

IAS

THE



HINDU

# ANALYSIS

# Topics

1. FCRA Bill – expanding state control over civil society – Pg 8
2. Implementation complete, but workers still vulnerable – Pg 8
3. Lows of the Land – Pg 8
4. Should India incentivise larger families? – Pg 9
5. Why is Nicobar debating elections? – Pg 10

GS II

GS II / GS III

→ GS II

→ GS I / GS III

→ GS II

## Prelims :

1. France backs 'Make in India' – Pg 12
2. India likely to be invited for Hormuz security initiative – Pg 16
3. Indian textile sector witnessing investments – Pg 15
4. Centre lifts excise duty on higher ethanol blend petrol – Pg 15

## PIB

1. Horticultural Crop Area and Production
2. India and Nepal Launch Cross-Border Remittance Mechanism to Strengthen Bilateral Financial Connectivity
3. Oilseeds Kisan Mitra
4. 13<sup>th</sup> BRICS urbanisation forum
5. Network Survey Vehicles

# Basics of GEOGRAPHY THROUGH MAPS



Mukesh Jha



Monday ; Wednesday & Friday  
6pm to 7pm



How to USE ATLAS for UPSC? | The  
LAYERING Method for Maps, Geography & ...



Class 12<sup>th</sup> Indian Economy NCERT  
Starting 12<sup>th</sup> June 2026  
5 PM to 6 PM  
on Unacademy Platform



# FCRA Bill — expanding state control over civil society

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill, 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 25, 2026, is far more than a routine regulatory measure. While presented as a step towards greater transparency and national security, it significantly increases executive power, transforming the FCRA from a law regulating foreign funding into one that enables extensive state control over non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charitable trusts, and educational and religious institutions.

## From oversight to overreach

The current FCRA regime was already among the most stringent regulations governing civil society in any democracy. The 2020 amendments imposed strict restrictions: requiring all foreign contributions to pass through a single bank branch (State Bank of India) in New Delhi, reducing administrative expenditure limits from 50% to 20%, banning sub-granting to smaller organisations, and expanding suspension powers. These measures alone devastated thousands of NGOs, particularly smaller faith-based and charitable bodies serving marginalised groups.

The 2026 Bill goes much further. By introducing a new Chapter IIIA (and removing the previous Section 15) and replacing existing asset-management provisions, it creates a framework for the government to seamlessly vest organisational assets and properties without compensation or management. Its most troubling provision is the proposed Section 14B, which introduces automatic "cessation" of FCRA registration. An organisation could lose its registration not only if renewal is denied but also if it fails to apply on time or if renewal remains pending. This effectively allows institutions to be paralysed through procedural delays rather than proven misconduct, weakening due process and increasing executive discretion.

The gravest concern is Section 16A under the new Chapter IIIA. It states that when an FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered, or deemed to have ceased, all foreign contributions and assets derived from them automatically "provisionally vest" in a government-designated authority, without prior judicial review or independent adjudication. This means that a simple administrative decision can strip organisations of control over their funds and property. As cancellation under Section 14 can be based on broad and subjective grounds such as "public interest," organisations risk losing control of their assets even for minor, procedural, or disputed violations. Because cancellation under Section 14 triggers the application of Section 16A, organisations risk losing assets even for procedural, minor, or disputed breaches. The designated authority would then be empowered to manage, transfer, or dispose of these assets, with sale proceeds credited to the Consolidated Fund of India. The provision is particularly sweeping because it may cover assets funded both domestically and from abroad—potentially bringing schools, hospitals, orphanages, religious institutions, charitable organisations, and places



P. Wilson

Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and a Senior Advocate practising in the Supreme Court of India

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, raises concerns that asset confiscation powers could disrupt welfare services relied upon by thousands in India

of worship such as churches, mosques, and temples built over decades under government control. The powers granted to the Designated Authority are extraordinary. It can take control of assets, manage institutions, oversee finances, and alter operations in the vaguely defined "public interest," giving the executive wide discretion. If an organisation fails to secure restoration or re-registration within the prescribed period, the vesting becomes permanent. The Authority may then transfer or sell the assets, with the proceeds credited to the Consolidated Fund of India—effectively enabling executive confiscation through legal process.

This endangers not only the survival of organisations but also the essential services and infrastructure upon which communities depend. FCRA assets include land, buildings, vehicles, equipment, and unspent funds, raising the real possibility that institutions could be effectively shut down. Foreign donors primarily support Indian charitable organisations to aid vulnerable communities, promote education, improve public health, and advance other public-interest goals. These contributions help organisations deliver tangible societal benefits.

Seizing such funds into the Consolidated Fund based on weak or disputed allegations defeats the very purpose of these donations. The new provisions thus expose Indian organisations to the constant risk of state expropriation, endangering both donated funds and the assets they support. This framework establishes sweeping procedures for "provisional vesting" and "permanent vesting" of assets in a government-appointed "Designated Authority".

The amendments also deepen executive control during suspension and investigation. The amended Section 13 bars organisations from managing their assets without prior approval during suspension, effectively paralysing their operations. The revised Section 43 centralises enforcement by requiring Union government approval before any state agency can investigate FCRA violations. Combined with broader definitions of "key functionaries" and increased personal liability for office-bearers, the Bill risks creating a climate of fear that discourages civil society participation.

## Limited accountability

The 2026 Bill proposes abolishing Section 22, which currently deals with the disposal of assets of defunct or non-operational organisations. The law also lacks clear timelines for approving or rejecting FCRA licences, permissions, registrations, and renewals, leading to uncertainty and delays that can hinder projects dependent on foreign funding and disproportionately impact vulnerable communities. Often, reasons for cancellation are not publicly disclosed due to national security concerns, making it difficult for organisations to challenge such decisions. Cancellations or suspensions might occur due to procedural lapses, risking the shutdown of organisations serving communities.

The impact on minority communities,

especially Christians, is particularly worrying. Christian organisations run thousands of schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, tribal welfare bodies, and charitable trusts—many supported by ongoing funding from churches, diaspora groups, and humanitarian agencies. There are many such institutions in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya. It is a fact that minorities operate charitable organisations that mainly benefit the majority. Under Section 16A, these could face government takeover if their registration lapses, renewal is delayed, or cancellation procedures are initiated. Institutions such as long-established convent schools, colleges, mission hospitals, and orphanages face the risk of coming under government control simply due to procedural non-compliance. But the fact remains that the government is systematically targeting organisations one after another, and between 2014 and 2026, about 22,000 FCRA licences have been cancelled for no valid or credible reasons. It could be stated with concern that the government appears to be eyeing the properties of minorities, which in reality benefits the majority.

Cancellations of FCRA licences threaten ongoing efforts in child protection, immunisation, neonatal health, nutrition, early childhood education, parental involvement, youth skills development, and access to government schemes in affected regions. The sector contributes significantly to the economy—around 2% of GDP—with roughly four lakh to eight lakh individuals per organisation losing access to vital services due to revoked licences. According to the 2014 Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation report, civil society organisations generate 27 lakh jobs and 34 lakh full-time volunteers, surpassing public sector employment. A separate survey of 515 NGOs found that 47% are the main source of employment in more than half the localities where they operate. These amendments threaten not only the existence of organisations but also the infrastructure and community resources relied upon by millions.

## Constitutional rights under threat

Critics view the Bill as a serious threat to civil society and minority institutions. Its vague "public interest" standard could be used against organisations working on minority rights, tribal welfare, environmental protection, human rights, or public advocacy. The result may be a chilling effect, discouraging donors, trustees, and volunteers from supporting such organisations.

The Bill also raises constitutional concerns under Articles 14, 19(1)(c), 25, 26, 29, 30, and 300A. By concentrating broad powers in the executive, it risks undermining freedom of association, the autonomy of religious and educational institutions, and property rights.

Any regulation of foreign contributions must be accompanied by due process, independent oversight, and safeguards against arbitrary state action. Without such protections, the Bill risks becoming one of the most oppressive laws affecting civil society in modern India.

→ GS II

Civil Society Organisations & NGOs

27 lakhs

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 was introduced in Lok Sabha on March 25, 2026. The Bill seeks to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010. The Act regulates the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution by individuals, associations, and companies. Foreign contribution is the donation or transfer of any currency, security, or article (beyond a specified value) by a foreign source. Foreign sources include governments of foreign countries or their agencies, foreign companies, trusts, or societies, and citizens of foreign countries.

