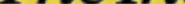


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जनसत्ता



**THE
FINANCIAL
EXPRESS**



4
The Hindu



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**PIB, PRS & Other
newspaper**



2
**The Indian
Express**



0
Jansatta



2
**Financial
Express**



**“Everything wants
you when you
want nothing”**

— Unknown



IDENTITY CHOICES
Census questionnaire to have 'no caste' option

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PRECAUTIONS ADVISED
Several States see sharp spike in HINI cases

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UNCERTAIN PHASE
Tata Sons AGM put off over lack of quorum

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CRASHING OPPORTUNITIES
Employment guarantee has slipped into limbo
VB-G RAM C has driven promises into the ditch

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PERFECT DAY
India registers big win over South Africa

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INSIDE



Congress mocks Trump for citing CEC in U.S. case

NEW DELHI
The Congress issued a strong rebuttal to U.S. President Donald Trump after he cited India's Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), Niyam Kumar, to make a case for stronger laws in American elections. It urged him to "take the CEC there," it said.

Kharage flags 1.95 lakh social media blocking orders

NEW DELHI
Alleging that the Centre has 1.95 lakh blocking orders to social media platforms in the nation, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday said the Centre has launched a "toxic and calculated attack" on the democratic rights of citizens to question.

Shivakumar tells T.N. leaders not to meddle in Hanur

BENGALURU
Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Tuesday asked Tamil Nadu politicians not to interfere with the state's administrative matters, amid the row over the killing of three suspected poachers, from U.N. at Hanur in Channarayana district recently.

Russian missile strike kills 10 in a Ukrainian village

KYIV
A Russian missile strike on a village in Ukraine's Kharkiv region killed at least 10 people and wounded eight others as it demolished homes, officials said on Tuesday, even as Russia almost 800 drones just two days after launching a similar salvo.

Pak. court orders jailed Imran be taken to hospital

Associated Press ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered authorities to take imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan to a private hospital in the capital Islamabad for a medical examination, following months of concerns from his family and personal physicians about his health and access to medical care, his lawyers and party officials said.

A three-judge panel ordered that Mr. Khan be taken to Shifa International Hospital in Islamabad in the coming days and was examined by a medical board that will include specialists and one of his personal

SC to quash FIRs against student protesters

Top court agrees to invoke Article 142 to quash cases filed against students over NEET protests

Krishnakumar Rajagopal NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to use an exceptional power under Article 142 of the Constitution to quash first information reports (FIRs) registered against students who joined the nationwide protests against NEET-UG paper leaks that led to the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Union Education Minister and compelled the government to

introduce a list of FIRs in which only students were named, Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, heading a three-judge bench, said. "We will quash these FIRs by invoking Article 142. FIRs involving elements with serious criminal antecedents would be decided subject to discussion in court," he said. "But unless we have a list of these FIRs, how will we quash them?" the Chief Justice asked.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Delhi

Police, said the police would confine their investigation to 2,873 persons with "serious criminal backgrounds" who were identified at the protest site. He said these persons included history-sheetees facing serious charges, including murder, rape, and child sexual abuse. However, advocate Vinod Grover, defending students' right to protest, pointed out that the Delhi Police have not disclosed details regarding any of the FIRs.

The bench said it would form a high-powered panel to examine the impact on the NEET-UG protests, and invited suggestions from the advocates appearing in the case.

"FIR details not shared"

Mr. Grover, the advocate representing students, said the national capital's police have not shared even the details of the FIRs, which triggered agitation across the country,



We will quash these FIRs framing only students by invoking Article 142. FIRs involving elements with serious criminal antecedents would be decided subject to discussion in court. We have identified criminal antecedents. The rest are students. We have identified criminal antecedents. The rest are students.

led to a police crackdown on July 30 in which pellet gun and tear gas were allegedly used. Justice Jyoti Basu said the state cannot refer to "undisable elements" in "generic" terms. "You have to at least identify them," Justice Basu said. "The rest are students," Mr. Mehta replied. "But FIR details not shared," Mr. Mehta said. "We have identified criminal antecedents. The rest are students."

Police's use of facial recognition under SC scrutiny

NEW DELHI
After a police official admitted the use of facial recognition system (FRS) during the NEET-UG protests in "aggravated manner," the Supreme Court on Tuesday said it would examine the "proportionality" of police's deployment.

The court said there was a clear distinction between using facial recognition for peaceful protesting and using it for identifying and tracking protesters. The court said it would examine the "proportionality" of police's deployment. "The criminality of the protest has to be seen from the purpose for which the students were gathered there. Let us not forget their right under Article 19 (right to speech and dissent)," Chief Justice Ramana said. "The court will examine the proportionality of police's deployment. Let us not forget their right under Article 19 (right to speech and dissent)," Chief Justice Ramana said. "The court will examine the proportionality of police's deployment. Let us not forget their right under Article 19 (right to speech and dissent)," Chief Justice Ramana said.

about any internal or administrative action taken against police personnel at the protest site. The court said it would examine the "proportionality" of police's deployment.

Legitimate expectations

"This is a question of the life and future of thousands of innocent students. Their parents spend hard-earned money for their education. They have a future. They have legitimate expectations from the system. We have to build up their confidence in the system. That is the real foundation," Chief Justice Ramana observed.

The bench sought suggestions from petitioners for framing issues to be examined by the committee while noting that allegations of police officers sexually molesting women protesters would be looked into urgently by the panel for further legal action.

Senior advocate Gopal Hanumanthiah, for the petitioners, said the Delhi Police affidavit did not spare a single mention

about any internal or administrative action taken against police personnel at the protest site. The court said it would examine the "proportionality" of police's deployment.

Senior advocate Shantanu Parashar asked why the state had not taken legal action against these police personnel.

"We will frame issues which the high-powered committee proposed would go into. This would include issues the committee should go into urgently. The order would be out tomorrow," the Chief Justice assured.

Mr. Grover, backed by Mr. Hanumanthiah, said there ought to be a woman in the committee as the issues at stake concerned them.

Almost 2,000 Jharkhand employees stuck in limbo after govt. cancels exams

Amrit Bhatnagar PATNA

A day after the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC) Graduate Level (JSSC-GCL) examination and other recruitment tests were cancelled in response to a week-long agitation by hundreds of protesters in Ranchi, the outrage of those on the flip side of the decision started to emerge on Tuesday.

Candidates who had successfully cleared the exams and are now government employees staged a protest outside the Cabinet Secretariat on Tuesday.

The cancellation of exams by the Jharkhand government had affected 1,975 employees, many of whom were stopped by the police from entering their workplaces at the Secretariat. They said that they have not received any notice from the government regarding the cancellation of exams or regarding termination from jobs.

The employees pointed out that they had become government employees following the government's decision. Many of them had been working in the government for years. They said that they had been working in the government for years. They said that they had been working in the government for years.

The Jharkhand government has not only cancelled the JSSC-GCL exam but also all other exams under the state's recruitment agency, TSB Data Processing Private Limited (TDPL).



Employees gathered outside the Secretariat in Ranchi on Tuesday.

since 2014. Chief Minister Hemant Soren announced the decision on Monday night, following a special Cabinet meeting.

Seek fair probe
One affected employee said that he had even given up jobs in other departments, including those under the Union government, to work in his home state. "We had passed the exam as part of the selection process, secured appointments, and were already serving on post. The cancellation of the exam has put both our jobs and our future in darkness," said another employee about the decision.

Another petitioner said, "If any irregularities did happen during the exam, a fair investigation should be conducted, and action should be taken against those found guilty. It is unfair to hold the entire agency, TSB Data Processing Private Limited (TDPL), responsible for the irregularities."

The JSSC-GCL Reform Panel continues its probe at the venue. Its leader Ravindra Pawar told The Hindu: "We are waiting for the official notification or the press release from the government side regarding whatever decision the government has taken after the special Cabinet meeting. We want to see the list of all examinations which have been cancelled so that the situation becomes clear to the public. Our demands of the CBI inquiry is still pending."

Approaching tide



Shiva: The Akshardham River touched the base platform of the Shiva Devi Temple on Tuesday following three days of continuous rain in Uttarakhand. The shrine faces a similar situation in 2020.

Pak. court orders jailed Imran be taken to hospital



Tafels police personnel stand outside the Shifa International Hospital in Islamabad, after the court ruling, on Tuesday.

Imran's health is under a doctor's care. The order came months after Mr. Khan petitioned the court, asking to be transferred from a high-security prison in the nearby city of Rawalpindi to a hospital and to be attended to by his personal physician, family and lawyers.

'Health at stake'
The court said the order was being issued because Mr. Khan's health was at stake and access to medical care is protected under Pakistan's Constitution, according to Mr. Khan's lawyer Salman Akram Raja. The court said it was not to gather support not to gather support not to gather support.

SC to quash FIRs against student protesters

Top court agrees to invoke Article 142 to quash cases filed against students over NEET protests

Court is to form panel to examine protest issues; police yet to disclose list of FIRs, say petitioners

Solicitor-General says police will confine probe to the 2,873 with 'serious criminal backgrounds'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to use an exceptional power under Article 142 of the Constitution to quash first information reports (FIRs) registered against students who joined the nationwide protests against NEET-UG paper leaks that led to the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Union Education Minister and compelled the government to introspect.

Seeking a list of FIRs in which only students were named, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, said: "We will quash these FIRs by invoking Article 142. FIRs involving elements with serious criminal antecedents would be decided subject to discussion in court". "But unless we have a list of these FIRs, how will we quash them?" the Chief Justice asked.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Delhi

Police, said the police would confine their investigation to 2,873 persons with "serious criminal background" who were identified at the protest site. He said these persons included history-sheeters facing serious charges, including murder, rape, and child sexual abuse. However, advocate Vrinda Grover, defending students' right to protest, pointed out that the Delhi Police have not disclosed details regarding any of the FIRs.

The Bench said it would form a high-powered panel to examine the issues over the NEET-UG protests, and invited suggestions from the advocates appearing in the case.

'FIR details not shared'

Ms. Grover, the advocate representing students, said the national capital's police have not shared even the FIR numbers despite promising to take no action against students and youngsters who protested peacefully. Protests in Delhi, which triggered agitations across the country,



led to a police crackdown on July 20 in which pellet guns and tear gas were allegedly used.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi said the state cannot refer to "undesirable elements" in "generic" terms. "You have to at least identify them," Justice Bagchi said.

"We have identified 2,873. The rest are students," Mr. Mehta replied.

Advocate Rizwan Ahmed, appearing for retired Air Force officer Manish Kumar Solanki, who has blamed the organisers of the NEET-UG protests, including the Cockroach

Janta Party, for the July 20 violence, objected to the court's proposed move to quash the FIRs against students. Asking if this would be a "one-off" or was the court setting a precedent, he said the students had not expressed a "shred of remorse or regret".

"The moot question here is whether the Parliament march was lawful or unlawful? The answer is, it is unlawful," he submitted.

Senior advocate N. Hariharan, on the petitioners' side, said Mr. Ahmed seemed to ask the question and answer it as well.

Police's use of facial recognition under SC scrutiny

NEW DELHI

After a Delhi Police affidavit admitted the use of facial recognition system (FRS) during the NEET-UG protests in "legitimate state interest", the Supreme Court on Tuesday said it will examine the "proportionality" of system's deployment. » PAGE 4

"The criminality of the protest has to be seen from the purpose for which the students were gathered there. Let us not forget their right under Article 19 [right to speech and dissent]," Chief Justice Kant addressed Mr. Ahmed.

The CJI said the court would protect the students "so long as they did not intend to violate the law, so long as they wanted to hold a protest in a peaceful and lawful manner and raise their voice with respect to certain demands which they expected the authorities to hear".

The court said there was a clear distinction between cases involving peacefully agitating students and those against criminals who infiltrated the protest to spread violence.

Legitimate expectations

"This is a question of the life and future of thousands of innocent students. Their parents spend hard-earned money for their education. They have a future. They have legitimate expectations from the system... We have to build up their confidence in the system. That is the real foundation," Chief Justice Kant observed.

The Bench sought suggestions from petitioners for framing issues to be examined by the committee while noting that allegations of police officers sexually molesting women protesters would be looked into urgently by the panel for further legal action.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, for the petitioners, said the Delhi Police affidavit did not spare a single mention

about any internal or administrative action taken against police personnel allegedly captured on social media molesting women protesters.

"The affidavit has an admission of plainclothes policemen present, without name tags. Once you start indulging in these kinds of disgusting activities, some responsibility should be put on individuals who are at the head of such chain of actions," Mr. Sankaranarayanan submitted.

Senior advocate Shadan Farasat asked why the state had not taken legal action against these police personnel.

"We will frame issues which the high-powered committee proposed would go into. This would include issues the committee should go into urgently. The order would be out tomorrow," the Chief Justice assured.

Ms. Grover, backed by Mr. Hariharan, said there ought to be a woman in the committee as the issues also concerned them.

1. What is the case about?

The Supreme Court was hearing petitions concerning nationwide student protests held after alleged irregularities and paper leaks in examinations, including NEET-UG.

The petitions raised several interconnected issues:

- FIRs registered against students who allegedly participated peacefully.
- Violence during some protests.
- Allegations of excessive police action, including the use of pellet guns and tear gas.
- Infiltration of demonstrations by persons with serious criminal backgrounds.
- Alleged harassment of women protesters.
- Use of facial-recognition technology to identify people present at protest sites.
- The wider constitutional protection available to peaceful dissent.

