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Cyclone set to cross the Andhra coast on Tuesday evening; red alert in 16 districts

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Cyclone Montha is very likely to cross the Andhra Pradesh coast between Machilipatnam and Kalingapatnam around Kakinada on Tuesday evening or night as a severe cyclonic storm with a maximum sustained wind speed of 90-100 kmph gusting to 110 kmph, the India Meteorological Department said on Monday. A red alert has been issued for 16 districts in the State on Tuesday.

The cyclonic storm triggered heavy rainfall in three north coastal districts and moderate rainfall in other stations of the State on Monday. Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam, and Anakapalli received moderate to heavy rainfall between 8.30 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Monday.

Stations in the central and south coastal parts of the State received light showers. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu directed officials to ensure that aid reaches without delay.

Rainfall data compiled by the State Directorate of Economics and Statistics showed Jathara in Visakhapatnam district receiving the day's highest rainfall of 92.25 mm, followed by Madhurawada with 86 mm and Kapuluppada with 85.25 mm. Other stations in the district, including those within the city, received around 70-80 mm. In Anakapalli district, Sabbavaram received 67.5 mm and Rajam received 62.5 mm. Other stations received less than 60 mm. The alerts for SPSR Nellore, Prakasam, Bapatla, Guntur, Krishna, West Godavari, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema, Kakinada, Anakapalli, Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram for Monday will stay till 8.30 a.m. on Tuesday, the IMD said.

For Tuesday, red alerts have been issued for 16 districts and orange alerts for five districts. Except for SPSR Nellore and the eight districts of the Rayalaseema region, all other districts are under red alert as isolated extremely heavy rainfall is likely, with the cyclonic storm likely to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm by Tuesday morning, the IMD added.

At a review meeting, Naidu directed officials to issue hourly bulletins and real-time updates on Cyclone Montha

It said the cyclonic storm over west-central and adjoining southwest Bay of Bengal moved northwestwards at a speed of 13 kmph and remained over the same region at 8.30 p.m. It was positioned at 400 km east-northeast of Chennai in Tamil Nadu, 410 km south-southeast of Kakinada and 460 km south-southeast of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh and 640 km south-southwest of Gopalpur in Odisha. It is likely to move north-northwestwards and intensify into a severe cyclonic storm by Tuesday morning. Continuing to move further north-northwestwards, it is very likely to cross Andhra Pradesh coast in the evening or night.

Meanwhile, the Indian National Centre For Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) has issued an alert for the State as high waves, in the range of 2.0-4.7 metres, are forecast between 5.30 p.m. and 11.30 p.m. on Monday, off the coast of Andhra Pradesh from Nellore to Srikakulam. Storm surge of height about 1 metre above the astronomical tide is likely to cause inundation over low-lying areas of coastal Andhra Pradesh, it said.

CM's meet

Holding a high-level review meeting on Monday, Mr. Naidu has directed officials to issue hourly bulletins and real-time updates on Cyclone Montha. He also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally enquired about the cyclone's impact and the State's preparedness and has assured all possible help.

Mr. Naidu ordered the deployment of satellite phones and additional mobile towers, and directed officials to keep 3,211 generators ready across 110 mandals for power backup at 2,707 villages.

The Chief Minister instructed that National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and SDRF teams remain on standby, and that the Fire Services, Electricity, Roads and Buildings, and Panchayat Raj departments stay fully alert.

Officials were told to act swiftly to restore infrastructure in case of road breaches, fallen trees, or power line damage. He directed that sanitation be given high priority post-cyclone to prevent disease outbreaks, and that 108 and 104 medical vehicles remain on standby, ensuring medical care for pregnant women and new mothers.

He also directed officials to evacuate residents in coastal areas vulnerable to the cyclone to designated rehabilitation centres.

- Preparedness:
  - NDRF & SDRF on standby.
  - 3,211 generators and satellite communication systems deployed.
  - Evacuation from vulnerable coastal zones underway.
- Infrastructure & Health Measures:
  - Power backup in 2,707 villages.
  - 108 & 104 ambulances mobilized for emergency response.
  - Sanitation and disease prevention prioritized post-cyclone.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Cyclone Montha, developing over the west-central and southwest Bay of Bengal, is expected to cross the Andhra Pradesh coast between Machilipatnam and Kalingapatnam around Kakinada on Tuesday evening/night.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) classified it as a severe cyclonic storm with sustained winds of 90–100 kmph, gusting up to 110 kmph.
- A red alert has been issued for 16 districts and orange alert for 5 districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has convened emergency measures and coordination among disaster management agencies, with assistance assured by the Prime Minister.
- The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) warned of high waves (2–4.7 m) and storm surges likely to inundate low-lying coastal regions.

Key Points

- Rainfall: Heavy to extremely heavy rainfall recorded in Visakhapatnam, Anakapalli, and Srikakulam; highest rainfall at Jathara (92.25 mm).
- Wind Speed: Predicted maximum sustained winds of 100 kmph; gusts up to 110 kmph.
- IMD Tracking: Cyclone positioned ~410 km south-southeast of Kakinada as of 8:30 p.m. Monday; moving north-northwest at 13 kmph.

