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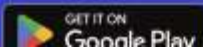


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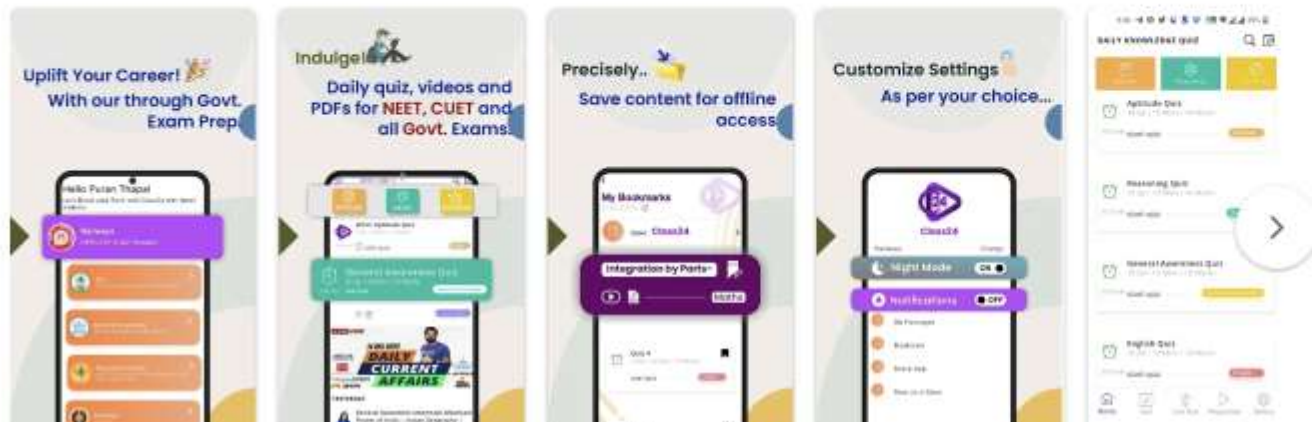
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INSIDE



Indian Oil Corp cancels lifting of oil from Iraq

NEW DELHI Indian oil Corp has cancelled the lifting of oil from Iraq due to increased risk and attacks on some vessels transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, three sources familiar with the matter said. **■ PAGE 10**

Kin of seafarers killed in Hormuz seek govt. relief

NEW DELHI Relatives of Indian seafarers killed in attacks on and around the Hormuz Strait urged the Centre on Tuesday to file a petition with the United Nations and seek compensation of \$5 million for each deceased family from the U.S. and Iran. **■ PAGE 8**

Mamata's plea to INDIA alliance to unite against BJP

BURHAN Trinamool Congress, Charmpant Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday urged all INDIA bloc parties, including the Congress and the CPI(M), in the State to bury their differences and unite against the BJP. She gave the call at the annual Marjins' Day rally. **■ PAGE 6**

Crypto scam of \$35 million uncovered

BENGALURU The Directorate of Enforcement (DE), Bengaluru Zonal Office has launched a money-laundering probe into an alleged \$35 million cryptocurrency scam, significantly larger than the \$10 million fraud first reported. **■ PAGE 8**

Toxic gas kills 20 in Sikkim tunnel; 5 workers still trapped

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI/NEW DELHI

A sudden release of suspected methane gas killed at least 20 workers inside an under-construction tunnel of the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC)'s Teesta State-VI Hydroelectric Project in Sikkim district of Sikkim. Efforts were under way to rescue five others trapped inside the structure.

The incident occurred inside the head race tunnel under construction at its tunneling on Monday afternoon "due to sudden explosive release of suspected methane gas trapped/embedded in the rocks, resulting in the generation of dense smoke and toxic gases", the NHPC

said in a statement. Twenty-five personnel were inside the tunnel during the incident, the NHPC said, citing information received from officials at the project site. Seven of the dead workers have been identified so far. Three of them were from West Bengal, one each from Jharkhand and Rajasthan, and the rest from Assam. Bhavesh's head resident of Police, Isman Dolma Bhutia, told journalists inside the head race tunnel since Monday have affected the rescue operations to some extent, she said. "Our site engineering teams are working round the clock alongside the rescue team to ensure the tunnel environment and ensuring rescue.



An ambulance inside the tunnel in Namchi, Sikkim, on Tuesday. **■**

A detailed investigation will be conducted to ascertain the cause of the incident, the NHPC said. **Rescue efforts on** The NHPC said the project team was working in close coordination with the district administration, the National Disaster Response

Force, the State Disaster Response Force, local authorities, and other emergency agencies to support the rescue operation. Apart from top officials of the NHPC, a special rescue team from the District Administration, the National Disaster Response

Fire on the hill



A fire lights up the night on Sanganathnagar hill in Varanasi on Tuesday. **■**

Gandhi reached Mandir Marg police station where Mr. Yadav had been detained on Tuesday night. Earlier, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia

the venue. By evening, the crowd had swelled, spilling over to the roads flanking Gandhi's residence. Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office J. Jayaprakash Narayan, secretary Govind Mohan, and others were seen at the Congress headquarters to negotiate with the Congress leadership and spoke to Mr. Gandhi. Dr. Singh accused Mr. Gandhi of shifting the 'goalposts' and said that he was in the "mood for conflict". The Minister alleged that Mr. Gandhi, while in residence, had initially said they would vacate the area if the government agreed to a detailed debate on the issue of paper leaks. However, they later added the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan as a non-negotiable de-

Opposition stalls Parliament for second day over NEET paper leak, police crackdown

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Both Houses of Parliament remained paralysed on the second day of the Monsoon Session on Tuesday as Opposition members protested over the alleged NEET paper leak, the police crackdown on students protesting in New Delhi, and the alleged Ram Temple donation theft.

Leak Sabha members were adjourned twice at 11 a.m. and noon before the House was adjourned for the day at 2 p.m. Similar scenes were witnessed in the Rajya Sabha.

MPs meet Speaker

A delegation of Opposition MPs from both Houses, led by the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, met Speaker Om Birla and demanded a discussion on alleged police brutality against students protesting the education system in the national capital on Monday.

"After the Hon'ble Lok Sabha Speaker today along with MPs of the Opposition, our demand is simple: Parliament must have a detailed discussion on the brutality unleashed on the students yesterday and on the government's complete lack of accountability for the examination crisis. Students were taken for asking legitimate questions about their own future, if Parliament cannot discuss the future of India's youth,



Students take shelter as a section of lawmakers take shelter in the Lok Sabha in New Delhi on Tuesday. **■**

what is it for? The Opposition will not let this be buried. We will ensure that the students' voice is heard on the streets and in Parliament," Mr. Gandhi posted on X.

Later, speaking to the media in the Parliament Complex, Mr. Gandhi said the Speaker had told the delegation that "he has to take permission from the government for a discussion".

Earlier in the day, INDIA bloc floor leaders met in the chamber of the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, and discussed the Opposition's strategy for the day. As soon as the Lok Sabha assembled for the Question Hour in the morning, Opposition members started raising slogans over the alleged NEET paper leak and the police later charged on protesting students. Mr. Birla assured the members that they would get an opportunity to raise their in-

Reach out to the youth, Modi tells MPs in alliance

NEW DELHI A day after the chairman on protesters taking out a march to the NEET question paper leak, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday told MPs that his government had taken "strict action" against those involved in the leak. It urged a "national responsibility" and not a matter for party politics, he said and appealed to the MPs to maintain a positive outreach and "guide and help" youngsters with regard to their aspirations. **■ PAGE 4**

mand, Dr. Singh said. The Congress denied the Minister's allegations, insisting that Mr. Gandhi had made four demands: the resignation of Mr. Pradhan, Delhi Police officials who "attacked" students to be held accountable and the Prime Minister to make a statement on Monday's events; debate on the issue in Parliament; and dropping of all charges against the protesters picked up by Delhi Police on Monday.

Escalating strategy

According to sources, plans for the final march were kept under wraps up till the last minute. All Congress MPs were asked to gather at Mr. Kharge's residence at 10 Rajaji Marg for his 84th birthday at 3:00 p.m. for "cake cutting". On reaching the Congress president's residence, Mr. Gandhi informed the assembled MPs that they would march to the residence of the Prime Minister's residence, about 100 metres away. Without waiting for a response from them, he set off on foot, with the MPs following.

Cong. leaders held after sit-in at PM's home

Rahul leads march by party, other Opposition leaders to PM's home amid anti-govt. protests

Centre sends emissaries to hold talks with MPs; the talks fail and ultimately police clear the area

Detained leaders released at night; 'This is the beginning of the end of Modi regime', says Cong.

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The principal Opposition party, the Congress, on Tuesday took the leadership of the anti-government agitation protesting the spate of paper leaks and seeking education reform, with the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, leading a party contingent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's doorstep. They were accompanied by other top Opposition leaders, including Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav.

Taken by surprise, the Delhi Police scurried into action, leading to a showdown between the two sides.

Three hours into the sit-in and after a failed attempt to negotiate with the MPs, the police forcibly cleared the area and detained several leaders, including Mr. Gandhi, who resisted by lying flat on the road, Mr. Yadav, and Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi.

"Modiji, try every pressure, exert all your might — this fight for justice for stu-

People regroup at CJP protest site once again

NEW DELHI

Thousands of people regrouped at the Cockroach Janta Party protest site at Jantar Mantar here by Tuesday afternoon. Security forces had almost cleared the area a day before in a crackdown which reportedly used shock batons and pellet guns on civilians in a first such instance in Delhi. From only about 200-300 people in the morning, the crowd swelled to thousands by evening. Hundreds more gathered outside entrances to the protest site. » PAGE 5

dents will not stop or be halted," Mr. Gandhi posted on X, while being detained at Chattrasal Stadium. Speaking to *The Hindu* from the same location, Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said that in the last two days, the Modi government's real face had been exposed. "This is the beginning of the end of the Modi regime," he said.



Seeking answers: Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi being detained by the police outside the Prime Minister's residence on Tuesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"Yesterday, the police attacked students and today they manhandled the Leader of Opposition himself," Mr. Venugopal said.

MPs detained

The Congress MPs were detained at different locations in the capital before being released late on Tuesday night. Earlier, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia

Gandhi reached Mandir Marg police station where Ms. Vadra had been detained with others as Congress workers held protests outside. Earlier, while being carried away by the police, Ms. Vadra shouted, "Narendra Modi is a coward."

Meanwhile, a day after the Delhi police cleared Jantar Mantar, the protesters continued to pour in at

the venue. By evening, the crowd had swelled, spilling over to the roads radiating from the protest site.

Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Jitender Singh and Home Secretary Govind Mohan were deputed as emissaries to negotiate with the Congress leadership and spoke to Mr. Gandhi. Dr. Singh accused Mr. Gandhi of shifting the "goalposts"

Reach out to the youth, Modi tells MPs in alliance

NEW DELHI

A day after the crackdown on protesters taking out a march over the NEET question paper leak, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday told NDA MPs that his government had taken "strict action" against those involved in the leak. Ensuring leak-free examinations was a "national responsibility" and not a matter for party politics, he said and appealed to the MPs to maintain a positive outreach and "guide and help" youngsters with regard to their aspirations. » PAGE 4

and said that he was in the "mood for conflict". The Minister alleged that Mr. Gandhi and other Congress leaders had initially said they would vacate the area if the government agreed to a detailed debate on the recent spate of paper leaks. However, they later added the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan as a non-negotiable de-

mand, Dr. Singh said.

The Congress denied the Minister's allegations, insisting that Mr. Gandhi had made four demands: the resignation of Mr. Pradhan; Delhi Police officials who "attacked" students to be held accountable and the Prime Minister to make a statement on Monday's events; debate on the issue in Parliament; and dropping of all charges against the protesters picked up by Delhi Police on Monday.

Escalating strategy

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Protester suffers injuries from pellet guns; shock batons used

This is the first known case of security forces using pellet guns, shock batons on civilians in national capital; doctors say pellets below eyes removed, but one lodged in neck may need another surgery; police deny use, call reports 'false'

Ashna Butani

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI

At least one of the 80 protesters injured in police action during the Monday march to Parliament called by the Cockroach Janta Party sustained pellet gun injuries, according to a source at Lady Hardinge Medical College, where the victim is undergoing treatment.

A friend of the protester, identified as Shaikh Irshad Mansoori, 25, told *The Hindu* that Mr. Mansoori was hit near Palika Bazaar in Connaught Place by a Rapid Action Force (RAF) jawan in uniform.

This appears to be the first known instance of security forces using pellet guns on civilians in Delhi. A video of a woman being stunned by a shock baton also emerged on Tuesday. This is the first known case of shock batons, which emanate mild electric shock, being used in Delhi.