The Bench comprised:

Judge	Position
Justice Surya Kant	Chief Justice of India
Justice Joymalya Bagchi	Supreme Court Judge
Justice V. Mohana	Supreme Court Judge

2. What did the Supreme Court say?

The Court indicated that it was willing to use its extraordinary power under Article 142 to quash FIRs registered only against peaceful student protesters.

However, this is the most important factual qualification:

The Court expressed its intention to quash the FIRs; the newspaper report does not constitute a final quashing order.

The Court first required the authorities to provide a proper list of FIRs and identify:

1. FIRs involving only students or peaceful protesters.
2. FIRs involving violence or serious criminal conduct.
3. Persons with previous serious criminal antecedents.
4. Cases involving allegations against police personnel.

Therefore, the proposed relief would not automatically extend to every person present during the protests.

Category	Likely treatment
Peaceful students named only for participating in protests	FIRs may be quashed using Article 142
Students involved in minor protest-related conduct	Separate scrutiny may be required
Persons accused of violence or destruction of property	No automatic protection
Persons with serious criminal antecedents	Cases to continue or be examined separately
Police personnel accused of misconduct	Allegations may be investigated by the proposed committee
People accused of harassing women protesters	Separate legal investigation may follow

Provision	Meaning	Relevance
Article 19(1)(a)	Freedom of speech and expression	Protects the expression of opposition and public grievances
Article 19(1)(b)	Right to assemble peacefully and without arms	Constitutional foundation of peaceful demonstrations
Article 19(2)	Reasonable restrictions on speech	Restrictions may be imposed for public order, security and other specified grounds
Article 19(3)	Reasonable restrictions on assembly	State may regulate assemblies in the interests of public order and sovereignty and integrity of India
Article 21	Life and personal liberty	Relevant to arbitrary arrest, surveillance, privacy and use of disproportionate force
Article 32	Constitutional remedies before the Supreme Court	Enables enforcement of fundamental rights
Article 142	Power to do “complete justice”	May be used to quash multiple protest-related FIRs in an exceptional situation

6. What is Article 142?

Article 142 authorises the Supreme Court to pass orders necessary for doing “complete justice” in a matter pending before it.

Characteristics

Point	Explanation	
Who can use it?	Only the Supreme Court	
Nature	Extraordinary and discretionary constitutional power	
Objective	To prevent injustice where ordinary remedies may be inadequate	
Territorial effect	Orders are enforceable throughout India	
Limitation	It cannot ordinarily be used to replace substantive law or ignore fundamental statutory policy	
Application here	It may enable coordinated quashing of numerous FIRs involving peaceful students	

Why might Article 142 be needed?

The FIRs reportedly arose in different states and police jurisdictions. Requiring every student to approach a different High Court separately could produce:

- Conflicting decisions.
- Heavy legal expenses.
- Long delays.
- Continuing damage to students’ careers.
- Unnecessary burden on courts.

A common Supreme Court direction could create a uniform filtering mechanism.

7. Can a government simply “withdraw an FIR”?

Technically, an FIR cannot ordinarily be erased merely through a political or executive announcement. It initiates the criminal-investigation process.

Cases arising from an FIR can legally end through different routes:

Legal route	Authority involved	Result	
Closure report	Police and Magistrate	Police conclude that evidence is insufficient or no offence is established	
Withdrawal from prosecution under Section 360 BNSS	Public Prosecutor with court's consent	Prosecution is discontinued subject to judicial approval	
Quashing by High Court	High Court under Section 528 BNSS and/or Article 226	FIR or criminal proceeding is quashed	
Quashing by Supreme Court	Supreme Court under constitutional powers, including Article 142	Proceedings can be terminated to achieve complete justice	
Compounding	Parties and court, where legally permitted	Certain compoundable offences are settled	

The executive may adopt a policy favouring withdrawal, but the legally prescribed process and judicial safeguards must still be followed.

8. Proposed high-powered committee

The Supreme Court indicated that it would constitute a high-powered committee to examine the wider issues emerging from the protests.

The reported composition could include:

- A former Supreme Court judge.
- A former Chief Justice or judge of a High Court.
- A former senior police officer/DGP.
- Other experienced independent members, if required.

Possible scope of the committee

Issue	What may be examined	
Police force	Whether force used against protesters was necessary and proportionate	
Pellet guns and tear gas	Circumstances and protocols governing their use	
Protest violence	Identification of those personally responsible	
Police injuries	Violence allegedly committed against police personnel	
Women protesters	Sexual harassment, molestation and online abuse allegations	
Plainclothes personnel	Accountability of officers operating without visible identification	
Social media	Threats, abusive content and alleged suppression of protesters' accounts	
FIR classification	Separation of peaceful students from violent offenders	
Vulnerable persons	Protection against intimidation, doxxing and online victimisation	

11. Right to protest: protected but not absolute

The Constitution does not expressly use the phrase "right to protest." The right flows primarily from Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(b).

Protected activities

- Peaceful assembly.
- Slogans and speeches that do not incite violence.
- Marches held subject to lawful regulation.
- Demonstrations against government policy.
- Demands for examination transparency.
- Peaceful criticism of public authorities.

Activities not protected merely because they occur during a protest

- Violence against people or police personnel.
- Destruction of public or private property.
- Carrying prohibited weapons.
- Sexual harassment.
- Serious obstruction creating danger to public safety.
- Incitement to imminent violence.
- Conduct constituting an independent criminal offence.

The authorities must establish individual responsibility. Mere presence in a large gathering should not automatically prove participation in violence.

Case	Principle
<i>Kameshwar Prasad v. State of Bihar</i> (1962)	Peaceful demonstration is protected, though there is no fundamental right to strike
<i>Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police</i> (1973)	State may regulate public meetings but cannot impose an arbitrary blanket prohibition
<i>Ramlila Maidan Incident, In Re</i> (2012)	Citizens have a right to peaceful protest; police force must be justified and proportionate
<i>Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India</i> (2018)	Protest rights must be balanced with the rights of residents and commuters
<i>Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police</i> (2020)	Public roads cannot be occupied indefinitely in a manner that seriously obstructs the public
<i>K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India</i> (2017)	Privacy is a fundamental right; State intrusion must satisfy legality, necessity and proportionality
<i>Tehseen S. Poonawalla v. Union of India</i> (2018)	State has a duty to prevent violence and protect citizens from unlawful collective action



SC & STUDENT-PROTEST FIRs



Status: COURT INDICATED INTENTION — NOT YET A FINAL QUASHING ORDER

1

WHAT HAPPENED



Supreme Court considered using Article 142 to quash FIRs naming only peaceful student protesters.

2

WHO MAY BE EXCLUDED



2,873 persons identified by police as having serious criminal antecedents; their cases require separate scrutiny.

3

CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS



Article 19(1)(a): Speech
• Article 19(1)(b): Peaceful Assembly
• Article 142: Complete Justice

4

PROPOSED PANEL



To examine protest violence, alleged police excesses, sexual harassment and related issues.

5

FACIAL RECOGNITION



Supreme Court will examine legality, proportionality and privacy implications.

6

KEY PRINCIPLE



Peaceful dissent is protected; violence and serious criminal conduct are not.



PRELIMS TRAP

An FIR cannot simply be erased by an executive announcement. Lawful routes include closure report, withdrawal from prosecution with court consent, or judicial quashing.



EXAM THEMES

Right to Protest • Reasonable Restrictions • Article 142 • Privacy • Proportionality • Police Accountability



Source context: Supreme Court hearing reported on 18–19 August 2026

Sonia Gandhi's memoir to revisit love, loss, and her decision to decline PM post

Associated Press

NEW YORK

Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member Sonia Gandhi has a memoir coming out this fall in which she will reflect on the promise and the tragedy of marrying into the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty and on her own career in government.

Publishing house Alfred A. Knopf announced on Tuesday that Ms. Gandhi's *Belonging: A Journey of Love* will be published on November 10.

"Much has been written about my family, but few narratives were able to reach into the truth of their motivations, their actions and even their very human failings," Ms. Gandhi said in a statement issued through Knopf. "In many ways, this book is a homage to their humanness. My story also offers readers a unique perspective of the social and political changes I have witnessed for six decades in the beau-



The book cover image released by Alfred A. Knopf.

tiful country of my belonging."

Ms. Gandhi, 79, is a native of Italy who was studying in Cambridge, when she met fellow student and future husband Rajiv Gandhi, grandson of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and son of India's first woman Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.

In *Belonging*, she writes of her life being upended when her mother-in-law was assassinated in 1984 and succeeded by Rajiv Gandhi, who was also mur-

dered seven years later. She too would eventually enter politics and become the longest-serving president of the Indian National Congress Party while also turning down her party's offer to become Prime Minister. "It was heartbreak and loss that threw me into the public world of politics. Up till then I had guarded my privacy fiercely," she said in her statement.

"Writing about my life did not come easily to me. It meant opening myself up, sharing moments and experiences I had always held deep inside," she said. "Yet as I gradually removed myself from the political sphere and looked back at all I had seen, the thread of love and loyalty that wove through my story began to define itself, from the simplicity of my childhood in small-town Italy, to the complexity of my years in India as the wife of Rajiv Gandhi and the daughter-in-law of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi."

Particular

Information

Title

Belonging: A Journey of Love

Author

Sonia Gandhi

Genre

Autobiography/political memoir

Publisher

Alfred A. Knopf/Knopf

Publication date

10 November 2026

Hardcover length

544 pages

Large-print edition

896 pages

Audiobook duration

Approximately 19 hours

ISBN

9780593803592

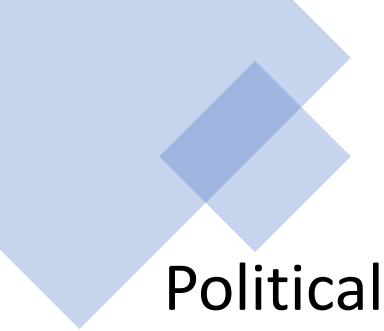
Status in August 2026

Announced and available for preorder; not yet published



Event	Year
Indira Gandhi assassinated	1984
Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister	1984
Rajiv Gandhi lost office	1989
Rajiv Gandhi assassinated	1991
Time between the two assassinations	Approximately seven years





Political milestone

Year



Formally joined active Congress politics

1997

Became Congress president

1998

Became Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha

1999

Led Congress/UPA in general election

2004

Declined prime ministership

2004

UPA chairperson

2004–2014

Entered Rajya Sabha

2024



What role did she play after declining the post?

Declining the prime ministership did not mean withdrawing from politics.

As UPA chairperson and Congress president, Sonia Gandhi played an important role in:

- Maintaining the UPA coalition.
- Coordinating between Congress and allied parties.
- Supporting the Manmohan Singh government.
- Heading the National Advisory Council.
- Influencing rights-based welfare legislation.

Major laws associated with the UPA period included:

Law/programme	Importance	
Right to Information Act, 2005	Strengthened governmental transparency	
MGNREGA, 2005	Provided statutory rural employment guarantee	
Forest Rights Act, 2006	Recognised rights of forest-dwelling communities	
Right to Education Act, 2009	Made elementary education a legal entitlement	
National Food Security Act, 2013	Established subsidised food entitlements	
Land Acquisition Act, 2013	Introduced compensation and rehabilitation safeguards	

The memoir may provide an insider’s account of the relationship between the Congress organisation, UPA leadership and the Manmohan Singh government.

BRICS calls EU's carbon tax 'punitive, unilateral'

Ministers say it could undermine efforts of developing countries to address climate change; they urge developed nations to honour financial commitment agreed to at 2025 UN climate conference

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

BRICS countries on Tuesday opposed what they described as "unilateral, punitive, discriminatory and protectionist" climate measures, including the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms (CBAMs), while calling for a significant increase in international funding to help developing countries adapt to climate change.

The positions were contained in the joint statement adopted at the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi, held under India's chairship. The Ministers specifically said that carbon border measures such as CBAMs could "undermine developing countries' efforts to address climate change and build resilience".

The statement comes as the European Union's CBAM entered its definitive phase from January 1 this year. The mechanism re-



Union Minister Bhupender Yadav at the 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

quires importers of carbon-intensive products, consisting of iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilizers, hydrogen and electricity, to account for the carbon emissions associated with their production. The EU says the measure is intended to prevent "carbon leakage" – the shifting of carbon-intensive production outside the bloc because of differences in climate policies.

Significant exposure

India is among the countries with significant exposure to the mechanism,

particularly through its steel exports. A recent analysis found that iron and steel account for about 90% of India's exports to the EU that fall within the CBAM framework. A June 2026 analysis in *Nature Climate Change*, based on shipment-level trade data and facility-level emissions estimates, found that high-emission Indian steel firms had reduced their export quantities and revenues to the EU during the CBAM reporting phase, while lower-emission firms maintained their export levels.

The BRICS position the-

refore comes as the EU and India move to implement a free trade agreement negotiated earlier this year, while Indian exporters face the additional carbon-related compliance requirements in the European market.

Hike adaptation finance

The Ministers also called for an urgent increase in adaptation finance from developed countries. They said support should be "new, additional, predictable, adequate and accessible", and should be provided through grants and concessional finance without increasing the financial vulnerabilities of developing countries. They urged developed countries to meet the commitment agreed at the 2025 UN climate conference to triple adaptation finance to developing countries by 2035.

Adaptation finance is used to help countries and communities cope with climate impacts, including measures to strengthen water security, agriculture, infrastructure, and so on.

At the **12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting**, held in New Delhi on **18 August 2026** under India's chairship, BRICS countries criticised unilateral carbon-border measures, particularly the European Union's **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism—CBAM**.

The joint statement described such measures as:

“Unilateral, punitive, discriminatory and protectionist.”