- **Vesting of foreign contribution and assets in certain cases:** Under the Act, certain persons must register with the central government for accepting foreign contribution. These include persons having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious, or social programme. Such persons may surrender the registration later. The Act also empowers the central government to cancel the registration on specified grounds. In cases of surrender or cancellation, the Act provides that foreign contribution and assets created out of it will vest in such authority as may be prescribed. Assets may be disposed of where a person ceases to exist.

The Bill adds that registration certificate will be deemed to have ceased if: (i) no application for renewal was made, (ii) renewal has been denied, or (iii) renewal is not obtained before expiry. In cases of cancellation, surrender, or ceasing of registration certificate, the Bill replaces the existing framework on management of foreign contribution and assets created out of foreign contribution. In such cases, foreign contribution and assets will vest provisionally in the Designated Authority notified by the central government. This will also cover assets created partly from foreign contribution. The Authority will supervise and maintain the assets.

- **Return of foreign contribution and assets if temporarily vested:** The Designated Authority may utilise foreign contribution to manage the assets and related activities. The Authority will return the unutilised contribution, and assets vested provisionally in it, upon renewal or restoration of registration, or issuance of fresh registration.
- **Utilisation of contribution and assets permanently vested:** The foreign contribution and assets will vest permanently in the Designated Authority: (i) if the concerned person fails to obtain a fresh registration or get the registration renewed or restored within a prescribed period, or (ii) where a person who was previously permitted to accept foreign contribution, ceases to exist or is rendered inoperative or defunct. The Designated Authority is required to apply the foreign contribution and assets permanently vested in it for public purposes. It may transfer such assets to ministries, departments, or agencies of the central, state, or local governments. It may also dispose assets through sale or other processes. Proceeds from disposal along with unutilised foreign contribution will be credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.
- **Duties of persons whose foreign contributions and assets are vested:** The Bill specifies certain duties of persons and their key functionaries whose foreign contribution and assets are vested. These include: (i) providing complete access of accounts, records, and properties for inspection to the Designated Authority, (ii) not transferring such assets without approval, and (iii) maintaining assets and carrying out activities under the supervision of the Designated Authority, and subject to terms and conditions specified by the Authority.
- **Appeals against orders of Authority:** Any person aggrieved by an order of the Designated Authority may appeal to the District Judge within 90 days.
- **Powers to exempt:** The central government may exempt certain persons from the provisions regarding vesting of foreign contribution and assets if necessary or expedient in public interest.
- **Prohibition on accepting foreign contribution:** Under the Act, certain persons are prohibited to accept foreign contribution. These include persons such as election candidates, political parties, judges, legislators, and news publishers. The prohibition also extends to associations or companies engaged in production or broadcast of news or current affairs programmes. The Bill expands this category to prohibit any "person" engaged in these activities.
- **Offences and penalties:** Contravening the Act or Rules under it is punishable with imprisonment up to five years, a fine, or both. The Bill reduces imprisonment term to up to one year. It adds that prior approval of the central government will be required to initiate an investigation for any offence under the Act.

# Existing FCRA Framework Already Stringent

- The 2020 FCRA amendments introduced:
  - ➔ Mandatory routing of foreign funds through a single SBI branch in New Delhi.
  - Reduction of administrative expenditure limits from 50% to 20%.
  - ➔ Restrictions on sub-granting of funds to smaller organisations.
  - ➔ Expanded powers to suspend NGO registrations.
- These provisions reportedly weakened many small NGOs and faith-based organisations working with marginalised communities.

# Shift from Regulation to State Control

- The 2026 Bill introduces a new Chapter IIIA and replaces existing asset-management provisions.
- According to the article, this transforms FCRA from a regulatory law into an instrument enabling government control over organisational assets and functioning.
- The Bill allows extensive intervention even in cases involving procedural lapses rather than proven wrongdoing.

# Automatic Cessation of Registration

- Proposed **Section 14B** introduces the concept of automatic "cessation" of FCRA registration.
- Registration can cease if:
  - Renewal is denied.
  - Renewal applications are delayed.
  - Organisations fail to apply within prescribed timelines.
- As a result, organisations may become inactive due to administrative delays rather than misconduct.
- Critics argue this weakens due process and increases bureaucratic discretion.

# Asset Vesting and Confiscation Concerns

- The most controversial provision is **Section 16A**.
- If an organisation's FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered, or deemed to have ceased:
  - Foreign contributions and assets derived from them automatically vest in a government-designated authority.
  - This can occur:
    - Without prior judicial review. ✓
    - Without independent adjudication.
- The designated authority can manage, transfer, or dispose of these assets. Sale proceeds are credited to the **Consolidated Fund of India**.





# Areas of Concern

- Many charitable institutions use foreign contributions to support:
  - Schools. ✓
  - Hospitals. ✓
  - Orphanages. ✓
  - Religious institutions. ✓
  - Community welfare programmes. ✓
- Assets such as land, buildings, vehicles, equipment, and funds could potentially come under government control.

# Expanded executive powers

- The Bill empowers a government-appointed **Designated Authority** with extensive powers.

The authority can:

- Take control of assets. ✓
  - Manage institutions. ✓
  - Oversee finances. ✓
  - Alter operations in the vaguely defined "public interest."
- Failure to secure restoration of registration within prescribed periods can lead to permanent vesting of assets.

## **Increased Government Oversight During Investigations**

- Amended provisions further strengthen executive control during suspension and investigation.
- Organisations may be prevented from managing their own assets without prior approval.

A world map in shades of blue and green, serving as a background for the text. The map shows the outlines of continents and oceans.

(Compliance burden)↑↑



Administrative cost has to be reduced.

# Implementation complete, but workers still vulnerable

**W**ith the notification of the rules for the four labour codes in May, the implementation framework for these codes is now complete. Trade unions and academics have raised serious objections to several provisions in the new labour codes, arguing that they are regressive and detrimental to the interests of workers. It has also taken nearly six years to operationalise the codes enacted during 2019-20. The codes are The Code on Wages, 2019, The Industrial Relations Code, 2020, The Code on Social Security, 2020 and The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020.

## Critical gaps

Rules essentially lay down the standard operating procedures (SoPs) for implementing an Act or Code. While they cannot contradict the provisions of the parent legislation, they become crucial where the law is broad or open-ended. Given the sustained opposition to several provisions in the four labour codes, it was expected that the rules would help moderate some of the contentious aspects. However, those expectations appear to have been belied.

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 formally introduced the concept of Fixed-Term Employment (FTE) into India's labour law framework, although such employment arrangements have been widely used for decades. However, the Code does not specify a minimum tenure or limit the number of contract renewals.

The rules could have addressed these gaps to mitigate potential adverse effects on workers. A minimum tenure (one year) could have prevented very short tenures which are detrimental to employees. Also, there could have been some restrictions in the number of times renewals can be allowed. Otherwise, there is a possibility that even regular positions become FTEs with



**Kingshuk Sarkar**

Professor of  
Economics and  
Public Policy at  
the Goa Institute  
of Management

Labour Code  
Rules leave  
workers'  
concerns  
unaddressed

unlimited renewals. Unfortunately, the rules remain silent on these important issues.

The Code on Wages (Central) Rules provide only a vague definition of the "floor wage" and do not clearly distinguish it from the minimum wage. While the Rules require consultation with State governments, they do not specify a detailed framework for such consultations, raising concerns that the process may remain largely symbolic. The Rules also fail to lay down clear principles for fixing minimum wages. As a result, the convention of treating a four-member family as comprising three consumption units is likely to continue. This effectively perpetuates gender bias, as an adult female is assigned a weight of 0.8 compared with 1.0 for an adult male.

The Rules further provide that the hourly wage shall be calculated by dividing the daily wage by eight. Conceptually, this is a flawed approach. An hourly wage should not merely be a pro-rata derivation of the daily wage, as workers may not be able to find work for the remaining hours of the day. Internationally, minimum hourly wages are often determined independently of daily wage rates. This issue is particularly important in India, given the large number of domestic workers and the likely expansion of gig and platform-based work in future.

