, said.

Around 279 million people depend on these forests to varying degrees for their livelihoods and daily needs.

"But these forests are ecologically important and provide significant ecosystem services," Dr. Chhatre said.

According to him, the new findings can be used to support conservation by prioritising wildlife corridors – patches of forests that form a loose link between protected areas.

"These corridors are used by large mammals to move between protected areas. The improvement of species richness in these corridors will increase forest resilience and support conservation directly," he said.

Helping conservation

To reduce pressure on forests, State Forest Departments across India have introduced initiatives like distributing subsidised LPG connections and efficient cooking stoves and heaters around many tiger reserves and national parks. The measures reduce people's need for fuelwood and to enter forests.

Garo tribal women carrying firewood in the West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya in 2024. Representative image. REUBEN KHARAR

Today, many protected areas are increasingly becoming isolated islands surrounded by human-dominated landscapes. They bear a heavy burden of extraction from communities who depend on them for their livelihood

Extending similar support to private landholdings and community forests along wildlife corridors could help conservation.

However, Imran Siddiqui, senior field conservationist at the Centre for Wildlife Studies, who has worked extensively in protected areas and with forest communities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, said that while such initiatives are well-intentioned and that communities often welcome them, they face implementation challenges.

"Funding can be inconsistent, participation from local communities may vary, and long-term support is not always guaranteed," he said.

Conservation partners

Today, there is growing recognition among wildlife conservationists and forest managers that conservation can't succeed without the support of local communities.

In addition to fuel alternatives and subsidies, many State Forest Departments also give local community members jobs in tourism, forest protection, and seasonal conservation work.

The late ecologist Madhav Gadgil was a strong advocate of an inclusive approach, believing conservation efforts would be more effective if local communities had rights, incentives, and a meaningful role in managing natural resources. He also emphasised the value of traditional ecological knowledge, and argued people who had lived alongside forests for generations possessed insights that could complement scientific approaches to conservation.

In Ladakh, the Snow Leopard Conservancy has mitigated economic losses of human-wildlife conflict with community-run homestays and livestock insurance programmes. In Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district, village-based Mangrove Co-Management Committees help protect mangrove ecosystems while supporting fisheries, ecotourism, and sustainable aquaculture.

In Arunachal Pradesh, hornbill nest adoption programmes run by the Nature Conservation Foundation have encouraged local communities to protect nesting sites, with former Nyishi tribe hunters now serving as nest protectors and forest patrollers.

There is also tremendous scope to expand these initiatives and to further support community welfare.

As Mr. Siddiqui said, wildlife tourism is a growing multi-million-dollar industry, yet only a small fraction of its revenue reaches the communities living alongside forests and protected areas. He added that a greater share of these benefits should be directed to local communities, creating stronger incentives for conservation.

The findings of the new study highlight the close links between alleviating poverty and conserving biodiversity, and show how socio-economic conditions and conservation goals need not be in conflict with each other. By recognising these connections, both conservationists and policymakers can design more inclusive frameworks to benefit both people and nature.

Ipsita Herlekar is an independent science writer. ipsitaherlekar@gmail.com)

THE GIST

- Researchers pointed out that when people have fewer livelihood options and depend heavily on forests to survive, the pressure on forest resources automatically increases
- The new findings can be used to support conservation by prioritising wildlife corridors — patches of forests that form a loose link between protected areas
- The findings show how socio-economic conditions and conservation goals need not be in conflict with each other

BIG SHOT

An employee of the Terratis company releases sterile male tiger mosquitoes in Montpellier, southern France, on June 5, 2026. With global warming, 86% of the world's population now runs the risk of being exposed to one or more infectious diseases long considered tropical, which cause more than a million deaths a year, according to the WHO. AFP

WHAT IS IT?

GRAPES-3: A cosmic-ray tracker

Vasudevan Mukunth

Researchers from Mumbai, Kochi, and Japan used the GRAPES-3 telescope to track how the earth's upper atmosphere temperature and the sun's magnetic field affect muons — subatomic particles from space. By analysing 22 years of data, they developed a way to use these measurements to monitor changes in the upper atmosphere in real-time with high accuracy. The findings are to be published in the August issue of *Astroparticle Physics*.