Static Linkages

- Tropical Cyclones:
  - Form over warm ocean waters (≥26°C) with Coriolis force aiding cyclonic rotation.
  - Classified by IMD under the system: Depression → Deep Depression → Cyclonic Storm → Severe Cyclonic Storm → Very Severe → Extremely Severe → Super Cyclone.
- Bay of Bengal vs. Arabian Sea:
  - Bay of Bengal generates ~80% of India's cyclones due to warmer waters and conducive wind patterns.
- Institutional Framework:
  - IMD – nodal agency for cyclone forecasting.
  - NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority) – policy formulation and coordination.
  - NDRF – specialized response teams.
- Legal Backing: Disaster Management Act, 2005 empowers both Union and State authorities to manage such disasters.
- Technological Support: INCOIS provides real-time ocean state forecasts and tsunami warnings.

Cons/Challenges:

- Coastal Andhra Pradesh remains highly vulnerable due to dense population and low-lying terrain.
- Infrastructure fragility—power lines, roads, and communication networks prone to collapse.
- Evacuation resistance among locals due to livelihood dependency on coastal areas.
- Post-disaster disease management remains a recurring weak link.

Big Tech's contempt for Indian public health

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The rise in misleading advertisements by popular platforms is also linked to the immunity that Big Tech enjoys in India

Since 1927, when the topic of drug regulation was first discussed in the Council of State after Sir Haroon Jaffer sought a resolution regarding the "control of the craze for medicinal drugs", the issue of advertisements of drugs claiming to have a therapeutic effect on humans has been a serious public health concern.

It took 27 years before India tackled the issue through the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act (DMRA), 1954. This law prohibits any advertisements of any drugs, whether approved or not by the regulator, for a list of 54 medical conditions. For example, the law prohibits the advertisement of any drug for the treatment of diabetes, regardless of whether its efficacy has been clinically established.

The advent of Internet-based advertising

A lot has changed since 1954, especially in the world of advertisement. The Internet and the rise of Big Tech platforms, in the nature of search engines, social media platforms, video-sharing platforms and online marketplaces for goods, have steadily eaten into the traditional avenues of advertising in print and broadcast formats. This shift has not only upended print journalism across the world which was reliant on advertisements, but also made it far tougher for governments across the world to police advertisements published on these Big Tech platforms headquartered in the United States.

In a deep dive on the advertising policies and practices of the most popular American Big Tech platforms in India, we were astonished to note that not a single one of them warns advertisers not to submit for publication, advertisements which are in violation of the DMRA. Thus, it is no surprise that all Big Tech platforms routinely publish a wide variety of misleading advertisements, especially for ayurvedic and homeopathic products. For example, a simple search for "ayurveda" + "blood pressure tablets" or "homeopathy" + "diabetes" on the most popular search engine and online market place in India will throw up a variety of advertisements on these platforms under the "sponsored" tag, indicating that they have been paid for by advertisers.

One of the most popular social media platforms features video advertisements by a notorious godman with the claim of being able to cure all kinds of diseases using ayurvedic products.

Similarly, a search of the online ad-libraries of these Big Tech platforms reveals a long list of offending advertisements, including those for cow-urine based products to treat cancers; these advertisements were supported by a charitable programme run by the Big Tech platform. All these advertisements are in violation of the DMRA.

None of these Big Tech platforms runs similar advertisements in the United States for ayurvedic and homeopathic products. The policies of these platforms for advertisements for health-related products to be displayed to users based in the U.S. are elaborate, with some even having pre-screening mechanisms that are meant to ensure compliance with tough American laws; these laws prohibit advertisements for therapeutic claims that are not approved by the drug regulator. In the U.S., violation of American law can attract swift criminal prosecution.

Disregard for Indian law

So, what explains Big Tech's brazen disregard of Indian laws such as the DMRA?

The first reason could be the traditional contempt that American corporations, dating back to Union Carbide, have shown for the lives of Indians. It is possible that this contempt arises from systemic racism that afflicts the management of American corporations, wherein Indian lives are not considered to be comparable to American lives.

The second is that Big Tech has escaped serious punishment earlier for violation of another law called The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994 (PNDT). This law prevents advertisements for products and services related to determination of the sex of the unborn foetus. A PIL was filed in 2008 by an activist before the Supreme Court of India pointing out how Big Tech platforms were in brazen violation of this law. Before the Court, Big Tech was evasive on the point of instituting proactive measures to block such advertisements, insisting that it was under an obligation to remove offending advertisements only if government or others informed them about such violations. To make a long story short, Big Tech fell back into a familiar pattern of deception, by claiming that it was the "intermediary" not the "publisher".

Under Indian law, intermediaries have qualified immunity from legal liability for content generated by their users because they are presumed to lack knowledge of each piece of content that is posted by users. But when it comes to advertisements, Big Tech knows very well that it is the "publisher" and not the "intermediary". The marketing teams of Big Tech on the ground in India actively pitch for advertisements, sign contracts with advertisers and accept payments for the purpose of displaying the advertisement on their platform. They have complete knowledge about these advertisements; hence, they are publishers and not mere intermediaries who can claim immunity under the law.

The PIL regarding the violation of the PNDT languished for nine years before ending with the usual insipid orders for the creation of a government committee to look into the issue. Criminal prosecution was never ordered by the Court despite being the prescribed punishment under the PNDT Act. The abject failure of the Court to enforce the law by ordering criminal prosecutions, and the process which frustrates litigants who represent public interest in such cases undoubtedly emboldened Big Tech's sense of impunity in India.