Pellets guns and shock batons are part of the



Injuries similar to those made by pellet guns seen on a man who was reportedly at the march on Monday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

RAF's gear, the anti-riot unit under the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), which was deployed alongside the Delhi Police on Monday in and around Jantar Mantar during the protest demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

While the CRPF did not comment, in response to a video shared by BJP's Saurav Das on X showing Mr. Mansoori's wounds, Deputy Commissioner of Police, New Delhi, said, "Reports

claiming that police forces are using pellet guns against peaceful protesters are completely false and misleading. The public is strongly advised not to share or circulate unverified content. Please verify facts from official sources before posting or forwarding any information."

Previous use

The pellets fired from guns, which penetrate the skin when sprayed from a distance, were last known to have been used during

the 2024 farmers' protest at Khanauri and Shambhu border along the Punjab-Haryana boundary. Though the police had denied the use of pellet guns then, farm leaders had alleged that several persons were injured. In 2023, the guns were used against protesters in ethnic-strife torn Manipur leading to a huge public outrage. In the past, pellet guns have been used in Jammu & Kashmir during the 2016 unrest leaving several people partially or fully blind.

During the day, Mr. Mansoori underwent surgery to remove the pellets lodged in the upper part of his body. "His surgery was successful and the pellets below his eyes were removed, but one in his neck could not be removed as it was close to a blood vessel. He might require another surgery for the same," the source said.

According to a source at the hospital, the number of injured increased through the evening and went up to 83, which included both ci-

vilians and police officers. The source added that another protester was shifted to AIIMS with an eye injury, which was also likely due to pellets. A protester, aged 15, who sustained other injuries, was shifted to Kalawati Saran Children's Hospital.

At noon on Tuesday, Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda visited the hospital and met Mr. Mansoori. A friend who was signing off on his hospital consent forms, said, "There are around 30-40 injuries on his face and all over his body."

The friend added that when Mr. Nadda asked him why he was at the protest venue, Mr. Mansoori told him that "issues in the education system" had brought him there.

A 21-year-old woman, Sakshi, who was severely injured in police action, was admitted in a critical condition at the ICU of Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. Her family members said she was in better condition than a day ago.

What are pellet guns?

Feature	Description
Weapon type	Fires multiple small metal pellets instead of a single bullet.
Purpose	Marketed as a "less-lethal" crowd-control weapon.
Potential injuries	Skin penetration, eye injuries, permanent blindness, internal injuries, infection, and occasionally death depending on range and impact.
Risk	Pellets spread over a wide area, making it difficult to target only specific individuals.

What are shock batons?

Feature	Details
Definition	Hand-held batons capable of delivering an electric shock.
Purpose	Used by some security agencies for self-defence or restraining individuals.
Reported effect	Temporary pain, muscle contraction, and incapacitation.
Controversy	Their use on civilians during crowd control is highly debated because of potential misuse and human rights concerns.

Why is this significant?

The article claims that, if verified:

Allegation	Significance
Pellet guns used on civilians in Delhi	Would be the first publicly reported instance of such use in the national capital.
Shock batons used on protesters	Would also represent the first reported use on civilians in Delhi.

These claims were disputed by the police.

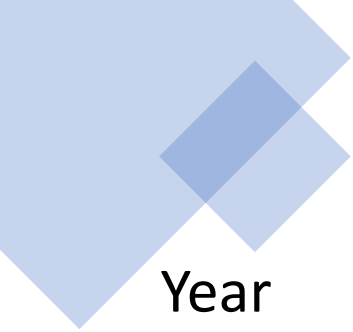
Police response

Delhi Police categorically denied the allegations.

According to the report, police stated:

- reports regarding pellet guns are false,
- no such weapons were used,
- people should not circulate unverified information,
- official information should be relied upon.

The **CRPF**, whose personnel were also deployed, reportedly did not comment in the article.



Year

Location

Context

2016

Jammu & Kashmir

Pellet guns were widely used during unrest, resulting in many eye injuries and cases of partial or complete blindness.

2023

Manipur

Allegations of pellet gun use during ethnic violence led to public criticism.

2024

Punjab-Haryana border

Farmers alleged pellet gun use during protests; police denied the allegation.



What India's young people are saying about families

Ask a grandmother in India what has changed since her time, and she will not talk to you about fertility rates. She will talk about her granddaughter, who finished college, has a city job, and is in no hurry to start a family. She will say it with pride and concern in the same breath, a blend the data reflects too.

The UNFPA survey

On World Population Day this year (July 11), UNFPA released the Demographic Futures Survey, the largest study of its kind, with over 1,08,000 young adults surveyed across 73 countries. It asked a simple question: not whether young people still wanted partnership and family, but what stood between them and it. (This year, India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare set the theme, "Healthy Timing and Spacing of Pregnancies" or HTSP, a reminder that at the heart of every demographic number is a question of choice: whether young people can decide, freely and on their own timeline, when and how to build their families.)

India's fertility rate has settled at two children per woman, below the replacement level of 2.1. Some will hear that and reach for words like "baby bust" or "population crisis". At UNFPA, we see something else entirely. This is not a warning sign but the outcome of sustained government investment across decades, in girls' education, the National Health Mission, and expanding contraceptive choice and maternal health services. The share of young women married before 18 years has fallen from 23.3% to 20.1% in just the last few years. That is a policy achievement India's institutions can rightly take credit for.

But numbers tell more than one story at once, and if we stop at the good news, we miss what young India is trying to say.

Ask young people directly, and most want what generations before them wanted. Across the



Andrea M. Wojnar

UNFPA
Representative in
India and part of
Team UN in India

Young Indians still want families, but the conditions they seek reveal their aspirations, anxieties, and changing realities

country, four in 10 women and a third of men say that two children is their ideal family size. The Demographic Futures Survey found the same pattern across countries: young people are not turning away from family life; they are asking whether the conditions exist to build it. So why the hesitation here? When we ask young couples what stands between them and the life they picture, the answers are almost always practical. Money comes first, cited by nearly four in 10. Then housing. Then job security. Then a very simple, human worry: how well can we care for our children?

That last question falls on one set of shoulders far more than another. Young women in India spend over five hours a day on unpaid housework and caregiving; young men spend about half an hour. Only 15 in every 100 young women are in paid work, compared to 55 in every 100 young men. These are not merely statistics. They help explain why so many capable young women feel that they must choose between a career and a family, when no one should have to choose at all.

The climate change issue

There is a newer worry layered on top of the old ones. The survey found that nearly all young people say climate change is disrupting their lives, and about half say it affects their peace of mind. Nearly half of young Indians also report being very worried about conflict, economic insecurity and environmental risk all at once, among the higher rates recorded anywhere. Add high youth unemployment and a mental health conversation that is only beginning in many Indian households, and a fuller picture emerges. This is not a generation rejecting parenthood. It is a generation asking, quite reasonably, whether the ground beneath it is steady enough to build on.

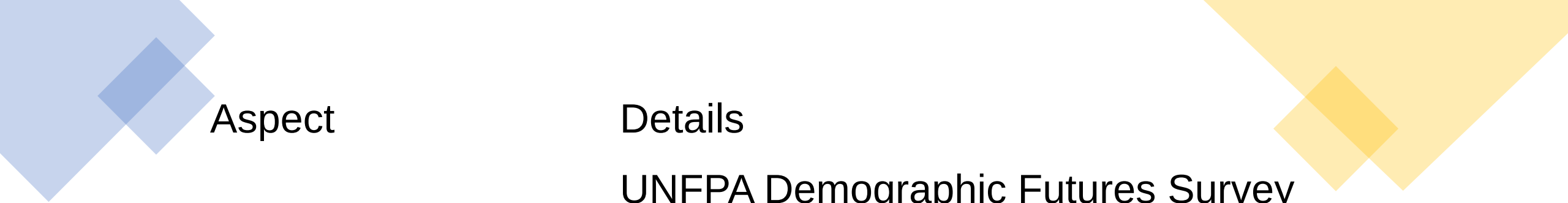
India is also marked by inter-State disparity. Bihar's fertility rate stands at 2.7, while Sikkim's is

just 1.0. Kerala, Delhi and Tamil Nadu have long settled below the replacement level, while Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand are still catching up. These differences show that India's demographic transition is unfolding at different speeds across States, and that no single national policy can fully address every State's realities.

Responding to youth aspiration

The UNFPA's partnership with the Indian government and communities is aimed at translating what young people are telling us into practical support: high-quality, affordable and accessible childcare; families that share caregiving more equally; continued investment in stable, dignified work for young people entering the labour force; and greater attention to youth mental health, including climate anxiety, in conversations about family and the future. The private sector also has a vital role to play through parental leave, flexible work arrangements and family-friendly workplaces that enable young people to balance work and caregiving. The UNFPA has a unique role in the United Nations development system as a leader in data collection, population dynamics and evidence-based policymaking. The Demographic Futures Survey shows how population data can and must be deployed to help countries understand, plan for and adapt to demographic shifts.

India is home to 255 million young people aged 15 to 24 years, the largest generation this country, or perhaps any country, has ever raised. This is India's demographic dividend, a window of opportunity that will not remain open indefinitely. The choices we make today will determine whether this generation can fully realise its potential before that window begins to close. Young Indians are not walking away from the idea of family. They are waiting for the conditions that would let them say yes to it fully.



Aspect

Details

Survey

UNFPA Demographic Futures Survey
(released on World Population Day – 11
July)

Countries covered

73 countries

Respondents

Over **1,08,000 young adults**

Purpose

Understand young people's views on
marriage, parenthood, and fertility
decisions.

Main finding

Most young people still aspire to have
families, but practical barriers delay
those plans.



Does this mean India faces a population crisis?

The article says **No**.

Instead, it argues this decline reflects:

- better education,
- improved maternal healthcare,
- greater access to contraception,
- women marrying later,
- increased freedom to choose family size.

These are viewed as outcomes of long-term social development rather than signs of crisis.

What do young Indians actually want?

The survey finds that **young people are not rejecting marriage or parenthood**.

Ideal Family Size

Response	Finding
Women	About 40% prefer two children
Men	About 33% prefer two children

Thus, the preferred family size remains moderate rather than very small.

Why are young people delaying marriage or children?

The article says the reasons are **practical, not ideological**.

Concern	Importance
Financial stability	Highest concern
Affordable housing	Major issue
Secure employment	Major issue
Ability to raise children well	Major concern
Work-life balance	Important
Childcare support	Important

Young couples first ask:

| "Can we afford to raise children?"

rather than

| "Do we want children?"

Gender Inequality

One of the strongest sections discusses the unequal burden of caregiving.

Time spent on unpaid work

Category	Average unpaid work/day
Young women	More than 5 hours
Young men	About 30 minutes

Employment

Category	Paid employment
Young women	15%
Young men	55%

This imbalance means many women feel forced to choose between:

- career,
- family.

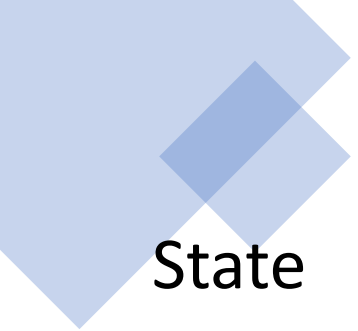
The article argues that **no one should have to make that choice.**

Climate Change and Mental Health

The survey finds that today's youth are also influenced by broader global challenges.

Issue	Survey Finding
Climate change	Nearly 50% say it is disrupting their lives.
Mental peace	About half say climate concerns affect their peace of mind.
Economic insecurity	High concern.
Conflict and wars	Significant concern.
Youth unemployment	Major factor affecting life planning.

The article suggests these overlapping anxieties make young people more cautious about starting families.



State

Approximate Fertility Rate (TFR)

Bihar

2.7

Sikkim

1.0

Kerala

Below replacement level

Tamil Nadu

Below replacement level

Delhi

Below replacement level

Uttar Pradesh

Still above replacement level

Jharkhand

Above replacement level



What should governments do?

The article recommends policies that make family formation easier rather than encouraging higher birth rates directly.

Area	Recommendation
Childcare	Affordable, high-quality childcare services
Employment	Stable jobs with decent wages
Housing	Affordable housing for young families
Gender equality	Equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities
Workplace reforms	Flexible work arrangements and parental leave
Mental health	Better support for young people
Women	Improve labour-force participation and career opportunities

New trade pact a win-win for India and U.K.

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which came into force on July 1st, marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of bilateral ties. More than a conventional trade agreement, the pact represents a strategic alignment between two major democracies seeking to reinvigorate their economic engagement in a rapidly shifting global order.

The India-U.K. CETA represents one of the most wide-ranging trade agreements concluded by India in recent years. Aligned with the broader India-U.K. Vision 2035, the CETA seeks to deepen cooperation across trade, technology, climate, and innovation. The agreement reflects the growing maturity of the India-U.K. economic partnership and provides a strong institutional framework for expanding trade and investment.

Both countries have further set a target of doubling bilateral trade to over \$100 billion by 2030, an objective that now appears more achievable with the new institutional framework in place.