The GRAPES-3 telescope in Ooty, Tamil Nadu does not look at light like a traditional telescope. Instead, it is a muon detector. Muons are created when high-energy cosmic rays from deep space collide with the earth's upper atmosphere. The facility consists of 16 independent modules spread over a large area. Each module contains 232 proportional counters, which are long steel tubes filled with a special mixture of argon and methane, with a thin tungsten wire running through the centre. When a muon passes through a tube, it knocks electrons out of the gas molecules. These electrons are pulled towards the wire, creating an electrical pulse that the telescope records as a hit.

The detector array of GRAPES-3 in Ooty. TIFR/GRAPES-3 EXPT.

The tubes are arranged in four layers, with each layer positioned at a right angle to the one below. This grid layout allows scientists to track the exact path and angle of the incoming muons. Thick layers of reinforced concrete are placed between the tubes to ensure the telescope only counts high-energy muons that are strong enough to penetrate the concrete. This is how GRAPES-3 is able to produce a high-resolution map of the invisible cosmic forces affecting the earth.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Daily page'

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Parameter	Details
Full Form	Gamma Ray Astronomy PeV EnergieS Phase-3 (GRAPES-3)
Location	GRAPES-3 Observatory
State	Tamil Nadu
Established	2000
Managed By	Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR)
Purpose	Study cosmic rays and muons
Recent Research	Monitoring upper atmosphere using muons
International Collaboration	India + Japan
Journal Mentioned	Astroparticle Physics
Data Used	22 years

What are Cosmic Rays?

Feature	Details
Definition	High-energy particles coming from outer space
Source	Sun, Supernovae, Black Holes, Galaxies
Composition	Mostly protons
Speed	Near speed of light
Discovered By	Victor Hess (1912)
Nobel Prize	Physics 1936

What are Muons?

Feature	Details
Type	Elementary particle
Family	Lepton
Charge	Negative
Mass	207 times electron
Created When	Cosmic rays hit atmosphere
Lifetime	About 2.2 microseconds
Can Penetrate	Concrete, rocks, buildings

How GRAPES-3 Works?

Step	Process
1	Cosmic rays strike atmosphere
2	Muons are produced
3	Muons reach Earth
4	Detector records muons
5	Scientists study atmosphere & solar activity

Structure of GRAPES-3

Feature	Details
Modules	16
Counters per Module	232
Total Counters	3712
Gas Used	Argon + Methane
Wire Used	Tungsten
Layers	4
Shielding	Reinforced Concrete

Why is this Research Important?

Area	Importance
Climate Science	Monitor upper atmosphere
Space Weather	Solar storms prediction
Aviation	Radiation monitoring
Satellite Safety	Space weather forecasting
Defence	Communication disruption forecasting
Astronomy	Cosmic ray studies

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Percentage increase in MCD revenue in 2025-26

17 in per cent. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi recorded its highest-ever annual revenue of ₹14,549.06 crore in 2025-26, a 17.27% increase over the previous financial year, officials said on Tuesday. The revenue figures were shared by MCD standing committee chairperson Satya Sharma, who said the total revenue increased from ₹12,406.73 crore in 2024-25. PTI

Number of beneficiaries under PM-VBRY

60 lakh. About 60 lakh first time employees, including over 1.8 lakh women have benefitted under Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PM-VBRY), official sources said. PM-VBRY is the Centre's Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme operational from August 1, 2025. The benefits of the scheme would be applicable till July 31, 2027. PTI

Identified area of coral reef capable of surviving climate crisis

64,000 sq miles. Nearly 1,66,000 sq km (64,000 sq miles) of coral reefs capable of surviving and recovering from climate change, three times more than previously estimated, have been identified by scientists in a study revealed on Tuesday. The coral reefs have come under severe stress in recent years. PTI

Energy storage capacity added by India in first quarter

4.6 GWh. India added 4.6 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of battery energy storage capacity in the first three months of this year, registering a 941% increase from 442.7 megawatt-hours added in the preceding October-December 2025 period, a report said. As per the latest research, India's cumulative installed battery energy storage capacity reached 5.9 GWh. PTI

Vacancies in Delhi Pollution Control Committee as of 2026

62 The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has improved its staffing position over the past four years, reducing vacancies from 187 in 2022 to 62 in 2026, according to a Right to Information reply. The RTI reply, obtained by environmental activist Amit Gupta, showed that the DPCC has 282 employees against a sanctioned strength of 344 posts. PTI

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Why was Trump's H-1B fee struck down?