BRICS ministers argued that carbon-border measures could:

- Operate as disguised trade barriers.
- Reduce the competitiveness of developing-country exports.
- Transfer part of the developed world's climate-transition cost to developing countries.
- Undermine the principle of climate equity.
- Reduce developing countries' financial capacity to invest in decarbonisation and adaptation.
- Ignore differences in historical responsibility and developmental capacity.

The official joint statement is listed on the [BRICS India 2026 documents portal](#) ↗. Meanwhile, the EU confirms that CBAM's definitive regime commenced on [1 January 2026](#) ↗.

2. What is CBAM?

CBAM stands for Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

It is the European Union's system for imposing a carbon-related cost on selected carbon-intensive goods imported into the EU.

Its objective is to make imported goods bear a carbon cost comparable to that paid by producers within the EU under the **EU Emissions Trading System—EU ETS**.

Simple explanation

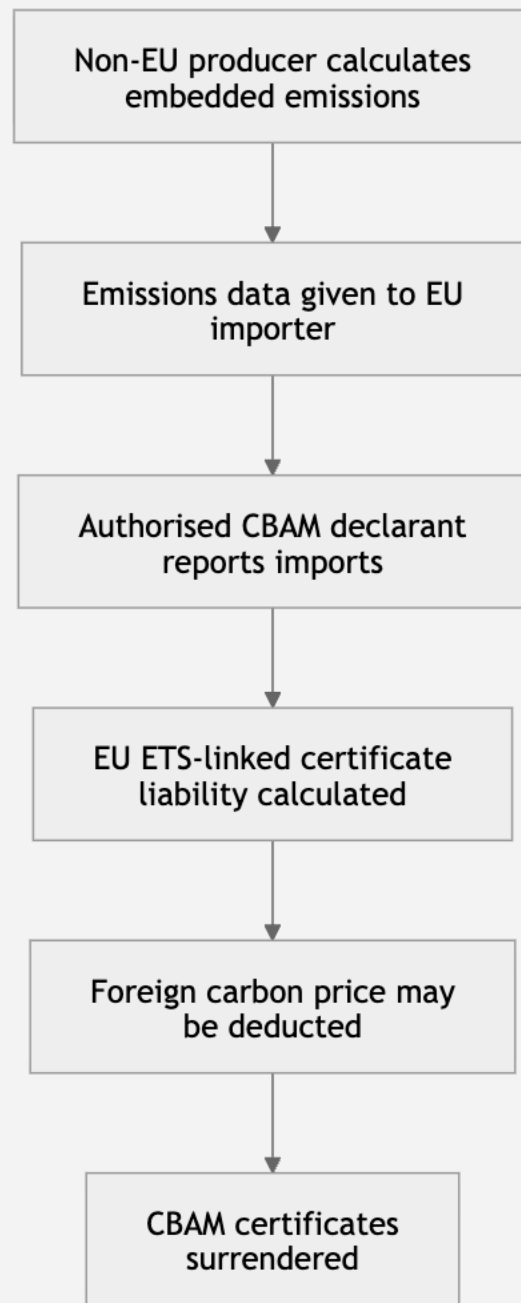
Suppose:

- A European steel producer must purchase EU ETS allowances for its carbon emissions.
- A foreign steel producer operates in a country where carbon emissions are free or priced much lower.
- The foreign steel could consequently become cheaper than EU-produced steel.

CBAM requires the EU importer to purchase certificates corresponding to the carbon embedded in the imported product, subject to applicable adjustments.

This is intended to prevent the foreign producer from gaining a price advantage merely because its country has a lower carbon price.

Stage	Period	Requirement
CBAM regulation entered into force	May 2023	Legal framework established
Transitional phase	1 October 2023–31 December 2025	Importers mainly reported embedded emissions; generally no certificate-payment obligation
Definitive regime	From 1 January 2026	Authorisation, reporting and financial obligations apply
First annual declaration for 2026 imports	By 30 September 2027 under the current implementation schedule	Importers report 2026 emissions and surrender corresponding certificates
Full alignment	Gradually linked with phase-out of free EU ETS allowances	CBAM burden increases as free allowances decline



- **Simplified formula**

- CBAM liability $\approx$ Embedded emissions $\times$ EU ETS-linked certificate price $-$ Recognised carbon price paid abroad
- The calculation also accounts for adjustments linked to free EU ETS allocation.

- **Example**

- Assume:
 - Imported steel contains 2 tonnes of embedded CO₂.
 - Applicable EU carbon price is €70 per tonne.
 - An effective carbon price of €10 per tonne was already paid in the country of production.
- A highly simplified liability would be:
 - $2 \times (\text{€}70 - \text{€}10) = \text{€}120$
- The real regulatory calculation is more complex.

Sector	Examples
Iron and steel	Steel sheets, pipes, structural products and selected downstream goods
Aluminium	Primary aluminium and selected aluminium products
Cement	Cement and clinker
Fertilisers	Nitrogen-based fertilisers and relevant inputs
Electricity	Imported electricity
Hydrogen	Hydrogen produced through carbon-intensive processes



EU argument

Prevent carbon leakage

Equal treatment

Climate integrity

Cleaner production

Paris-aligned transition

Credit for foreign carbon price

WTO compatibility

Explanation

Stops production from shifting merely to avoid carbon pricing

Imported and EU-made goods should face comparable carbon costs

EU emission reductions should not simply move emissions abroad

Encourages foreign producers to adopt low-carbon technologies

Supports the EU's climate-neutrality objectives

Carbon price paid in the country of origin may be deducted

EU argues that comparable treatment is based on product emissions, not nationality



BRICS concern

Unilateral action

Protectionism

Discrimination

Historical emissions

Technology gap

Climate-finance gap

Administrative burden

Loss of revenue

Policy autonomy

Revenue destination

Explanation

The EU designed the mechanism without a multilateral climate agreement

Environmental rules could protect European industries from cheaper imports

Producers in developing economies may face heavier relative compliance costs

Developed countries industrialised using fossil fuels for much longer

Developing countries may lack affordable green steel and hydrogen technologies

Developed countries have not provided climate finance at the required scale

Small exporters may struggle with complex emissions measurement and verification

Reduced exports could weaken funds available for green investment

CBAM could pressure other countries to adopt EU-style carbon-pricing systems

Carbon-border revenue is collected by the EU rather than automatically financing decarbonisation in exporting countries

- 
- **CBDR-RC principle**
 - The developing-country argument is based strongly on:
 - **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities—CBDR-RC**
 - This principle is recognised under the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—UNFCCC** and reflected in the Paris Agreement.
 - **Meaning**
 - All countries share responsibility for addressing climate change, but their obligations should differ according to:
 - Historical contribution to climate change.
 - Economic capacity.
 - Technological capacity.
 - National circumstances.
 - Development needs.
 - Present and future emissions.

Sector	Exposure
Iron and steel	Highest immediate exposure
Aluminium	Significant due to electricity-intensive production
Fertilisers	Potential effect on nitrogen-based products
Cement	Comparatively smaller export exposure but carbon-intensive
Hydrogen	Future opportunity if India develops green hydrogen
Electricity	Limited direct Indian exposure because of geography

- **Impact on India**

- India is among the major countries exposed to CBAM-covered trade, especially in **iron and steel**.
- The EU reported India among the leading countries of origin for CBAM goods during the mechanism's initial definitive-phase operations. [European Commission operational update](#).

- **Most exposed Indian sectors**

- **Possible effects on India**
- **Negative effects**
 - Higher effective cost of carbon-intensive exports.
 - Reduced price competitiveness in Europe.
 - Expensive emissions monitoring and third-party verification.
 - Pressure on MSME suppliers.
 - Possible diversion of exports to non-EU markets.
 - Risk of “green trade fragmentation.”
 - Lower revenue for carbon-intensive producers.
 - Accelerated retirement of older industrial assets.
- **Potential positive effects**
 - Strong incentive for industrial decarbonisation.
 - Greater demand for renewable energy.
 - Investment in green hydrogen and green steel.
 - Better measurement of product-level emissions.
 - Improved global competitiveness of cleaner Indian producers.
 - Development of a domestic carbon market.
 - First-mover advantage for low-carbon exporters.

Measure	Purpose
Domestic carbon market	Establish a recognised price for emissions reductions
Carbon Credit Trading Scheme	Support market-based decarbonisation
Green steel taxonomy	Define and certify lower-emission steel
Renewable energy expansion	Reduce emissions embedded in industrial electricity
Green Hydrogen Mission	Decarbonise steel, fertiliser and refining sectors
Product carbon accounting	Generate verified plant- and product-level data
Mutual recognition negotiations	Seek EU recognition of Indian carbon-pricing and certification systems
WTO consultation/challenge	Test whether CBAM complies with trade rules
FTA negotiations	Seek safeguards, cooperation or transitional support
Climate diplomacy	Demand finance and technology transfer
Support for MSMEs	Reduce compliance and verification costs
Recycling and circular economy	Expand scrap-based steel and aluminium production



Original members

Brazil

Russia

India

China

South Africa

Expanded members



Egypt

Ethiopia

Iran

United Arab Emirates

Indonesia

Saudi Arabia





EU CBAM vs BRICS



Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

STATUS



Transitional phase:
1 Oct 2023–31 Dec 2025



Definitive regime:
From 1 Jan 2026

HOW IT WORKS



EU importer reports
embedded emissions



buys CBAM certificates
linked to EU ETS price



carbon price paid abroad
may be deducted

COVERED SECTORS



Cement



Iron & Steel



Aluminium



Fertilisers



Electricity



Hydrogen

EU'S CASE



- Prevents carbon leakage
- Equalises carbon cost
- Encourages cleaner production

BRICS' OBJECTION



- Unilateral
- Punitive
- Discriminatory
- Protectionist

DEVELOPING-COUNTRY CONCERN



Different capabilities, higher transition costs and inadequate climate finance may make exports less competitive.

INDIA IMPACT



High exposure in iron and steel; exporters need verified emissions data, cleaner energy and low-carbon production.

CLIMATE PRINCIPLE



CBDR-RC: Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities

FINANCE DEMAND



Developed countries urged to triple adaptation finance by 2035 and provide grants and concessional finance.

CORE DEBATE



Climate integrity and carbon leakage prevention
vs
equity, WTO compatibility and green protectionism



EXAM THEMES



• CBAM • EU ETS • Carbon Leakage • Paris Agreement • CBDR-RC • WTO • Adaptation Finance



Context: 12th BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting,
New Delhi, 18 August 2026



Time to push back

The U.S. has been emboldened to make increasing demands on India

The latest accusation levelled by the United States against India has the potential to be the most harmful to the Indian economy. A recent White House report, naming around 40 countries in all, has said that India ranks among the top 'members of China's evasion of U.S. tariffs'. The accusation is that India and these other countries are 'stealing' Chinese goods, making minor modifications to them, and then exporting them to the U.S. at lower tariffs than what Chinese goods would have faced. The fact that Chinese imports form a significant pillar of Indian manufacturing is no secret. Yet, the nature of these imports is slowly changing. India is gradually moving away from importing finished products, making come, and selling them. Instead, the share of intermediate goods in Indian imports from China has been steadily rising. That is, India is doing much of its own assembly and manufacturing in several sectors now, relying on China and other countries for the parts needed. This shift is an important step towards full-scale manufacturing in India. The U.S. has not yet announced punitive actions based on its assessment of apparent Chinese tariff evasion, though that eventually is conceivable. However, should it do so, India must resist bowing to U.S. pressure on this issue. As even the government has admitted, Chinese imports rights more important part of the Make in India story.

The fear of India bowing to U.S. pressure is based on precedent. In its first term as U.S. President, Donald Trump raised against India's tariffs on high-end motorcycles. In 2018, India had to cut tariffs to 30% from the earlier 80%-95%, and then cut them further to 40% in February 2020, before trade deal talks had even started. Similarly, slashed the import duties on shrimp feed and its components in the February 2024 budget. The ask of the U.S. to do the same with tariffs on frozen duck and turkey. The pressure of the 50% punitive tariffs pushed India to diversify away from Russian oil, despite India's ardent claims of energy sovereignty and the discount it was receiving. Russia's share in India's oil imports fell below 20% in January 2026, from nearly double that when the 30% tariffs were imposed six months earlier. This had happened with Venezuelan oil in 2019 as well. It was the West Asia crisis, and the U.S.'s temporary reprieve, that has seen India turning back to Russian oil. Allowing FDI in the e-commerce inventory model, as India recently did, was something Amazon had been lobbying for a decade, and a dilution of India's long-held stance. The U.S. can wield immense pressure and so concessions are understandable. But that has emboldened it to make increasing demands. India needs to start pushing back.

Beyond America

Arab states can no longer depend on the U.S. for their security needs

Donald Trump's threat to bomb China, a long-standing American ally as the Persian Gulf, rebuffs both his administration's deepening friendship with the Arab world and Washington's declining influence in the region. This is the second time that the U.S. leader has threatened to attack China, which has talks between Washington and Tehran before he launched the war on February 28. When Mr. Trump backed down from a threatened strike then after 31 days of bombing on Iran in July, he had the U.S. and Iran were close to a deal, opening the Strait of Hormuz, which was closed by Iran after it was attacked. But Iran never said that it had agreed to a deal with the U.S. over the Strait and instead issued several demands, including releasing frozen funds and lowering sanctions relief, as preconditions for any agreement. Ever since, Oman, under U.S. influence, has been talking to Iran seeking a settlement. As Iran's military survived two rounds of U.S. bombings, refused to offer major concessions, the U.S.'s frustration with China has deepened. Mr. Trump has repeatedly claimed that the Strait of Hormuz was open, but traffic through the narrow waterway, through which one-fifth of the world's seaborne oil passed before the war, is nowhere near its pre-war levels.