## Gig workers remain vulnerable

The Social Security Code (Central) Rules make no attempt to clarify the employment relationship in the gig economy. Gig and platform workers continue to be treated as self-employed and remain part of the unorganised workforce. The Rules are also silent on the mandatory gratuity insurance envisaged under the Code. Such insurance could protect workers against non-payment of gratuity by employers. However, the Rules fail to specify the modalities for implementing this safeguard, leaving an

important worker protection mechanism undefined. The Industrial Relations Code (Central) Rules provide that a sole registered trade union must have at least 30% membership to be recognised. This means that registration alone does not guarantee recognition. In large establishments, smaller or newly formed unions may find it difficult to meet this threshold, further weakening their ability to represent workers at a time when the bargaining power of trade unions has already been declining for decades. Notably, the 30% threshold does not appear in the Code itself. The Rules also fail to provide further clarity on the engagement and renewal of fixed-term employees, leaving significant scope for ambiguity and potential misuse.

## Missing safeguards for workers

The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (Central) Rules set out safety and welfare provisions for the various occupations covered under the Code. However, certain occupation-specific welfare measures, such as housing and medical facilities for plantation workers, are absent. The Rules also do not specify the activities for which contract labour may be engaged, nor do they clearly distinguish between core and non-core activities.

This omission is significant, given the growing informalisation of the labour market through the use of contract labour in core operations. The lack of clarity on what constitutes a core activity leaves considerable scope for ambiguity and misuse.

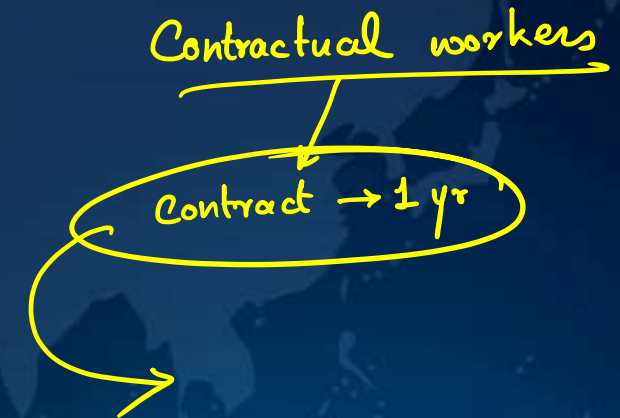
Broadly speaking, certain open-ended provisions contested by the trade unions and academics, could have been moderated to a certain extent while framing the Rules. But, as it is evident now, that did not happen. It is yet another missed opportunity and a further cause for concern for the country's working class.

# Labour Codes now fully operational

- With the notification of the rules for the four labour codes in May, the implementation framework of India's labour reforms is now complete.
- The four labour codes are:
  - Code on Wages, 2019
  - Industrial Relations Code, 2020
  - Code on Social Security, 2020
  - Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code, 2020

# 1. Concerns Regarding Fixed-Term Employment (FTE)

- The Industrial Relations Code formally incorporates **Fixed-Term Employment (FTE)** into labour law.
- Although FTE arrangements have existed in practice for decades, the Code:
  - Does not prescribe a minimum tenure.
  - Does not limit the number of contract renewals.
- As a result:
  - Workers may face repeated short-term contracts.
  - Employers may avoid offering permanent employment.





## 2. Weaknesses in Wage Determination

- The Code on Wages Rules provide only a vague definition of a **floor wage**.
- There is insufficient distinction between:
  - Floor wage.
  - Minimum wage.
- Although consultation with States is mandated, no detailed consultation framework is provided.
- The Rules fail to establish transparent principles for fixing minimum wages.

### 3. Gender Bias in Wage Calculations

- The methodology for determining wage requirements continues to assume a four-member family consisting of three consumption units.
- Under this approach:
  - An adult male is assigned a weight of 1.0.
  - An adult female is assigned a weight of 0.8.

# 4. Problems with Hourly Wage Calculation

- The Rules calculate hourly wages by dividing the daily wage by eight.
- This approach is conceptually flawed because:
  - Workers may not obtain employment for the remaining hours of the day.
  - Hourly wages should be determined independently rather than derived mechanically from daily wages.
- This issue is particularly significant given:
  - The growth of domestic work.
  - Expansion of gig work and platform-based employment.

$$\frac{\text{Daily wage}}{8}$$

## 5. Gig and Platform Workers Remain Unprotected

- The Social Security Code Rules do not clarify the employment status of gig and platform workers.
- These workers continue to be treated as self-employed rather than employees.
- Consequently:
  - They remain outside many labour protections.
  - Their bargaining power remains limited.
- The Rules also fail to specify mechanisms for implementing gratuity-related protections envisaged in the Code.

# 6. Occupational Safety and Contract Labour Concerns

- The OSHWC Rules provide general safety and welfare provisions.
- However, several occupation-specific welfare measures are absent, including:
  - ↳ Housing facilities.
  - ↳ Medical facilities for plantation workers.
- The Rules also fail to clearly define:
  - ↳ Activities for which contract labour can be employed.
    - The distinction between core and non-core activities.
- Such ambiguity may facilitate increased use of contract labour in regular operations.

Contractual.  
↳ lack of training



# Practice Question (10 marks)

- 'India's labour codes need to facilitate the ease of work.' Elaborate in the light of implementation of new labour codes

Intro →

Body →

worker centric

Conclusion →

## Lowes of the land

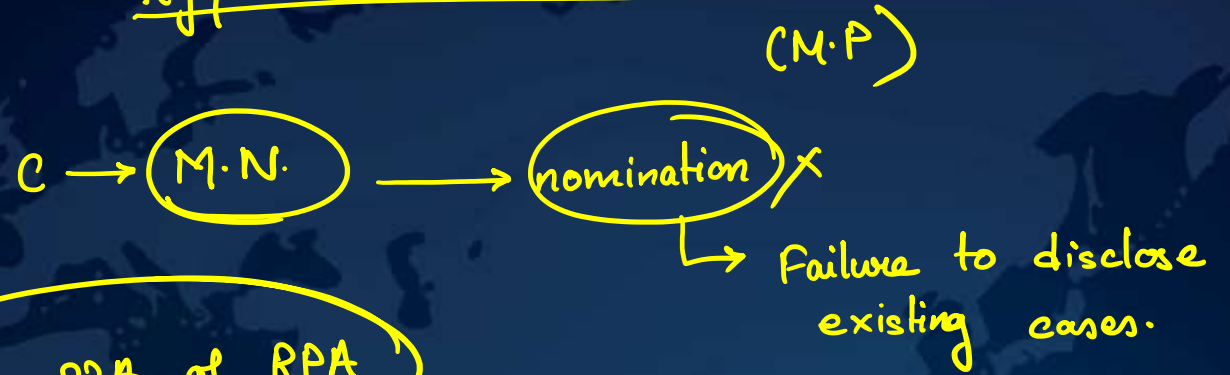
The rejection of the papers of Congress  
Rajya Sabha candidate is fraudulent

The rejection of Congress leader Mee-nakshi Natarajan's nomination for the Rajya Sabha election from Madhya Pradesh raises questions of institutional integrity and procedural fairness, going beyond the fate of a single candidate. The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the matter on Friday. Meanwhile, all three BJP candidates have been declared elected unopposed, raising further questions on the neutrality and fairness of the process. Ms. Natarajan's nomination was rejected by the Returning Officer (RO) following objections that she had failed to disclose a pending criminal case in Hyderabad in her election affidavit. As the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) in-charge of Telangana, she was named as one of the respondents in a private complaint filed by a former Telugu Desam Party corporator before the court of the Additional Metropolitan Magistrate, Hyderabad, in 2025. The complaint was not even against Ms. Natarajan; it was against another Congress leader for alleged inappropriate behaviour and criminal intimidation, and she was mentioned in the petition for allegedly not taking appropriate action against the leader. There is no criminal FIR by the Telangana police against Ms. Natarajan. Unlike a conventional police case, a private complaint originates directly before a court. The court had issued notices to the persons named in the complaint, including Ms. Natarajan.

The RO's decision to use this as grounds for the rejection of the nomination reeks of extreme arbitrariness, and even a conspiracy. The law regarding the disclosure of cases is unambiguous. Section 33A of the Representation of the People Act requires disclosure only of those cases that carry a punishment of two years or more and, above all, only of those cases in which charges have been framed. Framing of charges is a judicial step, which follows the filing of a charge sheet. The RO's position that material facts had been concealed and the nomination papers were incomplete is not merely a misinterpretation of the law, but an insult to common sense. Going by that logic, a candidate could be disqualified for failing to list notices of traffic violations too. The disclosure regime has been designed to ensure transparency regarding candidates' criminal antecedents and pending cases. What makes Ms. Natarajan's case starkly arbitrary is that in the same election cycle, another candidate was asked by the RO to amend the affidavits to meet mandatory requirements. The Election Commission of India has the sacred constitutional duty of ensuring free and fair elections. It is failing in that duty, damaging democracy in the process. The capture of a Rajya Sabha seat by the ruling BJP in complete disregard for the law is a severe setback for election integrity.