What is the H-1B visa programme and who uses it? Why did the Trump administration impose the $100,000 fee? What impact was the policy expected to have on States and employers? Did the President have the authority to impose the fee? Why did the court classify the charge as a tax rather than a penalty?

EXPLAINER

Kartikey Singh

The story so far:

On June 8, in a 42-page ruling with nationwide effect, U.S. District Judge Leo T. Sorokin struck down President Donald Trump's policy imposing a $100,000 fee on H-1B visas for highly skilled foreign workers. Upholding a challenge brought by California and 19 other States (plaintiffs), the court held that the fee amounted to an unlawful tax that the President could not impose without Congressional delegation.

What is an H-1B Visa?

The H-1B visa, created by the Immigration Act of 1990, is the backbone of the United States' high-skilled immigration architecture. Building on the broader framework of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (INA), which established the "H" category of temporary worker visas, the 1990 law carved out a distinct H-1B classification for highly educated professionals. It permits U.S. employers to hire foreign nationals in "specialty occupations", which require (i) theoretical and practical application of a body of specialised knowledge and (ii) at least a bachelor's degree in a relevant field, typically in sectors such as technology, engineering, healthcare, research, finance, and higher education. Notably, H-1B workers can generally remain in the U.S. for up to six years and often use the visa as a pathway to permanent residency.

To balance employers' demand for skilled talent with protection of the domestic workforce, Congress capped H-1B approvals for most private employers at 65,000 visas annually, with an additional 20,000 visas reserved for holders of advanced degrees. However, universities, affiliated non-profit entities, and governmental or non-profit research organisations are exempt from these numerical limits.

Policy change On September 19, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump signed Proclamation 10973, requiring a $100,000 supplemental payment for all H-1B visa petitions. GETTY IMAGES

Why did Trump impose a $100,000 fee?

On September 19, 2025, Mr. Trump signed Proclamation 10973, requiring a $100,000 supplemental payment for all H-1B visa petitions — a substantial increase over the pre-existing filing costs of roughly $960 to $7,595. The proclamation reasoned that the H-1B programme had been "deliberately exploited to replace, rather than supplement, American workers" with lower-paid foreign labour, harming U.S. economic and national security interests, particularly in critical STEM sectors. Mr. Trump's proclamation relied on Sections 212(f) and 215(a) of the INA. Section 212(f) empowers the President to restrict or suspend the entry of any class of aliens (non-citizens) when he finds their entry "would be detrimental to the interests of the United States." Additionally, Section 215(a), which also concerns the President's authority to regulate entry into the U.S., allows him to subject alien entry to "such reasonable rules, regulations, and orders, and such limitations and exceptions as the President may prescribe."

While alleging that the proclamation violated the 'separation-of-powers' principle as it "usurps Congress's exclusive constitutional authority to set immigration policy and to levy taxes", the plaintiff States argued before the U.S. District Court that the $100,000 H-1B fee would undermine their ability to recruit and retain essential skilled workers. They argued it would worsen teacher shortages, hamper hiring in higher education, disrupt research, and deepen healthcare staffing gaps — raising costs and straining public systems.

Simultaneously, the measure also carried significant implications for India. Indians account for roughly 70% of H-1B visa approvals, followed by Chinese nationals at about 12%, and are heavily represented in the STEM professions targeted by the proclamation. By raising the cost of an H-1B petition, the policy effectively created a prohibitive barrier for thousands of Indian software engineers, data scientists, researchers, and other skilled professionals, many of whom already face years-long green card backlogs.

Did the President have the power to impose the fee?

