

DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

DATE - 12/02/2026

**SOURCE
THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS**

**CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

Tamil Brahmi inscriptions in Egypt point to ancient trade links

N. Sai Charan
CHENNAI

A path-breaking finding has shed new light on trade links between ancient Tamilagam, other parts of India, and the Roman Empire. Two researchers have identified close to 30 inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi, Prakrit and Sanskrit at tombs in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. These inscriptions are said to belong to the period between the 1st and 3rd Centuries C.E.

The inscriptions were identified during a study in 2024 and 2025 by Charlotte Schmid, Professor at the French School of Asian Studies (EFEO) in Paris, and Ingo Strauch, Professor at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. The team documented the inscriptions across six tombs in the Theban Necropolis. They fol-

lowed in the footsteps of French scholar Jules Baillet, who surveyed the Valley of the Kings in 1926 and published more than 2,000 Greek graffiti marks.

Presenting their findings in a paper titled *From the Valley of the Kings to India: Indian Inscriptions in Egypt* at the ongoing International Conference on Tamil Epigraphy, the scholars said the individuals who made these inscriptions came from the north-western, western and southern regions of the Indian subcontinent, with those from the latter forming the majority.

Visitor graffiti

Visitors had left brief inscriptions and graffiti by carving their names on the walls of corridors and rooms, marking their presence in the tombs, the researchers said, adding that

these sets of inscriptions appear inside the tombs alongside larger bodies of graffiti in other languages, primarily Greek. Within such settings, the Indian visitors seem to have followed an existing practice of leaving their names inside the tombs, they said.

The name *Cikai Korran* (pronounced 'Kotran') appears repeatedly. It was inscribed eight times across five tombs. The name was found near entrances and high on interior walls among other graffiti marks. In one tomb, it appears at a height of about four metres at the entrance, Mr. Strauch said. "The name *Cikai Korran* is revealing, as its first element may be connected to the Sanskrit *śikhā*, meaning tuft or crown. While this is not a common personal name, the second element, *korran*, is more distinctly Tamil. It carries strong war-



A Tamil Brahmi inscription with the name *Cikai Korran* in one of the tombs at the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

like associations, as it derives from a root, *korram*, meaning victory and slaying. This root is echoed in the Chera warrior goddess *Korranai* and the term *koravan*, meaning king," Ms. Schmid said.

More finds

The name *korran* also came up in other finds in Egypt. It appears in *Korra-*

Chera capital, dated back to the 2nd or 3rd century C.E.

Two other individuals also left their names in Tamil Brahmi in these tombs. One inscription reads *Kopān vārata kantan* (Kopān came and saw). The name *Kopān* has also been found at Amankovilpatti in Tamil Nadu. Other Tamil names identified include *Cātan* and *Kiran*.

K. Rajan, academic and research adviser, Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, said the findings are significant as they shed light on the trade links between ancient Tamilagam from the Malabar Coast and the Roman Empire. He said that earlier work in Egypt had focused on the Red Sea port city of Berenike, where excavations were conducted for several years and attention has now moved to the Nile river valley.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- In 2024–25, researchers identified nearly 30 inscriptions in Tamil-Brahmi, Prakrit and Sanskrit in tombs at the Valley of the Kings.
- The inscriptions date between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE.
- They were documented across six tombs in the Theban Necropolis.
- Earlier evidence of Indian presence in Egypt had emerged from excavations at Berenike.
- The findings were presented at the International Conference on Tamil Epigraphy (2026).

Key Findings

- Languages found: Tamil-Brahmi (majority), Prakrit, Sanskrit.
- Nature of inscriptions:
 - Short graffiti-like name carvings.
 - Found alongside Greek graffiti.
- Prominent name: "Cikai Korran" (appears multiple times).
 - "Korran" linked to Tamil root *korram* (victory).
 - Associated with Sangam-era warrior terminology.
- Other Tamil names: *Kopān*, *Cātan*, *Kiran*.
- Parallel references:
 - Similar names found at Berenike.
 - Sangam text *Purananuru* mentions rulers with similar names.
- Indicates individuals from:
 - North-western India
 - Western India
 - Southern India (majority from Tamil region)

Static Linkages

- Tamil-Brahmi Script:
 - Derived from Brahmi.
 - Used in South India from 3rd century BCE onward.

Indo-Roman Trade Evidence:

- Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (1st century CE) mentions Indian ports.
- Roman coins found in Tamil Nadu (Arikamedu, Karur).
- Major Ancient Ports:
 - Muziris (Kerala coast)
 - Korkai
- Trade Commodities:
 - Exports: Pepper, pearls, ivory, textiles.
 - Imports: Gold coins, wine, glassware.
- Sangam literature describes "Yavanas" (foreign traders).

Significance

- Strengthens archaeological proof of Indo-Roman maritime trade.
- Extends evidence beyond Red Sea ports into Nile valley.
- Demonstrates:
 - Long-distance mobility of Indian merchants.
 - Cultural interaction and adaptation (adoption of local graffiti practice).
- Correlates literary sources (Sangam texts) with material evidence.

Issues & Limitations

- Inscriptions are brief – limited contextual detail.
- Cannot conclusively determine:
 - Whether individuals were traders, soldiers, or travelers.
- Dating based primarily on paleography (script analysis).

Way Forward

- Promote multidisciplinary maritime archaeology.
- Digitisation and documentation of Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions globally.
- Strengthen Indo-Egypt academic collaboration.
- Integrate findings into broader Indian Ocean trade studies.

Sensitive items out of U.S. statement on deal with India

Sahasini Haider
NEW DELHI

The U.S. on Wednesday backtracked on changes it made to the India-U.S. joint statement and the White House factsheet on the India-U.S. framework for the interim agreement on trade, removing references to 'pulses', 'agricultural products', 'digital service tax' and Indian 'commitments' on investing \$500 billion. The references, which were not in the original joint statement, had led to questions being raised in New Delhi.

Opposition leaders asked the government to clarify its position after officials had categorically said that sensitive agricultural items were not included in the deal and that India had "intended" but not given a binding commitment to investing \$500 billion in American products over a period of five years. "India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on all U.S. industrial goods and a wide range of U.S. food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red sorghum, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products," the corrected factsheet read.

"India intends to buy more American products and purchase over \$500 billion of U.S. energy, information and communication technology, coal, and other products", a line which earlier also included "agricultural" products.

The External Affairs Ministry did not respond to a question on whether the government or the Indian embassy had reached out

Taking back

The references had raised concerns after not being present in the original India-U.S. joint statement

Dropped references:

- Pulses
- Agricultural products
- Digital service tax
- "Commitments" on investing \$500 billion

to the U.S. government to request the changes. The U.S. did not issue any statement before quietly amending the two documents available online.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Trade Representative's office deleted another entry related to the India-U.S. deal. The social media post showed a map of India including in it Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and Chinese-controlled Aksai Chin. This is in line with India's official map but runs counter to the U.S.'s official maps that show the two regions as "disputed territory". The post had led to the question of whether the U.S. was changing its position in India's favour.