## Rajya Sabha elections



## Section 33A of RPA

↳ Only of those cases.

↳ Charges have been framed

→ Punishment of 2+ yrs.



# Should India incentivise bigger families?

PARLEY

For decades, Indian policymakers have encouraged population control, with the familiar slogan of 'Hum Do, Hamare Do' (We two, our two). However, the recent drop in India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) – the average number of children a woman would have in her lifetime – has now dropped to 1.9, below the replacement rate of 2.1, with some southern States seeing their TFR drop to 1.3. Last month, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu announced cash incentives of ₹30,000 and ₹40,000 to women having their third and fourth child respectively, in a bid to reverse that trend. Several other southern States have indicated that they also see the benefits of boosting population growth, though not through a cash payout. Should India incentivise bigger families? Aparajita Chattopadhyay and Neelanjan Sircar discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Priscilla Jebaraj.

**Why are policymakers considering a change in the approach to population control?**

**Aparajita Chattopadhyay:** After a long struggle with family planning since independence, our fertility has started declining. There are State-level variations, but overall fertility now is 1.9. It is fine, and India can grow in this way for maybe 40 to 50 years. But reversal of fertility trends cannot be a policy driven thing. It is deeply rooted socio-culturally and is an individualistic choice. You cannot tell a group of women to increase fertility because I am giving you money. It has never happened in that way, even in European or other Asian countries.

**The political implications are the immediate trigger for this policy. Is the threat of future parliamentary delimitation a reason to reverse fertility decline?**

**Neelanjan Sircar:** There has been a lot of discussion about the growth rate of southern States as delimitation is on the horizon. But we need to look beyond pure politics because any growth spurred by these incentives is unlikely to help in the short-term. The reality is, if there's a delimitation exercise happening in the next couple of years, you're not going to dramatically change the fertility rate by then.

Another reason this is being considered is because of the political economy of States with a working population that may be shrinking. But this is a ham-handed approach. Social and demographic transformations are complex phenomena, and go hand in hand with a certain level of economic development. Historically,



Children playing on the swings near the outskirts of the Amaravati capital region, amid the summer heat, in Andhra Pradesh on May 8. G.N. RAM

with a certain level of social and economic development, the fertility rate drops.

Now, there's a cash incentive at play to encourage people to have more children. For a wealthy family, this incentive is simply not enough to invest in another child. But for a poor family, perhaps it is. Here, you are not just increasing the fertility rate in a State, you are also changing other social attributes in the population, in terms of who is going to be able to respond to such an incentive and who will not. It's not as simple as saying we've created a working age population because you've fundamentally changed the composition of the working age population once you've introduced an economic incentive.

**What has been the international experience of attempting to boost population growth?**

**AC:** Incentivisation can help relatively lower income groups, and this has happened in many European countries. For example, in Poland, there was a short-term boost in birth rate only among the lower income demographics. In Sweden and France, tax incentives changed things for a short span, but it was very difficult to sustain that reversal, and the same thing happened with Singapore, Japan, South Korea.

Nowadays, the entire world is going through a polycrisis shock. There is a lot of instability in geopolitics, the economy, and the climate. Moreover, there are both altruistic and individualistic attitudes to fertility. The younger generation is quite aspirational. They need their prosperity – a good job and savings. So, you cannot ask them to go and have more children.

Until women confirm that there is security in every possible sense, they will not reverse the fertility rate because there are plenty of tangible and intangible costs for a woman or for the



Social and demographic transformations are complex phenomena, and go hand in hand with economic development. Historically, with a certain level of social and economic development, the fertility rate drops

NEELANJAN SIRCAR

society to have an additional child. So at this juncture, I believe that incentivisation may not work. In India, especially, it is not required because we have a huge population base, so there may not actually be a scarcity of working age labourers if you improve their skills, give them better job opportunities, improve the savings and investment scenario, and promote the silver ageing economy.

**Falling fertility rates are an uneven phenomenon. What does this portend for Indian federalism?**

**NS:** Obviously there are some immediate questions about converting populations into political representation through delimitation. But another variable would be that as we see differences in fertility rates, we're also going to see very different demographic profiles of States. And we know that the youth, the middle-aged, and the elderly all vote differently. They're in different stages of life, so they have different economic preferences in terms of what a government should be investing in, for instance, pensions versus manufacturing jobs versus childcare. So we're going to see very different political economy choices.

**AC:** With regard to Andhra Pradesh, if you look at the recent NFHS statistics, there are a number of areas, instead of cash incentives, where they can spend money in order to get lower middle class people to reproduce more. Almost one in four women aged 20 to 24 got married before turning 18. Only 30% of households have women who own any assets, and only 48% of women work. If Andhra Pradesh thinks that they're demographically advanced and can behave like Europe to reverse fertility trends, then the women in the workforce should be at 80%.

In European countries, the motherhood penalty is almost negligible. There is enough parental leave, and workforce participation is very high. So only when your economy and social security is perfect can you think of having a reversal of fertility trends.

**What are some key findings of the**

**Longitudinal Ageing Study in India?**

**AC:** By 2050, 20% or more of the Indian population will be aged 60 and above, so we have to prepare ourselves, especially with regard to healthcare costs. We need tremendous investment in geriatric care, basic primary healthcare, better pension schemes, and better savings schemes. We also need to have communities for elderly living. But we still have a huge population base. Don't mix up the percentage with the number base. We can reduce the working age population so long as we have a very highly skilled population who earn well and will pay for these costs.

**If population growth incentives don't work, then lower-fertility rate States may increase their working age population through migration from other States. What is the political fallout of that?**

**NS:** Demographic anxieties have been showing up in one State after another. Even in a poorer State like West Bengal, there are demographic anxieties vis-a-vis Bangladesh. As for why this phenomenon happens, these are labour market vacancies. These are populations which have achieved a certain level of development, and yet the economy requires some people willing to do manual work, at a lower wage, in the sun. This is not a problem that can be solved by simply having more children. It is unlikely that demographic anxieties can be reduced as a function of the economic structure.

Migration is an economic phenomenon that is almost independent of the fertility rate, given what the economic condition of these States might be. The people who are being birthed there are very unlikely to be willing to do those jobs that people coming from north India are doing today in south India.

It boggles the mind that somebody is trying to reverse what is a very standard social phenomenon and demographic trend at this stage of development. I understand that there are challenges in Europe where countries are well below replacement rates. But this entire debate is bizarre for the very simple reason that there are so many things the government could be spending this kind of money on which would actually address the needs of an ageing population and an underemployed population. This is a very peculiar policy decision.



To listen to the full interview  
Scan the code or go to the link  
[www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)

Why the debate around larger families?

TFR  
1.9

2.1

Delimitation

1.3 - 1.6

→ Declining pop<sup>n</sup>.

Decline in labour force

cash incentives

[Economically developed regions] ←

↳ (Fertility Rate) ↓↓

- Child care facilities
- Better workplaces
- Quality & cheap education.
- Nutritional support

# Why is Nicobar debating elections?

Why are Nicobarese tribal councils wary of the administration's proposed election rules? How are Nicobarese leaders chosen today, and what changes do the draft rules propose? Why does the administration want formal elections for tribal councils? How could the proposed rules change Nicobarese self-governance?

## EXPLAINER

Abhinav Lakshman

### The story so far

The centrally administered Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is planning to introduce elections, as they are conducted in the rest of India, to the Nicobarese tribal community's system of self-governance in the archipelago. This includes measures such as the definition of constituencies, the preparation of electoral rolls, and the reservation of seats and leadership positions for women in the community's tribal councils. This move has led to urgent discussions amongst existing tribal councils of the Nicobarese about how this might bureaucratise the governance they have been practising. Some have also suspected that it could be intended to have tribal councils that might be more favourable to the Union government's interests there, especially in Great Nicobar, where the current Nicobarese leadership has been opposing the Centre's \$90,000 crore container port, airport, and tourist-township project.