The third reason is that Big Tech is aware that the U.S. government would never extradite top managerial personnel from America to face criminal prosecution in India for violating the DMRA. Big Tech's employees running Indian subsidiaries located on Indian territory cannot be prosecuted because the Indian subsidiary is a different legal entity from its parent company located in the U.S., which legally owns and operates the advertising platforms in India. Undoubtedly, this implicit immunity is what fuels Big Tech's bad behaviour in India.

The need for reforms

Tackling Big Tech's dangerous violations of the DMRA should be an urgent priority in a country such as India which self-prescribes medicines and has an inherent bias toward "nationalist" tropes.

Registering criminal complaints before courts of competent jurisdiction against the management of these platforms would be a good first step. If Big Tech declines to produce its competent managerial personnel before an Indian court to face these charges, the government will be compelled to ensure reforms that will make Big Tech answerable to Indian sovereignty.

It is perhaps time for India to take a page from the new American playbook to regulate Tik Tok and create new regulatory mechanisms. This is to ensure that the managerial personnel responsible for creating and enforcing content and advertising related policies in India are Indian citizens who are based in Indian territory and answerable to Indian courts. Anything short of the threat of jail time for key managerial personnel will fail to ensure that Big Tech's complies with Indian law.

Further, a failure of Big Tech to comply with these legal requirements should result in a revocation of the immunity granted to Big Tech under Indian intermediary laws from legal action for user-generated content. Big Tech cannot be allowed to enjoy these benefits under Indian law if it does not enforce relevant Indian laws to protect public health in India.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India's Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 (DMRA) prohibits advertisement of drugs claiming to cure certain diseases or disorders (54 listed conditions).
- Despite this, Big Tech platforms (social media, search engines, e-commerce) continue to host paid advertisements promoting unverified ayurvedic and homeopathic "cures" for diabetes, cancer, etc.
- These practices violate the DMRA and expose serious gaps in the enforcement of digital advertising laws in India.
- Experts have called for stronger accountability mechanisms for Big Tech and legal reforms to ensure compliance with Indian laws on public health.

Key Points

- DMRA, 1954 aims to protect public health by restricting misleading drug ads.
- Big Tech claims "intermediary" immunity but acts as "publisher" by selling ad space.
- PNDT Act, 1994 faced similar non-compliance earlier.
- Indian courts have not imposed criminal liability on violators.
- Weak enforcement emboldens Big Tech; global firms exploit legal loopholes.

Static Linkages

- Article 47 – State duty to improve public health.
- Entry 19, List III – Regulation of drugs and poisons.
- Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 – Regulates manufacture and sale.
- Doctrine of Due Diligence – IT intermediaries must prevent unlawful content.
- Medical Ethics: "Do no harm" principle.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Protects citizens from false medical claims.
- Upholds consumer rights & health safety.
- Reinforces legal sovereignty.

Challenges:

- Weak enforcement & jurisdictional gaps.
- Misuse of "intermediary immunity."
- Lack of digital ad regulation authority.

Way Forward

- Amend DMRA to cover digital advertisements.
- Mandate local compliance officers under Indian law.
- Create Digital Advertising Regulatory Authority.
- Enable criminal prosecution for repeated violations.
- Strengthen coordination: CDSCO–MeitY–CCPA.
- Promote AI-based ad screening and digital literacy.

A start for North-South carbon market cooperation

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On September 17, 2025, the European Union (EU) and India set out a new comprehensive strategic agenda in their joint communication. Called the New Strategic EU-India Agenda, it primarily addresses five pillars on which their partnership will be enhanced: prosperity and sustainability; technology and innovation; security and defence; connectivity and global issues, and enablers across pillars. Buried in the section on clean transition is a critical line that the EU will link the Indian Carbon Market (ICM) with the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

In plain terms, carbon prices paid in India will be deducted from CBAM levies at the EU border. This is a breakthrough. It could prevent Indian exporters from being penalised twice and reward early decarbonisation. However, major barriers still plague its operationalisation. Unless addressed, they will stall this integration before it delivers real gains.

Underdeveloped Indian carbon market

India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), commonly referred to as ICM, is still an evolving architecture. Unlike the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), which has a two decade record of robust auction structure, cap-setting processes, and independent verification, India's scheme is built on fragmented foundations. Current credits are often based on intensity improvements or project-based offsets, not absolute caps on emissions, wherein the ICM is moving. The CBAM, however, requires a tonne-for-tonne accounting of embedded carbon in goods. Without legally binding caps and strong penalties for non-compliance, EU regulators will treat Indian credits as second class.

There is also no current institutional equivalent in India to the EU's independent regulators or emissions registries that guarantee market integrity. In effect, the EU cannot "deduct" Indian carbon prices unless it is confident that the underlying system delivers environmental integrity. Bridging this institutional gap is not a technical fix. It requires a structural redesign of the ICM to mirror the compliance-grade features of the EU's ETS. Imagining this substantive pivot within the Indian our bureaucratic understanding and operation anytime soon is challenging.

CBAM also relies on a clear and stringent carbon price. In the EU's ETS, the price floats around €60 to €80 a tonne. In India, initial carbon credit prices hover in the range of €5 and €10. Unless the carbon price is comparable and enforced across covered sectors, European regulators will not deduct much, if anything, at the border.