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer told Fox News on Wednesday, "India has already started winding down purchases of Russian energy products and are already ramping back up purchases of American energy and other sources."

The government has not so far denied the U.S. contention that it has given up Russian oil, saying only that its policy is to "diversify" energy procurement and this would be in "national interest".

- Agricultural tariff concessions appear limited and not across-the-board.
- Language revised from "commitment" to "intends" → indicates non-binding formulation.
- Energy dimension central to negotiations (oil, LNG, coal).
- Digital Services Tax references removed → indicates ongoing negotiation sensitivity.
- India maintains policy of diversified energy sourcing amid global geopolitical tensions.
- Crude oil import dependence: ~85% (Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas).

Static Linkages

- WTO's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principle.
- Exception for FTAs under GATT Article XXIV.
- Equalisation Levy introduced via Finance Act, 2016 & 2020.
- Union List (Seventh Schedule) – Foreign trade and commerce.
- Strategic autonomy in Indian foreign policy.
- Energy security concept (Economic Survey).
- Agricultural protection through tariff policy.

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Strengthens India-U.S. strategic economic ties.
- Enhances energy diversification.
- Potential access to advanced technology and capital goods.
- Supports Indo-Pacific economic alignment.

Concerns

- Agricultural tariff cuts may affect farmer incomes.
- Risk of trade imbalance widening.
- External pressure on energy sourcing choices.
- Ambiguity in communication may create diplomatic friction.
- Digital taxation sovereignty concerns.

Strategic Dimension

- Balancing U.S. partnership with continued ties to Russia.
- Preserving policy space in agriculture and digital economy.
- Maintaining credibility in multilateral trade forums.

Way Forward

- Adopt phased and sector-specific tariff liberalisation.
- Protect sensitive agricultural commodities.
- Continue diversified energy sourcing based on cost and security.
- Ensure transparency in trade negotiations.
- Strengthen domestic competitiveness before deeper liberalisation.
- Align digital taxation reforms with global OECD framework while preserving fiscal autonomy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The U.S. amended its official joint statement and factsheet on the India-U.S. Interim Trade Framework.
- Removed references to:
 - Pulses and certain agricultural products
 - Digital Services Tax (DST)
 - A binding Indian commitment to invest/purchase \$500 billion worth of U.S. goods
- Earlier wording triggered concerns in India regarding:
 - Inclusion of sensitive agricultural items
 - Perception of binding large-scale purchase commitments
- U.S. Trade Representative also deleted a social media post showing India's official map (including PoK and Aksai Chin).
- U.S. officials stated India is reducing Russian energy imports; India reiterated its policy of diversification in national interest.

Key Points

- India may reduce/eliminate tariffs on select U.S. industrial goods.

No reduction in States' share in tax devolution, FM asserts in Lok Sabha

Minister counters Opposition, says that resources that will be transferred to the States is estimated at ₹25.44 lakh crore; Constitution gives Centre authority to collect cesses and surcharges, she adds

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday dismissed allegations by Opposition members that the Centre was not transferring 41% of the divisible pool of taxes to the States, as mandated by the 15th Finance Commission, asserting that the required transfers were made every year.

The 15th Finance Commission had recommended that for 2020 to 2026, the Centre should transfer 41% of its divisible pool of taxes to the States, which the Centre had accepted.

"Often, we are accused of not transferring the 41% that we have transferred to the States. We have not reduced any State's devolvable tax," she said.

The Union Finance Minister said the total resources to be transferred to the States, including the devolution and under Centrally sponsored schemes,



NIRMALA SITHARAMAN
Union Finance Minister

This Budget has been prepared as the first Budget in the second quarter of the 21st century. So, this Budget covers a lot of issues from 2026 to 2050

was estimated at ₹25.44 lakh crore for 2026-27.

"This entails an increase of ₹2.7 lakh crore over 2025-26 and is ₹3.78 lakh crore more than the actuals of 2024-25," she said.

"The 16th Finance Commission analysed the States' share transferred by the Centre to the States from 2018-19 to 2022-23 and concluded that in each of these years, the devolution made by the Centre exactly matches the recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission," Ms. Sitharaman added.

Devolution pool

She said that it was the Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) that audited the Centre's finances and decided what the net proceeds of the Centre were, after subtracting from the gross tax receipts the cess-

es and surcharges collected by the Centre.

"Out of that, have we transferred 41% of the divisible pool, that is what should be looked at, not the gross tax revenue," the senior BJP leader said.

"The Constitution gives the Centre the authority to collect cesses and surcharges."

The Finance Minister sought to counter charges levelled by Opposition members that the Centre was shrinking the divisible pool of taxes by focusing more on cesses and surcharges, which the States cannot gain from.

"The cesses and surcharges are collected for a particular purpose such as health cess, education cess, road cess," Ms. Sitharaman said. "These do not benefit the Centre, they go to the States in terms of

building schools, hospitals, roads in the States."

Medium-term Budget

The Finance Minister explained why the Union Budget included several announcements that were aimed at the medium and long term.

"This Budget has been prepared as the first Budget in the second quarter of the 21st century," she said.

"So, this Budget covers a lot of issues from 2026 to 2050. We are also starting the new five-year cycle of the new Finance Commission and therefore the estimates are largely on the recommendations of the 16th Finance Commission," she said.

"By doing these [longer term announcements], which are leading us towards the medium and long term, we are also continuing our push in building infrastructure," she said.

"It is not just roads and National highways, we are also looking at waterways so that the cost of logistics can come down and States that are in the hinterland will have the advantage of moving goods faster at a lesser cost," she said.

◦ All Union taxes except cesses and surcharges.

• Distribution based on Finance Commission formula.

3. Cesses & Surcharges

- Levied under Article 271.
- Not shareable with States.
- Increasing share in Gross Tax Revenue reduces effective divisible pool (PRS data).

4. Role of CAG

- Under Articles 148–151.
- Certifies net proceeds of taxes for devolution calculation.

Importance

- Core to Fiscal Federalism.
- Linked to:
 - Cooperative Federalism
 - Vertical & Horizontal Imbalance
 - Government Budgeting
 - Centre–State Relations

Issues Involved

Concerns Raised

- Rising share of cesses & surcharges.
- Reduced fiscal autonomy of States.
- Vertical imbalance:
 - Centre collects more.
 - States spend more (social sector, health, education).

Government's Position

- 41% of divisible pool transferred fully.
- Cesses used for specific purposes.
- Constitution permits such levies.