### What do the draft rules propose?

The draft Andaman and Nicobar Islands Tribal Councils (Preparation of Electoral Rolls and Conduct of Elections) Rules, 2026, was notified by the district administration on May 15 this year and prescribes the exact procedure and rules for conducting 5-yearly elections to the Village Councils and Tribal Councils. The draft rules provide for conducting elections, the structure of the new representative system, the manner in which seats and constituencies are to be defined, the rules for candidature, nomination, and withdrawal, their duties and responsibilities, and the broader administrative set-up for conducting these elections.

The proposed structure involves Nicobarese villagers electing five to nine Captains for each village and directly voting for the position of the Chief Captain of each Island Tribal Council. The First Captains of each village of a particular island are to vote for the position of the Vice-Chief Captain of the Island Tribal Council, and this Island Tribal Council would include the Chief Captain, the Vice-Chief Captain, and all First Captains of the island.

These draft rules have been notified under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Tribal Councils) Regulation, a Presidential regulation promulgated in 2009 with the specific intent to bring autonomous self-governance to the Nicobarese community. Even though this Regulation provided the statutory language to set up the Village Council and Tribal Council structure, a key feature of this Regulation gave the district administration through the Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner) an absolute and unilateral veto over any decision of the councils, if they posed a threat of injury or "annoyance" to the public or might "lead to a breach of peace".

Since the 2009 Regulation was passed, there have been several attempts at notifying Draft Rules under it, the latest one in 2020. The past iterations of the draft have often been circulated amongst tribal council leaders, but the leadership has not been able to successfully communicate the essence of these rules and procedures to the community at large.



The Tribal Welfare Department of the A&N administration has said that it will wait till June 15 for suggestions and objections, but never

Even though the Nicobarese community has been participating in Lok Sabha elections, according to officials from the Office of the CEO, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, this would be the first time a system of constituency-wise representative leadership structure will be implemented for Nicobarese self-governance if the Draft Rules are finalised.

### How do the Nicobarese tribal councils function today?

The Nicobarese community, a designated Scheduled Tribe with a total population of about 20,000 across the Nicobar group of islands, is traditionally represented by Tribal Councils that have been established over the last five to six decades. Each group of inhabited islands in the Nicobar has its own Tribal Council. Under this Tribal Council structure lies the village leadership, which comprises three Captains per village, headed by the First Captain and assisted by the Second and Third Captains. Including the Tribal Council of Little and Great Nicobar, seven Tribal Councils represent the Nicobarese community in islands like Car Nicobar, Narcovery, Kamorta, Tezesa, and others.

Since at least the mid-1870s, experts and scholars have observed that the Nicobarese have been picking village captains through adult franchise. The concept of captaincy as village leadership first emerged in the 19th Century, when the Nicobarese who would go on board passing ships of colonial empires to negotiate began calling themselves captains. The British colonisers were, however, the first to start legitimising the captaincy structure as representative leadership of the community for their own administrative advantage towards the end of the 19th Century.

This structure eventually developed into a supplement to the social structure of large jank families, often referred to as Tribes, that could become a formal channel of communication with the government.

The idea of the tribal council, however, emerged only in the 1990s to facilitate and ease the community's entry into government developmental activities, specifically in relation to a Central government scheme of the time for poverty alleviation. Today, the Nicobar district says that the Village leadership and the tribal councils have become "the

link between the Local Administration and the tribal people of the island... most of the developmental schemes are being implemented through their only".

### How are leaders currently chosen in Nicobarese communities?

Even though authorities in the Nicobar district administration have maintained that under the current system, village captains are usually elected every four years, Anthropologist and community leader Aniruddha Joshi has told The Hindu that "there is actually not much documentation on how exactly the leadership of the existing tribal councils operate".

A senior leader of the Tribal Council in Great Nicobar Island explained that elections for Captains and Tribal Council chairperson are held whenever the community feels the need for it. This leader, who is also the First Captain of his village on Great Nicobar Island, elaborated, "For example, the last time I was elected Captain was maybe around 23 years ago. There is a tradition in our community to get together for a village meeting. All residents of the village are present at this meeting".

The villagers then nominate names for the Captains of the village through popular consensus. These names are then put on a ballot paper. "We make the ballot papers and print them out ourselves, we appoint a polling officer from among us to conduct the ballot, and the person with the most votes becomes First Captain." He added that similarly, the Tribal Council on GN has been choosing the Chairperson by popular consensus, but that it had been decades since there was an election to this position.

Villagers mostly think about candidates' level of education, fluency in Hindi (the language of government officials), "bravery" (an indicator of exposure to the world outside the islands), and "smartness" (the ability to deal appropriately with officials and outsiders, according to R. Venkat Ramanujan, Simronjit Singh & Ardi Van QOG). What Ramanujan et. al. noted, however, was that even though the Captains and Council were elected, "decisions were taken after popular consultation, usually through community meetings, and the tribal council did not have unilateral decision-making powers. Consequently, the captains were neither

seen as lawmakers nor as "leaders" balancing social and political concerns."

### Why are the proposed changes causing concern?

Tribal Council leaders who have spoken to The Hindu about the implications of the new Draft Rules said that the proposed structure is largely being seen as something that would disrupt their traditional ways of perceiving governance. The tribal council leader from Great Nicobar said, "We have been using this way of governing our villages for generations. We hold elections through consensus when needed, and our traditional ways of living are so well integrated into how we oversee the island and villages. This looks like it will turn all of this into an office job that we will have to do in addition to the lives we live on the islands."

Meanwhile, Mr. Joshi has noted that there is a real chance that an attempt to notify the Rules has come now in light of the opposition the government is facing from the Tribal Council on GN, even though he acknowledged that systemic problems of opacity have riddled the existing systems of Tribal Councils and Village Captaincy. "For instance, in several Island Tribal Councils, it remains unclear when the Chairperson was last elected and what kind of authority they wield," he said.

But experts like Mr. Joshi, who have worked with the government on engaging with the indigenous communities of the A&N, have doubted whether the entire Nicobarese community in the islands will have the time and resources to understand the Draft Rules as they have been notified, the content of the Regulation under which they will be implemented, and the implications of introducing such a system for their village-level governance.

The Tribal Welfare Department of the A&N administration has said that it will wait till June 15 for suggestions and objections, after which a final version may be notified. While the Tribal Councils of Nicobar are yet to hand in a formal objection or suggestions, the Congress party in A&N has already objected to them and called for their withdrawal, primarily citing the lack of recognition for the Tribes system and the lack of consultation with the community before bringing this draft.

## THE GIST

➤ Draft rules propose formal elections for Nicobarese Village and Tribal Councils, including constituencies, voter rolls, and reservations for women.

➤ Traditional governance is consensus based, with village captains chosen through community meetings and locally conducted ballots rather than a fixed bureaucratic electoral system.

➤ Tribal leaders fear the proposed electoral system could bureaucratise their traditional governance structure and alter existing decision-making processes.

# Context

- The administration of the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands** has proposed a formal electoral framework for the Nicobarese tribal councils.
- The proposal seeks to introduce elections similar to those conducted elsewhere in India, including:
  - • Delimitation of constituencies.
  - • Preparation of electoral rolls.
  - • Reservation of seats.
  - • Formal voting procedures.

# Present Condition

- The Nicobarese are a [Scheduled Tribe population] spread across approximately 30,000 people inhabiting the Nicobar Islands.
- Their traditional governance system is based on **Tribal Councils**, which have existed for decades.
- The current institutional framework derives from:
  - ↳ Tribal customs and community practices.
  - ↳ Administrative recognition under the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956 (ANPATR)**.
  - ↳ A specific regulation promulgated in 2009.
  - ↳ The councils enjoy substantial autonomy in local governance.



# Traditional Selection of Leaders

- Leadership selection in Nicobar is not based on formal electoral competition.
- Instead, leaders emerge through:
  - Community consultations.
  - Consensus-building.
  - Village meetings.
- Village Captains traditionally derive legitimacy from social acceptance rather than electoral victory.

# Draft Proposal

- **The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Tribal Councils (Preparation of Electoral Rolls and Conduct of Elections) Rules, 2026**, notified on May 15, lay down procedures for:
  - ↳ Conducting elections to village and tribal councils.
  - ↳ Defining constituencies and voter eligibility.
  - ↳ Nomination and withdrawal of candidates.
  - ↳ Reservation of seats for women.
  - ↳ Duties and responsibilities of elected representatives.