Worse, exporters may end up facing both the Indian compliance cost and the EU's full CBAM levy. This creates political risk inside India, where industries may resist a "double burden" and they could lobby to water down India's scheme, i.e., compliance parameters under ICM. Bridging the price gap requires either targeted sectoral carbon contracts or a negotiated floor price that aligns with CBAM expectations. Both are politically difficult options to negotiate.

The linking of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism with the Indian carbon market is significant but there are hurdles to cross

Fundamental nature of CBAM

Even if technical and price issues are solved, CBAM remains controversial. India and other developing countries have consistently opposed it at the WTO and international dialogues as being a unilateral and protectionist measure. Agreeing to a linkage between India's carbon market and CBAM, therefore, creates a political contradiction that India would be legitimising a mechanism it has formally resisted.

This tension will resurface in disputes. For instance, if the EU deems India's carbon price to be "insufficient" and refuses full deductions, exporters will cry foul, and New Delhi will be forced to escalate the issue politically or legally. There is also a sovereignty issue because carbon pricing is a domestic policy tool, but CBAM effectively gives Brussels a say in whether India's measures are "good enough". For a country that guards its policy space, this could become a red line. Beyond trade law, there is a strategic risk wherein CBAM deductions will work only if India maintains a steady, transparent carbon market. Any domestic political backtracking, for example, rolling back compliance under industry pressure, would immediately expose exporters to full CBAM costs, destabilising trade flows. In short, the linkage is hostage not only to WTO legalities but also to domestic political economy and EU-India trust.

Looking at optimistic resolutions

The Indian carbon market and CBAM linkage is one of the most significant agreements under the strategy agenda by the two big global economies. If it works, it shields Indian exporters, accelerates industrial decarbonisation, and creates a model for North-South carbon market cooperation. But weak domestic architecture, misaligned carbon prices, and political contradictions may sink it. There is an underlying case to be made for more comprehensive collaboration. India can strengthen its market design, and the EU can offer clarity and technical support for a smooth transition. Otherwise, this "breakthrough" will remain on paper, while Indian exporters continue to pay at the border.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- On September 17, 2025, the European Union (EU) and India unveiled the New Strategic EU–India Agenda, outlining cooperation across five pillars — prosperity and sustainability, technology and innovation, security and defence, connectivity and global issues, and enabling mechanisms.
- Under the "Clean Transition" pillar, the EU proposed to link India's Carbon Market (ICM) with its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).
- This linkage implies that carbon prices paid by Indian exporters domestically could be deducted from CBAM levies at EU borders — potentially avoiding double carbon taxation.
- However, institutional, price, and political hurdles threaten to delay or derail the integration.

Key Points

- India's Carbon Market (ICM) stems from the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), 2023, under the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022, operationalised by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).
- The EU's Emissions Trading System (ETS) is a mature carbon pricing model with a cap-and-trade mechanism and prices averaging €60–€80/tonne CO_2.
- India's credit prices currently range between €5–€10/tonne, far below EU levels, raising compatibility concerns.
- The CBAM, effective from 2026, covers imports of carbon-intensive goods (steel, cement, aluminium, fertilisers, electricity, hydrogen).
- CBAM deductions will apply only if India's market demonstrates compliance-grade verification, transparent emissions registries, and legal caps comparable to the EU's ETS.
- The EU–India linkage, if implemented, could shield exporters from dual carbon costs and incentivise industrial decarbonisation.

Static Linkages

- Carbon Pricing Instruments: Market-based tools (cap-and-trade, carbon tax).
- Paris Agreement, Art. 6: Allows carbon market cooperation.
- Energy Conservation Act, 2001 (Amended 2022): Legal base for carbon trading.
- WTO Principles: Non-discrimination; CBAM seen as potential trade barrier.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Avoids double taxation on exporters.
- Incentivises decarbonisation and global cooperation.
- Strengthens India–EU climate ties.

Cons:

- Institutional gaps in India's carbon market.
- Large carbon price disparity.
- Risk of EU interference in India's policy space.
- WTO and sovereignty concerns.

Way Forward

- Build robust MRV and compliance mechanisms.
- Align carbon prices with CBAM expectations.
- Set up India–EU joint carbon task force.
- Ensure WTO-compatible trade clauses and industry readiness.

Devil in the details

The Election Commission's SIR must not repeat Bihar's glaring anomalies

After Bihar, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has now embarked on a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in 12 States and Union Territories. Its stated goal is unambiguous – to update the rolls which have been affected by frequent migration, dead voters and other inaccuracies, which have been pointed out by political parties, the Congress in particular. Yet, the experience in Bihar suggests that the process, as envisaged, could risk the disenfranchisement of a significant number of people. It was conducted on a short timeline – roughly a month for enumeration and a month for claims and objections. The most significant change now is the formal provision of a "Notice period" for hearing and verification for about 54 days. The hurried approach in Bihar produced glaring statistical anomalies in the final roll. The gender ratio fell to 892 women per 1,000 men from 907 in the pre-SIR roll – well below recent survey figures for Bihar. Women voters were disproportionately excluded in areas with higher female than male turnout in the general election 2024, particularly in the 18-29 age group under the "permanently shifted" category. High female turnout relative to low registration typically indicates male migration, yet more women were deleted despite the SIR's stated aim to remove migrants not "ordinarily resident".