Static Linkages

- Article 268–281 – Distribution of revenues
- Article 270 – Taxes levied and distributed
- Article 271 – Surcharge
- Article 275 – Grants-in-aid
- Article 280 – Finance Commission
- Article 266 – Consolidated Fund

Way Forward

- Rationalise excessive use of cesses.
- Strengthen Inter-State fiscal dialogue.
- Improve States' own tax capacity.
- Enhance transparency in fiscal data.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- During the Union Budget debate, the Union Finance Minister clarified that the Centre has transferred 41% of the divisible pool of taxes to States as recommended by the 15th Finance Commission (2020–26).
- Allegations were raised that increasing reliance on cesses and surcharges was shrinking the divisible pool.
- The Finance Minister stated:
 - 41% devolution has been made every year.
 - The CAG determines the net proceeds.
 - The 16th Finance Commission review found no deviation from 15th FC recommendations.
- Total estimated transfer to States (2026–27): ₹25.44 lakh crore (including tax devolution + grants + CSS).

Key Constitutional & Economic Concepts

1. Finance Commission

- Constitutional body under Article 280.
- Recommends:
 - Vertical devolution (Centre vs States)
 - Horizontal distribution (among States)
 - Grants-in-aid under Article 275
- 15th FC recommended:
 - 41% of divisible pool (reduced from 42% due to J&K reorganization).

2. Divisible Pool of Taxes

- Defined under Article 270.
- Includes:

Judicial drift in the Special Intensive Revision hearings

In the first week of February 2026, in an unprecedented event, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, appeared before the Supreme Court of India in the ongoing hearings around the conduct of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls, which has been taking place in multiple States across India.

The Chief Minister's arguments were focused on certain procedural infirmities that were causing hardship to the residents of her State. Her intervention led to the Court passing a slew of directions on February 9, ostensibly seeking to mitigate some of these hardships. However, in the course of the hearing, the Court also made a statement that no impediment to the SIR would be allowed across any of the States.



Gautam Bhattacharya
is a Delhi-based lawyer

had effectively become a fait accompli, too big to be undone. In the intervening six years, the Court had passed various orders about where and how Aadhaar could be used or demanded, but had not touched the constitutional challenge before it.

The repetition of this pattern in the SIR case reveals a normalisation of the Court moving away from its role as a constitutional court, and adopting the role of the administrator. This is unfortunate.

There are significant issues. Indeed, the SIR process has raised certain significant constitutional issues. Many of these issues turned upon the question of power: while the Representation of the People Act (India's umbrella election law) authorises the Election Commission of India (ECI) to conduct a special revision for "any constituency or any part of a constituency", and for reasons to be recorded, there is a fundamental question about whether this very specific power is also a carte blanche authorisation to conduct State and nation-wide SIRs. The wording of the section seems to imply that its purpose is a targeted and focused exercise meant to correct for distortions that might creep in in certain specific places. By contrast, the present SIRs are dragged, large-scale revisions of the rolls that, in effect, turn them into citizenship determining exercises. Added to this is the fact that electoral rolls already exist. Thus the ongoing SIRs amount to an exercise where the entire populations of States are called upon to freshly establish their citizenship and their right to vote, without any pre-existing cause for suspicion. The constitutional question then turns upon whether the ECI can simply operate on this mass presumption of non-citizenship, and force people to prove their rights from scratch.

In 1995, in *Lal Babu Hussein and Others vs Electoral Registration Officer and Others*, the Court had held that it could not. There again, the ECI had sought to effect large-scale removal of names from the voter rolls, acting on the suspicion that in certain constituencies there were many non-voters on the rolls. The Court struck down this exercise, and in the directions that it passed, made it clear that notices for removal from the rolls would have to be directed at specific individuals, and also a disclosure of the reason for suspicion that the individual in question was not a citizen of India.

As noted above, the present SIRs completely

invert that basic process. Instead of issuing notices to specific people that it reasonably suspects are non-voters, the ECI now requires everyone to come and prove that they are voters. It is crucial to note that multiple reports have come in from various States about arbitrary deletions and of individuals having to run from pillar to post to prove that their citizenship does not exist in a vacuum. They are the product of this fundamental inversion of the state-citizen relationship. The other troubling impact of the SIR exercise is that the wholesale revision of voter rolls has brought into play the notorious Form 7, which allows any person to "object" to the inclusion of any other person in the electoral roll. There have already been widespread reports about the misuse of Form 7 to have people struck off the rolls, en masse, from multiple States.

An accentuation of disparities. Finally – and this was something highlighted by the West Bengal Chief Minister as well – in a country with vast material inequalities, and disparities in access to the State, documentation requirements operate asymmetrically, and, in particular, impact the vulnerable and the marginalised (people at the intersection of the axes of caste, poverty and gender). Indian Courts have long articulated an equality jurisprudence that is cognisant of material and socio-political discrimination: a process that accentuates, rather than mitigates, these disparities, violates basic constitutional principles.

It should be obvious that these are not mere "administrative" glitches that can be corrected by administrative tweaks, in the manner in which the Court has been doing for the past eight months. Rather, the specific problems of voter deletions and disenfranchisement that are being brought to the Court on a regular basis are symptoms. They are downstream from the actual issue, which is the manner in which the ongoing SIRs invert the relationship between the state and the individual, and leave the latter effectively at the mercy of the former. This is a question that goes to the heart of the constitutional order. It cannot be remedied through a mere administrative fix. Rather, it must be addressed from the perspective of a constitutional framework that genuinely affirms the dignity and participatory rights of every individual, refusing to reduce persons to mere cogs in the machine of state and administrative efficiency.

3. Judicial Role

- Court has passed administrative directions (e.g., on documents).
- Core constitutional validity yet to be decided.
- Risk of "fait accompli" if exercise continues without final adjudication.

4. Equality and Vulnerability

- Documentation requirements disproportionately affect:
 - Migrants
 - Women (post-marriage name change)
 - SC/ST communities
 - Urban poor
- Raises Article 14 (equality) concerns.

5. Form 7 Misuse

- Form 7 allows objections to inclusion of a voter.
- Reports of mass objections in multiple States.
- Potential for political misuse.

Relevant Legal Precedent

- *Lal Babu Hussein vs Electoral Registration Officer* (1995):
 - Deletion requires individual notice.
 - Reasons must be disclosed.
 - Mass suspicion without due process not permissible.

Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Powers of ECI.
- Article 326 – Universal Adult Suffrage.
- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 21 – Due process and dignity.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 – Preparation and revision of rolls.
- Basic Structure Doctrine – Democracy and Judicial Review.
- Principles of Natural Justice – Audi alteram partem.

Critical Analysis

Arguments in Favour of SIR

- Ensures purity and accuracy of electoral rolls.
- Prevents duplication and fraudulent voting.
- Falls within ECI's constitutional mandate.
- Essential for free and fair elections.

Concerns

- Blanket revisions may exceed statutory authority.
- Inversion of state-citizen relationship (citizens must prove eligibility).
- Disproportionate impact on marginalized groups.
- Risk of disenfranchisement.
- Judicial delay may legitimize executive action without constitutional scrutiny.