# Proposed Structure of Tribal Councils

- Each village would elect:
  - A **Chief Captain.** ✓
  - A **Vice-Chief Captain.** ✓
  - Several **First Captains.** ✓
- These village representatives would together form the **Island Tribal Council.**
- The Island Tribal Council would consist of:
  - Chief Captain. ✓
  - Vice-Chief Captain. ✓
  - First Captains from villages across the island.
- The objective is to establish a constituency-based representative governance structure.

# Concerns and upsides

Competition.

Consensus

Tribal customs can  
be ignored

Factionalism

Erosion of Autonomy

Dev. requirements

→ Transparency

→ Administration → efficient.



# Prelims Bits

# France backs 'Make in India' in defence, signals new model for Rafale deal

**Saurabh Trivedi**  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France for the G7 Summit, French diplomatic sources on Thursday said the nation's future defence cooperation with India, including the proposed Rafale fighter jet deal, will be aligned with the 'Make in India' initiative and based on an equal partnership.

France has reiterated its commitment to India's 'Make in India' programme in the defence sector, signalling that the proposed procurement of 114 Rafale fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF) would be structured differently from previous defence deals.

During the visit on June 13-14, Mr. Modi is scheduled to hold bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the summit.

India is currently ad-



Narendra Modi will hold bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the G7 Summit. FILE PHOTO

vancing a mega defence acquisition programme, estimated at around ₹3.25 lakh crore, for 114 Rafale fighter aircraft from the IAF.

According to French diplomatic sources, the proposed collaboration is being envisioned as a partnership based on co-development and industrial cooperation rather than a traditional client-vendor arrangement.

"The defence programmes developed jointly by France will be fully

aligned with India's 'Make in India' requirements," a source said. The sources stressed that the partnership was based on an "equal-to-equal" approach.

Civil nuclear energy is expected to feature prominently in discussions between Mr. Macron and Mr. Modi. French officials expressed optimism about the prospects of enhanced cooperation in the nuclear sector, citing recent legislative reforms in India.

G7 summit

# 'India likely to be invited to join Hormuz security initiative'

**Saurabh Trivedi**  
**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron at the G7 Summit, France has proposed a broader maritime security partnership with India, including participation in a multinational initiative aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

French diplomatic sources said here on Thursday discussions between the two leaders are expected to cover a wide range of issues, including defence cooperation, maritime security, military hardware and developments in West Asia.

**Discussions between Modi and Macron are expected to cover a wide range of issues: diplomatic sources**

According to the sources, France is working with a group of partner nations to ensure maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz amid rising regional tensions.

India is expected to be among the countries invited to join the initiative. The sources also revealed that leaders from India, the United States, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are expected to participate in a West Asia-focused meeting on the margins of the G7

Summit.

Briefing the media about Prime Mr. Modi's upcoming travel plans for France and Slovakia, Secretary (West) Sibi George of the Ministry of External Affairs said when Mr. Modi and Mr. Macron meet, "All issues of interest – global issues – including the developments in West Asia will be discussed."

Hinting at the French proposal on working with a group of partner countries for the Strait of Hormuz, he said "new announcements being made by various sides" will be discussed as well.

Mr. George further said that defence-related announcements will be made during Mr. Modi's visit to Slovakia during June 14-16.

France

India  
U.S  
Qatar  
Saudi Arabia  
U.A.E

West Asia security meeting

# Indian textile sector witnessing revival of investments

M. Soundariya Preetha  
COIMBATORE

For the textile and clothing industry, the last quarter of FY26 and the first quarter of the current financial year have seen growth in demand, triggering investments, according to industry officials.



Textile mills are said to be investing in modernisation and expansion.

"After 2022, the industry saw demand picking up across the textile value chain from January to mid-May. There is a slowdown in demand now after withdrawal of the import duty on cotton. We hope the situation will stabilise in a month or so," said K. Selvaraju, secretary general, the Southern India Mills Association.

"All the good performers are investing now, expanding capacities. Investments are not decided based on the performance of two or three months. For larger industries, the investments were planned at least seven or eight months before. They are looking at long-term growth," added Chandrima Chatterjee, Secretary General, Confederation of Indian Textile Industry.

## Higher yarn exports

Yarn exports from October 2025 to March 2026 were higher compared with the same period the previous year in quantity. Export of fabrics picked up and then saw a slow down. Similarly, yarn price spike did have an impact on garments and made-ups for a few weeks. Now, fall in cotton prices again led to demand drop, Mr. Selvaraju said.

"When the market revives, it takes about three months for the entire supply chain to benefit. Cotton

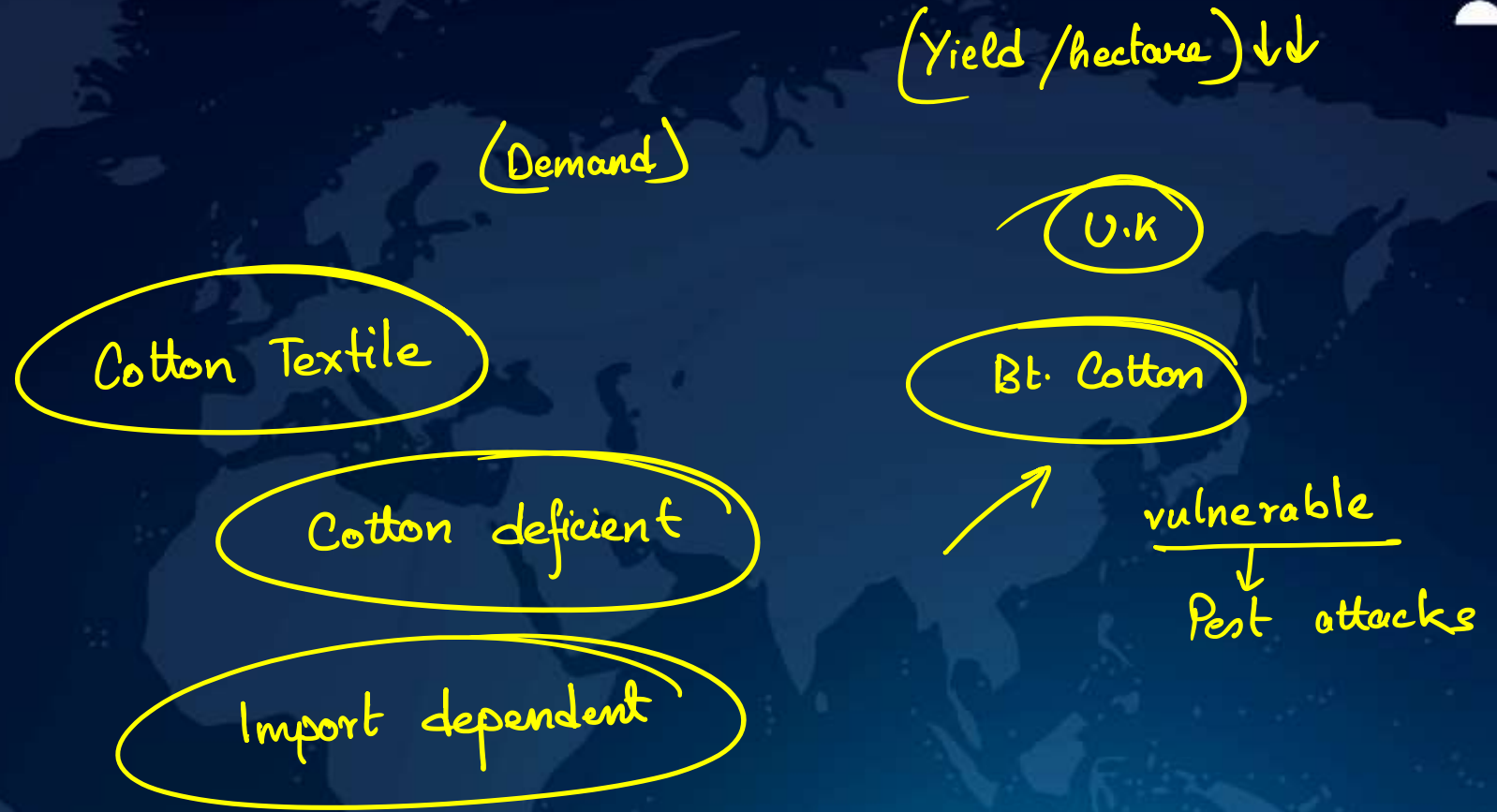
imports have crossed 40 lakh bales between October 2025 and May 2026. Another 15-20 lakh bales are expected to come in by the end of September. Cotton prices crossed ₹75,000 a candy and are dropping now. This has led to demand slowdown. Everyone is waiting to see how much the prices will fall. The situation will be clear in the next few weeks," added Mr. Selvaraju.