These anomalies seem to be built into the ECI's procedural framework, where the primary onus of verification is unduly borne by citizens and party representatives – Booth Level Agents – beyond Booth Level Officers. Expecting members from parties to ensure the inclusion of all eligible voters is problematic as they are more concerned about political competition. The ECI's non-response to the anomalies – anyone left out can re-register with the help of BLAs – is inadequate. After the Supreme Court's intervention, the ECI had to publish lists of all excluded voters with reasons, leading to some correction. An amended model is now being replicated across a larger canvas. While the ECI's provision for BLOs to make three house visits is welcome, temporary migrants who might be absent during the enumeration window despite remaining "ordinarily resident" by law, could still lose out. The ECI's stated mitigation, allowing electors to fill the Enumeration Form online, is insufficient. This provision overlooks the digital divide and literacy challenges, placing an undue burden on voters who are not physically present to be assisted by a BLO. As this exercise unfolds, it is incumbent upon civil society, the media and parties to assume a role of intense vigilance lest this affects the integrity of India's electoral democracy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has launched a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in 12 States and Union Territories, following its pilot exercise in Bihar.
- The revision aims to remove inaccuracies caused by migration, deceased voters, and duplication, which were highlighted by political parties, especially the Indian National Congress.
- However, the Bihar experience revealed gender disparities, data anomalies, and potential voter exclusion, especially among women and temporary migrants.
- The process now includes a 54-day notice period for hearing and verification to improve transparency.

Key Points

- Objective: To ensure accurate and updated electoral rolls before upcoming elections.
- Timeline: Approximately one month for enumeration and one month for claims and objections.
- New Provision: 54-day "Notice Period" for verification and inclusion hearings.
- Findings in Bihar:
  - Gender ratio fell from 907 to 892 women per 1,000 men post-SIR.
  - Disproportionate exclusion of women aged 18–29 under "permanently shifted" category.
  - Statistical anomalies despite ECI's claim of fair verification.
- Procedural Concern: Burden of verification rests heavily on citizens and political party agents (BLAs) rather than on ECI's Booth Level Officers (BLOs).
- Digital Access Issue: Online enumeration option is limited due to digital divide and literacy barriers.
- Judicial Intervention: After the Supreme Court's direction, ECI was required to publish names and reasons for deletion to allow re-registration.

Static Linkages

- Universal Adult Franchise as part of Democratic Ideals in the Constitution.
- Article 324: Vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the ECI.
- Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950 – governs preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- RPA, 1951 – deals with the conduct of elections and related disqualifications.
- Model Code of Conduct and its role in ensuring fairness in electoral processes.
- SC Judgement (PUCL v. Union of India, 2003) – upheld voter's right to know as part of Article 19(1)(a).
- Digital Literacy Mission & Digital India Programme – relevance in ensuring inclusive access to electoral reforms.
- Delimitation and Electoral Roll Revision as part of periodic electoral integrity measures.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Cleans voter lists, improves accuracy.
- 54-day verification enhances transparency.

Cons:

- Risk of disenfranchisement of women, youth, migrants.
- Overreliance on party agents.
- Digital and literacy barriers.

Moral Angle: Violates spirit of universal franchise if genuine voters are excluded.

Bihar on the move

The state's economic turnaround has been remarkable. Now it needs to invest in its people, develop institutions

N K Singh

Since I began writing on Bihar, my objective has been to invest optimism and hope into its development story. For long, the state has been regarded as a basket case in policy circles — a case of being stuck in a "low-level equilibrium trap". Since Richard Nelson wrote about it in 1956, the East Asian Tigers and many South Indian states have escaped this trap. Bihar, however, appeared locked in a cycle of low productivity, low savings, low incomes, and a narrow margin between demography and per capita income.

This diagnosis is now being replaced with that of a state quietly scripting one of contemporary India's remarkable growth narratives. The state is today among the nation's fastest-growing economies. Its nominal GSDP is projected to surge by 22 per cent in FY 2025-26 to nearly Rs 11 lakh crore. A region once viewed as agriculture- and aid-dependent is undergoing a decisive transition. Industry's share has climbed to 26.6 per cent while the services sector is dominant. This signals the rise of a more diversified growth engine. A revenue surplus of 0.8 per cent of GSDP marks a fiscal turnaround. Capital expenditure now accounts for 14 per cent of the budget, indicating commitment to infrastructural growth over consumption-driven expansion. Per capita income has risen 11 per cent year-on-year. Long-term projections place Bihar's economy above $200 billion by 2030. Bihar, today, embodies India's new frontier of inclusive, bottom-up growth.

The transformation in the last two decades is striking. During the 1990s, Bihar's per capita NSDP growth was almost negative. Since 2000, it has improved to roughly 5.3 per cent annually. GSDP growth averaged 8.22 per cent CAGR during 2004-2017. The services sector now contributes 58.6 per cent of the output. Agricultural employment has fallen sharply from 72.6 per cent in 2004 to 43.8 per cent in 2017. The most rapid expansion has come in construction, telecommunications, and financial services. Bihar is developing new comparative advantages and demanding integration into the national growth story.

The state must now stay the course in order to become a participant in India's aspiration to reach advanced-economy status. Five priorities deserve focus.