Gains for both sides

The headline gain for India is the zero-duty access secured for 99% of Indian exports to the U.K. This is expected to boost exports, particularly labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, footwear, marine products, and gems and jewellery, which are sensitive to pricing. It will also benefit India in sectors such as engineering goods and chemicals, where margins depend on consistent market access.

Tariffs ranging from 70% on processed foods to 12% on textiles will now come down to zero. The Indian government has also addressed concerns relating to steel exports. Regarding the U.K.'s new steel measures that came into effect on July 1, both sides have agreed on arrangements that protect commercial interests, minimise market disruptions, and provide



Chandrabh Sekharia
Director General, DG

greater certainty for Indian exporters. Moreover, the import of electric vehicles will be subject to tariff-rate quotas, with tariffs being reduced in a phased manner. This reflects India's calibrated approach to balancing consumer access with continued support for domestic manufacturing. India has also retained appropriate safeguards in sensitive sectors such as agriculture and dairy.

The deal also opens access to government procurement markets, enabling Indian firms to bid for a wider range of public contracts in the U.K., especially in sectors such as infrastructure services and consulting.

Equally important is the agreement's emphasis on services and professional mobility. Expanded access for Indian IT, education, healthcare, financial and professional services providers strengthens India's position as a global services hub. The agreement also strengthens cooperation in education and skills by enabling U.K. institutions to establish campuses in India.

Modern provisions on digital trade, labour, gender, intellectual property, and innovation, make the agreement future-ready, enabling Indian firms to integrate into the U.K. and global value chains, while attracting investments for emerging sectors such as biotech and artificial technologies. These provisions will also create new opportunities for startups and Global Capability Centres to further advance collaboration in emerging technologies such as AI.

The U.K. is already India's sixth largest investor, contributing around 8% of cumulative FDI through Direct Investment equity since India opened its April 2000. The agreement is expected to further strengthen bilateral investment flows.

To maximise benefits from the CETA, the Indian industry must invest in quality upgradation, standard compliance, and sustainability. Indian companies should leverage mobility

provisions to deepen their presence in the U.K. services market, build partnerships, and invest in long-term capabilities. Again, with opportunities in sectors such as processed foods, textiles, handicrafts, and IT-enabled services and business services, Indian exporters have a critical role to play in enabling Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to benefit from the agreement. This requires guidance on compliance and regulatory requirements, as well as procurement opportunities.

Template for the future

A time of rising regulatory barriers across the world, the India-U.K. CETA reaffirms the value of open, rules-based trade. It supports India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision by enhancing competitiveness and complementing the Make in India and Digital India schemes through greater market access, services exports, and mobility. For the U.K., the agreement strengthens its strategic economic partnership with one of the world's fastest growing major economies.

Upon implementation, the CETA can reshape trade and investment flows, create quality jobs and growth, and transition India to a more competitive and innovation-driven economy.

Further, the India-U.K. CETA can also serve as a foundation for bilateral economic partnerships by combining India's manufacturing strength and skilled workforce with the U.K.'s financial, technological, and global commercial networks. The U.K.'s membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, together with the proposed India-EU trade agreement, can further create complementary opportunities for Indian businesses to integrate into standard compliance, and sustainability. Indian companies supply chain resilience.

Why Punjab's Dalits remain divided

As 2027 elections inch closer, party leaders have again started wooing SC groups

STATE OF PLAY

Nikhil Yaswanth

Punjab

The Scheduled Caste (SC) vote bank in Punjab is close to 32% of the total population of the state, the highest in the country, yet they remain politically marginalised, having pushed only one Dalit Chief Minister and that too for a brief period in the year 2024.

With elections due in early 2027 in the State, mainstream parties, including the Congress, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the Bhartiya Janshakti Party (BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), are once again courting Dalit voters. While the SCs in Punjab are close to 32% of the total population, the Jat Sikh population is over 30%, yet since 1977, the state has not seen a single non-Jat Sikh Chief Minister till 2022, when Charanjit Singh Chahal held the top post for a brief period during the Congress regime, indicating the political dominance of the Jat Sikh community. Before Mr. Chahal, it was Giani Zail Singh who was the last non-Jat Sikh to serve as Chief Minister of Punjab between 1977-77.

Sharp divisions

Even as political parties continue to make efforts to woo their support, sharp caste divisions among SCs is believed to be among the key determinants to their emergence as a unified force. Punjab's SCs, like their counterparts in many other parts of the country, are not a homogeneous community. They are split into about 30 different castes, and are further divided by religious and mixed faiths that have traditional value chains, popularly known as 'Deras'.

While some of the SC De-

ras, such as the Ravidassias and Ad Dharmi groups are well-off in terms of education and have attained upward social mobility, others, like the Bahmiks and Khadhis, are the 'marginalised' within the marginalised. They are spread over different regions as well, including Chharian, Hindu, Sikh, and independent religions. This prevents them from coming together as a community or working with a unified approach to make a successful impact in politics.

Ranvir Singh, the founder of the Bahadur Singh Party (BSP), tried hard to unite the different SC castes in Punjab politically, but when he didn't see much success, he moved his focus to Uttar Pradesh instead. The inability of the BSP's ideological plank to drive its agenda in the political domain of Punjab, reinforces the argument that the Dalit community have remained far from being a unified voting bloc.

As the elections to the 2027 Punjab Assembly draws near, the freedom of politicians across party lines at different Deras in the State has already begun. Several leaders of all key political parties have been seen visiting different Deras in order to seek their support, which is aimed at garnering support and votes of the respective Dera followers.

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi's visit to Punjab on July 1st, the 60th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, and his latest meeting with the Dera Head Sanjivan Singh on July 17 in Jalandhar, indicate the party's Dalit outreach attempt, which has yet again renewed the debate surrounding Dalit-centric politics. Mr. Modi has recently been conferred the Padma Shri as well.

In 2023, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, along with AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, met Sanjivan Singh and paid obeisance at Dera Sachkhand Ballan and laid the foundation stone of the Guru Ravidass Bani Adhyan Centre. In August 2025, Mr. Modi again met the Dera Head and laid the foundation stone for a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) at Dera Sachkhand Ballan. These repeated visits only drive the significance of Dalit voters.

Leaders from other parties, including the SAD and the Congress, have also been visiting Deras as the countdown to the polls has begun.

Assessment politics

As per an academic estimate, in Punjab, Dalit voters have a high to moderate electoral influence in at least 85 Assembly constituencies of the total 17 Assembly constituencies.

While the division among the SCs has been one of the reasons behind their political marginalisation over the years, political parties have often made what observers see as token gestures towards the Dalit community's upliftment, rather than pursue genuine empowerment by sincerely implementing constitutional provisions and reservation laws. Mainstream political parties have largely kept their focus on assessment politics and have barely nurtured any genuine Dalit leadership.

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For the first time, undergraduate enrolments decline in India

AIISH reports released after a prolonged delay show a drop in students enrolled in undergrad courses, particularly in States such as Maharashtra and UP

DATA POINT

Nikhil Yaswanth

Even as issues around education have momentarily taken centre-stage amid the protests led by the Higher Education Union (HEU) and the Maharashtra Education Union (MEU), the reports of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for two years released to gather after a prolonged delay by the Union Ministry of Education (MoE) has largely gone unnoticed. Importantly, the much-awaited report that has gone unreported is the inexplicable decline in the total number of students enrolled in undergraduate courses across the country. Such a decline has happened for the first time ever since the Union government started publishing AISHE reports from 2015.

In the government's own words, AISHE "serves as the primary source of official statistics on higher education in India and provides critical insights for policy formulation, planning, and monitoring of the sector." Yet, the MoE intermittently delayed the release of these reports. The AISHE report for 2022-23 had a delayed release in January 2024. More than two years later, the Ministry released the reports for 2022-23 and 2023-24, together earlier this month without much fanfare.

The total enrolment in higher education, which include undergraduate, postgraduate, diploma, Ph.D. and other types of courses, increased by 3.5 lakh (0.6%) in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23, which is the lowest-ever increase. However, the number of students enrolled in undergraduate courses, which account for over 75% of enrolments, declined by 93,000 (0.27%) in the same period (Chart 1). This is despite the fact that the youth population in the eligible age group saw an increase, with an increase in the number of Higher Education Institutions

(HEIs) that participated in AISHE, which went up from 36,480 in 2022-23 to 39,823 in 2023-24.

Neither the 2023-24 report, which played up the marginal increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio from 29.8 to 30, nor the Ministry for Education Charanendra Prasad, who cited the report to highlight the increased enrolment of female students in STEM courses, have offered an explanation for this decline. Interestingly, the decline is seen only among male students since the number of female students enrolled in undergraduate courses saw an increase although they were fewer in numbers than the males. The enrolment of male students dropped by 2.2% between 2022-23 and 2023-24 while that of female students increased by 1.8% (Chart 2).

In absolute numbers, two States — Maharashtra (4%) and Uttar Pradesh (2%) — accounted for the highest drop in undergraduate enrolments (Chart 3). While the chart shows only 10 States with the highest number of enrolments, several other States such as Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal saw steep falls in undergraduate enrolments by 15% and 9% respectively. Delhi, a major hub for education, registered a decline of 6%.

The States that saw declines accounted for a drop of over six lakh enrolments. The overall decline in the country would have been far higher, if not for the increase reported in few other States such as Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Karnataka and Odisha. Tamil Nadu in particular recorded the highest increase of 1.8 lakh (1.5%) in enrolments in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23, which is the lowest-ever increase. However, the number of students enrolled in undergraduate courses, which account for over 75% of enrolments, declined by 93,000 (0.27%) in the same period (Chart 4). This is despite the fact that the youth population in the eligible age group saw an increase, with an increase in the number of Higher Education Institutions

Unexplained drop

Data for the charts were sourced from All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports released by the Ministry of Education. With inputs from Gauri Singhwani, Ganika Sinha and Sachin Sengupta, who are interacting with The Hindu's Data team

CHART 1: This chart shows the overall enrolment and enrolment in undergraduate (UG) courses. UG enrolments declined for the first time in 2023-24. (Note: values are in lakhs)

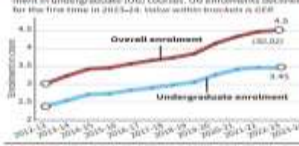


CHART 2: The gender-wise number of students enrolled in UG courses shows that the decline in 2023-24 was noticed only among male students

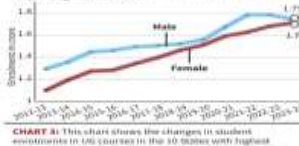


CHART 3: This chart shows the changes in student enrolments in UG courses in top 10 States with highest number of enrolments. Tamil Nadu's sharp increase offset the overall decline in UG enrolments



CHART 4: Among the top five types of programmes, UG courses show the highest decline in enrolments. Arts, Science and Commerce saw declines



CHART 5: Tamil Nadu showed a sharp decline in UG enrolments, which was offset by the increase in UG enrolments in other States

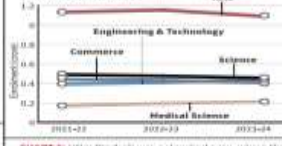
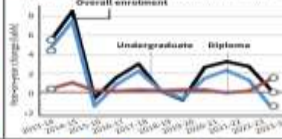


CHART 6: Tamil Nadu showed a sharp decline in UG enrolments, which was offset by the increase in UG enrolments in other States



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 22, 1976

Biggest bank robbery in French city

Nice, France, July 21: Hundreds of agitated clients besieged a bank here yesterday to find out if they were among the victims of the biggest robbery in history.

At least 30 million francs (Rs. 6 crore) were split away from the bank during a week-long operation carried out with military precision by a gang who got clean away.

The thieves dug a tunnel eight metres long into the strongroom of the bank, where they rifled 200-gold boxes containing money, securities, jewels and gold.

Behind them the thieves left a note saying, "No shots, no violence, no hatred" and bearing the international peace sign.

The gang worked undisturbed all the week-end in an operation that earned the French "Great Train Robbery" look like a candy store hold-up. Bank officials discovered the robbery only on Monday, as before leaving the way they got in, the gang had walled the vault door shut from the inside.

The police who confessed that they were astounded by the skill displayed, believe the gang started the operation on Friday night.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 22, 1926

Electric driving of weaving sheds

An interesting installation, unique in South India, has recently been carried out at the Kallakurichi Mills, Coimbatore, by the English Electric Co. Ltd.

This spinning mill, which is one of the largest in the district, working with electric drive, has recently installed a weaving shed and on the advice of the English Electric Co., they equipped it entirely on this Company's individual drive system. The latest method of driving looms is to have long lines of shafting running down the shed, on which pulleys are mounted, driving the looms by belts. In the individual drive system, however, each loom is driven by its own motor.