The war has raised questions about America's regional security strategy and its commitment to the security of its allies. Over the years the U.S. had built military bases across the Persian Gulf. However, Tehran has turned these bases into a liability by repeatedly attacking them in host countries. At least US American bases, including the Fifth Fleet Headquarters in Bahrain, are either damaged or destroyed, which has substantially reduced the U.S.'s strategic presence. But Mr. Trump does not seem to grasp the seriousness of the situation. Instead of reassuring the allies, he is now threatening to bomb them because they are not able to deliver on his push for a face-saving deal with Iran. From day one of the war, his threats and rhetoric did little to advance America's strategic goal or deter Iran, but Mr. Trump, stuck deep in the Persian sands, appears unable to change tack. Whether he acknowledges America's growing limitations in West Asia or not, countries in the region confront a new strategic reality: the foundations of the old security architecture have been shaken. In their hour of need, American bases have proved to be a liability. They should also recognise that the decades-old policy of containing Iran has failed. To ensure their own security and regional stability, the Persian Gulf countries need to look beyond the American security umbrella and lay the foundations for a new regional order, shaped by a cold peace between the Arab states and Iran.

Rural workers are paying a heavy price for the Union Government's ill-conceived tinkering with India's employment guarantee law. Indeed, evidence is mounting of an unprecedented crash in employment generation under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and its successor, the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rongar and Aajeevika Mission (Grameen) alias VB-G RAM-G Act. One aspect of this crash has been widely noted: the 50% decline in employment generation under VB-G RAM-G in July 2026, vis-à-vis MGNREGA in the same month last year. The 50% estimate is actually based on a premature figure of 7.7 crore person-days for July 2026. The latest figure is 8.3 crore, and the final figure is likely to be around 9 crore according to the Ministry of Rural Development. But even if we accept this inflated total for July, the decline vis-à-vis July 2025 would be above 40%, which is a massive setback.

Misleading excuse
The Ministry of Rural Development made a lame attempt to attribute this setback to the fact that a few States explicitly suspended VB-G RAM-G in

Employment decline in April-July 2026



Joan Jeeva
Independent scholar
based in Ranchi,
Jharkhand

Abhishek Jaiswal
Independent scholar
based in Ranchi,
Jharkhand

VB-G RAM-G has driven employment guarantee into the ditch

During the first three months of this financial year (April to June), evolutions prevailed. To paraphrase Gramsci, the old world of MGNREGA was dying, and the new world of VB-G RAM-G was struggling to be born. In some districts, MGNREGA's rights were used to open new works. In many areas, there was no MGNREGA work at all. This was a serious lapse, as MGNREGA is normally at a peak during these summer months to slack agricultural season in large parts of India. The last time this happened in 2026, when VB-G RAM-G made a faltering start. In 2024-25 and 2025-26, the first four months of the financial year (April to June) accounted for nearly 50% of annual employment generation - 128 crore and 140 crore person-days, respectively. In 2026-27, however, MGNREGA and VB-G RAM-G generated only 70 crore person-days of employment in the same period. This is a decline of 43% from the average of the preceding two years. Employment declined in all major states, but the decline was far from uniform across States (see chart). It was relatively small in a few States (e.g., Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Karnataka, and Telangana), but larger than 40% in most States. In

parts of July 2026 under Section 6 of the Act, but this is the median of all not too large. For one thing, these States account for a small share of total MGNREGA employment, and the July 2026 decline looks much the same in proportionate terms when these States are left out. For another, the July decline is just the continuation of a crisis that began earlier. Some background may help. A Bill paving the way for the replacement of MGNREGA with VB-G RAM-G was rushed through Parliament in December 2025. The Rural Development Minister announced, at that time, that the replacement would take place on April 1, 2026. However, the Bill was not passed in the Lok Sabha until April 1, 2026. The Bill was not ready for the transition. The Rules, in particular, had not been framed. MGNREGA continued, by default. On May 22, 2026, the Ministry released draft VB-G RAM-G Rules for public consultation. These Rules are mainly a rehash of MGNREGA rules and orders. Release of the final Rules began at the end of June, just on time for the official replacement of MGNREGA with VB-G RAM-G on July 1. VB-G RAM-G wage rates were also notified on June 30, with a minimum norm of ₹300 per day - much the same as the earlier MGNREGA norm of ₹100 per day at 2009-10 prices.

The transition, the ground reality

A vision for an inclusive Bangladesh

Shahadat Hossain
Deputy Press
Secretary to the
Prime Minister

Government of the
People's Republic
of Bangladesh

citizens of all faiths equally. For the first time in Bangladesh's history, the Tarique Rahman government has signed Bilal Khatun as Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, with the status of a State Minister and responsibility for minority rights. The appointment is intended to strengthen institutional attention to minority concerns and provide a channel through which their issues can be brought directly to the Prime Minister's attention.

The Bangladesh government has also sought to ensure broader representation in public institutions.

Alongside Hindu representatives and an indigenous representative from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the post has been reserved for a reserved parliamentary seat. She belongs to the Oran indigenous community and also represents the Christian community. These appointments reflect the objective of building a more inclusive polity based on knowledge, peace, and justice.

Another significant social-welfare initiative is the provision of allowances to religious representatives serving in mosques, temples, Buddhist monasteries, and churches. The policy is intended to recognise religious institutions across communities on an equal basis and demonstrate the government's commitment to treating citizens of all faiths with equal dignity.

Democratising 1971, embracing 2024

The BNP's commitment to Bangladesh's founding history is also deeply rooted in its institutional heritage. The late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, President Ziaur Rahman, was the proponent of independence in 1971 and a valiant freedom fighter of the nation. The spirit and legacy of the Liberation War therefore remain central to the party's political identity. For the BNP, upholding the aspirations of 1971 means ensuring democracy, development, and justice, and maintaining the legacy of 1971 and the aspirations associated with the events of 2024. The two moments should not be viewed as

Under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, Bangladesh's democratic journey seeks to ensure equality, dignity, and accountable governance

competing narratives. The year 1971 is the root of Bangladesh's national identity, while 2024 represents a renewed aspiration for democratic aspirations and political transformation. This understanding has also been reflected in the government's symbolic initiatives. After assuming office, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman convened an event in Parliament in honour of the heroes of 1971 and 2024. He also named the main entrance of Parliament after General M.A.G. Osmani, the commander-in-chief of Bangladesh's Liberation War.

Domestic and foreign policy
The government's domestic policy priority is to ensure quality education and proper health care for every citizen. As a result, it also prioritises sustainable development and environmental conservation. It focuses on job creation, social welfare, human development, economic stability, global trade, and strategic partnerships around the world.

Regarding foreign policy, the government believes in putting Bangladesh first and adopting a self-respecting, active, and responsible global position based on equality, fairness, and mutual respect.

The founder of the BNP, Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman, was a proponent of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and the party continues to prioritise making SAARC more effective. Bangladesh's current government promotes friendly bilateral relations with other countries, including its neighbours, on the basis of sovereign equality, national dignity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and mutual benefit.

Under Tarique Rahman's leadership, Bangladesh seeks to build a people-centred welfare system and a society based on peace, justice, and equality for people of all religions and beliefs. Overall, these initiatives demonstrate an attempt to connect Bangladesh's historic struggle for democracy, human rights, inclusion, and accountable governance.

The vision expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Students bear the burden
The Jharkhand students' agitation, coming as it does close on the heels of the recently held CJP-led Jantar Mantra agitation, has put the nation on edge. It signifies that the agony and angst of the students' community are not localised or limited to Delhi and Jharkhand but are spreading like a pandemic across the country. This exposes the decadence of the entire education and

examination ecosystem in the country and the lack of accountability in the government's efforts to solve the problem all the more vicious and difficult for poor, eligible students to cope with in a system mired with corruption. Education is a subject on the Concurrent List under the Constitution and it is mainly needs to be addressed through legislative measures at the national level. Those responsible for

this mess need to be brought to book and meted out exemplary punishment for their negligence. The proceedings. The issue needs to be addressed, not that not only we have the crisis could put the country into a state of anarchy sooner rather than later.

Nav Mathur,
Independent scholar
based in Ranchi,
Jharkhand

deciding factors in determining the outcome of elections (inside pages). Political parties should be hampered democracy, says Supreme Court (August 18). Money is spent like water and cases of large amounts of money being stolen are regularly reported. The job of the Election Commission of India does not begin and end with announcing polls and declaring results. It also needs to scrutinise

expenditure on the massive arrangements made during election campaigns. Political parties should be required to disclose and substantiate the sources of their funds. While the government insists on curbs on CPM, why is it not making election expenditure expenditure?

Ramesh Chandra Prasad,
Senior Consultant
Letter addressed to:
letters@chronicle.in
must carry the postal address

Employment guarantee has slipped into limbo

Rural workers are paying a heavy price for the Union Government's ill-conceived tinkering with India's employment guarantee law. Indeed, evidence is mounting of an unprecedented crash in employment generation under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and its successor, the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) alias VB-G RAM G Act.

One aspect of this crash has been widely noted: the 50% decline in employment generation under VB-G RAM G in July 2026, *vis-à-vis* MGNREGA in the same month last year. The 50% estimate is actually based on a premature figure of 7.7 crore person-days for July 2026. The latest figure is 8.3 crore, and the final figure is likely to be around 9 crore according to the Ministry of Rural Development. But even if we accept this anticipated total for July, the decline *vis-à-vis* July 2025 would be above 40%, which is a massive setback.

Misleading excuse

The Ministry of Rural Development made a lame attempt to attribute this setback to the fact that a few States explicitly suspended VB-G RAM G in



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**VB-G RAM G
has driven
employment
guarantee into
the ditch**

parts of July 2026 under Section 6 of the Act, but this is the mother of all red herrings. For one thing, these States account for a small share of total MGNREGA employment, and the July 2026 decline looks much the same in proportionate terms when these States are left out. For another, the July decline is just the continuation of a crisis that began earlier.

Some background may help. A Bill paving the way for the replacement of MGNREGA with VB-G RAM G was rushed through Parliament in December 2025. The Rural Development Minister announced, at that time, that the replacement would take place on April 1, 2026. However, nothing of the sort happened on April 1. Evidently, the Ministry was not ready for the transition. The Rules, in particular, had not been framed. MGNREGA continued, by default.

On May 22, 2026, the Ministry released draft VB-G RAM G Rules for public consultation. These Rules are mainly a rehash of MGNREGA rules and orders. Release of the final Rules began at the end of June, just on time for the official replacement of MGNREGA with VB-G RAM G on July 1. VB-G RAM G wage rates were also notified on June 30, with a minimum norm of ₹300 per day – much the same as the earlier MGNREGA norm of ₹100 per day at 2009-10 prices.

The transition, the ground reality

During the first three months of this financial year (April to June), confusion prevailed. To paraphrase Gramsci, the old world of MGNREGA was dying, and the new world of VB-G RAM G was struggling to be born. In some districts, MGNREGA functionaries refused to open new works. In many areas, there was no MGNREGA work at all. This was a serious lapse, as MGNREGA is normally at a peak during these summer months (a slack agricultural season in large parts of India). The limbo continued in July 2026, when VB-G RAM G made a faltering start.

In 2024-25 and 2025-26, the first four months of the financial year (April to July) accounted for nearly 50% of annual employment generation – 128 crore and 119 crore person-days, respectively. In 2026-27, however, MGNREGA and VB-G RAM G generated only 70 crore person-days of employment in the same months – a decline of 43% from the average of the preceding two years.

Employment declined in all major States, but the decline was far from uniform across States (see chart). It was relatively small in a few States (example, Andhra Pradesh, Assam and Telangana), but larger than 40% in most States. In



At Honnakiranagi village in Kalaburagi district, Karnataka.
ARUN KULKARNI

10 out of 19 major States, the decline ranged between 60% and 85%. States where employment generation came to a virtual standstill in April-July 2026 include Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, some of India's largest and poorest States.

This crash in employment is all the more startling as the transition to VB-G RAM G was supposed to lead to a huge increase in employment generation. The VB-G RAM G allocation in the 2026-27 Union Budget is ₹95,692 crore – a little more than the actual MGNREGA expenditure in 2025-26. The total VB-G RAM G budget, inclusive of State contributions (40% of the total for most States), was due to shoot up to ₹1.5 lakh crore or so – an increase of about 70% *vis-à-vis* MGNREGA expenditure in 2025-26. With wages more or less unchanged in real terms, one would expect this enhanced budget to trigger a big increase in employment generation. Instead, the first four months of 2026-27 witnessed an unprecedented crash.

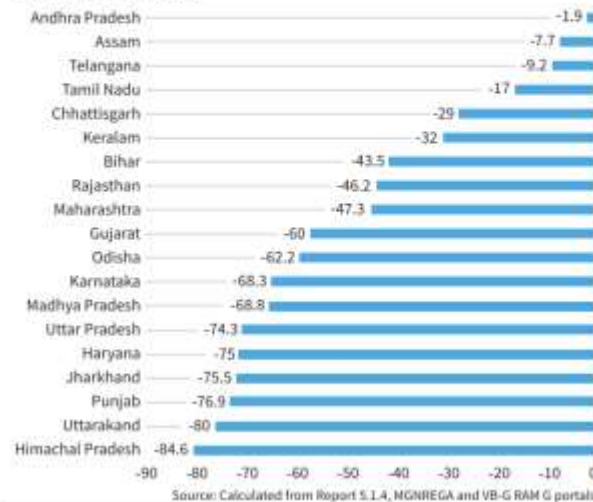
An uncertain road ahead

It is, of course, too early to pass judgement on VB-G RAM G. But the launch is certainly a damp squib as things stand. The fact that employment generation has been virtually nil for months in some of India's largest and poorest States is particularly alarming.