The threshold issue before the court was whether the $100,000 charge was a 'tax' or a 'penalty', because only Congress possesses the constitutional power to "lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts, and Excises" under Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution, unless it clearly delegates that authority to the executive.

To answer this question, the judge, an appointee of President Barack Obama, relied on two landmark Supreme Court precedents. In *Bailey v. Drexel Furniture Co.* (1922), the court invalidated the Child Labour Tax Law, holding that its "heavy exactions" was a 'penalty' rather than a 'tax' because it was designed to prohibit the employment of child labour. By contrast, in *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius* (2012), the court found that the Affordable Care Act's requirement that individuals pay an additional fee to the Internal Revenue Service for not obtaining health insurance amounted to a 'tax', not a 'penalty', explaining that a penalty ordinarily constitutes "punishment for an unlawful act or omission." Applying this framework, judge Sorokin concluded that the $100,000 H-1B charge was a 'tax', as hiring workers under the H-1B programme is plainly lawful, and the payment did not operate as punishment for any unlawful conduct.

Further, the court examined whether Congress had delegated taxing authority to the President through Sections 212(f) and 215(a) of the INA. It found no such delegation.

While those provisions empower the President to impose "restrictions", "rules", "regulations", "orders", "limitations", and "exceptions" governing the entry of non-citizens, judge Sorokin held that their ordinary meaning does not encompass the power over the public purse. The court also found multiple violations of the Administrative Procedure Act. Accordingly, judge Sorokin ruled that "the Policy implementing the Proclamation is declared unlawful and is vacated in its entirety".

Kartikey Singh, lawyer, and currently working as a Law Clerk-cum-Research Associate at the Supreme Court of India. Views expressed are personal.

THE GIST

- To balance employers' demand for skilled talent with protection of the domestic workforce, Congress capped H-1B approvals for most private employers at 65,000 visas annually, with an additional 20,000 visas reserved for holders of advanced degrees.
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What does Tenth Schedule provide on party mergers?

Why has the misuse of the merger provision increased after the deletion of paragraph 3?

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

As many as 20 rebel Trinamool Congress MPs met the Lok Sabha Speaker and announced their decision to merge with Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI). This has raised issues about the interpretation of Tenth Schedule with respect to merger of political parties.

What is the origin of Tenth Schedule?

The defections of legislators during 1960s and 70s from their parent parties created political instability in many States bringing down elected governments. This prompted the 52nd constitutional amendment to introduce the 'anti-defection' law through the Tenth Schedule in 1985. This Schedule provides that a member of a House of Parliament or State legislature who voluntarily gives up the membership of their 'political party' or votes against the instructions of their party in a House are liable for disqualification from such House. The 'political party' is the entire organisation of a party, while the 'legislature party' is all the members of a political party in a House of Parliament or State legislature.

The Tenth Schedule originally had two exceptions that would not render the members liable for disqualification viz., one-third of members of the 'legislature party' splitting to form a separate group (paragraph 3), or a merger of their 'political party' with another party that is approved by two-thirds of the members of its 'legislature party' (paragraph 4). However, considering the need to strengthen the 'anti-defection' law, paragraph 3 was omitted in 2003.

With the deletion of paragraph 3, there have been instances of two-third members of a legislature party 'practically' defecting but claiming to be the original political party in order to escape disqualification. This happened in the case of Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party in June 2022 and July 2023 respectively.

There have also been instances where more than two-third members of a 'legislature party' in a house have merged themselves with another political party to escape disqualification. This happened in September 2019 (in Rajasthan) when all 6 Bahujan Samajwadi Party MLAs merged themselves with the Congress and in September 2022 (in Goa) when 8 out of the 11 Congress MLAs merged themselves with the BJP. The Bombay High Court upheld the merger of Goa's Congress Legislature Party with the BJP, though an appeal is pending in the apex court. A similar move occurred in April 2026 when 7 of 10 AAP Rajya Sabha MPs merged with the BJP.

What is the present case in Bengal?

After the recent West Bengal polls, around 60 of the 80 MLAs elected from Trinamool Congress formed a separate faction led by Riabrata Banerjee, who was recognised as the Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly even after the party expelled him. Meanwhile, 20 of the 29 Lok Sabha MPs have submitted their decision to the Lok Sabha Speaker to merge themselves with the NCPI. Their claim is that they constitute two-thirds of the legislature party and are hence authorised to take this step under the provisions of the Tenth Schedule without attracting disqualification.