The Mills adopted the system, in the face of much criticism from parties whose interest lay in the supply of fine shafting, still gearing and are not favourably impressed with having the courage to be pioneers in South India, of the latest and most up to date system.

For the first time, undergraduate enrolments decline in India

AISHE reports released after a prolonged delay show a drop in students enrolled in undergrad courses, particularly in States such as Maharashtra and U.P.

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Pon Vasanth B.A.

Even as issues around education have momentarily taken centre-stage amid the protests led by the Cockroach Janta Party and activist Sonam Wangchuk, the reports of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for two years released together after a prolonged delay by the Union Ministry of Education (MoE) has largely gone unnoticed.

Importantly, the strange trend that has gone unreported is the inexplicable decline in the total number of students enrolled in undergraduate courses across the country. Such a decline has happened for the first time ever since the Union government started publishing AISHE reports from 2011.

In the government's own words, AISHE "serves as the primary source of official statistics on higher education in India and provides critical insights for policy formulation, planning, and monitoring of the sector". Yet, the MoE inordinately delayed the release of these reports. The AISHE report for 2021-22 had a delayed release in January 2024. More than two years later, the Ministry released the reports for 2022-23 and 2023-24 together earlier this month without much fanfare.

The total enrolment in higher education, which include undergraduate, postgraduate, diploma, Ph.D and other types of courses, increased by 3.7 lakh (0.8%) in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23, which is the lowest-ever increase. However, the number of students enrolled in undergraduate courses, who account for over 75% of all enrolments, declined by 93,000 (0.27%) in the same period (**Chart 1**). This is despite the fact that the youth population in the eligible age group saw an increase, along with an increase in the number of Higher Education Institutions

(HEIs) that participated in AISHE, which went up from 56,180 in 2022-23 to 59,533 in 2023-24.

Neither the 2023-24 report, which played up the marginal increase in Gross Enrolment Ratio from 29.5 to 30, nor the Minister for Education Dharmendra Pradhan, who cited the report to highlight the increased enrolment of female students in STEM courses, have offered an explanation for this decline. Interestingly, the decline is seen only among male students since the number of female students enrolled in undergraduate courses saw an increase although they were fewer in numbers than the males. The enrolment of male students dropped by 2.2% between 2022-23 and 2023-24 while that of female students increased by 1.8% (**Chart 2**).

In absolute numbers, two States – Maharashtra (-6%) and Uttar Pradesh (-3%) – accounted for the highest drop in undergraduate enrolments (**Chart 3**). While the chart shows only 10 States with the highest number of enrolments, several other States such as Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal saw steep falls in undergraduate enrolments by 13% and 8% respectively. Delhi, a major hub for education, registered a decline of 6%.

The States that saw declines accounted for a drop of over six lakh enrolments. The overall decline in the country would have been far higher, if not for the increase reported in few other States such as Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Karnataka and Odisha. Tamil Nadu in particular recorded the highest increase of 1.6 lakh, which is more than the 1.53 lakh decline reported in Uttar Pradesh. The latter in particular saw a sharp decline in undergraduate enrolments, accompanied by an almost similar increase in enrolments in Diploma courses – a trend not noticed in other major States (**Chart 5**).

Programme type-wise analysis showed that the decline was in Arts, Sciences, and Commerce

Unexplained drop

Data for the charts were sourced from All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports released by the Ministry of Education. With inputs from Gauri Singavarapu, Gandla Sneha and Sachin Swaraj, who are interning with The Hindu's Data team

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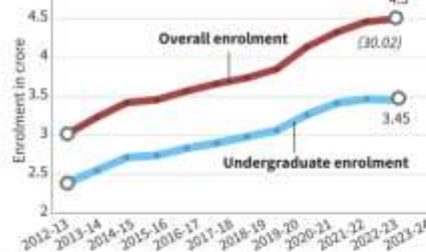


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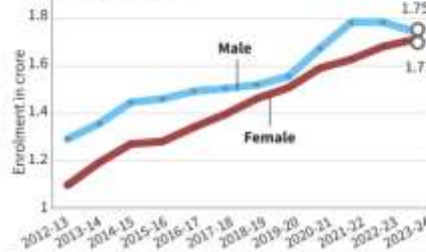


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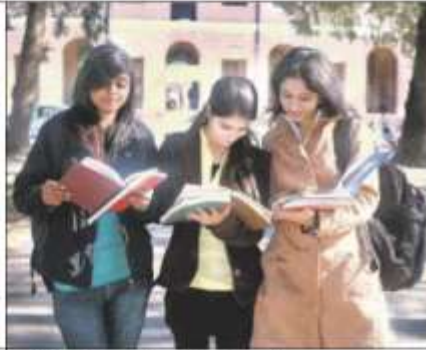
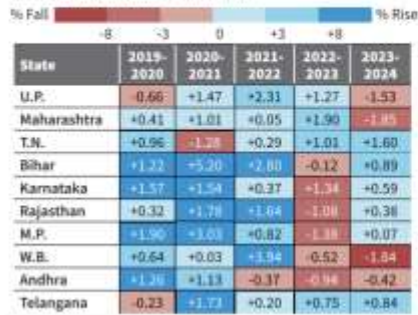


CHART 4: Among the top five types of programmes with highest number of enrolments, Arts, Science and Commerce saw declines

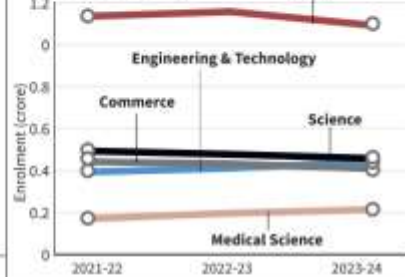
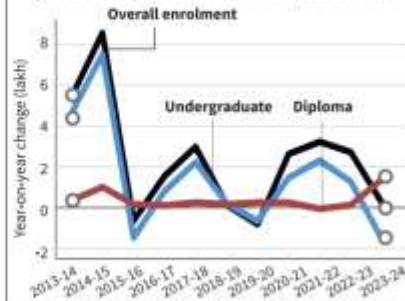


CHART 5: Uttar Pradesh was a standout case, where the sharp decline in UG courses was offset almost completely by the sudden spike in enrolments in Diploma courses



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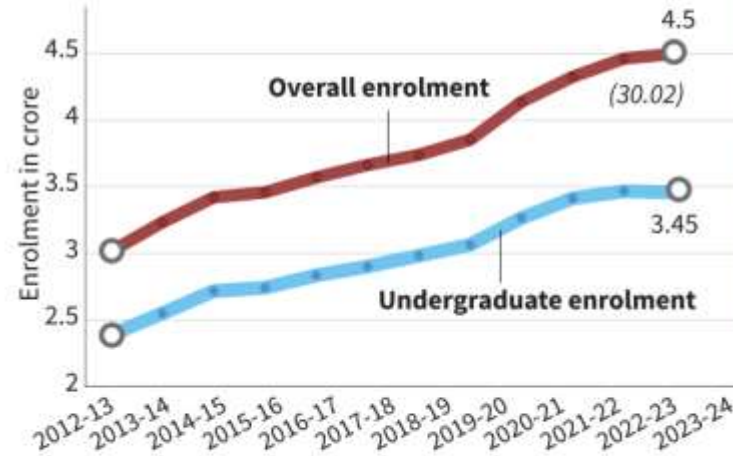


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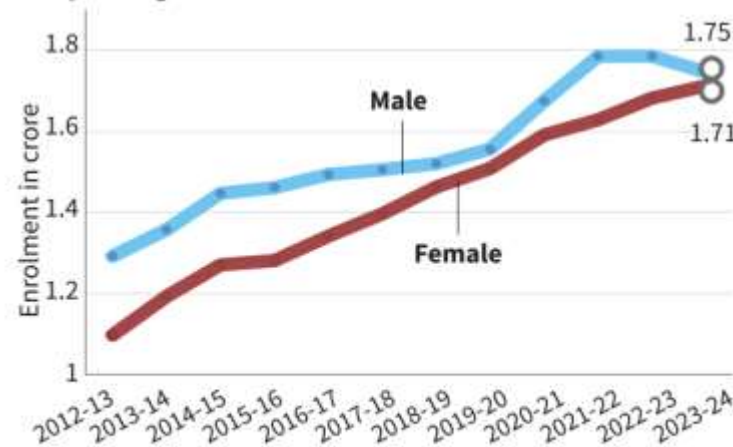


CHART 3: This chart shows the changes in student



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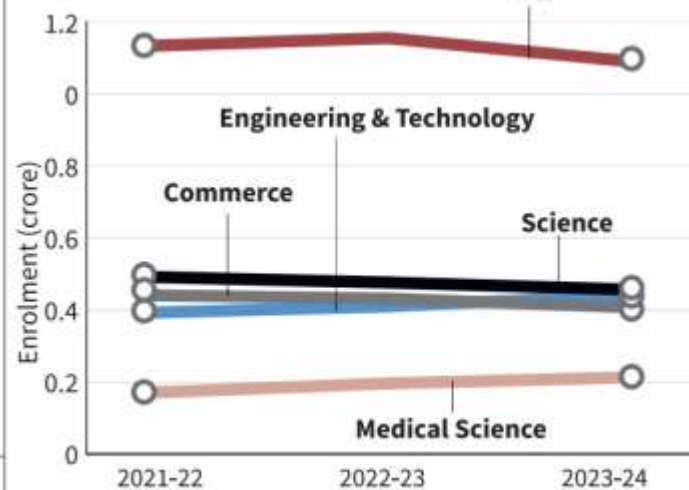
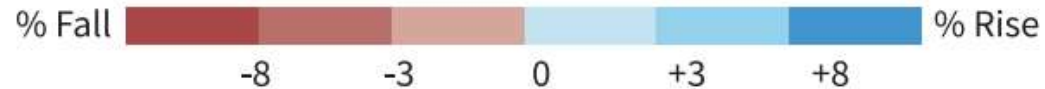


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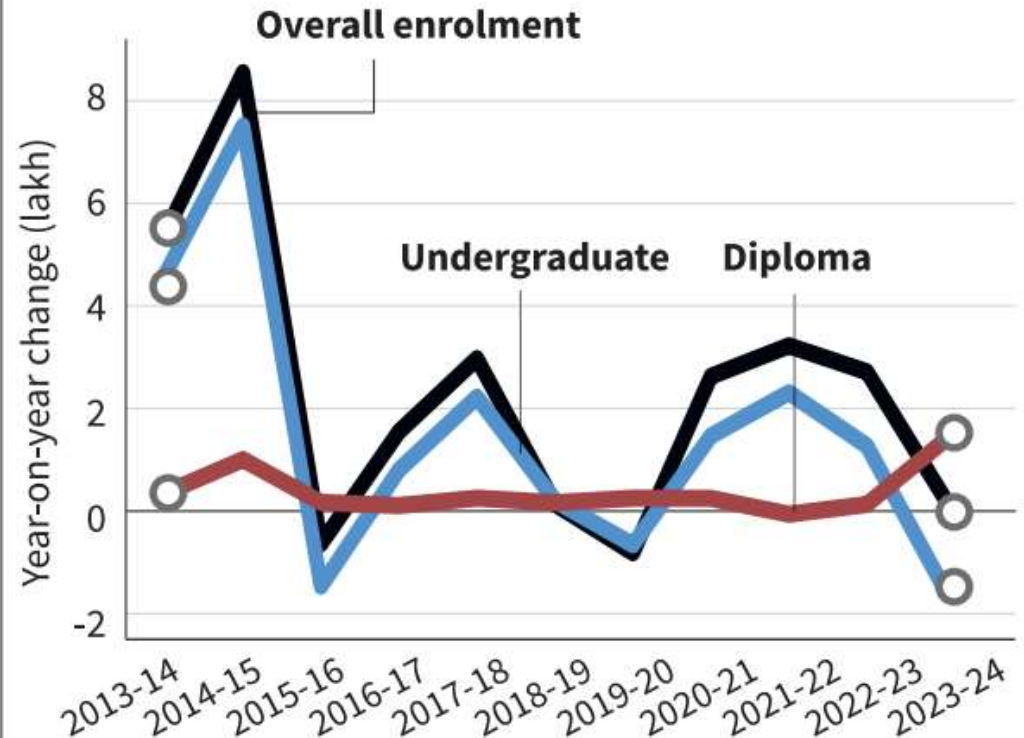
State	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
U.P.	-0.66	+1.47	+2.31	+1.27	-1.53
Maharashtra	+0.41	+1.01	+0.05	+1.90	-1.85
T.N.	+0.96	-1.28	+0.29	+1.01	+1.60
Bihar	+1.22	+5.20	+2.80	-0.12	+0.89
Karnataka	+1.57	+1.54	+0.37	+1.34	+0.59
Rajasthan	+0.32	+1.78	+1.64	-1.08	+0.38
M.P.	+1.90	+3.03	+0.82	-1.38	+0.07
W.B.	+0.64	+0.03	+3.94	-0.52	-1.84
Andhra	+1.26	+1.13	-0.37	-0.94	-0.42
Telangana	-0.23	+1.73	+0.20	+0.75	+0.84

2021-22

2022-23

2023-24

CHART 5: Uttar Pradesh was a standout case, where the sharp decline in UG courses was offset almost completely by the sudden spike in enrollments in Diploma courses



The latest **AISHE reports** reveal a **historic decline in undergraduate (UG) enrolments** in India during **2023–24**, marking the **first fall since AISHE began publishing data in 2011**.