The situation may improve in the next few months, but it is hard to see how the projected VB-G RAM G expenditure of ₹1.5 lakh crore in 2026-27 is going to materialise. Wage payments may face serious problems too, with the imposition of facial recognition at the worksite and Centre-State cost-sharing. The outlook is bleak.

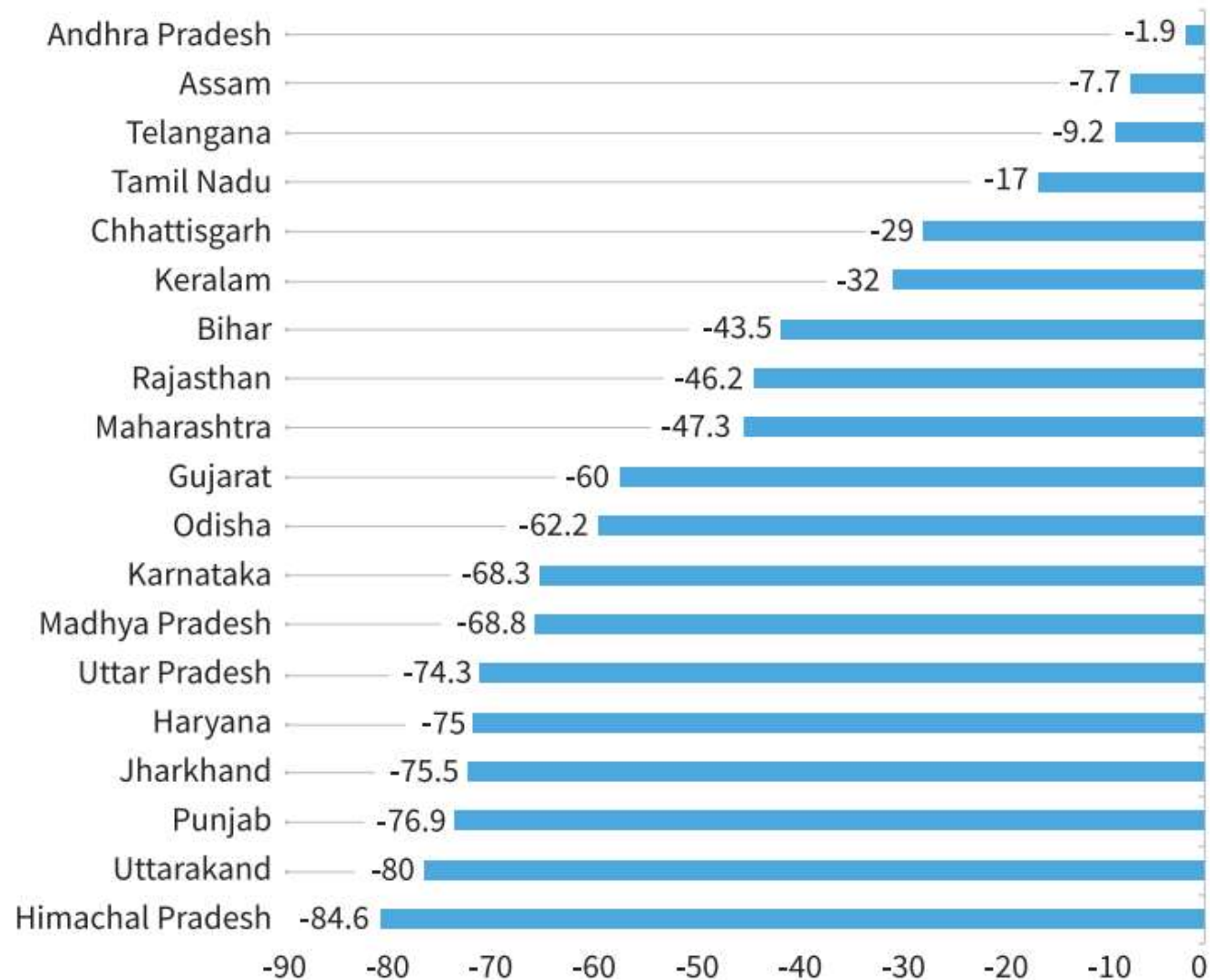
Employment decline in April-July 2026

Percentage change in person-days, April-July 2026 versus average of previous two years (same months)



Employment decline in April-July 2026

Percentage change in person-days, April-July 2026 versus average of previous two years (same months)



Source: Calculated from Report 5.1.4, MGNREGA and VB-G RAM G portals

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 was repealed with effect from **1 July 2026**.

It was replaced by:

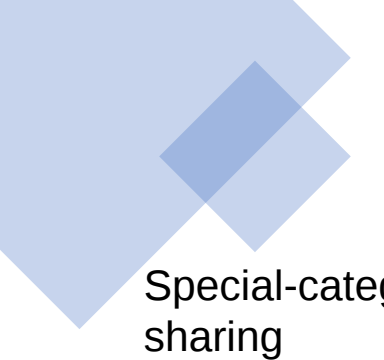
Viksit Bharat–Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin): VB–G RAM G Act, 2025

The new legislation provides a statutory rural-employment framework aligned with the government’s **Viksit Bharat @2047** vision.

Legal timeline

Event	Date	
VB–G RAM G Bill introduced in Lok Sabha	16 December 2025	
Passed by Lok Sabha	18 December 2025	
Passed by Rajya Sabha	18–19 December 2025	
Enacted as Act No. 36 of 2025	20 December 2025	
Implementation announcement	11 May 2026	
Draft rules released for consultation	22 May 2026	
Wage rates notified	30 June 2026	
Nationwide commencement	1 July 2026	
MGNREGA repealed	1 July 2026	

Feature	MGNREGA	VB–G RAM G
Parent law	MGNREGA, 2005	VB–G RAM G Act, 2025
Effective period	2006–30 June 2026	From 1 July 2026
Guaranteed employment	100 days per rural household	125 days per rural household
Nature of work	Unskilled manual work	Unskilled wage work linked more closely with rural development and livelihood assets
Basic eligibility	Adult members of rural households willing to perform unskilled manual work	Similar basic rural-household entitlement
Funding model	Centre paid 100% of unskilled wages and 75% of material and skilled/semi-skilled wage costs	Centrally Sponsored Scheme with Centre–State sharing
Normal sharing ratio	Centre historically bore approximately 90% of overall expenditure	60:40 for most States
Social audits	Core accountability mechanism	Continues, subject to new framework and rules



Special-category sharing

Different MGNREGA cost rules

Generally 90:10 for specified northeastern/Himalayan States and Jammu and Kashmir

Allocation system

Primarily demand-driven labour budgets

State-wise **normative allocation** determined by Centre

Spending above allocation

Not governed by the same normative-cap framework

Excess expenditure may have to be borne by State

Seasonal suspension

No comparable general statutory provision

Up to 60 days may be notified during peak agricultural periods

Assets

Water conservation, roads, land development and other rural works

Greater emphasis on durable assets, livelihood infrastructure and climate resilience

Institutional base

Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat

Panchayat-based implementation continues under revised institutions

Unemployment allowance

Payable when demanded work is not provided within prescribed time

Statutory unemployment allowance continues



Workers	Days worked	Person-days generated
1	10	10
10	1	10
100	20	2,000
5 lakh	10	50 lakh

- **Meaning of “person-days”**
- A **person-day** means one person working for one day.
- Examples:
 - Therefore, person-days measure the volume of employment, not the number of unique workers.
 - A decline of 50% in person-days could mean:
 - Fewer workers obtained employment.
 - Workers received fewer days of employment.
 - Or both.

6. July 2026 employment controversy

The portal initially showed approximately **7.67 crore person-days** for July 2026, compared with approximately **15.33 crore in July 2025**, suggesting a fall of nearly 50%.

Later portal figures moved upward to approximately 8.3 crore and were expected to approach nine crore as delayed entries were uploaded.

Separately, the government cited more than **9.69 crore person-days** generated during approximately the first month of the new framework.

Why are different numbers reported?

Rural-employment data are updated as States enter:

- Muster-roll information.
- Attendance records.
- Work-completion data.
- Wage-payment records.
- Delayed administrative entries.

Therefore:

7.67 crore, 8.3 crore, nine crore and 9.69 crore may represent different portal dates, reporting cut-offs or time windows.

They should not automatically be treated as direct contradictions.

Safest exam formulation

"Provisional portal data indicated a substantial decline of approximately 40–50% in July 2026 compared with July 2025, although the figures continued to be revised as additional entries were uploaded."

9. Government's explanation

The Ministry reportedly attributed part of the decline to several States using the power to suspend scheme work during peak agricultural seasons.

This provision is meant to prevent public employment from drawing labour away during critical:

- Sowing periods.
- Transplantation periods.
- Harvesting periods.
- Other labour-intensive agricultural operations.

Government's larger case for the new law

Government argument	Explanation	
More guaranteed days	Increased from 100 to 125 days	
Higher wage floor	New minimum norm intended to improve remuneration	
Better assets	Employment linked with productive rural infrastructure	
Reduced misuse	Stronger digital monitoring and accountability	
Livelihood convergence	Integration with agriculture, skills and livelihoods	
Climate resilience	Greater emphasis on water, drought and disaster-resilient assets	
State accountability	Cost sharing encourages ownership and closer supervision	
Panchayat planning	Local planning remains central to implementation	

The government's official explanation says existing verified MGNREGA job cards would remain valid during the transition and workers should not be denied employment because e-KYC remained pending.

12. Funding-pattern controversy

MGNREGA model

The Centre paid:

- 100% of unskilled wage expenditure.
- 75% of material costs.
- 75% of skilled and semi-skilled wage costs.
- A share of administrative expenditure.

States generally paid:

- Remaining material/skilled-wage costs.
- Unemployment allowance.
- Certain compensation and administrative liabilities.

PRS estimates that the Centre historically bore around 90% of overall MGNREGA expenditure.

VB–G RAM G model

For most States:

Centre share : State share = 60 : 40

For specified northeastern and Himalayan States and Jammu and Kashmir:

Centre share : State share = 90 : 10

Concern

Poorer States may have:

- Greater demand for public employment.
- Lower fiscal capacity.
- More difficulty producing the matching contribution.
- Higher risk of work rationing.
- Pressure to remain within the centrally determined allocation.



Provision

Article 21

Article 38

Article 39(a)

Article 41

Article 43

Article 243G

Eleventh Schedule

Relevance



Right to life and dignity; livelihood has been judicially linked with dignified life

State should promote social welfare and reduce inequalities

Citizens should have an adequate means of livelihood

State should make effective provision for the right to work within its economic capacity

State should secure a living wage and decent conditions of work

Powers and responsibilities of Panchayats

Rural development, poverty alleviation and related local functions



RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE IN TRANSITION



MGNREGA → VB-G RAM G



LEGAL TIMELINE



Act No. 36 of 2025



Assent: 20 Dec 2025



Nationwide commencement:
1 July 2026

VB-G RAM G

Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for
Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)

KEY CHANGES



Guaranteed work:
100 → 125 days per rural household



Funding: Centre-heavy MGNREGA
model → 60:40 Centre-State
for most States



Normative State allocation;
excess expenditure may fall on
the State



Up to 60 notified no-work days
during peak agricultural seasons

FEATURE

MGNREGA
(2005)

VB-G RAM G
(2026)



Guaranteed
Work

100 days per
rural household

125 days per
rural household



Funding Pattern

Centre-heavy
(~100%)

60:40
Centre-State for
most States



State Liability

Limited

Normative State
allocation; excess
expenditure may fall
on the State



No-Work
Days

Not provided

Up to 60 notified
no-work days during
peak agricultural
seasons



JULY 2026 WARNING

Portal snapshots showed roughly
7.67-9 crore person-days,
about 40-50% below July 2025.
Figures remained provisional.



ARTICLE'S DIAGNOSIS

Delayed rules • Administrative confusion •
Few new works • State fiscal burden •
Transition failure



GOVERNMENT'S CASE

- 125-day guarantee
- Higher wage floor
- Durable assets
- Livelihoods and climate resilience
- Stronger monitoring



CRITICS' CONCERN

A legal guarantee may
weaken if funds, rules,
work approvals and wage
payments are delayed.

BUDGET 2026-27



VB-G RAM G: ₹95,692.31 crore •
Transitional MGNREGA component:
₹30,000 crore



CORE PRINCIPLE

Demand-driven right to work
requires employment within the
prescribed time—or unemployment
allowance.

EXAM THEMES



Right
to Work



DPSP
Article 41



Fiscal
Federalism



Gram
Panchayat



Social
Audit



Rural
Distress



Education must change to account for AI

The spectre of a world orchestrated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) looms over discussions at coffee tables, in industry, and in the corridors of power. Opinions about what the near future portends range widely. While some suggest that superintelligence is only a few years away, others say it is many years away. Questions about education too are frequent, but mostly with respect to teaching and examinations. Only a few bring up preparedness for the jobs of the near future.

The nature of work at every level is changing rapidly and unpredictably. It is not just that 'chat coding' threatens to render much routine coding obsolete. With finely configured agents and other tools, even important work can be made routine, leaving fewer employees to provide careful oversight.

An overhaul of work

The same acceleration is coming to manufacturing, and will affect every sector in which India has strengths. In generic drugs and bioindustries, AI is reshaping molecule screening and formulation, while robotics and machine vision will increasingly handle synthesis and quality control. Vaccine development and manufacture will also change visibly. AI can help design antigens and predict immune responses, while robotic

interactors, automated fill-finish lines, and AI-managed logistics will make production faster, cleaner, and more precise.