What may be way forward?

A plain reading of the Tenth Schedule allows only for merger of a political party with another party that is approved by two-thirds of its legislature party. It does not authorise two-thirds of the legislature party in a house to merge itself with another political party to claim immunity from defection. However, in the recent instance with respect to proposed merger of Trinamool Lok Sabha MPs with NCPI as well as the merger of Rajya Sabha MPs of AAP with the BJP, this is what has happened. It is also subject to interpretation whether a merger of an 'original political party' can happen only with another political party that already has members in the legislative house. Moreover, the authority to decide on the disqualification of members is vested in the Speaker or Chairman. While they are expected to perform this constitutional role impartially, the presiding officers have often favoured the ruling dispensation. The Supreme Court in K. M. Singh case in 2020, recommended that the Parliament amend the Constitution to vest these powers in an independent tribunal headed by judges.

An authoritative Supreme Court judgement in the matters of merger and setting up of an independent tribunal to decide on disqualification may reduce the ambiguities surrounding the Tenth Schedule. However, it may not prevent the ingenious methods adopted by political parties to circumvent the Tenth Schedule. Any such manoeuvres may be viewed as a betrayal of the electorate by the elected representatives. A stricter measure, as recommended by the Law commission in 1999, could be to amend the Tenth Schedule and delete paragraph 4 that provides exemption from disqualification for merger of political parties. Any action by elected members of a legislature party against their political party should lead to disqualification that results in seeking fresh mandate from the people.

Rangarajan R. is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courtsmanship on Policy Simplified'. He currently trains at 'Officers IAS Academy'. Views expressed are personal.

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Rangarajan R. is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified'. He currently trains at 'Officers IAS Academy'. Views expressed are personal.

Topic	Details
Anti-Defection Law	Tenth Schedule
Added By	52nd Constitutional Amendment Act
Year	1985
Prime Minister	Rajiv Gandhi
Objective	Prevent political defections
Disqualification Authority	Speaker/Chairman
Judicial Review	Allowed (1992)
Major Amendment	91st Constitutional Amendment, 2003

Constitutional Amendments Asked Frequently

Amendment	Year	Importance
52nd Amendment	1985	Added Tenth Schedule
91st Amendment	2003	Removed split provision

What is Defection?

Situation	Disqualified?
Voluntarily giving up party membership	Yes
Voting against party whip	Yes
Abstaining against whip	Yes
Independent member joining party after election	Yes
Nominated member joining party after six months	Yes

Original Exceptions (1985)

Before 2003

Provision	Requirement
Split	One-third members
Merger	Two-thirds members

Exam Fact

Split provision removed in 2003

Current Position (After 91st Amendment)

Provision	Status
Split (1/3rd)	❌ Removed
Merger (2/3rd)	✅ Allowed

Merger Rule under Tenth Schedule

To avoid disqualification:

Condition	Requirement
Merger of original political party	Required
Support of legislature party	Minimum 2/3 members

Formula

Total Members	Required for Merger
30	20
60	40
90	60
300	200

Landmark Supreme Court Cases

Year	Case	Importance
1992	Kihoto Hollohan Case	Judicial review allowed
2020	Keisham Meghachandra Singh Case	Speaker should decide within reasonable period
2020	K M Singh Case	Suggested tribunal instead of Speaker

Year	State	Event
2019	Rajasthan	BSP MLAs merged with Congress
2022	Goa	Congress MLAs joined BJP
2022	Maharashtra	Shiv Sena split crisis
2023	Maharashtra	NCP split controversy
2026	Parliament	TMC–NCPI merger claim (current issue)

Word of the day

Salvo:

an outburst resembling the discharge of firearms or the release of bombs a sudden outburst of cheers

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Synonyms: Volley, Burst

Usage: *The jets dropped a salvo of bombs over the target area. There was a sudden salvo of approval.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/salvo

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈsæl.vəʊ/

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