While **overall higher education enrolment continued to grow slightly**, the decline in UG admissions—the segment that accounts for over **75% of all higher education students**—is a major concern.

Key Highlights

Indicator	2022–23	2023–24	Change 
Overall Higher Education Enrolment	~4.47 crore	4.50 crore	+0.8% (≈3.7 lakh)
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)	30.0	30.2	↑
UG Enrolment	~3.46 crore	3.45 crore	−93,000 (−0.27%)
Higher Education Institutions (AISHE reporting)	56,180	59,533	↑

Main Finding

- Higher education overall is still expanding.
- Undergraduate admissions are shrinking for the first time.

Why is this important?

UG programmes constitute **over 75%** of India's higher education system.

A decline in UG admissions can eventually affect:

- skilled workforce availability,
- postgraduate admissions,
- research ecosystem,
- employability,
- demographic dividend.

Trend Since 2012

Category	Trend
Overall enrolment	Continuous increase
UG enrolment	Grew steadily until 2022–23, then declined in 2023–24

The decline is unusual because:

- India's youth population remains large,
- the number of colleges has increased,
- the GER has continued to rise.

Male vs Female Enrolment

One of the most striking findings:

Category	Trend
Male students	Declined by about 2.2%
Female students	Increased by about 1.8%

Interpretation

The fall in UG enrolment is **entirely driven by a decline in male admissions**.

This continues the broader trend of improving female participation in higher education.

State-wise Impact

The decline is concentrated in a few large states.

State	Change in UG Enrolment
Maharashtra	-6%
Uttar Pradesh	-3%
Jammu & Kashmir	Significant decline
West Bengal	Significant decline
Delhi	About -6%

Together, **Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh** account for most of the national decline.

States that Offset the Decline

Some states continued to record strong growth.

State	Growth
Tamil Nadu	Highest increase (about 1.6 lakh students)
Bihar	Increase
Karnataka	Increase
Odisha	Increase

Without these gains, the national decline would have been much larger.

Programme-wise Analysis

Among the largest undergraduate streams:

Programme	Trend
Arts	Declined
Science	Declined
Commerce	Declined
Engineering & Technology	Nearly stable/slight decline
Medical Sciences	Slight increase

The biggest traditional disciplines—Arts, Science, and Commerce—experienced the most noticeable reductions.

Possible Reason

Explanation

Growth of skill-based education

Students opting for diplomas, ITIs, apprenticeships, or vocational courses.

Competitive exams

Many students spend one or more gap years preparing for exams such as NEET, JEE, UPSC, SSC, etc.

Employment preferences

Some youth enter the workforce earlier instead of pursuing a degree.

Demographic changes

Fertility decline in some states gradually reduces the college-age population.

Migration

More students pursuing education abroad or through online platforms.

Economic constraints

Rising costs of higher education may delay or discourage enrolment.

Boeing asks U.S. to intervene over record European loan to Airbus



Short flights: Both sides own partial share in a battle at WTO over mutual claims of aircraft subsidies

Boeing
FANNINGOUGH, U.S.

Boeing asked the U.S. government to press the European Union (EU) for transparency over a €3 billion (£3.43 billion) loan package to Airbus, resurfacing potential trade tensions over the two sides' extended a tariff truce over jet subsidies.

The request for the U.S. government to intervene comes as Airbus has been talking about the development of a new plane as early as 2030, potentially kickstarting a new wave of competition in the global jet market.

Both sides saw partial victories in a 17-year battle at the World Trade Organization over mutual claims of aircraft subsidies that led to a wave of Transatlantic trade tensions over the industries, before agreeing a five-year truce in 2001.

The truce, which was set to expire on July 6, has been extended indefinitely as both sides draw back from a renewed trade war over jet subsidies, a letter to U.S. Trade Representative Kenneth Gries, sent by Reuters, Boeing said it had been surprised by a June 29 announcement from the European Investment Bank, the EU lending arm, committing to its largest-ever corporate loan for Airbus.

Full accounting of terms
It asked the WTO to request a "full accounting of the terms of this loan" from the EU and to explain why it was compatible with the 2001 agreement, which called for an "open and transparent process".

Boeing noted that the announcement, which included an initial tranche of €3 billion, came just four days after the EU adopted the decision to extend the standard agreement.

At a minimum, the timing of this loan is surprising, Boeing said in its letter. The EIB denied offering Airbus any unusual support.

"This is a normal loan, carrying interest, part of the EIB's overall financing activity," a spokesman said.

Airbus and Boeing declined comment.

The WTO and European Commission did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Airplane developments
In its loan announcement, the EIB said the package of loans would support Airbus' long-term investment through 2030. Boeing noted that this is the same year in which Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury has said Airbus plans to begin the development of an A320neo successor.

In an interview with Aviation Week ahead of the Farnborough Airshow, Faury spoke of a new plane in 2030 and disclosed the internal code word for the project, "A3EON".

The timing of this significant loan also coincides with Airbus leadership remarks publicly committing to a launch date of a new airplane, which further raises questions about both the size and the intent of this historic economic assistance package, Boeing's letter to the WTO said.

Market conditions not right
Boeing has said market conditions are not yet right for a new generation of plane orders, analysts say both companies are expected to start the next developments by mid-decade. Boeing's letter underscored tensions over funding on both sides, though tensions have eased considerably since the WTO dispute for the subsidies.

Washington has not officially said it is extending the exports truce on tariffs tied to the Airbus-Boeing dispute, but four people familiar with the matter said both sides had effectively buried the matter at the WTO dispute for the time being. While the Trump administration has repeatedly used tariffs, it is seen as reluctant to make use of WTO tools that would have the effect of recognising unilateral rules the president opposes.

Trump called this month for talks with trading partners to address the impact of foreign jet requests. Boeing's concerns about the EU loan to Airbus could also be raised in these talks, a U.S. official told Reuters. European sources say similar loans were cleared in the WTO dispute.

New U.K. FM Healey calms market but investors see more tax, debt ahead

Former defence minister Healey seen as safe pair of hands. Burnham's early promises suggest more spending, analysts say, markets looking for clarity on fiscal plans soon. U.K. weapons-maker stocks rose on expectations that spending on defence could rise to 3% of economic output by 2030

NEWS ANALYSIS

Healey
LONDON

The surprise decision by Britain's new Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to name John Healey his finance minister is adding to speculations about how much extra borrowing or tax hikes are coming for the stretched bond market and an economy struggling to grow.

Healey — who quit as defence minister in the previous government of Boris Johnson over what he criticised as "under-spending on the armed forces" — is widely seen as a safe pair of hands for the Treasury job.

But analysts are now trying to tie up the loose ends of investment in defence on top of promises made by Burnham — the centre-left former mayor of Greater Manchester who ousted Boris Johnson — the centre-left former mayor of Greater Manchester who ousted Boris Johnson — the centre-left former mayor of Greater Manchester who ousted Boris Johnson.

U.K. weapons-maker stocks rose on Tuesday on expectations that spending on defence could rise to 3% of economic output by 2030, higher than the 2.7% agreed by Starmer, which could cost roughly an extra £10 billion a year.

"Quite a bit of money"
Burnham has also suggested he wants to raise the threshold at which people



New names: John Healey walks to attend the first cabinet meeting with British PM Rishi Sunak at 10 Downing Street in London, Britain, on Tuesday

start to pay income tax, said he would keep the tribute-like mechanism for raising the state pension — which costs an estimated £3 billion more than a less expensive alternative — and tackle a crisis in social care, a multi-billion-pound challenge that he predicted would be his first priority.

"You're starting to talk about quite a bit of money," said David Zohn, head of European fixed income at Franklin Templeton.

For now, the appointment of Healey — rather than former energy minister Ed Miliband, whose past enthusiasm for borrowing to fund green investments worried investors — has calmed the U.K.'s jittery government bond

market. Healey has a hand experience of how the U.K.'s public finances work.

"Wait and see mode"
However, the day after Burnham moved into Downing Street and named Healey in the first of his cabinet picks, the relationship between the country's two most powerful politicians remains to be understood.

"We will need to wait and see if Healey talks in the same way as Burnham, and if he can soften Burnham's flexibility within the fiscal rules that he inherited from Starmer's government, before stabilising on Tuesday after Healey's appointment."

After two spells in junior finance ministry roles in the 2000s under Gordon Brown, Healey has first-

critical. "Healey's appointment is not evidence the pressure to spend has gone away," Green said. "It is evidence Burnham knows the market needed reassurance while he works out how far he can push."

Finances stretched

Britain's economy, like much of the rest of Europe, has struggled to grow since the financial crisis almost 10 years ago and government spending to offset shocks such as COVID and the Ukraine war has pushed up debt.

Data published on Tuesday showed the limitations in the new government when it comes to extra spending.

Day-to-day spending — which the government is seeking to balance with tax revenues by the end of the decade — was £42 billion in the red in the first three months of the year, £1.3 billion above forecasts that the country's two most powerful politicians remain to be understood.

These forecasts do not include the impact on the public finances of the Iran war, which the Resolution Foundation think tank estimates at around £14 billion a year. That would leave Healey with a historically low £10 billion of wiggle room to maintain policy, to hit the 2030 target, even before any extra spending on defence, housing or other priority areas.

A first announcement of

cost-of-living support made on Tuesday — removing value-added tax from domestic power bills — prompted some to question the new government's claim that it would be fully funded by scrapping a digital TV scheme.

"The government will have to set out how it will pay for its new policies at the budget," a Labour ally, Darren Jones, a former chief secretary to the Treasury, said.

While Burnham has talked about savings from Britain's fast-growing welfare spending, he has also said his priority will be more training to help get people back into work, suggesting no short-term reductions from lower benefits payments.

Tax rises for spending?

With the public finances in tight, attention is turning to possible tax increases when Healey delivers his first full tax and spending plan, probably in the autumn.

Burnham has said that staying on track to meet the fiscal targets might mean "having to ask for a little more".

Having pledged to stick with Labour's 2024 election promise not to raise the main rates of taxation, that could mean higher taxes on capital gains, inheritance or property purchases, or some levy on wealth.

Will India's plastic notes be a better alternative?

EXPLAINER

Santosh V. Purnam

INDIA, which is among the five largest economies of the world, is still coping with the idea of introducing plastic currency, three decades after Australia put in place a full series of its denominations and as many as 60 nations have a currency in some form.

Early this month, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) currency printing unit invited global suppliers of interest for supplying polymer substrates with embedded security features, signalling its move to replace its old paper notes, depending on de-nomination, need highly specialised technology to produce polypropylene — derived from petroleum and natural gas, a sector with direct correlation to environmental costs.

Although polymer currency offers an opportunity to minimise environmental impact by enhancing durability, reducing the risk of counterfeit, and strengthening security, apprehensions over the high cost of production and the need for specialised recycling facilities even as a previous study commissioned by the RBI and conducted by The Energy and Resources Institute found that the production cost alone was 20-24% of the currency's value, for low denominations.

The support of plastic currency nevertheless may lower replacement frequency, can justify the higher production cost, and the higher frequency of handling and physical deterioration.



See the cost! Plastic banknotes may also be costlier to make than cotton-paper ones. (LIFE MATRIS)

tion when India the country is fast going less cash-intensive and digital transactions, spending exponentially. While the stand of both the RBI and the government may seem justifiable, some certain questions remain unanswered.

Why should India invest heavily in plastic currency, most importantly when there is due to the volatility in petrochemical prices and the global disruption?

Since polymer is derived from polypropylene, fluctuations in crude prices could increase manufacturing costs of plastic currency over time. India is dependent on imports for polypropylene, which constitutes for roughly a fifth of domestic consumption even as major domestic players as Indian Oil Corporation are undertaking major capacity expansion aimed at scaling up production by 2030.

Secondly, why at a time when digital payments are booming? The United Pay and 220 million UPI transactions more than 24,000 crore transactions

and ₹4,778 crore in FY2020-21. Moreover, India reportedly spends almost ₹5,000 crore annually on replacing old and worn-out notes, and maintain its stock of banknotes and cheques 20-24 billion solid notes a year, most of them lower denominations.

The primary objective was to increase the shelf life but the project was shelved due to technological challenges.