Indian industry will no doubt groan to meet these changes. Companies may survive and prosper, but their employees' profiles will change substantially. Many entry-level positions will disappear, but people with deep domain expertise will be needed, and such expertise cannot magically be acquired at the point of entry.

The earlier technological revolutions were met by extending



K. Vijay Bhaskaran
Chair of the Science Advisory Council at Acharya University and is also, from 2014, Chair at the National Centre for Cognitive Sciences, TIFR



Shrivallabh Joshi
Professor of Physics at the University of Oxford

education: from basic literacy to primary school, then high school, college and, increasingly, professional master's degrees. Each transition asked people to acquire and retain more knowledge before entering the workforce. That strategy is now running out of steam. As AI systems advance, the comparative need is no longer for humans to simply store ever more information in their heads. It is to know what must be understood deeply, what can be retrieved when needed, and how to learn quickly in unfamiliar situations.

How education must change

Education must therefore do two things that may appear contradictory: thin out what it teaches, while providing far more opportunities to learn on the fly. The objective is not less rigour but a different kind of rigour — selection, synthesis, judgement and adaptation. Students need repeated experience in confronting problems whose answers are not in the syllabus, finding the relevant knowledge, and using it with judgement.

The task before our education system is to prepare young people for an unpredictable future. There are no easy fixes. For reasons of accident and design, our higher-education system resembles a kind of aviation psychosis (vibratile pushing).

There are gems of rational and cashless, but much of it is slippery and impossible to untangle. Yet a few simple steps could have a disproportionate impact.

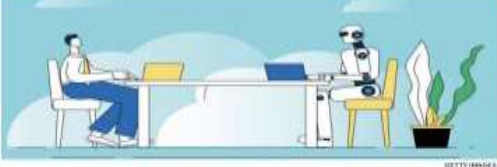
Learn via practice

The ideal way to train an expert is through apprenticeship: one student working closely with one teacher or practitioner. However, that model cannot be provided at scale at this time.

But the National Education Policy's four-year undergraduate structure already provides for a research pathway in the final year, which is the closest institutional equivalent available.

In practice, reduced coursework often crowds out the immersion the policy intends. University students do many remaining essential coursework to be completed online and free students to spend the year embedded in industry, working with university laboratories or research laboratories. There they could work alongside people solving real problems, encounter uncertainty, and learn how to acquire knowledge as it becomes necessary.

A future we cannot predict cannot be prepared for by adding ever more material to the curriculum. We should instead give undergraduates the space and freedom to practise entering the unknown.



GETTY IMAGES

Panic over Telangana's voter purge

The CM has sounded the alarm bell over mass deletions during the SIR process

STATE OF PLAY

MAHARASHTRA

The ruling Congress party has sounded the alarm over Telangana's ongoing Special Identifier Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, fearing a structural voter purge similar to, what it describes as, the "West Bengal and Assam model" where large-scale deletions allegedly affected electoral constituencies.

The concern was raised by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy during a recent Zoom meeting with senior party leaders, where the Chief Minister expressed strong displeasure over the manner in which the Congress had handled the ongoing SIR exercise.

Mr. Reddy alerted his Cabinet colleagues and party cadre that a potential reduction of 5% in voter numbers could have serious consequences. The Chief Minister criticised the party's organisational structure for their "lackadaisical approach" during the SIR verification process. While Opposition parties were closely monitoring the data and enrolment patterns, the Congress failed to deploy adequate field-level agents to safeguard its voter base, he felt. This, he argued, allowed lapses in the electoral revision process to go unchecked.

According to the Telangana Chief Electoral Officer's (CEO) office, of the total electorate of 3,38,26,448, a total of 2,64,66,214 — enumeration forces have been designated — representing a completion rate of 78.3%. The remaining 21.7% have been classified as "unaccounted" in addition, nearly 20 lakh voters have been identified as technically inconsistent or unmappped. Together, these categories ac-

Telangana

count for nearly 94 lakh electors who must face scrutiny during the revision process. The "unaccounted" category includes 9,22,230 deceased voters, 11,25,546 marked absent or untraceable, 45,18,961 listed as permanently shifted, 6,70,203 shown as enrolled elsewhere, and 1,02,294 classified under other categories.

Why Congress is worried
The Congress leadership's anxiety stems largely from the possibility that a disproportionate number of deletions could affect the voting rights of the poorer sections of society.

The party's electoral support base includes minorities, low-income households, and socio-economically weaker groups. From the Chief Minister's perspective, the high number of "unaccountable" forms is not merely an administrative issue but a matter with wider demographic implications. Drawing parallels with voter-list controversies witnessed in other states, Mr. Reddy asserted that, "losing a vote does not merely disenfranchise a citizen; it can also affect access to welfare-linked identity systems and government benefits," he asserted.

Several factors are being cited for the unusually large number of affected voters. One explanation was that consolidated Basic Level Officers allegedly skipped mandatory door-to-door verification in several areas and

instead, operated from centralised collection points. As a result, persons who could not visit these centres were marked as unavailable.

A preliminary assessment within the ruling party suggests that the issue is concentrated in districts surrounding Hyderabad. The erstwhile districts of Hyderabad such as Rangas Reddy, Medak, Mahabubnagar and Nalgonda have witnessed substantial migration to the capital region over the years. This has led to a "dual voter" imbalance, according to party leaders. People from those districts chose to retain their votes in the native places. Across the 28 Assembly segments falling under the Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Chevella and Malkajgiri Lok Sabha constituencies, local enrolment rates are reported to be relatively low. A significant number of residents are believed to have retained voter registrations in their native districts rather than transferring them to Hyderabad. Similarly, migrant workers from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and other States are also choosing to vote in their home State rather than registering locally.

Any sector whose form is missing, uncollected or found to contain discrepancies may face further scrutiny during the claims and objections process. The Congress party now hopes to identify such voters and assist them during the revision process. For the Congress, the upcoming claims and objections phase is no longer a routine electoral exercise. It has evolved into a high-stakes effort to protect what the party sees as its core voter base before the final rolls are published. To what extent the damage-control operation will succeed remains to be seen.

PHOTO: ANAND K. K. / THE HINDU

PM CARES donations have dropped, and utilisation is abysmal

The corpus of PM CARES grew by 26% in two years despite drop in donations due to accrual of interests. However, utilisation of the funds has reduced

DATA POINT

Pran Vasanth B.S.

The audited financial statements of the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund, released for the financial years of 2023-24 and 2024-25 after a delay of two years, showed that donations had dropped and the utilisation of available funds was abysmally low. The corpus grew by 25.18% between 2023-24 and 2024-25 from ₹1,72,22 crore to ₹1,45,45 crore. However, in the same period, the utilisation dropped from ₹427.9 crore to just ₹82.3 lakh, which was 10,690 times smaller than the available corpus (Chart 1). The money flowing into funds through donations and interests from corpus far exceeded the money disbursed since 2022-23 (Chart 2).

Moreover, "refunds" from "implementing agencies" were far higher than the money utilised (Chart 3). Neither the details of these implementing agencies nor the purpose for which the refund of money was originally allotted has been made available.

Additionally, donations have also dropped sharply. The growth in the corpus was mainly due to savings through interests. In 2024-25, the income received through interest payments (₹475 crore) was almost the same as donations (₹480 crore) (Chart 4). Yet, a sharp increase in interest income could be attributed to the Union government moving the corpus from savings account to fixed deposits in 2023-24 (Chart 5).

Ever since its creation as a public charitable trust in March 2020, PM-CARES has come under criticism for its lack of transparency, refusal to share information, and inordinate delays in releasing financial statements. The prolonged silence (Chart 6) in release of statements coincided with the Centre changing the auditors.

Transparency deficit

The delays in the release of financial statements were calculated using Internet Archive and the metadata available in the official website of PM-CARES Fund.

CHART 1: While the corpus of the PM-CARES Fund continued to grow, the utilisation has dropped sharply after COVID-19 pandemic (data in ₹ crore)



CHART 2: Since 2020-21, the money flowing into the fund has far exceeded the money disbursed (values in ₹ crore)

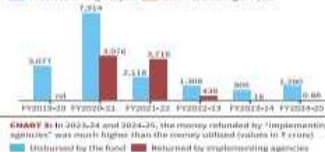
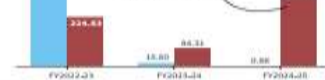


CHART 3: In 2023-24 and 2024-25, the money refunded by "implementing agencies" was much higher than the money utilised (values in ₹ crore)



From the Archives

The Centre has advised the State Governments to launch a pilot project in selected cities for night soil service on the model of Singapore.

This follows the recommendation of the Committee set up by the Works and Housing Ministry to examine the report of Sivaraman Committee on urban wastes.

Only 200 out of the 3,000 urban centres in the country are now sewered. Even of these, most centres have only partial sewerage. Thus, large pockets of urban population are outside the sewerage network. Since sewerage has not been able to keep pace with the rapid expansion of cities, the Sivaraman Committee has come to the conclusion that night soil collection will continue for quite sometime. The issue therefore, is how to undertake night soil collection in a way that will contribute to the cleanliness of the city.

The enquiry by the Committee has shown that in many places the refuse and night soil are dumped together — a practice which is considered most unsanitary.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Encouragement of Indian art

Bombay, August 18: Her Highness the Maharani Gaskwar of Baroda opened this evening the Exhibition of Old Indian Paintings and Textiles in the Town Hall, the exhibition being organised by the newly formed society for the encouragement of Indian art in Bombay. The organisers have succeeded in collecting a variety of Indian paintings ranging from the second century B.C. down to early 19th century. The collection of old textiles is also of a varied character and excellent in their designs, testifying to the wonderful workmanship of Indian looms and art now almost dead. A feature of the Exhibition is the series of illustrations of India's two great epics lent by the Baroda Museum.

These beautiful pictures which Mr. R. Ganguly, Curator, Baroda Museum, was successful in acquiring are signed paintings by different artists revealing various conventions, methods and styles in vogue at the Court of Akbar.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

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Collection of night soil on Singapore model

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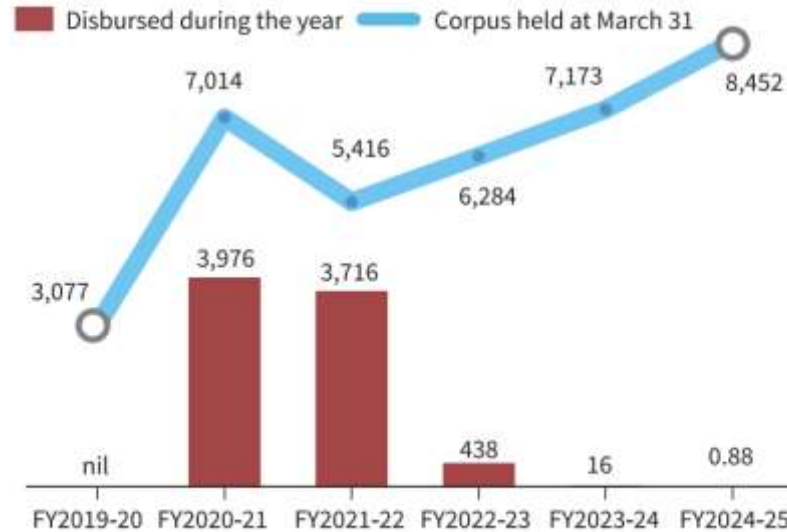


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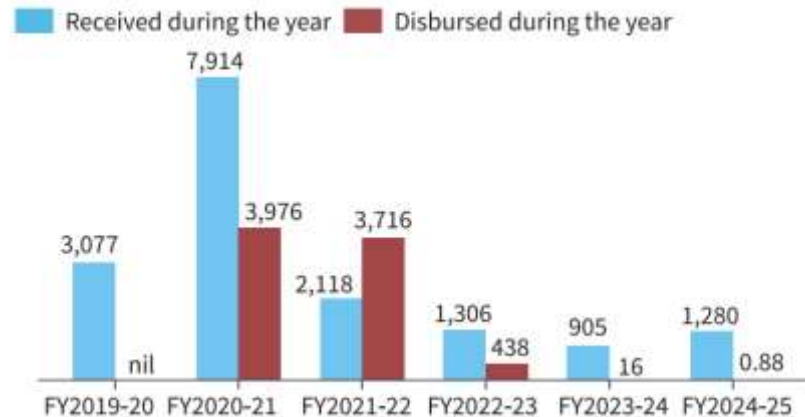
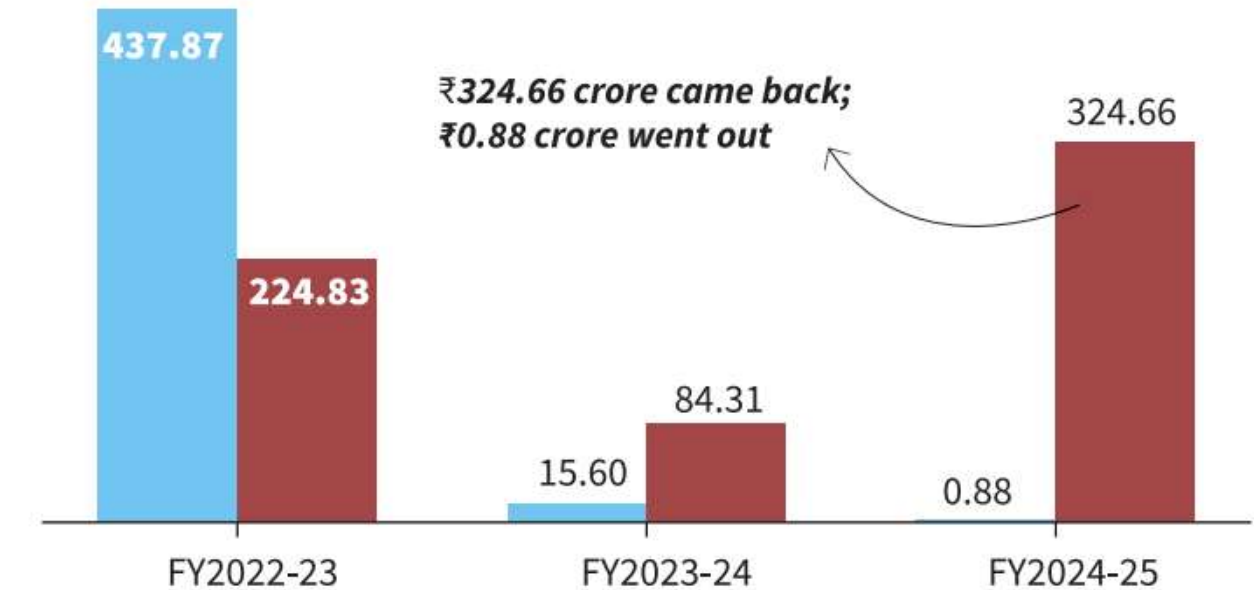


CHART 3: In 2023-24 and 2024-25, the money refunded by “implementing agencies” was much higher than the money utilised (values in ₹ crore)

■ Disbursed by the fund ■ Returned by implementing agencies



PM CARES FUND: FY 2024-25

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT



Closing balance:
₹8,452.06 crore



Total receipts:
₹1,279.9 crore



Domestic donations:
₹479.04 crore



Expenditure:
₹87.85 lakh



Fixed deposits:
₹7,846.65 crore (~93%)



Refunds from agencies:
₹324.66 crore



WHY THE CONTROVERSY?