Way Forward

- Early constitutional adjudication by Supreme Court.
- Strict compliance with individualized notice requirement.
- Transparent audit of deletions.
- Safeguards against misuse of Form 7.
- Uniform documentation norms.
- Strengthened grievance redressal mechanism.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- In February 2026, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, appeared before the Supreme Court of India during hearings concerning the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
- The SIR is being conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI) across multiple States.
- Petitions challenging the constitutional validity of SIR were first filed in July 2025 (initially relating to Bihar).
- On February 9, 2026, the Court issued procedural directions to mitigate hardships but stated that no impediment to SIR would be allowed across States.
- The core constitutional question regarding the scope of ECI's powers remains undecided.

Key Issues Involved

1. Scope of ECI's Powers

- Article 324 vests superintendence, direction and control of elections in ECI.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 permits "special revision" for any constituency or part thereof.
- Question: Does this allow blanket, state-wide revisions without specific cause?

2. Burden of Proof

- Earlier jurisprudence required:
 - Specific notice to individuals before deletion.
 - Disclosure of reasons.
- Present SIR allegedly requires all individuals to re-establish eligibility.
- Raises concerns about presumption of non-citizenship.

The top court's conduct in the SIR case sees it moving away from its role as a constitutional court and adopting the role of administrator

The CPI base revision exercise measures a slice of life

Inflation, one of the most closely watched macroeconomic indicators, is something that most people feel in daily life in their routine household expenses. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) captures this reality by tracking the prices of goods and services that households regularly consume, turning everyday experiences into an official measure of inflation. For the common man, the CPI is like a quiet mirror of daily life capturing, inter alia, the changing cost of basic needs such as food on the plate, rent for the roof over the head, and fuel for the journey to work.



Saurabh Garg
is Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India

More than a simple number

Though it appears as a simple number, it speaks for households, guiding income and social security adjustments so that life's essentials remain within reach. CPI-based inflation is also the primary indicator for the Reserve Bank of India to help guide it in decisions such as interest rates and inflation control. Therefore, when the CPI reflects reality, policies respond better to what people are truly experiencing.

Inflation is not just about prices going up. It is about how these price changes affect household budgets. That is why making sure that the index reflects current consumption patterns is just as important as tracking the prices themselves. This is the context in which India's ongoing CPI base update from the year 2012 to 2024 must be seen.

Since the last base revision, the economy has changed significantly, urbanisation has grown, services have expanded, digital platforms have changed buying habits, and household spending has diversified.

The CPI 2024 series has, therefore, been updated using the latest Household Consumption Expenditure Survey of 2023-24. As people's preferences and expenses changed over time, the importance (weightage) given to different goods and services in the CPI has also been adjusted.

It will better trace how prices shape daily life and policy decisions

Items on which households now spend more have been given greater weight, with less weight for those that account for a smaller share of spending. This ensures that the CPI measures price changes that really affect household budgets. The consumption basket has also been updated to reflect emerging trends, such as growing spending on services, driven by rising incomes and changing lifestyles.

Updating the way that the CPI is calculated is just as important as updating what it measures. The revised CPI is more closely aligned with international standards while retaining features specific to India. This makes it easier to compare India's inflation with other countries. From the perspective of households, this matters because it helps policymakers understand how price changes in India fit into the global picture, without losing sight of what affects daily life.

Data collection for the CPI has been upgraded to keep pace with how people shop and spend. While traditional market surveys still track prices, particularly of food and other essentials, the 2024 framework has introduced that captures online prices for items such as telecom services, airfares, and certain other services.

A wider database

The adoption of computer-assisted price collection in the new series has reduced manual errors and allowed real-time checks, improving the quality and timeliness of price data. Quality and timeliness of the CPI matter because these shape decisions that touch everyday life, such as how high loans are, how much savings earn, and how rising prices influence household budgets.

In the new base year, the CPI draws more on official data from government sources, railfares, postal charges, fuel prices, and items sold through the public distribution system. This means that these numbers are captured with greater precision by mitigating the chances of

errors and biases that can occur in market surveys. This integration of survey data, administrative records and digital price sources represents a marked improvement over earlier practices and provides a more reliable picture of how prices are changing.

The massive institutional effort behind a base revision exercise of this scale is also worth noting. It involves coordination across field offices, statistical divisions and national and international expert bodies.

The process involves extensive scrutiny of methodology, testing of alternatives and consultation with economists and domain specialists. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has engaged with expert groups, international organisations and stakeholders to ensure that the changes are transparent, easy to understand and methodologically sound.

Even with updates to the basket, weights, and data sources, the CPI keeps its core purpose, capturing how prices change from a household's point of view. This continuity matters because it lets us compare prices over time. In other words, the index is being improved without losing the connection to everyday life, so that it remains a reliable guide for policymakers.

In context

The CPI reminds us that behind every statistic lies the lived experience of millions, and that numbers, ultimately, are about people. It quietly traces how prices shape daily life and inform policy decisions. Through the ongoing base revision exercise, MoSPI has ensured that the CPI continues to be accurate, up-to-date, and consistent over time, so that it remains not just a number, but a true mirror capturing the realities faced across the country.

The views expressed are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has revised the Consumer Price Index (CPI) base year from 2012 to 2024.
- The revision is based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24.
- CPI is the official inflation measure used under India's Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) framework.
- The revision reflects:
 - Structural changes in consumption
 - Rise of services and digital platforms
 - Urbanisation and income growth

Key Points for Prelims

- CPI measures retail inflation at the consumer level.
- Calculated using the Laspeyres price index formula (fixed base year weights).
- Base year revision ensures:
 - Updated consumption basket
 - Revised weight structure
- Greater weight to:
 - Services (education, healthcare, telecom, transport)
- Incorporates:
 - Online price data
 - Administrative data (fuel prices, rail fares, PDS items)
- CPI is used by:
 - Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for monetary policy
 - Government for Dearness Allowance (DA) adjustments

Static Linkages

- Inflation types: headline vs core inflation.
- Difference between CPI and WPI.
- Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) – 6 members.
- Inflation Target: $4\% \pm 2\%$ (as per amended RBI Act, 1934).
- Importance of base year in index numbers.
- Role of National Statistical Commission in statistical reforms.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Improves accuracy of inflation measurement.
- Strengthens credibility of inflation targeting regime.
- Reflects digital and service-led economy.
- Enhances global comparability.

Challenges

- Rural consumption patterns may be underrepresented.
- Frequent revisions may affect long-term comparability.
- Data integration complexity.
- Informal sector price capture limitations.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent methodology disclosure.
- Improve rural and informal sector data coverage.
- Strengthen statistical capacity at state level.
- Periodic (5-7 year) base revisions.
- Integrate big data and digital platforms responsibly.