In 2013 and 2014, the Parliament was informed that the Government remained committed to the pilot project, after which the project was shelved because of de-monetisation and its apportionment costs including in printing new series.

What next?
Barthapras Reserve Bank of India has now invited eligible domestic and international manufacturers to submit bids by August 18 for manufacturing specialised substrates designed for banknote printing.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra had last month confirmed that the currency was again under active consideration.

As he moves towards a digital rupee and deeper financial digitalisation, the long-term demand for physical cash may expand slowly, potentially increasing the economic justification for large-scale polymer adoption.

A currency is efficient only when its production and maintenance costs remain a small proportion of its purchasing power. It is not about choosing between paper and plastic, but about designing a smarter, more efficient currency that can replace some money over ₹1 lakh in circulation despite the UPI revolution.

At the same time, the RBI has also been looking at the use of polymer banknotes, which are more durable and have a longer shelf life. The RBI has also been looking at the use of polymer banknotes, which are more durable and have a longer shelf life.

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Will India's plastic notes be a better alternative?

EXPLAINER

Santosh V. Perumal
CHENNAI

India, which is among the five largest economies of the world, is still toying with the idea of introducing plastic currency, three decades after Australia put in place a full series of its denominations and as many as 60 nations use such currency in some form.

Early this month, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) currency printing arm invited global Expressions of Interest for supplying polymer substrates with embedded security features, signalling its most concrete step towards implementation since the original 2009 proposal.

Plastic banknotes, which last 2.5 to 4 times longer than cotton-paper notes, depending on denomination, need highly specialised biaxially oriented polypropylene – derived from petroleum and natural gas, a sector with direct correlation to environmental concerns.

Although polymer currency offers an opportunity to modernise cash management by enhancing durability, reducing lifecycle costs and strengthening security, apprehensions concern production cost as some calculations project that it can approach or even exceed the face value of low-denomination notes. Many countries found that the production cost alone was 20-24% of the currency's value for low denominations.

The supporters of plastic currency nevertheless say lower replacement frequency can justify the higher production cost. ₹10 and ₹20 notes see the highest frequency of handling and physical deteriora-



Note the costs: Plastic banknotes may also be costlier to make than cotton-paper ones. GETTY IMAGES

tion, leading to disproportionately high replacement costs.

Large savings

Polymer notes could potentially deliver large lifecycle savings in these lower denominations, even though they are not the largest by value since the ₹500 note has consistently been the single most widely circulated denomination in India over the last five years, both by volume and by value, as per RBI annual reports.

Sustainability concerns centered around higher initial carbon footprint, plastic waste disposal and the need for specialised recycling facilities even as a previous study commissioned by the RBI and conducted by The Energy and Resources Institute found that the extended circulation lifespan will stand in good stead as fewer notes would need to be manufactured and transported over time, giving polymer a smaller overall carbon footprint than paper.

Key queries

The logic behind RBI's latest move to revive the plastic currency comes at a

time when India the country is fast going less cash-intensive and digital transactions expanding exponentially. While the stand of both the RBI and the government may seem justifiable, some certain queries stay remain unanswered.

Why should India invest heavily in plastic currency, most importantly when there is due to the volatility in petrochemical prices owing to the West Asian crisis-led global disruptions. Since polymer is derived from polypropylene, fluctuations in crude prices could increase manufacturing costs of plastic currency over time.

India is dependent on imports for polypropylene, which constitutes for roughly a fifth of domestic consumption even as major domestic players as Reliance Industries and Indian Oil Corporation are undertaking major capacity expansion aimed at scaling capacity significantly by 2030.

Secondly, why at a time when digital payments are booming? The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) now processes more than 24,000 crore transactions

annually, accounting for 85% of retail digital payments, while currency-to-GDP ratio (the percentage of total cash in circulation relative to GDP), which had hit a low of 8.7% in two decades during demonetisation in 2016-17, has stayed above 11%, reflecting a structural shift in payment behaviour.

The monetary system's dichotomy or currency demand paradox, as coined by the RBI, showed UPI grew exponentially amid steady growth in currency in circulation, which exceeded ₹41 lakh crore by 2025-26 against ₹16-17 lakh crore a decade earlier. This apparently could be due to informal sector and low digital acceptance in rural pockets where digital connectivity is poor.

Cost curve

In India, data on the cost of printing banknotes is not available per denomination but the RBI provides the cost of security printing as part of its income statement in the annual reports, which show that the aggregate expenditure on printing currency was ₹5,101 crore in FY2023-24, ₹6,373 crore in FY2024-25

and ₹4,875 crore in FY2025-26. Moreover, India reportedly spends almost ₹5,000 crore annually to replenish and maintain its stock of banknotes and destroys 20-24 billion soiled notes a year, most of them lower denominations, under its Clean Note Policy.

Polymer banknotes typically cost 30-60% more to manufacture than traditional cotton-paper notes as they use specialised polypropylene substrates, transparent windows, sophisticated anti-counterfeiting features and complex printing technologies.

Added to these costs, ATMs, currency sorting machines, vending machines and banknote processing equipment may require recalibration to handle polymer notes. Commercial banks, cash logistics firms and retailers would incur transition costs initially.

A research paper in the *International Journal of Economics* found the cost almost doubled in lead up to the period of demonetisation (2016), driven by the printing and issue of two new series of banknotes (₹500 and ₹2,000) to replace all prior series of the same denomination in circulation. Since demonetisation, ₹200 has also been issued, leading to an increase in the cost of printing banknotes.

Average cost per note printed, it noted, follows a similar pattern, rising from ₹1.5 pre-2016 to ₹2.7 during demonetisation and resetting to pre-demonetisation levels as of 2019 suggesting marginal costs of printing currency in India may not always decrease with increased supply.

Historical perspective

RBI first mooted in 2009 to introduce 100 crore ₹10

polymer banknotes. In 2012, the Ministry of Finance informed the Parliament the notes would be introduced on a pilot basis in five cities – Kochi, Mysuru, Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, and Shimla, selected for diverse climatic conditions.

The primary objective was to increase the shelf life but the project was shelved due to technological challenges.

In 2013 and 2014, the Parliament was informed that the Government remained committed to the pilot project, after which the project apparently went silent because of demonetisation and its apurtenant costs, including in printing new series.

What next?

Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran has now invited eligible domestic and international manufacturers to submit bids by August 18 for manufacturing opacified polymer substrate sheets designed for banknote printing.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra had last month confirmed that polymer currency was again under active consideration.

As India moves towards a digital rupee and deeper financial digitisation, the long-term demand for physical cash may expand slowly, potentially reducing the economic justification for large-scale polymer adoption.

A currency is efficient only when its production and maintenance costs remain a small proportion of its purchasing power. It is not about choosing between paper and plastic; but about designing a smarter, more efficient cash ecosystem in an economy where over ₹41 lakh crore worth of currency remains in circulation despite the UPI revolution.

RBI Polymer (Plastic) Banknote Policy

Aspect	Details
Objective	Introduce polymer (plastic) banknotes instead of traditional cotton-paper notes for selected denominations.
Who made it?	Reserve Bank of India (RBI), with approval from the Government of India.
Why?	To make currency more durable, secure, cleaner, and harder to counterfeit.
Current status	RBI has invited bids for polymer banknote substrates. The policy is under active consideration; polymer notes have not yet been rolled out nationwide.

What does the policy cover?

Area	What it includes
Durability	Notes last 2.5–4 times longer than paper notes.
Security	Advanced anti-counterfeiting features such as transparent windows and enhanced security elements.
Printing	New polymer substrate and specialized printing technology.
Circulation	Initially likely for selected denominations or pilot projects before wider adoption.
Cash Handling	Banks, ATMs, and cash-sorting machines may need adjustments to handle polymer notes.

How does it help you?

Benefit	Practical Impact
Longer-lasting notes	Fewer torn or damaged notes in your wallet.
Cleaner currency	Polymer notes absorb less dirt and moisture.
Water resistance	Less likely to be damaged by rain or accidental washing.
More secure	Lower risk of receiving counterfeit currency.
Lower replacement needs	Over time, fewer note shortages caused by worn-out currency.

Does it change anything for you?

Question	Answer
Will the value of my money change?	No. ₹100 remains ₹100, regardless of whether it's paper or polymer.
Can I still use paper notes?	Yes. Existing notes remain legal tender until RBI decides otherwise.
Will shops accept polymer notes?	Yes. They would be legal tender like current notes.
Do I need to exchange my money?	No, unless RBI announces a replacement program in the future.

Any disadvantages?

Issue	Impact
Higher production cost	More expensive to manufacture initially.
Infrastructure changes	Banks and ATMs may require upgrades.
Environmental concerns	Polymer is plastic-based, though the longer lifespan can reduce overall replacement frequency.

Does it benefit businesses?

Yes.

User	Benefit
Consumers	Cleaner, more durable, and more secure notes.
Banks	Lower long-term replacement of damaged notes.
Retailers	Fewer counterfeit notes and less handling of damaged currency.
Government/RBI	Better currency security and potentially lower lifecycle costs despite higher initial production costs.

How a new law aims to place 'Vande Mataram' on a par with 'Jana Gana Mana'

Vineet Bhalla
New Delhi, July 21

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah is set to introduce the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in Rajya Sabha during the Monsoon Session. This will amend the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, to grant the national song, *Vande Mataram*, the same statutory protection currently given to the national anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*.

According to Section 3 of the Act, intentionally preventing the singing of the national anthem or causing a disturbance to any assembly engaged in such singing is a criminal offence punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, a fine or both. The Bill proposes to include the national song within the ambit of this section.

Legal status of national song

This year, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued guidelines regarding the singing and playing of the national song. The "orders

relating to the National Song of India" detailed the authorised lyrics, written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and specified occasions for its mass singing, such as "on the unfurling of the National Flag, on cultural occasions or ceremonial functions".

The orders also stated that "whenever the official version of the National Song is sung or played, the audience shall stand to attention", and suggested that "in all schools, the day's work may begin with community singing of the National Song".

A petition, filed in the Supreme Court by one Muhammed Sayeed Noori, challenged the directives. Arguing for him, Senior Advocate Sanjay Hegde questioned whether people could be "compelled to sing the song in the garb of an advisory".

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, however, dismissed the plea as "premature" and based on a "vague apprehension of discrimination". The court said that the government's directive was advisory in nature and there were no penal consequences for those who

chose not to sing the national song.

How it differs from the national anthem

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill states that on January 24, 1950, Constituent Assembly President Rajendra Prasad declared that 'Vande Mataram' should be "honoured equally" and have "equal status" with 'Jana Gana Mana'. It then states that "presently, there is no specific legal provision to prevent insults" to the national song.

The national anthem and the national song, however, don't have equal status within the legal framework. Under Article 51A(a) of the Constitution, it is a fundamental duty of every citizen to respect the national flag and the national anthem. The national song is not mentioned here or anywhere else in the Constitution.

This distinction is also reflected in the government's executive orders containing guidelines on both. While the playing of both is recommended for the arrival of the

President, a Governor or a Lieutenant Governor at state functions, immediately before and after the President addresses the nation over All India Radio and "[w]hen the National Flag is brought on parade", the anthem is additionally mandated for "Civil and Military investitures", during parades, for "hoisting of colours in the Navy" and "when the Regimental Colours are presented".

The orders for the national song exclude such military protocols, specifying its playing only for "civil investitures".

Disrupting anthem's singing

To understand how the amended law might operate, one might look at how courts have interpreted the existing Section 3 of the 1971 Act, which currently applies only to the national anthem.

In 2014, the Kerala High Court in *Salman v. State of Kerala* clarified what constitutes such a disturbance. The court refused to quash an FIR against the petitioner, accused of "making noise and hue and cry" while the national anthem was being sung.

Justice P Ubaid held that "causing obstruction or prevention to the singing of National Anthem, by making loud or contemptuous noise" falls under the offence defined in Section 3 of the Act and ruled that such serious allegations require police investigation.

Right to respectful silence

While actively disrupting the singing of the national anthem is an offence under the Act, the Supreme Court distinguished this from simply choosing not to sing in the landmark *Bijoe Emmanuel & Ors v. State of Kerala* judgment of 1986.

The case involved three children belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses Christian sect who were expelled from school for refusing to sing the national anthem during a morning assembly, even though they stood respectfully in silence while it was sung. Their refusal was based in their religious faith that did not permit them to sing praises to anyone except in prayers to their God.

The Supreme Court ruled in favour of

the students, holding that their expulsion violated their fundamental rights to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) and freedom of religion under Article 25(1) of the Constitution.

The court held that there is no legal provision obliging anyone to sing the national anthem. "Proper respect is shown to the National Anthem by standing up when the National Anthem is sung," the court said. "It will not be right to say that disrespect is shown by not joining in the singing."