Meanwhile, textile mills are said to be investing in both modernisation and expansion projects though the exact investment data is not available.

## More automation

Some of the mills are investing to make value added yarns and some others modernising adopting more automation, said industry sources.

Implementation of the Free Trade Agreement with the U.K. is expected to bring in more orders for garments and made-ups. Another \$10 billion increase in exports will support the entire textile value chain. However, the West Asia war and uncertainties in the U.S. tariff are of concern, sources said.



# Centre lifts excise duty on higher ethanol-blend petrol

Union government exempts E22, E25, E27, and E30 variants from central excise duty; clarifies that the latest reduction does not indicate anything on rolling out higher blends

Saptaparno Ghosh  
NEW DELHI

Aiming to popularise the uptake of bio-fuels in the country, the Union government late on Wednesday removed central excise duty on petrol blended with higher quantum of ethanol. Following the move, petrol blended with ethanol at 22%, 25%, 27% and 30% would be exempted from central excise duties.

In a statement, the government clarified that the latest reduction did not indicate anything on rolling out higher blends.

“This is a preliminary prerequisite for eventually introducing higher blends, but doesn’t convey anything about roll out of higher blends as of now as that will only be done after extensive testing and consultation,” the government stated.

The government clari-



**In the pipeline:** The move is a preliminary prerequisite for eventually introducing higher blends, the government stated. ANI

fied that the exemption specifically concerned the blending activity of ethanol with petrol, which is essentially a manufacturing activity. The objective is to avert the possibility of a dual levy.

“Petrol bears excise duty and ethanol bears GST at their respective stages. When the two are blended, the resulting product may attract excise duty once again on the full quantity,”

the Centre clarified.

“For ethanol blends of petrol up to 20%, excise duty on the blended petrol was exempted by the Ministry of Finance. The exemption ensures that the duties already paid are not charged a second time on the blend,” it added.

The gazette notification comes days after India formally launched the E85 variant of petrol, that is 85% ethanol blended with

15% gasoline, on June 5.

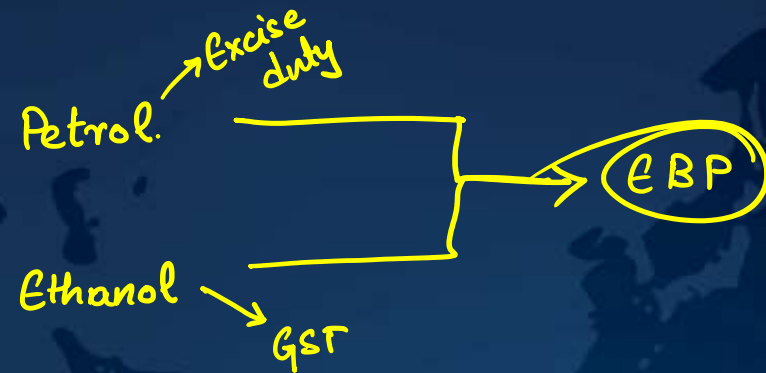
Industry associations across the ethanol blending value chain have welcomed the move to remove excise levy.

C.K. Jain, President of the Grain Ethanol Manufacturers Association (GEMA) said that the move indicated a “strong signal of policy stability and long-term commitment”.

“It is essential for attracting fresh investments across the ethanol value chain, including production capacity, logistics, storage, fuel retailing and flex-fuel mobility solutions,” he said.

Welcoming the move, Bharati Balaji, Deputy Director General at the All-India Distillers Association (AIDA) added, “We urge the state governments to complement this measure with aligned tax structures so that the full benefit reaches both industry and consumers at the pump.”

Double Taxation





PIB

## Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare Releases Second Advance Estimates of Horticultural Crop Area and Production for 2025-26

Horticulture Cultivation Area Likely to Reach 301.51 Lakh Ha in 2025-26

Horticulture production in the country is expected to be about 3777.76 Lakh Tonne in 2025-26

Posted On: 11 JUN 2026 6:28PM by PIB Delhi

The Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare has released the Second Advance Estimates of 2025-26 of Area and Production of various Horticultural crops compiled on the basis of information received from the States/UTs and other Government sourced agencies.

Total Horticulture	2024-25 (Final)	2025-26 (First Advance Estimates)	2025-26 (Second Advance Estimates)
Area (in Lakh Ha)	301.36	301.31	301.51
Production (in Lakh Tonne)	3707.38	3708.46	3777.76

### Highlights of 2025-26 (Second Advance Estimates):

- The horticulture area in the country is expected to be about 301.51 Lakh Ha in 2025-26, an increase of 0.14 Lakh Ha (0.05%) over 2024-25 (Final).
- The horticulture production in the country is expected to be about 3777.76 Lakh Tonne in 2025-26, an increase of 70.39 Lakh Tonne (1.90%) over 2024-25 (Final).
- An increase in production is envisaged in Fruits, Vegetables, Flowers and Aromatic & Medicinal crops.
- The production of Fruits is expected to increase from 1176.49 Lakh Tonne in 2024-25 by 3.25% (38.26 Lakh Tonne) to 1214.75 Lakh Tonne in 2025-26 due to increased production of Banana, Mango, Papaya, Apple and Guava.
- The area under Vegetable cultivation is expected to increase from 117.91 Lakh Ha in 2024-25 by 0.75% (0.88 Lakh Ha) to 118.79 Lakh Ha in 2025-26 where as the production of Vegetables is expected to increase from 2177.97 Lakh Tonne in 2024-25 by 1.47% (32.04 Lakh Tonne) to 2210.00 Lakh Tonne in 2025-26. Increase is expected in production of Potato, Tomato, Okra/Ladyfinger, Peas, Cauliflower and Bottlegourd.
- The area under Onion cultivation is expected to increase by 2.31% (0.46 Lakh Ha) over 2024-25 i.e. to 20.14 Lakh Ha in 2025-26 from 19.68 Lakh Ha in 2024-25. The production of Onion is expected to be 307.37 Lakh Tonne in 2025-26 as compared to 307.67 Lakh Tonne in 2024-25.
- The production of Potato is expected to be 598.89 Lakh Tonne, which is higher by 13.18 Lakh Tonne (2.25%) as compared to 585.71 Lakh Tonne in 2024-25.
- The production of Tomato is expected to be 214.61 Lakh Tonne, which is higher by 8.62 Lakh Tonne (4.19%) as compared to 205.99 Lakh Tonne in 2024-25.
- The production of Aromatics & Medicinal Plants is expected to increase from 9.01 Lakh Tonne in 2024-25 to 9.76 Lakh Tonne in 2025-26.
- The area under Plantation crops is expected to be about 46.56 Lakh Ha and production is expected to be about 169.34 Lakh Tonne during 2025-26.
- The area of Flowers is expected to increase by 0.66% over 2024-25 i.e. to 4.00 Lakh Ha in 2025-26 from 3.97 Lakh Ha in 2024-25 whereas, around 7.47% increase in the production of Flowers is envisaged. The production of Flowers is expected to be 45.84 Lakh Tonne in 2025-26 compared to 42.65 Lakh Tonne in 2024-25.
- The area under Spices is expected to increase to 50.00 Lakh Ha in 2025-26 whereas production of Spices is expected to increase to 126.55 Lakh Tonne in 2025-26. An increase in production is envisaged in Garlic, Turmeric, Curry Leaf and Fenugreek.

## India and Nepal Launch Cross-Border Remittance Mechanism to Strengthen Bilateral Financial Connectivity

Seamless, secure and instant **P2P transfers** enabled through direct linkage of India's **UPI** and Nepal's **National Payments Interface**

The initiative strengthens financial inclusion, boosts digital and economic integration, and enhances convenience for travellers and businesses across both countries

Posted On: 11 JUN 2026 3:47PM by PIB Delhi

In a major boost to digital financial connectivity and neighbourhood cooperation, India and Nepal officially launched a peer-to-peer (P2P) cross-border remittance mechanism on June 6, 2026.