Reining in a bigot

Assam's CM's rhetoric is to divert attention from governance deficits

Assam is among the States scheduled to hold Assembly elections in the months ahead. The northeastern State is also one of India's laggards in many critical socio-economic markers – its HDI, per capita income, gainful industrial employment numbers, and enrolment rates in higher education are lower than the national average, while it has many poor health indicators. Any political leadership of such a State would face a clear and fundamental choice in governance. One path would be to identify systemic lacunae and bridge gaps in health, education, income and employment for every citizen, earning the goodwill of the electorate and seeking continuation in office on the strength of performance. The alternative path is more insidious – the creation of bogeymen through imaginary enemies and the stereotyping of entire communities. By doing so, demagogues seek to bypass the hard work of governance, inciting the electorate through polarisation and ensuring that political discourse remains mired in communal division. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma of the BJP has chosen the latter path, deploying incendiary rhetoric that targets the Bengali-origin Muslim community, framing it as a “demographic threat” and a “matter of life and death” for the indigenous population, and escalating to what can be described as calls for economic persecution – urging citizens to underpay Muslim rickshaw-pullers so that “they suffer” and “leave Assam”. He has accused the community of “fertilizer jihad”, blamed them for urban floods, and coined a lexicon of manufactured hatreds, all of it in pursuit of what H.L. Mencken once described as the cynical art of politics “to keep the populace alarmed... by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary”.

In the CPI(M)/CPI's petition filed in the Supreme Court, Mr. Sarma's statements have been documented to demonstrate not isolated political rhetoric but a sustained pattern of communal targeting that is politically distasteful and constitutionally unlawful. As the petition rightly argues, his statements deserve scrutiny from two lenses. First, the constitutional framework that concerns the Chief Minister's oath of office, fundamental rights of all citizens and the Preamble's guarantees of secularism and fraternity. Second, that these statements are liable to prosecution on offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Representation of the People Act. The Court has through its cumulative effect doctrine, in *Amish Devgan* and *Tehseen Poonawalla*, suggested that a CM's speeches carry the weight of the State's authority which makes communally polarising language in them even more damaging as it is used by someone who controls the police apparatus. The Court should not dismiss it as an election-eve political manoeuvre, and recognise it for what it is – a test of whether its own directions on hate speech carry any meaning when the offender holds the highest office in a State.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Assam is scheduled to hold Assembly elections in the coming months.
- The State faces significant socio-economic challenges:
 - Lower per capita income than national average (Economic Survey).
 - Poor performance in health indicators (NFHS).
 - Lower higher education enrolment ratio (AISHE).
 - Persistent poverty (NITI Aayog Multidimensional Poverty Index).
- Public speeches by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma targeting the Bengali-origin Muslim community have sparked controversy.
- CPI(M)/CPI filed a petition before the Supreme Court alleging:
 - Violation of constitutional provisions.
 - Promotion of communal hatred.
 - Breach of oath of office.
- The issue raises questions regarding:
 - Hate speech jurisprudence.
 - Secularism.
 - Electoral integrity.
 - Role of constitutional functionaries.

Key Constitutional and Legal Provisions

Constitutional Provisions

- Preamble – Secularism, Equality, Fraternity.
- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15 – Prohibition of discrimination.
- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of speech.
- Article 19(2) – Reasonable restrictions (public order, morality, etc.).
- Article 21 – Protection of life and dignity.
- Article 38 – Promote welfare of the people.
- Article 51A(e) – Fundamental Duty to promote harmony.
- Third Schedule – Oath of office of Chief Minister.

Statutory Provisions

- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 – Offences relating to promoting enmity between groups.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951:
 - Section 123(3) – Appeal to religion is a corrupt practice.
 - Section 125 – Promoting enmity during elections.

Important Supreme Court Judgments

- *Amish Devgan v. Union of India* (2020) – Cumulative effect doctrine in hate speech.
- *Tehseen Poonawalla v. Union of India* (2018) – State accountability in preventing hate crimes.
- *Abhiram Singh v. C.D. Commachen* (2017) – Religion-based electoral appeals prohibited.
- *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994) – Secularism part of Basic Structure.

Core Issues

- Whether political speech by constitutional functionaries enjoys wider immunity.
- Conflict between free speech and communal harmony.
- Role of judiciary in regulating hate speech.
- Ethics in public life and constitutional morality.
- Impact of identity politics on development-oriented governance.

Static Linkages

- Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Rule of Law.
- Constitutional Morality.
- Reasonable Restrictions.
- Corrupt Practices in Elections.
- Collective Responsibility.
- Welfare State concept.

Critical Analysis

Constitutional Perspective

- Secularism and fraternity are constitutional commitments.
- Hate speech by a Chief Minister carries enhanced impact due to control over police machinery.
- Oath of office demands impartial governance.

Governance Perspective

- Polarisation may divert focus from:
 - Employment generation
 - Health infrastructure
 - Education access
 - Industrial growth

Electoral Perspective

- Communal appeals undermine free and fair elections.
- Potential violation of RPA provisions.

Ethical Perspective

- Violates principles of:
 - Impartiality
 - Integrity
 - Public trust
 - Compassion

Way Forward

- Strict enforcement of hate speech provisions under BNS and RPA.
- Clear judicial guidelines on accountability of constitutional functionaries.
- Strengthening Election Commission's monitoring mechanisms.
- Promote issue-based political campaigns.
- Civic education on constitutional values.
- Institutional reforms to fast-track hate speech cases.

US deal raises questions. PM must take a leaf out of Manmohan Singh's book

TRADE DIPLOMACY is a game of chess. The real world of trade negotiations rarely conforms to David Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage where the French sell their wine to England and the British sell their cloth to France. Trade negotiations are also about asserting national power and security. The Nobel Prize-winning economist Thomas Schelling famously told the United States Congress a half-century ago, "Trade policy is national security policy".

It is, therefore, entirely understandable that President Donald Trump chose to weaponise tariffs in his quest to reassert American power. US allies in Europe and Asia quickly capitulated, but China, Brazil and India had held out. It would seem from the manner in which India has agreed to end the impasse that it has also capitulated.

In matters pertaining to national security, a government should not only be doing the right thing, but should also be seen to be doing the right thing. Mere assertion and ham-handed messaging cannot substitute for clear statements of intent and purpose. Since Parliament is in session, Prime Minister Narendra Modi ought to have made a statement in the Lok Sabha rather than allow a Tweedledum-Tweedledee buck-passing performance by the ministers of commerce and external affairs. On matters of international relations, economic or political, the buck stops with the PM.

Returning from his visit to Washington, DC in July 2005 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh chose to address Parliament, offering a detailed account of his discussions with President George Bush. On the matter

of energy security, the core of the US-India civil nuclear energy agreement, Prime Minister Singh told Parliament: "That India's quest for energy security is an essential component of our vision for our development was a significant theme of my talks. I elaborated the imperative need for India to have unhindered access to all sources of energy, including nuclear energy, if we are to maintain and accelerate our rate of economic growth. I am pleased to state that the US understood our position in regard to our securing adequate and affordable energy supplies, from all sources."