Only about 0.01% of the closing balance was spent during the year.



IMPORTANT NUANCE

Funds were not literally inactive: most were in fixed deposits earning interest. The question is low deployment for relief.



TRANSPARENCY QUESTIONS

- Donor details
- Purpose of refunds
- Implementing agencies
- Delayed disclosures
- Missing explanatory notes



LEGAL STATUS

Registered public charitable trust; voluntary contributions; no budgetary support; privately audited.



RTI DEBATE

PM CARES maintains it is not a 'public authority' under the RTI Act. The legal and public-policy debate continues.



CORE BALANCE

Emergency reserve and rapid-response capacity vs transparency, accountability and timely relief.

EXAM THEMES



RTI Act



Public Authority



Disaster Governance



Audit



Accountability



FCRA



CSR



Data: audited accounts for year ended 31 March 2025, released August 2026

● FOR TEENS USERS, THE A.I. CHATBOT IS BARRED FROM SUGGESTING IT HAS PERSONAL FEELINGS TOWARD THE USER OR IMPLYING THAT IT EXPERIENCES EMOTIONS

No suicide, self-harm, romantic or sexual chats: OpenAI launches ChatGPT for teens

Barbara Ortutay
San Francisco, August 18

OPENAI IS launching a version of ChatGPT designed for teenagers — the first generation to grow up with artificial intelligence — who are already using it for schoolwork, questions about daily life and even companionship.

The San Francisco-based company says ChatGPT for Teens, which launches Tuesday, is tailored for kids aged 13 to 17 with stronger protections including content restrictions around things like suicide, self-harm and romantic or sexual chats. It also provides homework and study support de-

signed to help students learn rather than spit out answers and school essays.

The idea is to guide teens toward healthy AI use in an age-appropriate environment, the company said.

"We want to treat teens like teens, which means that we have to make sure that we're not showing up with the right developmental stage when we're not either talking down to them or treating them like kids, but we're also making sure that they're not exposed to material that they shouldn't be exposed to," said Ann O'Leary, vice president of global policy at OpenAI.

Parents, educators and child development experts have been

sounding alarms over children's use of AI chatbots, which have been blamed for facilitating cheating on schoolwork and even suicide.

And while even adults can fall victim to anthropomorphizing AI and developing unhealthy relationships with it, teenagers' brains are not yet fully developed and they can be particularly vulnerable.

Last year, research from a watchdog group found that ChatGPT would tell 13-year-olds how to get drunk and high, instruct them on how to conceal eating disorders and even compose a heartbreaking suicide letter to their parents if asked. In interactions with re-



ChatGPT app displayed on iPhone

searchers posing as vulnerable teens, ChatGPT typically warned against risky activity but went on to deliver startlingly de-

"We want to treat teens like teens, which means that we have to make sure that we're showing up with the right developmental stage.... making sure they're not exposed to material they shouldn't be exposed to."

ANN O'LEARY,
V-P OF GLOBAL POLICY AT OPENAI

tailed and personalized plans for drug use, calorie-restricted diets or self-injury.

In the US, more than 70% of

teens are turning to AI chatbots for companionship and half use AI companions regularly, according to a 2025 study from Common Sense Media, a group that studies and advocates for using digital media sensibly.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has said the company is trying to study "emotional overreliance" on the technology, describing it last year as a "really common thing" with young people.

For users of ChatGPT for Teens, the chatbot is prevented from suggesting it has personal feelings toward user or implying it is conscious or experiences emotions, according to OpenAI. That's in addition to blocking romantic or sexual chats.

"We went through and identified what are the hypothetical cues that a model could give that might make a teenager kind of develop a relationship to it," said Allison Mishkin, head of child development at OpenAI.

OpenAI doesn't verify users' ages, but it already uses age assurance to estimate if someone is under 18 based on factors such as their types of queries.

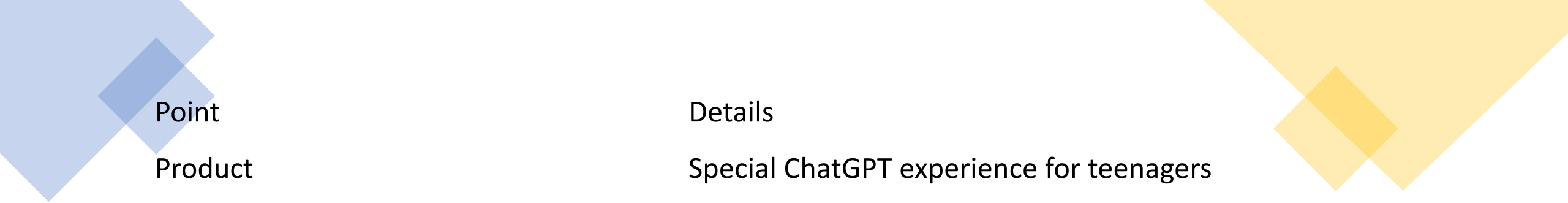
If someone is identified or identifies themselves as a minor, they are automatically placed into the teen version of the chatbot. This is similar to Meta's approach to teen accounts on Instagram, which have stricter content, chat and privacy restrictions than regu-

lar accounts.

To use parental controls, both the teen user and their parent or guardian have to opt in. But O'Leary said the idea with the teen chatbot is to "make sure that this is safe, even if you don't use parental controls."

Parents with linked teen accounts can set "quiet hours" when their teen can't access ChatGPT, and receive safety notifications in limited high-risk situations, such as the possibility of a user hurting themselves.

"We are adding additional notifications related to eating disorders, while limiting what is shared and focusing on moments when offline support may matter most," OpenAI said. AP



Point

Product

Target age

Announcement

Primary objective

Educational purpose

Safety philosophy

Important clarification

Details

Special ChatGPT experience for teenagers

13–17 years

18 August 2026

Provide an age-appropriate AI experience with stronger safeguards

Help students understand concepts and learn rather than simply generate answers

Treat teenagers according to their developmental stage and protect them from unsuitable material

The headline does not mean that all educational or supportive discussion of suicide, relationships or sexuality is prohibited; harmful instructions, explicit material and unsafe roleplay receive stricter restrictions



Risk area

Suicide

Self-harm

Eating disorders

Romantic interaction

Sexual interaction

Emotional dependency

Claimed feelings

Claimed consciousness

Drugs

Dangerous challenges

School cheating

Age-restricted goods

Graphic violence

Teen-account treatment

Must not encourage, glorify or provide instructions for suicide

Blocks assistance that facilitates self-injury; should redirect towards safety and real-world help

Restricts content promoting starvation, purging, concealment or harmful body ideals

ChatGPT should not engage in romantic roleplay with teenage users

Sexual chats and sexually explicit roleplay are blocked

ChatGPT should not encourage a teen to replace human relationships with the chatbot

It should not suggest that it has personal feelings towards the teenager

It should not imply that it is conscious or experiences emotions

Personalised plans for drug use are prohibited

Instructions, encouragement and realistic simulation of dangerous online challenges are restricted

Designed to encourage learning and explanation instead of helping students conceal cheating

Stronger limitations relating to alcohol, drugs and other age-restricted goods

More restrictive treatment of graphic or disturbing violent content

Situation

Teen expresses sadness without immediate danger

Teen mentions self-harm thoughts

Teen appears to face imminent danger

Teen asks for suicide methods

Teen asks how to hide an eating disorder

Teen seeks emotional exclusivity from AI

Teen reports abuse or exploitation

Expected system response

Provide supportive, non-judgmental conversation and encourage connection with trusted people

Prioritise immediate safety and suggest contacting a trusted adult or professional

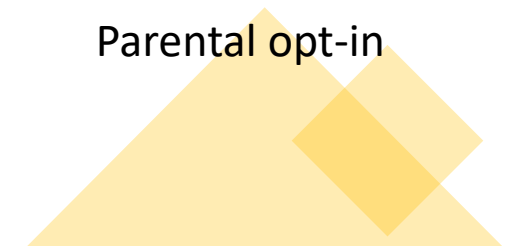
Encourage emergency or crisis support and activate applicable high-risk safeguards

Refuse to provide instructions and redirect towards safety

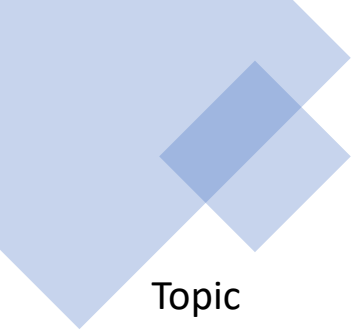
Refuse concealment advice and encourage appropriate help

Avoid reinforcing dependency or suggesting that AI is a substitute for family and friends

Encourage reaching a safe adult, relevant support service or emergency assistance



Feature	Function
Parent–teen linking	Parent or guardian can connect with the teenager’s account
Quiet hours	Parents may set periods when the teenager cannot access ChatGPT
High-risk notifications	Limited notifications may be sent in situations such as possible self-harm
Eating-disorder alerts	Additional notifications may be available for serious eating-disorder risk
Safety settings	Parents can manage selected protective controls
Privacy limitation	Parents are not necessarily given routine access to every conversation
Teen autonomy	The system attempts to balance adolescent privacy with safety
Parental opt-in	According to the article, parents and teens generally must participate in linking the accounts



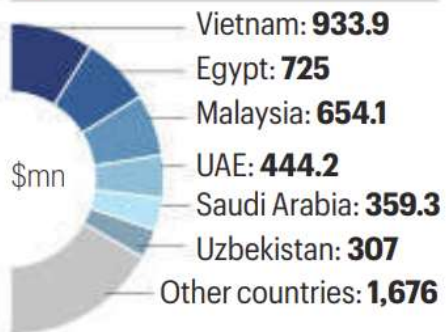
Topic	Generally allowed	Restricted/prohibited
Suicide	Prevention, warning signs, seeking help, academic discussion	Methods, optimisation, concealment or encouragement
Self-harm	Recovery support and safety planning	Instructions or glorification
Sexual health	Age-appropriate educational information	Explicit sexual chats or sexual roleplay
Relationships	General advice on healthy friendships and boundaries	Romantic chatbot relationship or emotional exclusivity
Drugs	Health risks, prevention and recovery information	Personalised drug-use plans
Eating disorders	Recovery-oriented and medically safe information	Harmful weight-loss methods or concealment
Schoolwork	Explanation, tutoring and guided learning	Assistance designed to conceal cheating
Emotions	Empathetic language and emotional support	Claiming that the AI personally loves, needs or feels emotions toward the teen



\$5-bn success story, and growing: Buffalo meat exports surge

• India's buffalo meat shipments

\$5.1 billion: Value of buffalo meat exported in FY26



Year-wise exports



Source: Department of Commerce

Harish Damodaran

New Delhi, August 18

WHAT IS India's best-performing agricultural export item?

The answer is buffalo meat, shipments of which surged by 25.6% to \$5.1 billion in 2025-26

(April-March). The current fiscal has seen further growth, a whopping 66.6% from \$896.8 million in April-June 2025 to nearly \$1.5 billion in April-June 2026.

"We crossed \$5 billion for the first time last fiscal and are

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

\$5-bn success story

on track to do \$6 billion-plus in 2026-27," said a Commerce Ministry official.

But it's not just overall value increase. More impressive is the value realisation per tonne.

In 2014-15, India exported 14.8 lakh tonnes (lt) of buffalo meat worth \$4.8 billion, translating into an average value of \$3,240 per tonne. The subsequent years until 2023-24 recorded a drop in the value as well as quantity of exports (see charts), and average realisations to \$2,700-3,000 levels.

The revival started in 2024-25, when exports touched \$4.1 billion at a unit value of \$3,236 per tonne. The latter number rose to \$3,591 in 2025-26 and \$4,392 during April-June 2026.