The newly operationalized system establishes a direct link between India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Nepal's National Payments Interface (NPI). This integration enables citizens of both nations to make seamless, real-time, and secure instant money transfers directly via mobile banking applications and digital wallets.

The UPI-NPI linkage represents a major advancement in financial inclusion, fostering stronger economic and digital ties between India and Nepal. This aligns perfectly with regional goals for accessible, safe, and affordable cross-border payments, reinforcing longstanding social and economic bonds.

### Driving Economic and Digital Integration:

The technical integration was executed via collaboration between NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL), the international arm of the National Payments Corporation of India—and the Nepal Clearing House Limited (NCHL).

### The Strategic Impact: Key Features of the UPI-NPI Remittance Linkage:

This digital payment corridor represents a major shift in how commerce operates between the two countries, delivering immediate benefits:

- **Enhanced Traveler Convenience:** Eliminates the friction of physical currency exchange, carrying large amounts of cash, or navigating unfamiliar foreign exchange fees.
- **Economic Boost for Local Merchants:** Nepal businesses gain immediate access to a massive, tech-savvy Indian visitor demographic, driving higher transaction volumes.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Local merchants will experience optimized cash management, lowered overhead costs associated with physical cash handling, and secure, real-time transaction settlements.
- **Real-Time, Direct Transfers:** Eliminates the need to carry physical cash across borders or rely on slower, traditional banking channels.

UPI Coverage around the world:

UPI is accepted in Nine countries - Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, France, Mauritius, Nepal, Bhutan, Qatar, Sri Lanka and Cambodia - enabling Indian travellers to make seamless payments abroad through familiar platforms.



## 'Oilseeds Kisaan Mitra', India's First Nationwide WhatsApp AI Advisory for Oilseed Farmers

24x7 multilingual chatbot delivers free, research-based advisory in all Indian languages

'Oilseeds Kisaan Mitra- A Multilingual, 24x7, Research Based Service from ICAR-IIOR and Partner Institutes

Posted On: 11 JUN 2026 5:56PM by PIB Delhi

As India enters the kharif sowing season with renewed focus on boosting domestic oilseed production and reducing dependence on edible oil imports, *Oilseeds Kisaan Mitra*, the WhatsApp-based AI advisory service developed by ICAR-Indian Institute of Oilseeds Research (ICAR-IIOR), Hyderabad, is emerging as a powerful tool bringing trusted, research-based knowledge about oilseed cultivation directly to farmers' mobile phones, anytime and in their own language.

The service was launched by the Secretary, DARE & Director General, ICAR during the National Oilseeds Conference, New Delhi on 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2026, underscoring ICAR's commitment to harnessing digital technology for the direct benefit of the farming community. The initiative enables any oilseed farmer in India to access free, trusted, and instant crop advisory simply through WhatsApp as a platform already familiar to millions of farmers, without needing to download any additional application.

Farmers can save the number **+91 4024598180** as 'Oilseeds Kisaan Mitra' on WhatsApp and ask questions in any Indian language about groundnut, mustard, sesame, sunflower, soybean, niger, and other oilseed crops. The AI-powered chatbot responds instantly with research-based guidance on variety selection, crop management, pest and disease control, irrigation, and post-harvest practices, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, free of cost.

# The 13th BRICS Urbanisation Forum under India's Chairship Begins in New Delhi

## BRICS Ministers deliberate on inclusive and resilient urban futures

Posted On: 11 JUN 2026 6:19PM by PIB Delhi

The 13th BRICS Urbanisation Forum was formally opened by Shri Manohar Lal, Hon'ble Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, at Sushma Swaraj Bhavan, New Delhi today.

Hosted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs under India's BRICS Chairship in 2026, the two-day Forum brings together Ministers, senior government officials and urban practitioners from Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates to deliberate on critical urban development priorities.

India is hosting the BRICS Urbanisation Forum for the fourth time, following the editions held in New Delhi in 2013, Visakhapatnam in 2016 and virtually in 2021. The Forum focused on the theme, 'Cities for People: BRICS Cooperation for Inclusive and Resilient Urban Futures.' Inaugurating the Forum, Shri Manohar Lal, Hon'ble Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs said, "Under India's BRICS Chairship, this Forum is an opportunity to bring the urban agenda more firmly into the global development conversation." He highlighted the anchors of India's development story as inclusive urban development, climate- and disaster-resilient infrastructure, strengthening institutions, and digital innovation.



Welcoming the delegations, Shri Srinivas Katikithala, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, set the context for the Forum, stating, "Over the years, this Forum has enabled member countries to exchange good practices, deepen mutual understanding of each other's systems, and build the trust required for sustained cooperation."

## Eyes on Every Mile: How NSVs Are Here to Make India's National Highways Safer

Posted On: 11 JUN 2026 1:45PM by PIB Delhi

On a crisp morning along India's bustling National Highways, a sleek white vehicle glides forward — not a police car, not a maintenance truck but something far more futuristic. Its rooftop scanners release invisible beams, high-resolution cameras quietly whirr and advanced 3D laser sensors begin mapping every inch of the road.

This is the **Network Survey Vehicle (NSV)** — an innovation equipped with laser profilers, GPS and cutting-edge imaging technology. With every pass, it scans the road surface for cracks, potholes and unevenness, turning highways into living digital maps. What looks like a simple drive is, in fact, a revolution in how India monitors, maintains and safeguards its National Highways.

To enhance the riding experience of commuters on India's National Highways, the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has announced a major leap forward: the deployment of Network Survey Vehicles (NSVs) equipped with advanced 3D laser-based systems across all states and its network.

These high-tech futuristic vehicles deployed at several National Highway corridors are more than survey machines. They are digital guardians of road quality. By scanning every stretch of road, NSVs collect detailed data on road inventory and surface conditions, identifying defects in potholes and patches.



## Innovation for Public Welfare

The adoption of 3D-laser technology reflects MoRTH's commitment to leveraging innovation for public good. This initiative is set to revolutionise highway maintenance, ensuring that defects are not just detected but rectified swiftly, creating smoother, safer journeys for millions of commuters.

What once took months is now accomplished in days — ensuring safer roads, faster rectifications and transparent communication across stakeholders.

### From 80 km to 300 km a Day

Earlier, surveys could cover only 20 – 80 km in a single day. Today, with advanced technology, NSV surveys up to 300 km daily. This leap in efficiency means quicker detection of road defects and faster action on the ground.

### Secure, Centralised Data Flow through a 3-Step Process

- Raw survey data is encrypted and transmitted to the centralised NSV centre within 48 hours.
- Expert teams, strategically deployed across five zones, monitor and report findings systematically.
- Within 10 days, raw data is transformed into actionable insights — a process that earlier stretched to 4-6 months.

### Quality Assured, Digitally Delivered

Every report undergoes a rigorous Q&A process by experts before acceptance. Once validated, notices are issued to stakeholders digitally and automatically through digital platforms, eliminating human intervention and ensuring seamless communication.

### AI-Powered Highway Monitoring for Smarter Maintenance

With the new NSV system, every detail captured on India's National Highways is uploaded directly to NHAI's AI-based Data Lake portal. This ensures that expert teams can analyse insights quickly and take evidence-backed repair and maintenance actions without delay.

### Across Every Landscape

The surveys will span two-to eight-lane National Highways, covering diverse terrains — from busy freight corridors and traffic-heavy stretches to weather-prone regions. Conducted at regular six-month intervals, these surveys will make sure that no defect goes unnoticed.



### Better Outcomes for Citizens

In the long run, this initiative strengthens asset management and road maintenance, delivering smoother rides, safer journeys and greater transparency. By harnessing AI and advanced survey technology, MoRTH is ensuring that India's National Highways are not just built but they are sustainably maintained for the public good.

### An App on the Go

A newly developed mobile app empowers site inspectors to:

- View NSV findings in real time
- Post comments and geo-stamped photos during inspections
- Track rectifications directly on site

This ensures transparency and accountability at every step.

### Closing the Loop with Rectification

Unlike earlier systems that stopped at monitoring, the new NSV framework ensures the process ends only after defects are fully rectified. Road maintenance agencies are held accountable until every reported issue is 100 percent resolved. This new initiative marks a decisive shift in highway management — moving from reactive fixes to proactive response. By identifying problems early, NSVs will help in reducing accidents linked to road defects and ensure smoother journeys for all. More than a technological upgrade, it now represents a bold step towards accountability, digital governance and data-driven infrastructure maintenance.