For three years, Parliament was allowed to discuss in minute detail all aspects of the nuclear deal. Despite that, opposition political parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party, voted against the deal. Many even in the Congress party were unhappy with the deal. It was Singh's transparency that earned him the trust of the Indian electorate and secured him a second term in office in 2009.

It is most unfortunate that the Modi government has fudged the issue on the final agreement with the US, with Trump making claims about a Russian oil conditionality that India has neither rejected nor accepted. It was left to the foreign secretary, Vikram Misri, to make a typically diplomatic statement that can be interpreted in various ways. Some have claimed that this was Indian tact and cleverness in the face of Trump's cowboy bravado. Unfortunately, it has come across as Indian duplicity and sophistry masquerading



SANJAYA BARUA

as Chanakyan cleverness.

Rather than celebrate the trade deal as a great achievement, the Modi government ought to have stated honestly that this was the best it could do under the circumstances to safeguard livelihoods in export-oriented sectors. India walked out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) using the language of national interest when, in fact, it was defending livelihoods in sectors that were unwilling to expose themselves to global competition.

The same motivation shaped the trade deal with Trump. It is a different matter that the Modi government did not think about the livelihood of Punjab's farmers, small and medium enterprises and traders when it closed the gates on trade with Pakistan. But then, the merchants of Surat and the shrimp farmers of the Coromandel Coast seem to have more clout.

The India-US trade deal may be the best under the circumstances, but it is not a favour done to India. It is a price India has agreed to pay to keep the US on its side. That is how the world will view it. This is not the first time that India has had to bend under pressure from Big Powers. But this is the first time such bending is being portrayed as a great achievement.

The deal may be the best under the circumstances, but it is not a favour to India. It is a price India has agreed to pay to keep the US on its side. That is how the world will view it. This is not the first time that India has had to bend under pressure from Big Powers. But this is the first time such bending is being portrayed as a great achievement

Trump has deliberately interpreted the trade deal as Indian capitulation by explicitly linking it to ending Indian purchase of Russian oil.

That the government has been able to orchestrate support from courtiers in the think-tank and diplomatic community is understandable. *Mea culpa*. It too have had to conduct that orchestration in my time in government. However, never during the negotiation of the civil nuclear deal did American leadership mock Indian leadership. Even when India temporarily turned off the taps on Iranian oil imports to please the American Jewish lobby, it was done voluntarily and was a temporary gesture aimed at securing a permanent benefit – the recognition of India as a nuclear weapons state.

Today there is no clarity on the longevity of the trade deal. Other countries, too, have been held on a short leash with uncertainty about the near future. Will Indian support to the US on various fronts and various causes be tested on a daily basis? If there is a war in the Gulf following an attack on Iran and if that disrupts oil supply to India from the Gulf, would India still be punished for accessing Russian oil? There are still far too many questions about the deal and the government has understandably called it a "Framework for an Interim Agreement". It is best that the Prime Minister comes clean and offers his understanding of where India stands on its external economic policies vis-à-vis the US and BRICS countries rather than fudge issues and pretend to be Chanakyan.

Barua is a writer and former editor, The Financial Express

- Strategic Autonomy – Core pillar of India's foreign policy.
- WTO Principles – MFN (Most Favoured Nation), National Treatment.
- Energy Security – Diversification of energy sources (Economic Survey).
- RCEP Withdrawal (2019) – Protection of domestic industry.
- Civil Nuclear Agreement (2005–08) – Example of trade-security linkage and parliamentary scrutiny.
- Parliamentary Oversight – Executive negotiates treaties; Parliament debates policy implications.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India and the United States recently concluded a "Framework for an Interim Trade Agreement" to ease tariff tensions.
- The US administration used tariffs as a strategic tool, linking trade issues with broader geopolitical concerns such as energy imports.
- The agreement comes amid global realignment involving the US, China, Russia, and BRICS.
- Debate has emerged regarding transparency, strategic autonomy, and the linkage between trade policy and national security.

Key Points

- Trade policy increasingly functions as economic statecraft (linking commerce with strategic goals).
- The US has used tariffs as leverage in bilateral negotiations.
- India termed the arrangement a "framework," indicating limited scope and evolving negotiations.
- Export-oriented sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, marine products, and gems & jewellery may benefit.
- Concerns exist regarding:
 - Possible geopolitical conditionalities (e.g., Russian oil imports).
 - Longevity and enforceability of concessions.
 - Implications for India's engagement with BRICS and Global South.

Static Linkages

- Comparative Advantage (David Ricardo) – Trade based on relative efficiency.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Prevents escalation into a tariff war.
- Safeguards export-oriented employment.
- Maintains strategic partnership with the US.
- Reflects pragmatic diplomacy in a multipolar world.

Challenges

- Risk of perceived erosion of strategic autonomy.
- Ambiguity regarding geopolitical conditionalities.
- Short-term nature of the agreement.
- Need for greater transparency and parliamentary discussion.

Way Forward

- Enhance export competitiveness through logistics and PLI reforms.
- Diversify trade partnerships (EU, ASEAN, Africa).
- Maintain diversified energy sourcing strategy.
- Strengthen institutional mechanisms for trade negotiations.
- Balance US partnership with BRICS engagement.

Scorecards forget civil service isn't only for disposing files



SHAILAJA CHANDRA

THE INDIAN Express reported on February 9 that the Cabinet Secretariat has begun using performance scorecards for Union secretaries. This marks a major change in the evaluation process for senior civil servants at the Centre. The scorecard covers a dozen parameters and relies on quantifiable indicators such as file disposal rates, reduction of pendency, expenditure control, and output delivery. Negative marks penalise lapses, while the cabinet secretary keeps a small discretionary part while awarding marks.

What is striking is not what these scorecards measure, but what they omit. At present, about 100 secretaries serve in the Government of India, with some 80 from the IAS. Those from non-IAS backgrounds — the Indian Foreign Service, other central services, engineers, scientists, economists — are, like IAS secretaries, involved in policy formulation and offering strategic guidance to ministers. No less important is a secretary's ability to anticipate consequences by ensuring proposals are administratively workable, fiscally sustainable, and politically viable. None of the parameters seem to recognise these responsibilities — the hallmark of a permanent civil service in a parliamentary system.

The All-India Services — the IAS, IPS, and IFS (forests) — were not conceived as delivery mechanisms. Under Article 312, Parliament and the law created these services not to maximise file-processing efficiency, but to enable officers to think nationally, act impartially, and hold together a complex federal polity. The scorecard omits a secretary's answerability for giving impactful policy advice and critically advising on the progress and impact of projects and programmes. If the principal responsibility of secretaries gets confined to rapid and compliant implementation, it can have sombre consequences.