First, Bihar has a unique opportunity to leapfrog traditional development typologies. Its vast migrant population is an asset. Nearly 73,000 workers moved abroad in 2023, and roughly 7.2 per cent of its population resides in other Indian states. Remittances fill gaps left by insufficient domestic job creation. More than half of all households rely on income earned elsewhere. This is a demographic paradox. Bihar supplies labour to the world, yet struggles to convert that human capital into domestic productivity.

> Many economies have successfully transformed remittance flows into investment capital. Bihar can cultivate much stronger linkages with its global diaspora. An institutional mechanism, which incentivises remittances, will help direct that capital to supporting education, entrepreneurship, and capital-creating assets. The right policy matrix could attract capital flows to support this development engine.

Many economies have transformed remittance flows into investment capital. Bihar can cultivate much stronger linkages with its global diaspora. An institutional mechanism, which incentivises remittances, will help direct that capital to supporting education, entrepreneurship, and capital-creating assets. The right policy matrix could attract capital flows to support this development engine.

Second, Bihar has seen an extraordinary surge in infrastructure investment. The Centre has approved over Rs 33,000 crore for 875 km of highway upgrade. This is in addition to Rs 675 crore for district-level road expansion and Rs 3,822 crore for the four-lane Sahebganj-Areraj-Bettiah corridor. Six more connectivity projects will target logistics efficiency and improved border access. Rail infrastructure is receiving unprecedented capital injection. Projects worth Rs 2,192 crore for doubling the Bakhtiyarpur-Rajgir-Tilaiya line, seven new train services including Amrit Bharat Express routes, and nearly Rs 1 lakh crore in ongoing rail capacity projects, including the planned high-speed Buxar-Bhagalpur corridor, have been undertaken. Bihar's aviation map is being redrawn through a state-AAI agreement for six regional airports. There are also plans for 15 operational facilities and a greenfield international airport near Patna.

These physical linkages augur well for a tourism expansion. However, there is no coherent strategy that can draw on Bihar's rich cultural endowments to attract domestic and foreign interest. The cost of doing business and setting up a viable tourism sector remains uncertain. Many economies thrive on tourism. But there would be few examples of such latent, under-explored, and under-exploited tourism hubs as Bihar.

Regulatory complexity and delays in clearances or contract enforcement discourage credible investors and undermine large projects. Digital transparency, rule-based systems, industrial land bank and efficient dispute resolution mechanisms will matter more than subsidies. Research has affirmed the role of institutions in shaping long-run development. Odisha and Uttarakhand have shown how even incremental governance reforms can unlock capital influx with greater credibility.

Third, private investment has been elusive. It has to become a driver of growth. The once-fabled Bihar bureaucracy is mired in a status-quoist approach. It views private capital with suspicion. Can bureaucrats in Bihar's development departments be assigned a target to attract private capital — single private capital or optimised international lending by multilateral and partner approaches? Can their performance in attracting private capital be judged on a transparent matrix?

Fourth, Bihar needs investment in people. The state's demographic dividend is its biggest potential and largest risk. The 2024 Periodic Labour Force Survey showed that the primary/middle school-educated population was the same as the all-India level. However, the secondary, higher secondary and graduate educated population was below the national average. Aversion to vocational education will not help the state shift to higher-productivity employment. Industry partnerships and aligning college curricula with the labour market are imperative. Upgrading human capital is not a social welfare aspiration but a foundational prerequisite for productivity.

Fifth, Bihar's fiscal management has been a success. A fiscal space creates unusual opportunities. Sustained investment in human capital will cement inclusive, durable growth rather than short-term populism.

These priorities outline a path to something far more ambitious than catching up. A state once trapped in stagnation can chart a new course by embracing technology, strengthening institutions, and turning its diaspora and youth into engines of innovation. Bihar has altered its economic destiny. What remains is to institutionalise the gains.

Bihar's progress reflects a rare symmetry of purpose between the Centre and the state. Bihar is no longer a basket case. The state needs sustained political support to convert identity politics into developmental compulsions.

The writer is former chairman, 15th Finance Commission

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Bihar, long regarded as a "low-level equilibrium trap" economy (as per Richard Nelson, 1956), is now among India's fastest-growing states.
- Nominal GSDP projected to grow 22% in FY 2025–26, touching nearly ₹11 lakh crore.
- Bihar's economy is diversifying from agriculture dependence toward industry (26.6%) and services (58.6%).
- The state recorded 8.22% CAGR in GSDP (2004–2017) and a revenue surplus of 0.8% of GSDP — signaling a fiscal turnaround.
- Capital expenditure now forms 14% of the budget, prioritizing infrastructure and productive assets over consumption subsidies.

Key Points

- Structural Transformation:
  - Agricultural employment declined from 72.6% (2004) to 43.8% (2017).
  - Growth drivers: construction, telecom, financial services, and logistics.
- Infrastructure Surge:
  - Centre approved ₹33,000 crore for 875 km of highways and ₹1 lakh crore for rail capacity projects.
  - Upcoming six regional airports and a greenfield international airport near Patna.
- Fiscal Prudence: Revenue surplus & higher capital spending signal efficient fiscal management.
- Human Capital: Literacy and education levels improving but secondary and tertiary education lag national averages.
- Diaspora Linkages: 7.2% of population works in other states; remittances form major income source for 50% of households.
- Governance Focus: Push for digital transparency, institutional reforms, and ease of doing business.