The court emphasised the importance of religious freedom, observing: "Article 25 is an article of faith in the Constitution, incorporated in recognition of the principle that the real test of a true democracy is the ability of even an insignificant minority to find its identity under the country's Constitution."

In the conclusion to its judgment, the bench of Justices O Chinnappa Reddy and M M Dutt remarked: "Our tradition teaches tolerance; our philosophy preaches tolerance; our constitution practices tolerance; let us not dilute it."

The Union Government proposes to amend the **Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971** so that **Vande Mataram** receives the same statutory protection as the **National Anthem**.

At present:

- **Jana Gana Mana** is protected under law.
- **Vande Mataram** enjoys official recognition as the National Song but **does not have equivalent statutory protection**.

The amendment seeks to remove this difference.

What is the proposed law?

Aspect	Details
Bill	Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026
Proposed by	Union Home Ministry
Objective	Give the National Song the same legal protection as the National Anthem.
Law being amended	Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971

Current legal position

National Anthem

Item	Status
Song	Jana Gana Mana
Legal protection	Yes
Governing law	Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971

National Song

Item	Status
Song	Vande Mataram
Legal protection	No statutory protection (currently)
Official recognition	Yes

What changes after the amendment?

Currently, Section 3 of the 1971 Act makes it an offence to:

- intentionally prevent singing of the National Anthem,
- create disturbance during its singing.

The amendment proposes to extend the same protection to **Vande Mataram**.

Punishment

If enacted,

intentionally:

- preventing the singing,
- creating disturbance,
- obstructing a gathering singing the National Song,

may attract the same punishment as for the National Anthem.

Punishment	Details
Imprisonment	Up to 3 years
Fine	Yes
Or both	Yes

Why is the amendment being introduced?

The Statement of Objects and Reasons recalls that **Dr. Rajendra Prasad**, while concluding the Constituent Assembly's deliberations in 1950, stated that:

- **Jana Gana Mana** would be the National Anthem.
- **Vande Mataram** should be honoured equally.

The government argues that although both hold high national importance, only the anthem presently has statutory protection.

Difference between National Anthem and National Song

Aspect	National Anthem	National Song
Name	Jana Gana Mana	Vande Mataram
Composer	Rabindranath Tagore	Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay
Constitutional mention	Citizens have a duty to respect the National Anthem under Article 51A(a).	Not specifically mentioned in the Constitution.
Legal protection	Yes	Proposed through this amendment.

Supreme Court position

Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)

Facts

Three school students belonging to the **Jehovah's Witnesses** faith:

- stood respectfully during the National Anthem,
- did **not sing** because of sincerely held religious beliefs.

They were expelled from school.

Supreme Court judgment

The Court held:

- expulsion was unconstitutional,
 - freedom of religion and freedom of expression protected the students,
 - respectful silence is permissible.
-

Important legal principle

Action	Legal Position
Standing respectfully without singing	Permissible
Singing	Not legally compulsory
Creating disturbance	Punishable under the law (for the National Anthem, and if amended, also for the National Song)

Kerala High Court ruling (2014)

The article also discusses a Kerala High Court decision.

The Court observed that:

- shouting,
- making loud noise,
- preventing others from singing,

can amount to obstruction and may attract action under the Act.

Thus, **the offence is obstruction, not mere non-participation.**

Kanishka Narayan is UK's first AI minister

ADITI KHANNA
London, July 21

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER

Andy Burnham finalised his top team within hours of taking charge at 10 Downing Street and promoted British Indian minister for artificial intelligence (AI) Kanishka Narayan to the Cabinet and purging allies of predecessor Keir Starmer from the government.

Burnham, who was invited to form the government by King Charles on Monday, unveiled his Cabinet ministers.

Lisa Nandy is another Indian-origin minister who holds on to her department,

with additional responsibilities as Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Narayan said his elevation, as Minister for AI, falling jointly within the Cabinet Office and the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, is a sign of new PM's "deep commitment to AI's importance".

The 36-year-old Bihar-born Labour MP for the Vale of Glamorgan, who held the AI brief as a junior minister in former prime minister Keir Starmer's team, pledged to focus relentlessly on securing British influence in shaping AI.

With roots in Muzaffarpur, Narayan's family moved to the

Welsh capital of Cardiff when he was a little boy. He studied at Oxford and Stanford universities before entering politics after a stint in the private sector and has been vocal about the importance of India-UK ties.

Meanwhile, Lisa Nandy is reappointed to ministerial role she has been in charge of since July 2024 with the additional responsibility for digital services too. The 44-year-old Manchester-born daughter of Calcutta-born academic Dipak Nandy and English mother Luise Byers is a close ally of Burnham as his Makerfield constituency neighbour in Wigan, within Greater Manchester region. —PTI

INDIA CONNECTION

KANISHKA NARAYAN

■ Born in Muzaffarpur, Bihar; moved to UK at 12

■ Oxford graduate; MBA from Stanford University

■ Former banker and global technology executive

■ Labour MP for Vale of Glamorgan since 2024

LISA NANDY

■ Indian-origin MP representing Wigan since 2010

■ First woman and first Asian MP from Wigan

■ Politics graduate from Newcastle University

■ Retains Culture Secretary post in the Cabinet



Delhi most affordable for students in the world: QS

● At 91st, Mumbai India's top-ranked student city overall

MANU KAUSHIK
New Delhi, July 21

DELHI HAS BEEN adjudged as the most affordable for students globally in the QS Best Student Cities Ranking 2027. While all four Indian cities featured in this year's rankings have scored well on affordability and graduate employability, the report cautioned that India's aspirations to become an education hub for international students remain a pipe dream.

According to the latest rankings of 150 cities in the world released by global higher education analytics firm QS, Delhi topped the affordability index with average annual international tuition fees of around \$2,700. Mumbai, now India's highest-ranked student city overall, was also among the world's most affordable destinations with a ranking of 123 on the affordability measure. Chennai and Bengaluru also featured among the global top 30 for affordability.

Besides affordability, Indian cities have done well on employer demand. Delhi ranks 29 globally and Mumbai 34 on QS' employer activity indicator, highlighting the growing confidence among recruiters in graduates produced by Indian institutes.

The common weakness is equally clear. Both cities rank near the bottom of the table for student mix, the measure of the size and international diversity of the student body, with Mumbai 150th of 150

STUDY DESTINATIONS

QS best student cities		
	2027 ranks	2026 ranks
Seoul	1	1
Tokyo	2	2
London	3	3
Melbourne	4	5
Munich	5	4
Sydney	6	6
Mumbai	91	98
Delhi	90	104
Bengaluru	114	108
Chennai	123	128

Source: QS



Most affordable student cities 2027

Delhi	1
Surabaya	2
Dhaka	3
Yogyakarta	4
Tashkent	5

and Delhi 146th. Neither yet draws the international student numbers that its scale of provision could support.

Overall, Mumbai jumped seven places this year to become India's highest-ranked student city at 91, while Delhi climbed five spots to 99. Chennai gained five places to 123, but Bengaluru slipped six places to a joint ranking of 114.

QS, however, flagged a glaring weakness in India's education system. The report stated that India currently hosts just around 50,000 international students despite being one of the world's largest exporters of students, with more than 1.3 million Indian students studying abroad. In addition, the sourcing of international students remains heavily concentrated with Nepal accounting for roughly one-third of all international students enrolled in India.

"The Study in India programme and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

are designed to close precisely this gap, by drawing students from across South Asia, Africa, the Gulf and, increasingly, Central Asia, and by allowing foreign universities to open campuses on Indian soil," the report stated.

QS said India's cities reflect the country's broader higher education trajectory—rapidly improving university performance, competitive costs and growing employer recognition—but noted that converting these strengths into genuine global appeal will require greater openness, stronger international partnerships and a more diverse student population.

"India sends far more students abroad than it receives, and its cities remain among the least internationally diverse in the ranking. Turning a formidable domestic and regional strength into genuine global appeal, through quality, openness, and the international partnerships now taking shape, is what will define the next stage of India's rise as

a study destination," said Jessica Turner, chief executive officer of QS.

Globally, Seoul retained its top position as the world's best student city, followed by Tokyo and London. Melbourne climbed to 4, while Munich and Sydney shared the fifth place. Asian cities continued to dominate the upper end of the rankings, with Singapore (11), Beijing (12), Taipei (14), Kyoto (16) and Hong Kong (17) all featuring in the top 20 list.

No single destination leads on everything, according to a press release. Each of the six lenses that make up the QS Best Student Cities 2027 is topped by a different city. Melbourne leads in the student mix category, Amsterdam in desirability, Tokyo in employer activity, and Berlin in student voice, according to the rankings.

In the QS World University Rankings 2027, published in June, India was the world's fifth most represented system, with 52 universities ranked.

Aspect	Details
Publisher	QS Quacquarelli Symonds (UK-based higher education analytics firm)
Purpose	Ranks the world's best cities for higher education.
Cities Ranked	150 major student cities worldwide
Parameters	University quality, affordability, employer activity, student mix, desirability, and student voice.

Rank	City	2026 Rank
1	Seoul	1
2	Tokyo	2
3	London	3
4	Melbourne	5
5	Munich	4
5	Sydney	6

City	2027 Rank	2026 Rank	Change
Mumbai	91	98	▲ +7
Delhi	99	104	▲ +5
Bengaluru	114	108	▼ -6
Chennai	123	128	▲ +5

Rank	City
1	Delhi
2	Surabaya (Indonesia)
3	Dhaka (Bangladesh)
4	Yogyakarta (Indonesia)
5	Tashkent (Uzbekistan)

Weaknesses

International Student Mix

The biggest weakness identified by QS is the **low number and diversity of international students**.

City	Student Mix Rank (out of 150)
Mumbai	150
Delhi	146

This reflects limited international diversity on campuses.

Why does India attract fewer international students?

The report notes:

Indicator	Details
International students in India	Around 50,000
Indians studying abroad	More than 1.3 million

India sends many more students overseas than it attracts.

Additionally, about **one-third of international students in India come from Nepal**, indicating limited geographic diversity.

Why is this a concern?

A strong international student population brings:

- academic diversity,
- research collaboration,
- cultural exchange,
- university reputation,
- economic benefits.

The report suggests India has room to grow in all these areas.

Government Initiatives

The article mentions two important initiatives.

Study in India Programme

Objective	Details
Attract foreign students	Promote India as an international education destination.
Focus regions	South Asia, Africa, Gulf countries, and Central Asia.



Topic of the day

Education's falling share in Budget over 12 years



UDIT MISRA

OVER THE past three days, New Delhi's Jantar Mantar has attracted significant attention as many disgruntled youth from across India have come together under the leadership of the so-called Cockroach Janta Party to demand the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

The immediate trigger for the protests was the leak of the 2026 NEET-UG question paper. Every year, millions of students hoping to become doctors take the exam. This was neither the first time NEET papers got leaked, nor was it the only examination to witness such a lapse. Reports suggest that over the past decade, test papers have been leaked in over 150 different competitive examinations held in India.

What has intensified criticism is the sense of lack of accountability around such repeated lapses. A recent investigation by *The Indian Express* into the status of cases linked to 45 major exam paper leaks over the past two decades, where each exam saw at least one lakh applicants, threw up stark results.

Only two of these cases led to convictions. Most are either trapped in legal quicksand or have hit a dead end. In fact, two of the accused in exam leaks are now representatives in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly.

At a time when the Narendra Modi-led government's handling of the education sector is under scrutiny, how can its performance be analysed? There is no singular metric, but the allocation of money from annual Budgets to the relevant departments and ministries is a good way to understand the importance any government attaches to a particular issue.

In the past, several scholars have repeatedly criticised Indian governments for not allocating enough funds to critical ministries such as education and health. Here is a look at how the annual allocations towards the Education Ministry in the Union Budgets have changed over the years.

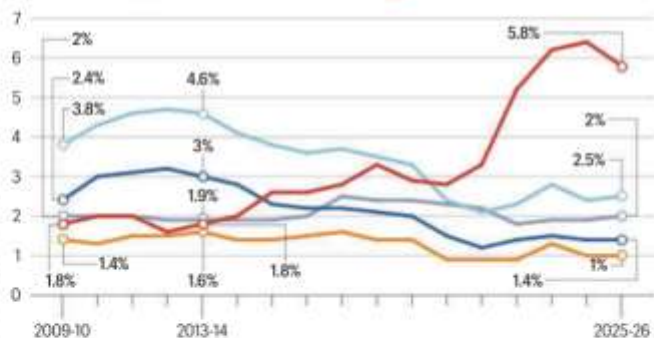
Examining Budget allocations

It is natural that over time, the absolute amount allocated to any major ministry

• WHERE THE GOVERNMENT CHOSE TO SPEND

The chart & table show allocation to various ministries and departments as a % of total Union Budget

Ministry of Education* — Department of School Education & Literacy — Department of Higher Education — Ministry of Health & Family Welfare — Ministry of Road Transport & Highways



*EARLIER CALLED MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT. SOURCE: CMIE, INDIAN EXPRESS RESEARCH

will increase, if for no other reason than the annual inflation in prices of the same goods and services. The metric for ascertaining whether a ministry or department lost or gained relevance in policy terms is to look at the funds allocated to it as a percentage of the total Budget for a financial year.