First, simplistic marking systems erode institutional memory. When every initiative is treated as a discrete project rather than part of a longer administrative continuum, institutional memory becomes dispensable. Policies that have endured for decades have survived because administrators adapted them over time, drawing on experience and prompt intervention. That is the bureaucratic kernel in any parliamentary system.

Second, there is an implied assumption that policy design may have moved elsewhere. If thinking and direction emanate not from the constitutionally and statutorily established bureaucracies but from elsewhere — external advisory structures, political units, think tanks — senior civil servants quickly learn that their safest role is to step back from questioning and focus on meeting timelines and targets. The purpose for which the civil services were created could regress. The outcomes will weaken the foundation of the bureaucracy. Unless that is intentional.

This is a system that rewards speed over scrutiny and compliance over counsel. It is unlikely to let inconvenient truths surface before things go awry. A competent bureaucracy is expected to play a preventive role to see that flawed proposals are changed, deferred, or quietly abandoned. This obviates the need for subsequent public withdrawal. When policies are centrally announced, or shaped top-down, they leave no scope to redesign things in-house. Treating this function as dispensable sacrifices one of the state's most valuable safeguards.

Fourth, devaluing the secretary devalues the entire edifice of governance. By making the top echelon of the bureaucracy irrelevant, it dismisses the UPSC's role in recruitment and the investments made in training senior officers to provide elevated and continuous support to governments.

None of this is to suggest that outcomes do not matter, or that senior officers should escape accountability. Without question, senior officers must be held accountable, but that is the responsibility of institutional watchdogs like the C&AG, CVC, Public Accounts Committee, and the Estimates Committee.

The scorecard adopts a corporate style of prescribing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which privilege speed, output, and efficiency but only to promote business growth. The Union secretary instead has a duty not merely to accelerate decisions and their outcomes, but to interrogate them. Systems do not fail for want of speed, but when judgement and dissent are treated as obstacles, not duties.

The writer is former chief secretary, Delhi, and former secretary, Ministry of Health

Policies that have endured for decades have survived because administrators adapted them over time, drawing on experience and prompt intervention. That is the bureaucratic kernel in any parliamentary system

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Cabinet Secretariat has introduced performance scorecards for Union Secretaries.
- Evaluation parameters include:
 - File disposal rate
 - Reduction in pendency
 - Expenditure management
 - Output delivery
- Negative marking for lapses; limited discretionary marking by Cabinet Secretary.
- Concerns raised about exclusion of qualitative parameters such as policy advice and administrative foresight.

Key Points for Prelims

- Around 100 Secretaries serve at the Centre; majority from IAS.
- Secretaries perform:
 - Policy formulation
 - Strategic advice to Ministers
 - Administrative coordination
 - Ensuring fiscal and legal viability of proposals
- Existing accountability mechanisms:
 - CAG (financial audit)
 - CVC (vigilance oversight)
 - Public Accounts Committee (PAC)
 - Estimates Committee
- Article 312: Parliament can create All India Services in national interest.
- Civil servants function under doctrine of collective ministerial responsibility.

Static Linkages

- Articles 309–311: Service conditions & protections.
- Article 312: Creation of All India Services.
- Articles 315–323: UPSC provisions.
- Permanent executive ensures:
 - Continuity in governance
 - Political neutrality
 - Federal cohesion
- 2nd ARC recommended:
 - Performance management systems
 - Results-Framework Documents (RFDs)
 - Outcome-based governance.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Encourages time-bound disposal of work.
- Promotes measurable accountability.
- May reduce bureaucratic delays.
- Aligns with outcome-based governance reforms.

Concerns

- Overemphasis on quantifiable output may ignore:
 - Quality of policy advice
 - Administrative feasibility
 - Long-term policy impact
- Risk of reducing Secretaries to implementation agents rather than strategic advisors.
- May discourage:
 - Dissent
 - Critical evaluation of flawed proposals
- Institutional memory and continuity may weaken.
- Corporate-style KPIs may not fully suit parliamentary governance model.

Way Forward

- Blend quantitative metrics with qualitative assessment.
- Include parameters like:
 - Policy innovation
 - Inter-ministerial coordination
 - Crisis management
- Protect space for reasoned dissent.
- Link evaluation to long-term governance outcomes.
- Align reforms with constitutional ethos of neutral and competent civil service.

When your inner clock and outer timetable meet



GEORGE JOHN

A CONFESSION to begin. I have been both the sanctimonious lark who quoted "early to bed and early to rise" and the defiant owl who bragged that real thinking only begins after midnight. Both versions believed they were virtuous. Both were wrong.

India loves binaries—science versus arts, vegetarian versus non-vegetarian, "morning person" versus "lazy owl". We turn a neutral biological difference called chronotype—the body's preferred sleep-wake pattern—into a moral referendum. In truth, what matters is not when you work, but whether your work, relationships and health are aligned with the clock inside your body.

As a retired psychiatrist who has listened to people in distress, and as a citizen who has watched children yawn through assembly, I have learnt what our public debate resists: Your circadian rhythm is a temperament of time, not a badge of character.

Look around. Our cities run on staggered tides of effort. Mumbai's *dabbawalas* move like clockwork in the late morning. Call-centre workers in Gurgaon answer queries from customers who will never know their "good evening" is being spoken at 3 am. Nurses keep vigil while the rest of us sleep. Society needs different kinds of bodies to stay awake at different times.

The trouble begins when a single timetable is treated as sacred. Schools that insist every teenager must sparkle at 8 am are fighting adolescent biology, not building character. Offices that reward being seen at a desk at nine, regardless of productivity, confuse "face time" with performance. Families that shame the late riser forget that this late riser may have sat up with a sick child till dawn.

There is a spiritual argument, too. We are stewards, not owners, of the small patch of creation that is our body. Good stewardship includes listening to the rhythms written into our flesh. Prudence asks: "Am I living in a way that respects my honest clock?" Compassion adds a second question: "Does my community make room for bodies unlike mine?" Those questions belong together. In the best Indian tradition, they are matters of *dharma*.

What would a chronotype-friendly India look like? Schools that start slightly later for adolescents, or at least offer some flexibility. Workplaces that judge staff by output. Courts, hospitals and public offices that keep staggered windows so citizens who cannot manage mornings are not locked out of justice or care. A public-health message that drops the moral tone: Not "wake at five or fail", but "sleep enough and align your effort with your peaks".

The payoff would be large. Better-rested students learn more. Workers trusted to manage their energy give more. Partners who respect each other's rhythms quarrel less and love more. A nation that prides itself on being truly awake might discover that wisdom is not about when we open our eyes, but how wisely we use them.

So which life wins: The owl's or the lark's? The wrong question. The real victory is when your inner clock and outer timetable meet. May you discover your honest clock. May your loved ones honour it. And may India—restless, ambitious India—learn to make enough room in time that larks, owls and the vast, drowsy middle can all play in tune.