Static Linkages

- Low-Level Equilibrium Trap: Cycle of low income–savings–investment.
- Lewis Model: Shift from traditional to modern sectors.
- FRBM Act, 2003: Ensures fiscal prudence.
- Institutional Economics (Douglass North): Governance quality drives growth.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Fiscal discipline, infrastructure surge, inclusive focus
- Better Centre–State synergy

Challenges:

- Weak private investment
- Low skill quality
- Regulatory delays, underused tourism potential

Way Forward

- Channel remittances into investment
- Reform bureaucracy for private capital
- Align education with job markets
- Develop "Brand Bihar" tourism
- Sustain capital-led fiscal policy

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY

MOTHERING AI, THE ADIVASI WAY

Western gaze has determined almost everything. AI shouldn't add to this list

ABHIK BHATTACHARYA

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY, IN his book *Provincialising Europe*, questioned the universalisation of "modernity" as an idea. Since the 19th century, concepts like secularism, liberalism and modernity, and their markers, have been mostly read as "neutral" and "natural." The socio-political contexts and the material referents that produced these abstract ideas gradually vanished, except when they were scrutinised by postcolonial scholars. Now, as AI starts to shape socio-political discourse, one must stand against Western bias in the data that feeds its worldview, because today's bias could become tomorrow's "norm", at least in terms of representation.

Aranya Sahay's debut film, *Humans in the Loop* (2024), questions such bias in data labelling — the process of feeding data into AI — and reimagines training the technology in an Adivasi way. Set in a Jharkhand village, the film follows the life of Nehma, a divorced Adivasi woman, who joins a data labelling centre working for a US-based company, so that she can get custody of her teenage daughter, Dhannu, and toddler, Guntu.

At the centre, Nehma is required to label different things — human bodies to machine parts — in the photos and videos that play on computer screens. This information will make the robot "walk", she is told. However, this data-feeding is not a "neutral" effort; it is ideologically charged and driven by the Western gaze. Nehma is asked to label pests in a set of images to equip AI-driven pest killers. But what is "pest" for the West is not "pest" for her. She leaves the image of a caterpillar unmarked. On being asked, she says, "This is not a pest. It only eats the rotten part of leaves."

The sidelining of the perspective of the indigenous people, despite their hard labour in mothering AI, is what shapes Sahay's intricate narrative. The silencing of one narrative in favour of another to create a dominant AI model is nothing but reinforcement of Western hegemony that women like Nehma challenge.

The symbiotic relationship between indigenous communities and nature, where even a porcupine is shown guiding Nehma's daughter when she is lost in the forest, defies the modern understanding that sees the world in terms of resources. The binary of useful and harmful is turned on its head. Sahay shows that when AI is taught a non-monolithic epistemic structure, it learns nuances of the marginalised, instead of mathematical categorisation. *Humans in the Loop* opens up possibilities to revolutionise AI's worldviews.

When Nehma's boss asks AI to show images of Indian tribal women, it produces pictures of white women with some markers of "perceived" indigenous cultures — like a romanticised headgear or a flower stuck in the hair. They don't represent the realities of Nehma and others like her. But as a mother and a trainer, Nehma knows the way out. She feeds her own images, clicked by her daughter, into the machine. In the next search, the technology shrugs off its inherent bias and delivers an image that is closer to the reality of "tribal woman in Jharkhand". Nehma's boss then exclaims, "AI is like a child...It can change. It just needs time and a whole lot of data."

Beyond this schema of preferential data feeding and competitive perceptions lies the mother in Nehma, who chooses to "mother" an AI so that she may be her own children's legally recognised mother. The blurring of these lines between AI-human, human-nature and nature-AI is what makes Sahay's film a masterpiece. Its use of silence, the absence of Savarna romanticism and lack of melodrama keep the audience focused on Nehma's resilience and innovation. Without saying so explicitly, *Humans in the Loop* makes one thing clear: It is our turn to provincialise AI.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Aranya Sahay's 2024 film Humans in the Loop explores the hidden human and cultural dimensions of artificial intelligence (AI) training, focusing on an Adivasi woman in Jharkhand engaged in data labelling for a global tech firm.
- The film highlights Western bias in AI datasets, where indigenous and non-Western worldviews are often excluded or misrepresented.
- The discourse echoes Dipesh Chakrabarty's thesis in "Provincialising Europe", which critiques the universalisation of European modernity and calls for contextual, plural epistemologies.
- The issue aligns with ongoing global debates on AI ethics, digital colonialism, and representation, especially as India pushes for its own National Strategy for AI and Responsible AI Framework (NITI Aayog, 2021).

Key Points

- AI Bias: Training data often reflects Western cultural assumptions, reinforcing stereotypes and marginalising non-Western identities.
- Indigenous Representation: The film portrays how Adivasi perspectives on nature and coexistence contrast with AI's binary logic of "useful vs harmful."
- Data Labour: Highlights the "invisible labour" of data annotators in the Global South who shape AI systems without recognition or agency.
- Ethical Implications: Raises questions about who "mothers" AI — those who train it or those who control its algorithms.
- Cultural Epistemology: Suggests that AI should incorporate plural epistemic structures — not just Western rational-empirical modes of knowing.
- Policy Relevance: India's National AI Mission and UNESCO's 2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of AI emphasise inclusivity and diversity in datasets.