Since Budget Estimates have routinely changed, the following exercise only looks back on the period for which hard data is available. In other words, all analysis uses data up to the end of the last financial year. The starting point for the data is 2009, the earliest year for which the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's (CMIE) Economic Outlook module provides details.

When the data is compiled, a clear picture emerges of the Education Ministry's relative importance, or the lack of it, during the first 12 years of this NDA government.

Reducing share since 2014

Looking back at the Union Budget from 2009-10 onwards, it becomes clear that, on average, the total size of the Union Budget grew by an average of 10.4% each year. This means that the total amount of money the government spent each year was roughly 10% more than what it spent the year before. As such, across most ministries and departments, Budget allocations (in abso-

lute terms) also went up.

In this analysis, however, the focus is not on the absolute amount of money spent on a ministry but whether its share in the overall Budget expanded or shrunk or remained stagnant. The chart maps the relative share (in the overall Budget) of three key ministries over the years:

- Education (earlier called Ministry of Human Resource Development). The chart also maps the share of allocations for the two departments under this ministry: School Education and Higher Education.
- Health and Family Welfare
- Road Transport and Highways

The data on the other two ministries provide context by showing other sectors where people often demand higher allocation (health) and which represent the growth model of the Modi era (roads and highways).

The data shows that the Education Ministry's share in the Union Budget fell from 4.6% in 2013-14 (the last year that the Congress-led UPA government was in power) to 2.5% in 2025-26. In other words, the Education Ministry now commands only half the share that it had before PM Modi took charge. The fall in relative share can also be seen in the allocation to both departments. The share of the Department of School Education is less than half of what it was 12

While the government has come up with the Skill India initiative, the share allocated to the Skill Development ministry has also remained minuscule

years ago, while the Department of Higher Education's share is just around 60% of what it used to be.

The share of allocation to the Health Ministry has gone up and down marginally from one year to another, but the share is stagnant over the long term.

In sharp contrast, the share of money spent on making roads and highways has almost trebled in the past 12 years. In fact, 12 years ago, education and health together received 6.5% of the annual Budget while the ministry received just 1.8% of the total expenditure. All these years on, education and health together received only about 4.5% of the annual Budget while the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways receives 5.8% alone.

Skill development allocations

Over the years, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence, governments have focused on skilling over and above education. In fact, in 2015-16, the Union government created a new ministry just for this purpose. However, the share of the Budget spent on skilling presents a sobering picture, and is quite in contrast to the government's pronouncements to "Skill India".

As the table shows, the share of allocations to the Ministry of Skill Development was a minuscule 0.06% to begin with, and has now slid to 0.05%.

The takeaway

Looking at the share, level and trend of allocations provides a good understanding of a government's priorities. To be sure, each government is entitled to choose its own set of priorities — after all, this is exactly why voters choose or discard governments. The Modi government is now in its third consecutive term, suggesting that voters have resoundingly ratified the government's policy choices.

Yet, the decline in the share of allocation to the Ministry of Education is worrying for the future of India's youth and their growing aspirations. And while spending more money is no guarantee for the quality of expenditure — as many cases of sinking new roads and falling bridges attest — it is often a necessary first step towards improving the situation. The picture emerging from this data echoes the words of the noted economist John Kenneth Galbraith: "I am worried about our tendency to over invest in things and under invest in people."

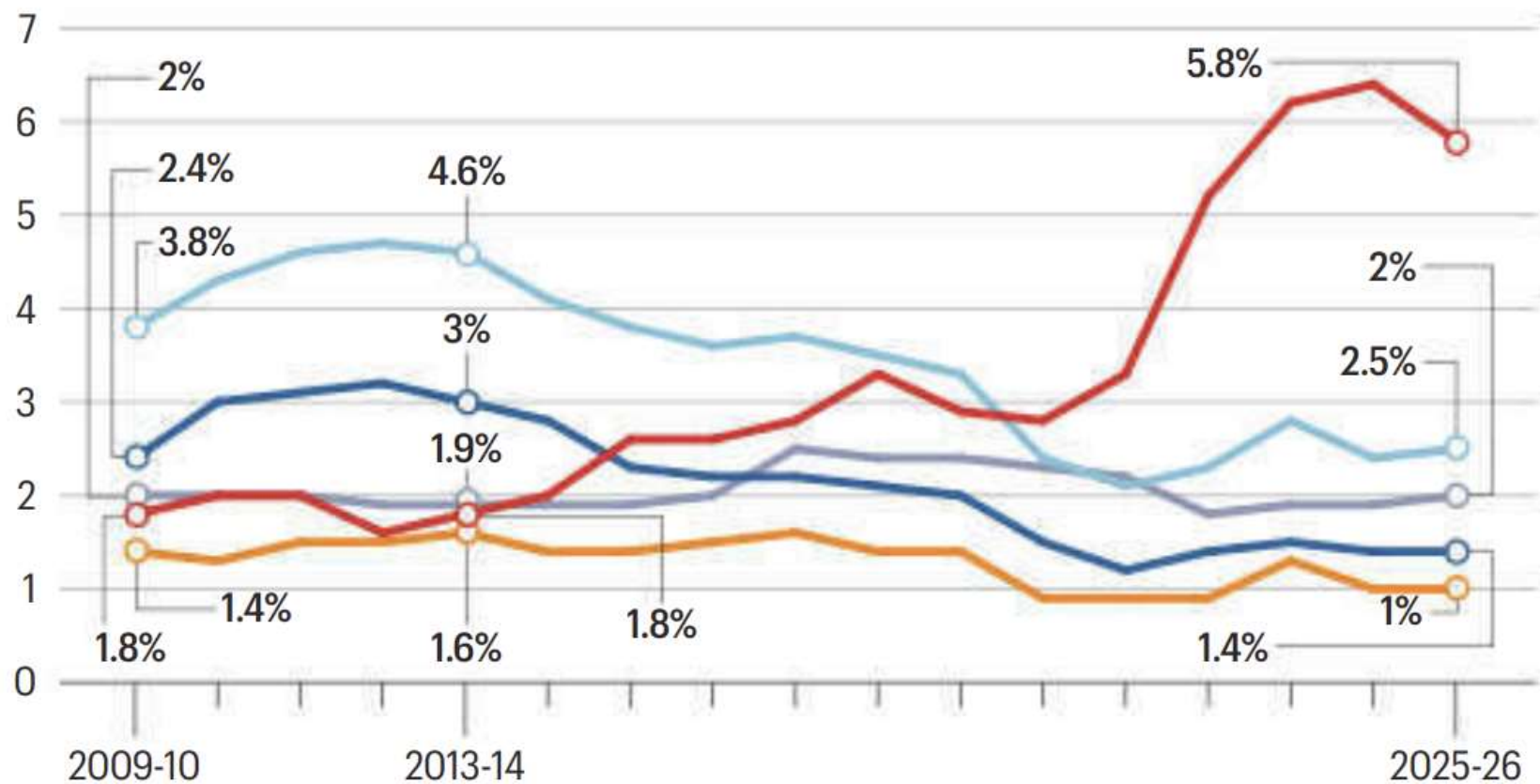
Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

2015-16	0.06%
2016-17	0.08%
2017-18	0.10%
2018-19	0.11%
2019-20	0.09%
2020-21	0.07%
2021-22	0.06%
2022-23	0.03%
2023-24	0.07%
2024-25	0.06%
2025-26	0.05%

• WHERE THE GOVERNMENT CHOSE TO SPEND

The chart & table show allocation to various ministries and departments as a % of total Union Budget

Ministry of Education* Department of School Education & Literacy Department of Higher Education Ministry of Health & Family Welfare Ministry of Road Transport & Highways



*EARLIER CALLED MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT; SOURCE: CMIE, INDIAN EXPRESS RESEARCH

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2021-22	0.06%
2022-23	0.03%
2023-24	0.07%
2024-25	0.06%
2025-26	0.05%

Aspect	Details
Main finding	Education's share in the Union Budget has fallen significantly since 2013–14.
Period analysed	2009–10 to 2025–26
Source of data	CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) using Union Budget data.
Method used	Comparison of each ministry's allocation as a percentage of the total Union Budget , not just the absolute amount.

Why use Budget Share instead of Absolute Amount?

The article explains that every year the Union Budget becomes larger because of:

- economic growth,
- inflation,
- increasing government expenditure.

Therefore, simply saying a ministry's budget has increased can be misleading.

Example

Year	Total Budget	Education Budget	Absolute Increase	Budget Share
Year 1	₹10 lakh crore	₹40,000 crore	—	4.0%
Year 2	₹20 lakh crore	₹60,000 crore	+₹20,000 crore	3.0%

Although the education budget increased in rupee terms, its **priority in the overall budget actually declined**.

Decline in Education Allocation

Ministry of Education

Year	Share of Union Budget
2013–14	4.6%
2025–26	2.5%

Decline

- approximately **46% reduction** in its share of the Union Budget.

School Education

Year	Share
2013–14	3.0%
2025–26	1.4%

School education has experienced one of the sharpest declines.

Higher Education

Year	Share
2013–14	1.6%
2025–26	1.0%

The article notes that higher education now receives only about **60% of the budget share** it had 12 years ago.

Skill Development

The article highlights that despite initiatives like **Skill India**, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has consistently received a very small share of the Union Budget.

Financial Year	Budget Share
2015–16	0.06%
2016–17	0.08%
2017–18	0.10%
2018–19	0.11%
2019–20	0.09%
2020–21	0.07%
2021–22	0.06%
2022–23	0.03%
2023–24	0.07%
2024–25	0.06%
2025–26	0.05%

Why is this important?

Education spending affects:

Area	Impact
School quality	Teacher recruitment, infrastructure, learning outcomes
Higher education	Universities, research, scholarships
Skill development	Employment readiness and vocational training
Innovation	Research and technological advancement
Human capital	Long-term economic productivity

Link with Current Issues

The article connects the budget trends to recent controversies such as:

- examination paper leaks,
- student protests,
- concerns about accountability in education.

It suggests that reducing the relative priority of education may have implications for the sector's quality and governance.

Indicator	Value
Education Ministry share (2013–14)	4.6%
Education Ministry share (2025–26)	2.5%
Road Transport share (2025–26)	5.8%
Skill Development share (2025–26)	0.05%
School Education share (2025–26)	1.4%
Higher Education share (2025–26)	1.0%

Word of the day

Zeitgeist:

the spirit of the time; the spirit characteristic of an age or generation

Synonyms: climate, outlook, spirit, trend

Usage: *In a very significant way, the protests captured the zeitgeist of the generation.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/zeitgeist

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /'tsaɪtgaɪst/

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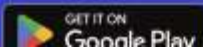


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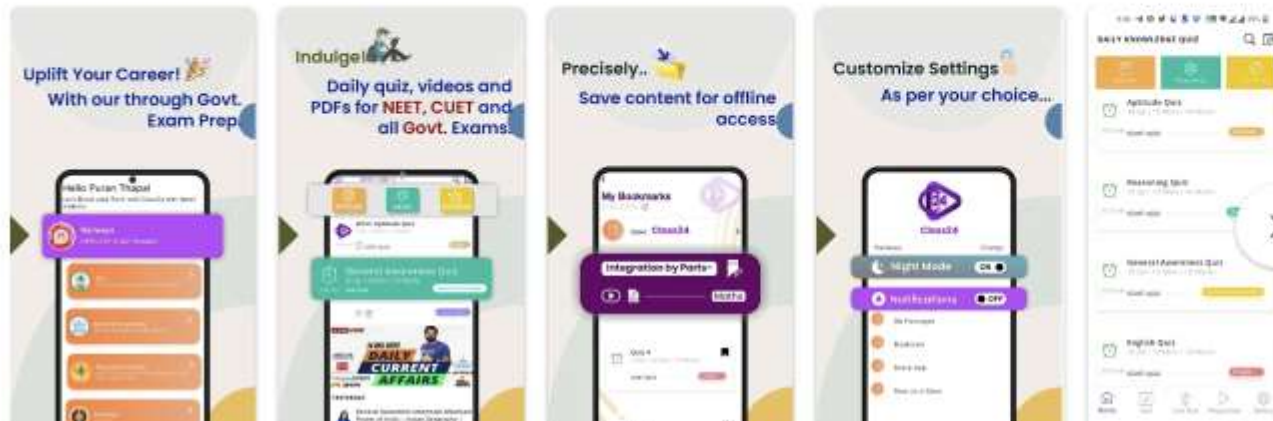
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