The writer is a retired psychiatrist



A nation that prides itself on being truly awake might discover that wisdom is not about when we open our eyes, but how wisely we use them

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the Issue

- Growing discussion in public health and education policy circles regarding chronotype (biological sleep-wake preference) and its implications for schools and workplaces.
- Concerns over:
 - Early school timings conflicting with adolescent biology.
 - Sleep deprivation among students and shift workers.
 - Productivity loss due to rigid office timings.
- Aligns with broader policy concerns of:
 - Human capital development.
 - Mental health burden in India.
 - Work-life balance in a 24×7 service economy.

Key Concepts & Facts

- Chronotype: Individual's natural sleep-wake pattern (morning type, evening type, intermediate).
- Regulated by circadian rhythm, controlled by the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) in the hypothalamus.
- Circadian rhythm influenced by:
 - Light-dark cycle (primary zeitgeber).
 - Hormones such as melatonin.
- Adolescents exhibit delayed sleep phase (tendency to sleep and wake later).
- Sleep deprivation associated with:
 - Reduced cognitive performance.
 - Increased mental health disorders.
 - Metabolic and cardiovascular risks.

- India's IT/BPO sectors operate in non-standard timings due to global integration.

Static Linkages

- Right to Health under Article 21 (Judicial interpretation).
- Article 47 – Duty of State to improve public health.
- Human capital theory – Education + Health as productivity drivers.
- NCERT Biology – Regulation of biological rhythms.
- Behavioural economics – Productivity linked to cognitive efficiency, not duration of work.

Critical Analysis

Benefits of Chronotype-Sensitive Policies

- Improved academic outcomes among adolescents.
- Better workplace productivity.
- Reduction in stress and mental health burden.
- Alignment with service-sector economic structure.

Challenges

- Administrative coordination in schools and public offices.
- Transport and infrastructure adjustments.
- Cultural resistance to changing early-start norms.
- Risk of unequal implementation across regions.

Governance Perspective

- Uniform timetables may not reflect biological diversity.
- Policy design must balance:
 - Efficiency.
 - Equity.
 - Feasibility.

Way Forward

- Pilot projects for flexible school timings.
- Encourage output-based evaluation in workplaces.
- Integrate sleep awareness in public health campaigns.
- Research-based policymaking through NITI Aayog and Health Ministry data.
- Balance institutional uniformity with biological diversity.

No-trust is no answer, onus on Speaker

WITH OPPOSITION MPs giving notice for a no-confidence motion against Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday, the question is: Is this an answer? In a climate of polarisation, amid repeated adjournments of the House, the Opposition has a set of grievances that are legitimate. Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi was not allowed to complete his speech on the motion of thanks on the President's address, the rulebook was waved to silence him when he tried to read out from the unpublished memoirs of a former Army chief. Nor was this an isolated instance — even earlier, rules have been interpreted to discourage debate, rather than encourage it. This was followed by the Speaker suspending eight Opposition MPs for the rest of the session, even as he let BJP MPs get away with similar conduct. And then, Speaker Birla said he had advised the Prime Minister against attending the Lok Sabha because of "credible information" that Congress MPs would create an "unprecedented incident" after reaching the PM's seat — this, even by the standards of the current political exchange, stretched credulity. So yes, the Speaker's conduct has invited criticism. But no, a no-confidence motion is not a prudent response to it.

The no-confidence motion against the Speaker is an instrument sparingly used — only thrice so far in post-Independence parliamentary history, and it did not succeed in unseating the Speaker even once. No-confidence motions were more recently moved in the Rajya Sabha against Deputy Chairman Harivansh and Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar, but both notices were rejected. Of course, the numbers game favours the ruling party. But a no-confidence motion against the presiding officer is not an answer also because it signals a breakdown, leaves no room for manoeuvre for both sides. In the current situation, the Opposition faces a government nearly two years into its third term, more than three years remaining. Having ratcheted up the pitch, it needs to ask where it can go from here.

Has it done its own work in the House, has it used its space in Parliament effectively and wisely, coordinating with allies and presenting a united front? If it finds its voice stifled, if it finds that less and less legislation is being debated or being sent to standing committees for scrutiny, it needs to find a way out politically. Walking out or name-calling is no substitute for strategy. As for the Speaker, the onus is on him — and his office — to earn the confidence of those in the Opposition benches, motion or no motion.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Opposition MPs have submitted a notice for a no-confidence (removal) motion against the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.
- Allegations include:
 - Restricting debate during the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address.
 - Suspension of Opposition MPs.
 - Interpretation of Rules seen as discouraging discussion.
- The issue raises questions about:
 - Neutrality of the Speaker
 - Functioning of Parliament
 - Role of Opposition in a parliamentary democracy

Constitutional & Procedural Framework

- Article 93 – Lok Sabha shall choose a Speaker and Deputy Speaker.
- Article 94(c) – Speaker may be removed by a resolution passed by a majority of all the then members of the House (effective majority).
- 14 days' notice mandatory before moving the removal resolution.
- During consideration of removal motion, the Speaker does not preside.
- Speaker's powers include:
 - Presiding over proceedings.
 - Interpreting Rules of Procedure.
 - Deciding disqualification under the Tenth Schedule.
 - Certifying Money Bills (Article 110).

Important Rules

- Rule 373 – Withdrawal of a Member.
- Rule 374 – Naming and suspension.
- Rule 374A – Automatic suspension for grave disorder.
- Suspension is distinct from expulsion (which requires separate resolution).

Historical Perspective

- Removal motions against Speakers have been rare and unsuccessful in independent India.
- Indicates:
 - High threshold due to majority requirement.
 - Political nature of such motions.

Institutional Significance

- Speaker is:
 - Guardian of House's dignity.
 - Protector of minority rights in Parliament.
 - Key authority in maintaining order.
- Neutrality is a constitutional convention (though not explicitly mandated).

Issues Analysis

1. Shrinking Space for Debate

- Decline in time spent on legislative scrutiny.
- Fewer Bills referred to Department-related Standing Committees (PRS India data in recent years).

2. Suspension of MPs

- Raises concerns about:
 - Balance between discipline and dissent.
 - Impact on representation of constituencies.

3. Political Strategy

- Removal motion is symbolic when numbers favor ruling party.
- May signal institutional breakdown rather than negotiation.

Linkages with Static Polity Concepts

- Parliamentary form of government → Executive accountable to Legislature.
- Collective responsibility (Article 75).
- Anti-Defection Law (Tenth Schedule).
- Separation of powers (functional, not strict).
- Conventions vs written provisions in parliamentary democracy.

Way Forward

- Strengthen parliamentary committees for deeper scrutiny.
- Ensure fair time allocation for Opposition (UK model reference).
- Codify neutrality norms for presiding officers.
- Greater transparency in suspension and disciplinary actions.
- Promote structured debate over disruption.