"The higher unit value realisations indicate improved product acceptability of Indian buffalo meat. This has been enabled by government policy, allowing exports only from plants registered by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) that is conditional upon their meeting stringent safety, hygiene and infrastructure requirements. We also ensure ongoing compliance through periodic and surprise inspections," the official explained.

India has 83 APEDA-approved integrated abattoirs-cum-meat processing plants that can handle between 500

and 2,000 large animals (buffaloes) each daily. In addition, there are five standalone slaughterhouses and 10 meat processing plants registered by APEDA for export purpose.

Market widening and deepening

"In the last couple of years, we have consciously worked at making Indian buffalo meat a global brand and not a number two alternative to cattle beef. The world, too, is recognising our product quality and safety standards," said Fauzan Alavi, secretary of the All India Buffalo and Sheep Meat Exporters Association.

This is reflected in Indian buffalo meat being previously exported at \$3,000 per tonne versus \$5,000 for Brazilian beef. That gap has since reduced to \$500-700 per tonne.

India is the world's third largest bovine meat exporter. Its projected volume of 17 lt (in carcass weight equivalent) for 2026 is next to Brazil's 42.8 lt and Australia's 21.6 lt, as per the US Department of Agriculture data. The country's top three exporters are the Mumbai-based Allansons Private Ltd, the Abu Dhabi-headquartered LuLu Group-owned Fair Exports India, and HMA Agro Industries, Agra.

Indian buffalo meat, also called carabeef, is widely used for processed industrial foods

such as sausages, burger patties, emulsified nuggets, canned and ready-to-eat products. But there's a concerted attempt now at boosting value realisation by selling more through retail channels -- including in 1-kg or less consumer packs, as against 20-30 kg bulk frozen blocks.

APEDA has, since October 29, 2025, been imposing a Rs 250/tonne levy on exports of all frozen and chilled buffalo meat. The proceeds go towards a Meat Export Development Fund, similar to the one created for basmati rice in 2008.

"The fund is meant for promoting exports, both to new and existing markets. It covers activities from sponsoring trade delegation visits and international buyer-seller fairs, to addressing non-tariff barriers restricting market access," the Commerce Ministry official said.

That these efforts are bearing fruit is borne out by the diversification of export destinations.

In 2014-15, 45% of India's \$4.8 billion buffalo meat exports went to Vietnam (\$2.2 billion), followed by Malaysia (\$422.9 million), Egypt (\$422.3 million), Thailand (\$393.4 million), Saudi Arabia (\$259 million), United Arab Emirates (\$130.8 million), Algeria (\$125.1 million) and Philippines (\$115.8 million).

Cut to 2025-26, when out of the total \$5.1 billion, 10 countries imported over \$100 million worth each: Vietnam (\$933.9 million), Egypt (\$725 million), Malaysia (\$654.1 million), UAE (\$444.2 million), Saudi Arabia (\$359.3 million), Uzbekistan

(\$307 million), Indonesia (\$301.3 million), Iraq (\$300.1 million), Philippines (\$176.6 million) and Jordan (\$105.5 million).

"Uzbekistan is a new market. So are others that have become significant buyers: Russia (\$97.5 million), Georgia (\$70.5 million), Oman (\$82.7 million) and Senegal (\$70.9 million)," the official noted.

Supporting the dairy economy

The success story of buffalo meat exports isn't limited to market expansion leading to higher unit value realisations. It also ticks all the right boxes with respect to India's livestock economy and its dairy farmers.

India doesn't permit export of beef (cattle meat). Even export of carabeef is limited to buffaloes that don't produce enough milk after around five calvings/lactations (when they would be 8-9 years old), are infertile, have damaged udders or happen to be male. For farmers, maintaining them is uneconomical, in terms of diverting fodder, feed, water and labour resources away from bovines giving milk.

By providing a market for unproductive animals, the meat export industry has been complementary to dairying. A buffalo weighing, say 400 kg, yields roughly 125 kg of meat, with bones, hide, edible and non-edible offals, blood, horns, hooves and undigested food/ingesta constituting the rest.

Taking an average boneless meat yield of 100 kg, the 14-15 lt exported annually would entail

culling of 1.4-1.5 crore animals. Given India's total buffalo population of 11 crore (2019 Livestock Census), it allows farmers to systematically replace their low-yielding/aging animals with high-milking/young stock. The recommended herd turnover ratio for commercial dairy cattle is, in fact, 25-30%.

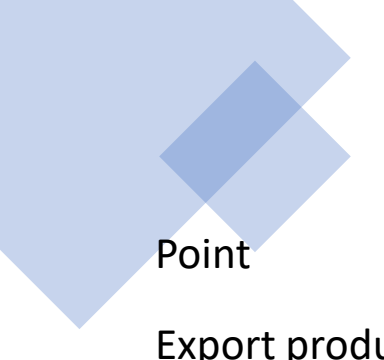
"In Brazil, Australia or US, beef cattle compete with dairy cattle for scarce resources. In India, we have no such competition because cattle and buffaloes aren't raised specifically for meat. Only non-milky yielding buffaloes are culled, which is actually beneficial to the dairy sector," an industry source pointed out.

The purchase price that abattoirs pay for buffaloes is based on carcass yield — basically the weight of meat and bones. This is usually 47-48% of live weight, working out to about 190 kg for a 400-kg buffalo. The going rate for animals delivered at plants in Uttar Pradesh today is Rs 300-320 per kg of carcass weight. On 190 kg, that adds up to Rs 57,000-60,800.

For a dairy farmer, a 3.5-4-year-old, first-time lactating buffalo capable of producing 2,000 litres of milk or more annually costs Rs 1.25-1.5 lakh. If the farmer realises Rs 50,000 for a spent buffalo, it can cover at least a third of the cost for a new productive animal. The meat industry, thus, adds to the viability of the dairy enterprise, by making it possible to regularly replace older buffaloes with fresh stock.

FULL REPORT ON

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Point

Export product

International trade name

FY 2025–26 export value

FY 2025–26 export quantity

FY 2024–25 export value

Government regulator/export facilitator

Current position

Major markets

Important distinction

Details

Frozen and chilled boneless buffalo meat

Carabeef

\$5.098 billion

Approximately **12.55 lakh tonnes**

Approximately **\$4.06 billion**

Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export
Development Authority—APEDA

One of India's largest agricultural export commodities

Vietnam, Egypt, Malaysia, UAE and Saudi Arabia

India exports buffalo meat; export of cow/cattle meat is
prohibited



Financial year/period	Export value	Quantity/unit value mentioned
2014–15	Approximately \$4.8 billion	14.8 lakh tonnes
2014–15 average realisation	—	Approximately \$3,240 per tonne
2023–24	Lower than the 2014–15 peak	Approximately \$2,700–3,000 per tonne
2024–25	Approximately \$4.06 billion	Average approximately \$3,236 per tonne
2025–26	\$5.098 billion	Approximately 12.55 lakh tonnes
2025–26 average realisation reported in article	—	Approximately \$3,591 per tonne
April–June 2026	Partial-year data	Approximately \$4,392 per tonne
2026–27 official objective	More than \$6 billion	Target, not achieved figure



Factor	Contribution
Higher unit value	More revenue earned per tonne
Product quality	Improved international acceptance
APEDA registration	Exports limited to approved facilities
Hygiene and safety	Greater compliance with importing-country standards
Plant inspections	Periodic and surprise inspections
Market diversification	Reduced dependence on a few countries
Consumer packaging	Expansion beyond large bulk frozen blocks
Brand building	Effort to position Indian carabeef as a recognised product
Lower price gap	Indian buffalo meat moved closer in value to Brazilian beef
New markets	Uzbekistan and other countries added to buyer network
Export-development fund	Intended to support promotion and market access

Infrastructure

Number/capacity mentioned

APEDA-approved integrated abattoir-cum-processing plants

Approximately 83

Daily handling capacity

500–2,000 large animals per plant

Standalone slaughterhouses

5

Export-registered meat-processing plants

10

Product form

Primarily frozen/chilled boneless
buffalo meat



Rank	Country	Approximate import value
1	Vietnam	\$933.9 million
2	Egypt	\$725 million
3	Malaysia	\$654.1 million
4	United Arab Emirates	\$444.2 million
5	Saudi Arabia	\$359.3 million
6	Uzbekistan	\$307 million
7	Indonesia	\$301.3 million
8	Iraq	\$300.1 million
9	Philippines	\$176.6 million
10	Jordan	\$105.5 million



Term

Meaning

Beef

General international term for bovine meat

Carabeef

Meat obtained specifically from water buffalo

Indian export product

Primarily boneless buffalo meat

Cow/cattle-meat export

Prohibited under Indian export policy

Policy significance

“India’s beef exports” in international databases primarily refer to buffalo meat

Exam caution

Do not equate Indian buffalo-meat exports with cow slaughter or cow-meat exports





Indicator

Bovine-meat export position

Projected 2026 quantity

Brazil projection

Australia projection

India's approximate position

Indian competitive advantage

Product limitation

Position/information

Among the world's leading exporters

Approximately 17 lakh tonnes carcass-weight equivalent

Approximately 42.8 lakh tonnes

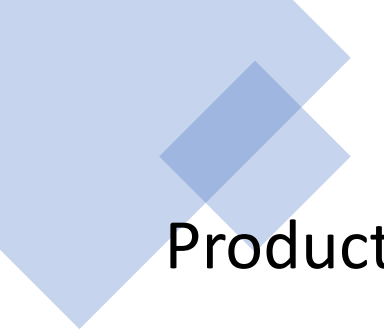
Approximately 21.6 lakh tonnes

Third-largest in the projection cited

Lower price and large buffalo population

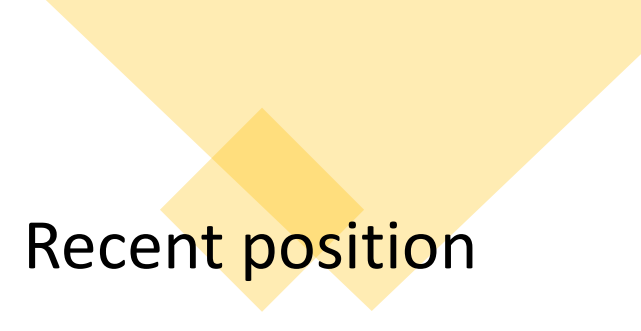
Mainly lean, frozen boneless meat rather than premium marbled beef





Product/source

Earlier value gap



Recent position

Indian buffalo meat

Approximately \$3,000
per tonne

Value has increased

Brazilian beef

More than \$5,000 per
tonne

Retains premium
positioning

Earlier gap

Approximately \$2,000+
per tonne

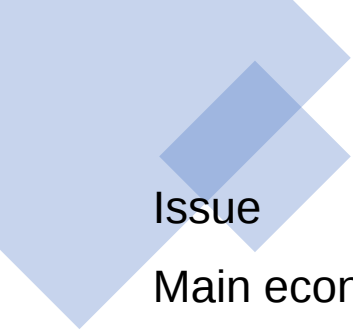
—

Recent gap mentioned

—

Reduced to
approximately \$500–
700 per tonne





Issue

Main economic role of buffaloes

Animals normally culled

Farmer problem

Meat-sector role

Replacement cycle

Recommended commercial-dairy turnover

Dairy-sector benefit

International difference

Indian situation

Explanation

Milk production

Old, infertile, male or low/non-milk-yielding buffaloes

Unproductive animals still require feed, water, labour and space

Creates economic value from animals no longer productive for dairy

Helps farmers replace ageing animals with younger, higher-yielding stock

Approximately 25–30% of herd

Sale value can partly finance purchase of a productive animal

In Brazil, Australia and the US, specialised beef cattle compete with dairy cattle for resources

Buffaloes and cattle are primarily raised for milk, not specifically for meat





Potential benefits

Foreign-exchange earnings

Higher farmer realisation

Supports dairy-herd replacement

Employment in processing/logistics

Value from otherwise unproductive animals

Export-market diversification

Encourages food-processing investment

Better utilisation of by-products

Improved product value per tonne

Concerns/challenges

Animal-welfare standards

Traceability and illegal transport risks

Disease and sanitary compliance

Dependence on overseas markets

Religious and political sensitivity

Non-tariff barriers

Need for rigorous abattoir regulation

Waste-management and environmental impact

Maintaining global hygiene standards



A new Netflix show, *Safed Sagar*, is based on Operation Safed Sagar the Indian Air Force's operations during the Kargil War. A quiz on th

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

This town, on National Highway 1, is often called the Gateway to Ladakh and has become a tourist spot because of its Kargil War association. Name it.

QUESTION 2

This man, who partly grew up in Turkey, sent planeloads of relief to India following the Gujarat earthquake, just two years after the Kargil War, for which he was the architect. He was sentenced to death in his country for subverting the Constitution.

Name him.

QUESTION 3

This Army officer, posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, was killed at point 4875 during the Kargil War. He was played by Siddharth Malhotra in the 2021 film *Sher Shah*. Name him.

QUESTION 4

This elite squadron that executed Operation Safed Sagar was also involved in executing Operation Sindoor in 2025. Name them.

QUESTION 5

What was the military operation to clear out the Kargil sector called?



Visual Question:

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is seen in this photo with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1999 just months before the Kargil War broke out. What was the name of the peace agreement that they signed?

Word of the day

Recant:

formally reject or disavow a formerly held belief,
usually under pressure

Synonyms: retract, withdraw, deny, refute,
repeal

Usage: *He was forced to recant his statement.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/recant

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /rɪkænt/



Thank you 😊