Static Linkages

- Human labour and technology in industrial revolutions — socio-economic impact of automation.
- Postcolonial theory — critique of Eurocentrism and cultural hegemony.
- Ethical dimensions of science and technology — Gandhian and Tagorean perspectives on modernity.
- Rights of indigenous peoples and cultural heritage under international frameworks (UNDRIP).
- Data protection and privacy principles under emerging AI governance frameworks.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Promotes cultural inclusivity in AI.
- Enhances ethical accountability.
- Recognises marginalised contributions.

Cons:

- Global AI dominated by Western firms.
- Limited data diversity.
- Weak ethical enforcement mechanisms.

Way Forward

- Ensure data sovereignty and local ownership.
- Include indigenous perspectives in AI policy.
- Build AI literacy among marginalised groups.
- Form Ethical AI Councils with social representation.

FRIENDS OF FRIENDS

India shouldn't be worried by Pakistan's closeness to US. It should work on reviving partnership with America

BEFORE THE START of Donald Trump's second presidential term in January 2025, successive US administrations, including Trump 1.0, had broadly followed a policy of deepening engagement with India to counter China's rise in the Indo-Pacific, while maintaining distance from Pakistan, largely due to Islamabad's support for terrorism and its diminished strategic value as America disengaged from Afghanistan. However, a series of recent diplomatic exchanges — Chief of Army Staff Asim Munir has made three official visits to Washington since June — suggest a renewed warmth in US-Pakistan ties. This shift has come at a time of setbacks in the India-US relationship, following Washington's decision to impose a penalty tariff on India over the latter's continued oil purchases from Russia. Against this backdrop, ahead of his meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in Kuala Lumpur on Monday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio described India-US ties as "deep, historic and important", emphasising that Washington's engagement with Islamabad does not come at the expense of its "relationship" and "friendship" with New Delhi. The statement highlights the distinctly different character of the US's relationships with India and Pakistan.

Partnerships between the US and Pakistan, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, have had a weak foundation. They have largely been transactional (as seen during the Soviet-Afghan war and its aftermath). India-US ties, in contrast, are anchored in security, technology and energy cooperation, trade and market access, and a shared objective in curbing China's influence. New Delhi's emphasis, therefore, should be on rejuvenating its partnership with Washington, deepening ties with nations that can complement its growth, and accelerating domestic reform.

It would be naive to deny that Pakistan has strategic assets — geographical location, capacity for disruption, nuclear capability, and a population of 250 million — that make it enticing to many countries such as the US, China, and, as seen recently, Saudi Arabia. It is also unrealistic to expect any country not to talk to Pakistan, even as it pursues stronger ties with India. New Delhi would be the first to recognise this reality, given that India continues to buy oil from the US's long-standing rival, Russia, while seeking to deepen partnerships with both. Rubio alluded to this when he remarked, "They (India) have some relationships with countries that we don't have relationships with." India, however, has little reason to fear any hyphenation with Pakistan. India's GDP is around $4 trillion while Pakistan's is around $400 billion, and the gap is widening. This is also true of the global standingof the two nations (Pakistan secured its 25th loan from the IMF earlier this year). The only form of hyphenation that exists is the one India risks imposing on itself, driven by domestic factors. The surest way to prevent any re-hyphenation is to separate Pakistan from internal politics and increase India's leverage vis-à-vis economic growth and technological capacity. As External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar recently observed, "The best way of de-hyphenation is to outstrip the other party in terms of power and capability." That, and not the state of US-Pakistan ties, should be New Delhi's focus.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- US Secretary of State Marco Rubio clarified that US–Pakistan engagement won't affect US–India ties.
- Comes amid tariff tensions between Washington and New Delhi over India's oil imports from Russia.
- Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir made three visits to Washington since June 2025, showing revived US–Pakistan warmth.
- Marks a subtle shift in US South Asia policy, contrasting with Trump's India-focused Indo-Pacific approach.

Key Points

- US–Pakistan ties: Transactional, security-driven, limited depth.
- India–US ties: Strategic, anchored in defence, tech, energy, trade.
- Economic gap: India $4 trillion vs. Pakistan $0.4 trillion GDP.
- Pakistan's leverage: Location, nukes, China–Saudi links.
- De-hyphenation: India maintains independent ties with rivals like Russia and the US.
- Jaishankar's view: "Best way to de-hyphenate is to outstrip the other in power and capability."

Static Linkages

- Strategic Autonomy & Non-Alignment 2.0.
- Indo-Pacific and Quad frameworks.
- India–US Civil Nuclear Deal (2005).
- Balance of Power in IR.
- Economic strength as foreign policy tool.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Stabilizes Afghanistan; maintains US influence.
- India shows maturity through issue-based diplomacy.
- Opportunity to strengthen tech & trade links with the US.

Cons:

- Pakistan's terror network remains a threat.
- US dual engagement may test India's trust.
- Tariff dispute exposes divergent interests.

Way Forward

- Rebuild India–US strategic & economic trust.
- Diversify partnerships with ASEAN, Africa, Gulf.
- Focus on economic strength & tech innovation.
- Keep foreign policy above domestic politics.
- Institutionalize high-level India–US dialogues.

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY