

# DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

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**CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY  
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

# SC denies Bengal plea to stay voter roll freeze

Top court says tribunal hearings could not be 'compressed' to fit a pre-conceived deadline

CJI says the blockade of judicial officers in Malda was 'well-planned, and deeply instigated' move

Logical discrepancies are 'peculiar' to Bengal, prompting use of judicial officers, court says

Krishnadass Rajagopal  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday declined the West Bengal government's appeal to wait for a few more days before freezing the electoral roll so that many of the over 20 lakh voters, who could not pass the verification by judicial officers after being removed from rolls under the special intensive revision (SIR), get a chance to vote in the Assembly elections on April 23 and April 29.

On the gheraoing of judicial officers in the State's Malda district on April 1, the top court invoked powers under Article 142 of the Constitution and Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a Bench, said the incident was not an emotional outburst, but a "well-planned, calculated and deeply instigated" move. The court directed the National Investigation Agency to take over the in-

vestigation of the case.

The hearing began with senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for West Bengal, saying there were long meandering queues of voters in the State who remain excluded from the electoral rolls over 'logical discrepancies'.

Mr. Divan said the 19 appellate tribunals should be asked to dispose of the appeals by April 15. A final supplementary electoral roll, including the names of voters who have won their appeals, could be published on April 18, five days ahead of April 23, the first polling date. Electors, whose appeals could not be decided by April 15, could be included in the electoral roll, he said.

**'Mapped electors'**  
Freezing the electoral roll on April 6, the last date of filing nominations for the first phase, would deprive lakhs of their right to vote and would amount to ignoring the appellate pro-



**Last resort:** People queue up in Nadia, West Bengal, on Monday to submit their petitions before the special tribunal after their names were deleted from the voter list under the SIR. (PI)

cess, he submitted. "Appeals are a continuation of the adjudication process, and no elector should be disenfranchised. These are mapped electors. They had voted in the 2002 elections," Mr. Divan said.

But Justice Jyotsna Bagchi said a tribunal hearing cannot be "compressed". Principles of natural justice were involved and the hearing of appeals cannot be made into a hasty exercise to fit a pre-conceived deadline of April 15, as suggested by the State.

The court noted that out of over 60 lakh objections, 38.15 lakh were disposed of by the judicial officers.

## LS, RS Chairs reject notice for CEC's removal

**NEW DELHI**  
Rajya Sabha Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla have rejected a notice submitted by 153 Opposition MPs across both Houses seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar. No specific reasons were cited for the rejection. The Opposition MPs had accused the CEC of being "absentminded" to the executive and the "deliberate abuse of power". **» PAGE 4**

final order would be delivered. That may however take a month or 60 days... How can the tribunals work when so much pressure is put on them," Justice Bagchi asked.

In a connected hearing, the court pulled up the West Bengal Chief Secretary, who had gone uncommunicative despite repeated calls for aid by the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court on April 1. The Chief Secretary, along with the Director-General of Police, Director-General and apologetic to the court. "Lower yourself a bit so that ordinary minions like the Chief Justice of the High Court can access you," Justice Jyotsna Bagchi told the two officials.

Chief Justice Kant said the bureaucracy drew their obscenity from being "pampered".

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closure of 60 lakh objections challenging logical discrepancies. Now, we have to draw a line and freeze the electoral roll. Persons aggrieved would be able to file appeals. The appellate tribunals would formulate their own procedure based on the principles of natural justice and a

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The Supreme Court of India declined the West Bengal government's plea to delay freezing of electoral rolls ahead of Assembly elections (April 23 & 29).
- Over 20 lakh voters were excluded after failing verification during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).
- The Court emphasized timely completion of the electoral process over extending verification deadlines.
- In a related incident, the Court invoked Article 142 of the Constitution of India to transfer the Malda violence case to the National Investigation Agency.
- The Court criticized administrative lapses, including non-responsiveness of state officials to the Calcutta High Court.

### Key Points

- Electoral Roll Freeze: Deadline aligned with nomination filing (April 6).
- Ensures certainty and integrity of the election process.
- Scale of Verification: ~60 lakh objections raised; 59.15 lakh disposed of by judicial officers.
- Appeals Mechanism: Appellate tribunals to decide cases post-freeze.
- Emphasis on natural justice over rushed adjudication.
- Judicial Concerns: Tribunal hearings cannot be "compressed" arbitrarily.
- Administrative accountability questioned.
- Law & Order Dimension: Gherao of judicial officers termed "planned and instigated".
- NIA probe ordered to ensure impartial investigation.

- Election Commission's Role: Election Commission of India defended the need to "draw a line" for electoral certainty.

### Static Linkages

- Free and fair elections form part of the basic structure doctrine.
- Electoral rolls are governed under Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Principles of natural justice: Audi alteram partem (hear the other side).
- Judiciary's power to ensure complete justice in exceptional cases.
- Federal structure: balance between State administration and constitutional bodies.

### Critical Analysis

#### Pros

- Ensures timely conduct of elections.
- Maintains integrity of electoral rolls.
- Reinforces authority of ECI and judiciary.

#### Cons

- Risk of disenfranchisement of genuine voters.
- Administrative lapses in verification process.
- Tension between fairness vs procedural rigidity.

### Way Forward

- Improve digital electoral roll management.
- Strengthen grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Ensure inclusive verification processes.
- Better coordination between ECI and States.

# 518 of 697 lakes in J&K either vanished or shrunk: CAG

Peerzada Ashiq  
SRINAGAR



The CAG report highlighted that 315 lakes in J&K that constitute a water area of 1,537.07 hectares have disappeared. FILE PHOTO

A whopping 518 lakes, constituting 74%, have either disappeared or shrunk in Jammu and Kashmir, according to the latest report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Conservation and Management of Lakes for the period up to March 2022. Consequently, it has degraded ecosystem and climate insecurity.

The report highlighted that 315 lakes, 45% of the total 697 lakes in J&K that constitute a water area of 1,537.07 hectares, have disappeared. "These lakes included 80 lakes (25%) falling under the jurisdiction of the Forest Department and 235 lakes (75%) falling under the jurisdiction of Revenue Department and Agriculture Department," it said.

lakes (29% of 697 lakes) had decreased by 1,314.19 hectares. The report suggested that water in 63 lakes has disappeared by "more than or equal to 50%". "Thus, there is a potential greater risk of extinction of these lakes," it added.

Meanwhile, the water area of 150 lakes (22%) has increased by 538.22 hectares. "The water area of 14,535.76 hectares in 29 lakes (4% of 697 lakes) had

remained static," the report pointed out.

#### Cause of floods

The CAG report suggested that the shrinkage of lake area was one of the causes for massive floods in J&K in September 2014, "as lakes are natural flood balancing reservoirs and defence for the flood regulating system".

It highlighted that four administrative departments and the Forest De-

partment did not have lake generic management programmes. As such they failed to check growing anthropogenic pressures around lakes, resulting in loss and decrease in open water area and increase in aquatic vegetation. "This adversely affected the ecosystem of the lakes," it said.

It further pointed out that failure to formulate conservation and management programmes and to undertake lake generic management activities by the district administrations concerned and the Forest Department in respect of 44 lakes resulted in anthropogenic pressures, generated by human activities including construction works. "These anthropogenic pressures led to land use changes in these lakes," it added.

According to the report, the J&K Ecology, Environment & Remote Sensing

Department, had "failed to carry out a detailed survey of 697 lakes". "Hence physical, chemical and biological dynamics of lakes were not available for preparing development plans for these lakes," it said.

Besides, 255 lakes, under the jurisdiction of the Forest Department, "had no comprehensive conservation and management programme". "Although high altitude lakes in protected areas are free from anthropogenic pressures, they may be facing problems of siltation and issues relating to water sources. As such, they also require conservation and management efforts," it suggested.

The J&K government has conservation and management programmes for only six lakes, which include Dal, Wular, Hokersar, Manasbal, Surinsar and Mansar lakes.

## Disaster Link:

- Shrinking lakes reduced natural flood buffering capacity, worsening flood impacts

## Static Linkages

- Wetlands provide ecosystem services: flood control, groundwater recharge, biodiversity support
- India is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention (1971)
- Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 regulate use and conservation of wetlands
- Concept of carrying capacity and sustainable land-use planning
- Himalayan ecosystems are fragile and climate-sensitive

## Critical Analysis

### Significance:

- Highlights institutional accountability gaps
- Establishes link between ecosystem degradation and disasters
- Provides quantitative evidence for policy intervention

### Challenges:

- Fragmented governance across departments
- Lack of scientific baseline data
- Weak enforcement of environmental regulations
- Increasing anthropogenic pressure
- Climate change accelerating degradation

### Implications:

- Threat to water security and biodiversity
- Increased flood and climate risks
- Impact on livelihoods and local economy

## Way Forward

- Conduct comprehensive lake mapping using GIS and remote sensing
- Prepare Integrated Lake Basin Management Plans
- Strengthen implementation of Wetlands Rules, 2017
- Establish inter-departmental coordination mechanism
- Promote community participation in conservation
- Enforce strict anti-encroachment measures
- Use nature-based solutions for flood mitigation
- Regular ecological audits and monitoring

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India released a performance audit on "Conservation and Management of Lakes in J&K (till March 2022)".
- The report highlights large-scale degradation of lake ecosystems in Jammu and Kashmir.
- It links shrinking lakes to increased ecological vulnerability and disaster risks, particularly referencing the 2014 Jammu and Kashmir floods.

### Key Points

- Total lakes assessed: 697 (1,537.07 hectares)

### Status of Lakes:

- Disappeared: 315 lakes (45%)
- Shrunk: 203 lakes (29%) → loss of 1,314.19 hectares
- Severely degraded: 63 lakes lost ≥50% water
- Increased water area: 150 lakes (22%)
- Stable: 29 lakes (4%)

### Administrative Responsibility:

- 75% of disappeared lakes under Revenue & Agriculture Departments
- 25% under Forest Department

### Major Issues Identified:

- Absence of lake-specific management plans
- Only 6 lakes covered under conservation programmes (Dal, Wular, Hokersar, Manasbal, Surinsar, Mansar)
- Lack of scientific data (physical, chemical, biological parameters)
- No comprehensive survey of lakes

### Anthropogenic Pressures:

- Encroachment and construction
- Land-use changes
- Increase in aquatic vegetation
- Siltation and drying of water sources

# A disturbing step for rights, dignity and mental health

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 has caused deep confusion, perplexity, and, over the past two weeks since its introduction, apprehension and fear. In trying to make sense of both the intent and the possible implications of the amendment, these days have raised more questions than they have provided satisfactory answers. At the core is the question, "Who owns my gender and therefore my gender identity?"

For the majority of men and women who happen to be cisgender, life hardly ever brings us to a point where we are faced with this as a question. There is no 'evaluation' that we need to undergo. Whether it is a form at a hospital, clinic, bank, or workplace, we claim our gender ourselves by ticking a box. We simply state our gender, not expecting anyone to question the obvious. However, for gender diverse and transgender individuals, this is what is proposed henceforth. This violates the foundational principles of dignity, autonomy and mental well-being.

**From progression to regression**  
In 2014, the Supreme Court of India delivered a historic judgment in NALSA vs Union of India, recognising transgender persons as a legitimate gender identity. It was a watershed moment for jurisprudence, public policy and governance because it rested on a simple and possible principle: gender identity is self-identified. Just as any individual declares themselves a man or a woman without external verification, transgender persons, too, were reaffirmed as the final and only authority on their gender identity. This principle is rooted not only in human dignity and autonomy but also in constitutional morality under Articles 14 (Equality before Law), 15 (non-discrimination), 19 (Freedom of Expression) and 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty).

In 2019, Parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act. While parts of it were criticised by the community, it remained aligned with NALSA on the cornerstone issue of self-identification. Indeed, it acknowledged the community's long history of discrimination and exclusion, and sought to prohibit discrimination, ensure access to education and health care, extend welfare measures such as housing, skill development and employment support. These welfare schemes, in our minds, as allies and health-care practitioners, represented an attempt to build an enabling framework rather than a restrictive one.

Much of the work being done at both the health-care training and education levels, as a result of the 2019 Act, requires sensitisation drives to ensure that curricula and training for health care and allied professions are sensitive to gender-affirming practices, and to make welfare schemes more widely known and implementable. In these six years, all stakeholders had just about started to align themselves with the global



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standards that the 2014 judgement and the 2019 Act both validated.

The amendment to the 2019 Act – which was notified in the Gazette on March 30, 2026 – fundamentally reverses the NALSA judgment. It replaces self-identification with medical and bureaucratic gatekeeping, redefining who is 'allowed' to call themselves transgender. Under this amendment, a transgender person must appear before a medical board, undergo an assessment to 'prove' their gender identity, wait while the board forwards its recommendation to the District Magistrate, and obtain a certificate declaring them transgender.

There is no medical or evaluative biomarker for gender identity. No external knowledge or proof of any sort can determine the deeply held and personally felt experience of one's gender identity. There would have been no need for trans individuals to "come out" at all if that had been the case.

This is the accepted truth in medicine and health care across the globe.

Therefore, it is perplexing that the Amendment talks about determining and validating someone's gender through a process in which the answer to the question "what is my gender?" has to be given by complete strangers.

This raises many issues that seem to present challenges at many levels.

Medical boards – many of which do not exist at the district level – are already overburdened even for urgent health-care needs. In the absence of criteria, as well as time and process, it is likely that boards may fall back on arbitrary, invasive or abusive examinations, including the possibility of genital inspection.

This seems arguably from the traditional way of "assigning" gender at birth by looking at the genitals of a newborn child by a doctor or another adult. This is far from what we know to be the understanding of gender identity for gender diverse and trans individuals.

Extrapolating this method to an adult and making it mandatory is in direct and complete violation of dignity, privacy and bodily autonomy. I cannot imagine any circumstance that would make me wish to approach this premise for myself as an adult cisgender woman. The very thought of such a scrutiny by a board of strangers, would probably create anticipatory mental distress and make me actively avoid approaching such a premise.

Instead of improving welfare access, the amendment will likely shrink it, deter individuals from approaching the state, and reintroduce fear and humiliation into an already vulnerable population.

**Mental health fallout, crisis in the making**  
The transgender community already faces extreme vulnerability. Data show that 99% of transgender persons have faced social rejection, 52% have faced harassment or violence in

educational spaces; 57% of trans women report experiencing physical or sexual violence at least once, and transgender adolescents have suicide attempt rates estimated between 13% and 50%, far above the national average.

Against this backdrop, introducing additional layers of suspicion, verification and scrutiny is not just insensitive. It is unsafe. As a mental-health practitioner and an ally for the trans community, I am deeply concerned.

Not just prospective, what is concerning is the uncertainty for thousands of transgender individuals currently enrolled in health-care services, whose access may now be questioned or invalidated in the face of the ambiguity about supporting the gender exploration and gender journey of an individual. This is not merely a procedural shift; it has the potential of developing rapidly into a public mental-health emergency.

The amendment introduces a clause that criminalises "undue influence" in helping someone identify as transgender, with penalties up to 15 years of imprisonment. For mental-health practitioners, psychologists, lawyers and educators, this creates an unprecedented ethical and legal risk. In many families, gender identity journeys create tension or disagreement. Community-based organisations, trans-affirmative mental health practitioners and services are frequently accused of 'encouraging'

adolescents simply for acknowledging their lived reality. Under this amendment, such allegations could become criminal charges.

This will discourage health-care practitioners from providing essential, evidence-based care; challenge community-based organisations to remain as allies, and push transgender persons away from formal health care and heighten mental distress that will likely remain unsupported.

Additionally, the amendment collapses distinctions between transgender, intersex and hijra identities, erasing cultural, social and biological differences. Trans men remain nearly invisible in the framework, further marginalising them.

**An appeal for reflection and action**  
The current amendment risks undoing a decade of progress across law, governance, health systems and institutional practice. If misuse has occurred – even if limited to the 0.00% that the government suggests – the solution lies in audits, verification protocols and administrative strengthening – not in policies gender identity or forcing medicalisation.

To uphold constitutional values, protect mental health, and ensure administrative feasibility, this amendment must be reconsidered. We owe each individual in India the assurance that governance frameworks do not deepen fear, stigma, or exclusion for any community.



- Impact on Welfare Access May deter transgender persons from accessing schemes due to procedural barriers.
- Mental Health Concerns High vulnerability:
  - ~99% face social rejection
  - Significant rates of violence and suicide attempts.
- Identity Issues Conflates transgender, intersex, and hijra identities, ignoring their distinctions.

## Static Linkages

- Equality before law and equal protection of laws
- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex
- Freedom of expression including identity expression
- Right to life includes dignity, privacy, and autonomy
- Concept of constitutional morality
- Role of judiciary in expanding fundamental rights
- Welfare state obligations towards vulnerable sections
- Principles of social justice and inclusivity

## Critical Analysis

Pros

- Attempts to create formal mechanism for identification
- Addresses concerns of misuse (government's claim)

Cons

- Violates autonomy and dignity (FR implications)
- Contradicts NALSA judgment (judicial precedent)
- Administrative impracticality (lack of infrastructure)
- May increase exclusion and stigma
- Criminal clause may deter support systems (NGOs, doctors)

## Way Forward

- Restore self-identification principle
- Use minimal and non-intrusive verification mechanisms
- Strengthen implementation of 2019 Act welfare provisions
- Ensure stakeholder consultation (community participation)
- Align with constitutional values and global best practices

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 was notified on March 30, 2026, amending the 2019 Act.
- The amendment introduces mandatory medical and bureaucratic certification for recognizing transgender identity.
- It has triggered concerns among stakeholders, including civil society, healthcare professionals, and the transgender community.
- The move is seen as a departure from the principle of self-identification upheld in earlier legal frameworks such as the NALSA (2014) judgment.

### Key Points

- Shift from Self-Identification to Certification Requires individuals to appear before a medical board and obtain approval via the District Magistrate.
- Medicalisation of Gender Identity Introduces external evaluation despite lack of scientific biomarkers for gender identity.
- Administrative Challenges Many districts lack functional medical boards; existing systems are already overburdened.
- Criminalisation Clause Penalises "undue influence" in gender identification with up to 15 years imprisonment.

# Climate change as a public health emergency

When we talk about climate change, the conversation almost always veers toward rising sea levels or extreme weather events. Some may even talk about the economic disruption that these natural disasters can and do cause. However, few, if any, touch upon another dimension of climate change: the broad spectrum medical crisis that changing planetary patterns can trigger, as climate change intensifies every disease we already know and opens the door to those we have yet to face.

Nowhere is this more visible than in India. Increasingly frequent and severe waterlogging due to excess rain in cities such as Mumbai is creating ideal conditions for waterborne infections including cholera, typhoid, hepatitis A and leptospirosis. Recurrent waterlogging overwhelms sanitation infrastructure, contaminates clean water supplies, and leaves urban populations exposed to serious illnesses. Conversely, drought-prone regions are facing worsening water scarcity, forcing communities to rely on unsafe water sources, thereby increasing the burden of diarrhoeal diseases as well as chronic dehydration.

Expanding disease risk  
Meanwhile, shifting seasonal patterns are driving a rise in infections, allergies and vector-borne diseases, as changing temperatures and rainfall cycles disrupt established trends and prolong pollen seasons. Disease windows are expanding, and their geographic reach is steadily widening, quietly accelerating climate-driven spread. Communities with no prior exposure lack immunity, while health-care systems in these regions remain underprepared to respond at scale. One major example of this is the exponential growth of mosquito-borne diseases, as rising temperatures have made previously inhospitable regions suitable for this insect. The impact on dengue patterns is already measurable in Delhi-NCR. The number of cases traditionally peaked in September but now peaks in



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November, as warmer and rainier conditions sustain mosquito populations for longer periods. Malaria, once largely confined to endemic pockets of the Gangetic Plains and the warm, humid regions of central India, is now being reported in cooler areas such as Himachal Pradesh, where it historically had minimal presence.

## Climate change threats

Climate change also triggers rising air pollution. As summers become increasingly hotter, greater reliance on air conditioning drives higher energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. These emissions contain elevated levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> – microscopic pollutants that penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream – exerting widespread effects across multiple organs in the body, particularly the lungs, heart and kidneys.

Fine particulate matter penetrates deep into the lungs, causing inflammation, reduced lung function, and exacerbating respiratory conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. These particulates can also damage blood vessels, accelerate atherosclerosis, and increase the risk of hypertension, heart attack and stroke. The kidneys are equally vulnerable, and chronic exposure can impair kidney function, reduce filtration efficiency, and contribute to the progression of chronic kidney disease. Greenhouse gases also trap more heat in the atmosphere, creating a feedback loop that amplifies the very crisis we are trying to manage through air conditioners and other cooling appliances. This heat stress forces the heart to work harder to regulate the body's temperature, increasing strain on the cardiovascular system. This can trigger complications such as hypertension, heart attack, and stroke. These conditions disproportionately affect people

without adequate shelter, such as manual labourers who spend long hours working outdoors in extreme conditions.

Parts of the country, such as Odisha, Telangana, and Vidarbha, are reporting a rising number of heat-stroke-related deaths. In addition, rising night-time temperatures in urban pockets such as Delhi-NCR and Mumbai are eliminating the critical recovery window that the human body relies on to cool down after prolonged daytime heat exposure. Infant health outcomes are also increasingly at risk – exposure to extreme heat and air pollution has been linked to preterm births and low birth weight among newborns.

## Impact on food security

The health consequences of climate change also extend into food systems and nutrition. Extreme weather events and unseasonal rain disrupt crop cycles and reduce agricultural productivity, contributing to food shortages. The declining nutritional quality of food crops, combined with rising prices, further compounds the crisis, creating a hidden burden of micronutrient deficiencies and chronic malnutrition, especially among children.

Rising temperatures can also cause a decline in milk production, as cattle affected by heat stress compromise infant and child nutrition. These cascading effects on food security translate directly into weakened immunity and greater vulnerability to disease particularly among children and the elderly.

The warnings have existed for decades, but were largely overlooked. Climate change is no longer a distant threat – for public health in India, it is already a present reality. It is a multifaceted challenge. Treating it as purely environmental overlooks its profound human cost. Recognising it as a medical emergency is the first step toward responding with urgency.



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- Climate change is increasingly being recognised not just as an environmental issue but as a public health emergency, with multidimensional impacts across India.
- Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and extreme weather events are altering disease patterns, increasing both communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- Urban flooding (e.g., Mumbai) and drought-prone regions are simultaneously aggravating waterborne diseases and water scarcity-related health issues.
- Vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria are expanding geographically and temporally due to changing climatic conditions.
- Climate-induced air pollution and heat stress are contributing to cardiovascular, respiratory, and renal diseases, along with rising heatstroke-related deaths.

### Key Points

- Waterborne diseases: Cholera, typhoid, hepatitis A, leptospirosis increasing due to urban flooding and poor sanitation.
- Vector-borne diseases: Dengue season shifting (e.g., Delhi peak moving from September to November); malaria spreading to non-endemic regions like Himachal Pradesh.
- Air pollution linkages: PM<sub>2.5</sub> exposure leads to respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and kidney dysfunction.
- Heat stress impacts: Increased mortality in regions like Odisha, Telangana, Vidarbha; rising night temperatures reduce recovery time.
- Vulnerable groups: Manual labourers, urban poor, children, elderly disproportionately affected.

- Infant health: Increased risk of preterm birth and low birth weight due to heat and pollution exposure.
- Food security: Climate variability reduces crop productivity, nutritional quality, and milk production, worsening malnutrition.
- Disease expansion: New regions exposed to diseases due to lack of immunity and weak healthcare preparedness.

### Static Linkages

- WHO definition of health: Physical, mental, and social well-being.
- Epidemiological transition theory.
- Determinants of health (environmental, social, economic).
- Water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) principles.
- Air pollution standards (PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub> – CPCB norms).
- Greenhouse effect and global warming basics.
- Heat stress and human physiology (homeostasis).
- Food security pillars: Availability, accessibility, utilisation, stability.
- National Health Policy 2017 (preventive healthcare focus).
- National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).

### Critical Analysis

#### Positives

- Growing recognition of climate-health nexus in policymaking.
- Scope for preventive healthcare and early warning systems.
- Opportunity for integrated policy approach (health + environment).

#### Challenges

- Weak public health infrastructure, especially in rural areas.
- Lack of data and surveillance systems on climate-health linkages.
- Poor urban planning leading to flooding and sanitation issues.
- Increasing health inequality among vulnerable populations.
- Limited preparedness for emerging diseases.

### Way Forward

- Integrate climate considerations into health policy and planning.
- Strengthen disease surveillance and early warning systems.
- Improve urban infrastructure (drainage, sanitation, water supply).
- Promote climate-resilient agriculture and nutrition programs.
- Expand primary healthcare access in vulnerable regions.
- Enhance inter-sectoral coordination across ministries.
- Invest in clean energy and pollution reduction strategies.
- Encourage research and data-driven policymaking.

## Magical acts Malda gherao to protest the SIR adjudication vitiates Bengal elections

The gherao of seven judicial officers in Malda on April 1 by a mob marks a disturbing escalation in what has been a fevered election season in West Bengal. The Supreme Court of India condemned it as a “calculated” attempt to disrupt the adjudication process. The ECI has referred the probe to the National Investigation Agency, and the incident has become a flashpoint in the confrontation between the Trinamool Congress (TMC)-led State government and the ECI over the Special Intensive Revision exercise and its aftermath. Election-related violence has largely become a thing of the past in most States, but not in West Bengal, where violence is endemic during any election. This is partly due to the intensity of political contestation. During the era of Left Front dominance, elections were battlegrounds for “area dominance” between the Left and the TMC. The State pioneered panchayati institutions in India, which led to significant politicisation at even the local level. With a largely rural economy and little industrialisation, electoral contests were also about who controlled the power to distribute patronage. Today, the Left Front is a shell of its former self and the polity is dominated by contests between the TMC and the BJP; the TMC using what some academics term a “franchise model of politics,” leveraging the charisma of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to foster a patronage system with local satraps, and the BJP seeking to import a similar model but with a Hindutva emphasis. This new political contest has brought its own forms of violence.

This year, the contest has been complicated by the SIR. The process has dragged on even after the revised roll, with 7.04 crore electors, down from 7.6 crore in 2024, was released. Close to 60 lakh electors are still being parsed for “logical discrepancies” with roughly 40% of adjudicated cases resulting in rejections. Judicial officers, working under the Court’s oversight, have been clearing this backlog – an exercise that would never have reached this stage had the ECI not relied on flawed software to filter enumeration requests. The Court has allowed appellate tribunals for persons whose names have been rejected, but there is uncertainty over whether these will conclude before polling. With tempers running high over what appears to be significant disenfranchisement – electors and political leaders in affected areas allege that the deletions have disproportionately hit the minority Muslim community – the resort to illegal methods of protest such as the Malda gherao has vitiated the election process. A more electorate-friendly approach to the SIR by the ECI, along with effective interventions by the Court, could have avoided much of the public anger. West Bengal’s political leaders must tamp down the rhetoric, not inflame it.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- On April 1, 2026, seven judicial officers were gheraoed by a mob in Malda, West Bengal during election-related proceedings.
- The Supreme Court of India termed it a “calculated” attempt to disrupt adjudication.
- The Election Commission of India referred the probe to the National Investigation Agency.
- The issue is linked to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
- Electoral rolls reduced from 7.6 crore (2024) to 7.04 crore, with ~60 lakh voters under scrutiny.
- Allegations of disenfranchisement and procedural flaws have intensified political tensions.

### Key Points

- Article 324 empowers ECI for conduct of elections, including electoral rolls.
- RPA, 1950 governs preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- Large-scale deletions raise concerns over universal adult suffrage (Article 326).
- Judicial oversight introduced via appellate tribunals for rejected voters.

- Use of faulty digital tools/software flagged in enumeration process.
- Persistent electoral violence in West Bengal linked to patronage politics and intense competition.
- Incident reflects institutional friction between State government and ECI.

### Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Powers of Election Commission
- Article 326 – Universal Adult Suffrage
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 & 1951
- Basic Structure Doctrine – Free and fair elections
- Rule of Law & Equality before Law (Article 14)
- Independence of Judiciary
- Panchayati Raj and grassroots political mobilisation

### Critical Analysis

#### Issues

- Risk of mass disenfranchisement due to faulty revision process
- Credibility concerns regarding neutrality of ECI
- Mob action against judiciary undermines rule of law
- Electoral violence indicates weak institutional enforcement
- Technological dependence without safeguards → exclusion errors

#### Positives

- Supreme Court intervention ensures procedural fairness
- Provision of appeals safeguards voter rights
- NIA probe signals seriousness in tackling electoral disruptions

### Way Forward

- Ensure transparent, auditable electoral roll revision
- Strengthen IT systems with independent audits
- Time-bound grievance redressal and appeals
- Enforce strict action against electoral violence
- Enhance ECI accountability and stakeholder consultation
- Promote voter awareness and verification mechanisms

## Arrest the grief

Livelihood issues are at the heart of illegal sand mining in central India

The National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary in central India protects a lotic ecosystem across an area straddling three States. Its existence is crucial for the critically endangered gharial, the red-crowned roofed turtle and the endangered Ganges river dolphin. All three species depend on sand to survive, especially the river's sandbars and sandbanks. Yet, organised crime and state paralysis have been stealing away just that sand, prompting the Supreme Court of India to call the local sand-mining mafia "modern dacoits". The mafia erupted to meet the demand for sand during North India's construction boom, and has been able to exploit gaps in jurisdiction among the three States – Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh – despite the Court and the National Green Tribunal (NGT) banning the activity. State governments have also abetted this ploy by passing the buck on acting against the mafia. Between 2017 and 2024, tractor trolleys laden with illegally mined sand mowed down forest guards and police officers while miners also shot at police during raids. The police reported that miners had also begun using local villagers to track the movement of patrol vehicles using mobile apps and GPS. By 2023, reports indicated that mining syndicates in the Gwalior-Chambal region were using semi-automatic weapons, often outgunning the local forest departments.

Frustrated with having failed to staunch the bleeding, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan attempted to legalise sand mining in certain districts inside the sanctuary. Madhya Pradesh submitted proposals for limited mining in two districts but resistance from the NGT stalled its plans, and the State subsequently withdrew them. Rajasthan followed with a similar proposal in March this year only for the Court to block it. Traditional agriculture is difficult in the Chambal ravines, leaving many young men to turn to mining sand for a living. The mafia recruits them as foot soldiers, leaving forest officials to face 'public anger' when they militate against the mafia. The Court took *suo motu* cognisance of Rajasthan's measure, with Justice Sandeep Mehta, last week, 'reminding' the State of the National Security Act and the State-specific Goonda Act. The Court's frustration is understandable. But given the recent troubled history of green governance, where it has played regulator, there is merit in the Court disciplining the regulator rather than replacing it. The lesson from Chambal's violent history is that force alone cannot quiet an economy feeding on grievance. Sweeping crackdowns will deepen local resentment and entrench the same social cover that sustains the syndicates. Lasting change will come only from restoring lawful livelihoods and credible, even-handed enforcement.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The National Chambal Gharial Sanctuary is facing large-scale illegal sand mining.
- The Supreme Court of India termed the sand mafia as "modern dacoits" and intervened suo motu.
- Mining persists despite bans by the National Green Tribunal due to weak enforcement and inter-state coordination failures.
- Violent incidents against forest officials and police highlight the criminalisation of resource extraction.

### Key Points

- Sanctuary spans Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh.
- Protects riverine (lotic) ecosystem of Chambal River.
- Key species:
  - Gharial – Critically Endangered (IUCN)
  - Red-crowned roofed turtle – Critically Endangered
  - Ganges river dolphin – Endangered, National Aquatic Animal

- Importance of sand:
  - Nesting grounds for reptiles
  - Maintains river morphology and flow
- Impacts of mining:
  - Habitat destruction
  - Riverbank erosion
  - Decline in biodiversity
- Governance issues:
  - Federal gaps (3 states involved)
  - Weak enforcement + political-criminal nexus
  - Local livelihood dependency

### Static Linkages

- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972
- Environment Protection Act, 1986
- NGT Act, 2010
- Public Trust Doctrine (SC)
- Sustainable Development Principle
- River geomorphology and sediment balance (NCERT)

### Critical Analysis

- Judiciary active but risks overreach into executive domain
- Enforcement failure due to federal fragmentation
- Criminalisation of mining linked to local unemployment
- Blanket bans vs sustainable regulation dilemma
- Weak institutional capacity at ground level

### Way Forward

- Inter-state joint enforcement mechanism
- Promote alternative livelihoods in Chambal ravines
- Use technology (GIS, drones) for monitoring
- Strict accountability of officials
- Community participation in conservation
- Scientific regulation of sand mining outside eco-sensitive zones

# Finance commission strengthens local bodies, but at the cost of states

THE RECOMMENDATIONS of the Sixteenth Finance Commission (SFC) for the period 2026–31, which have been accepted by the Union government, have raised serious concerns about the future of federalism.

The changes in the horizontal criteria, discontinuation of statutory grants, and tacit approval of the shrinking of the divisible pool have tilted the scales toward greater central leverage through discretionary transfers.

This shift has come at the expense of statutory equity, further compounded by the doubling of transfers to the third tier. In making these unprecedented changes, SFC has taken liberties with the constitutional framework, thereby weakening the statutory backbone of fiscal federalism in India.

Even though the SFC retained the share of states at 41 per cent, it has overseen a reduction in their effective share from around 36 per cent to around 32 per cent. Further, by tweaking the devolution formula, 14 states, mostly the smaller states, have got a lower share in taxes than in the previous commission. The share in tax devolution, for example, of all northeastern states is 15.5 per cent lower than under the Fifteenth FC. This could have a crippling effect on the region.

More damaging is the discontinuation of revenue deficit grants, which had been accruing to the fiscally weaker states. So too the sector-specific grants, and state-specific grants-in-aid. These grants under Article 275(1) have been an important part of all the previous commissions' awards.

Based on the combined states' revenue deficit of 0.3 per cent of GDP, the SFC has reasoned, rather erroneously, that gap-filling has been rendered unnecessary. Not only should needs be assessed individually for states and not by aggregation, the SFC has

failed to take cognisance of the post-GST reality. The shift from a producer-oriented to a consumer-oriented tax regime has altered the revenue dynamics of states. The consuming or destination states may no longer show revenue deficits of the same magnitude as earlier. But this in no way obviates, let alone eliminates, the needs for equalisation. Special area administration and tribal welfare have been explicitly split out in Article 275.

Instead of abolishing the revenue deficit grants, the SFC should have redesigned gap-filling as equalising grants by replacing the single deficit criterion with multiple criteria, including SC/ST population or rural consumption patterns. The Commission has also remained largely agnostic to GST Council dynamics, GST settlement issues, and cost-of-collection variations, missing an opportunity to align horizontal distribution with the current consumption-based indirect tax regime.

In an era of GST interdependence and growing regional disparities, the Commission should have acted boldly — recommending caps or partial inclusion cesses in the divisible pool, reimaging Article 275 for contemporary needs of consumption-based equalisation, and guiding GST-related adjustments.

Worse still, the SFC has used Article 282 to dramatically double the grants to the third tier — panchayats and urban local bodies. It has recommended nearly Rs 791 lakh crore (roughly Rs 4.4 lakh crore for rural and Rs 3.6 lakh crore for urban), with basic (80 per cent) and performance-linked (20 per cent) components, plus urbanisation incentives.

This compositional shift —



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from tax shares and Article 275 statutory grants towards Article 282 discretionary mechanisms and third-tier focus — has three problematic dimensions. First, the move from criteria-based entitled transfers to more condition-based discretionary ones. Second, from statutory predictable flows charged on the Consolidated Fund to non-statutory flows with hardly any accountability. Third, from equity-driven (based on need, backwardness, social welfare) to efficiency-oriented (based on performance, GDP, population) criteria.

The SFC's approach of treating grants under Article 275 and Article 282 as interchangeable ignores the constitutional purpose of the two provisions, which is fundamental and intentional. Article 275(1) offers a safety net for equity and provides a targeted, statutory mechanism for fiscal support to states in need. These grants are charged directly on the Consolidated Fund of India, ensuring accountability, predictability, and parliamentary oversight. The Constitution envisages assistance based on genuine need — including tribal welfare and special area administration, viewed as national responsibilities — rather than narrow post-devolution revenue deficits, a limited criterion introduced by the Third Finance Commission. The Constitution speaks of assistance based on need, not narrow accounting gaps.

In contrast, Article 282 grants are purely discretionary. Both the Union and states "may" make grants for any public purpose. They are drawn from revenues of India and lack the same statutory obligation, transparency, and charging mechanism.

By abolishing statutory grants under Article 275 and replacing

them with discretionary funding — including for centrally sponsored schemes — the Commission has diverted resources that should strengthen the divisible pool or statutory grants towards Centre-led initiatives. This mirrors past practices that weakened the Gadgil formula and proliferated conditional schemes, long regarded as detrimental to fiscal federalism.

Also, the SFC has, contrary to the Constitution, made local bodies effectively another stakeholder, besides the states, in the scheme of vertical distribution. Consequently, the horizontal distribution has been bifurcated: Formula-driven tax devolution primarily for the second tier (states), with grants increasingly tailored for the third tier (local bodies). This move of treating the two levels at par doesn't sit well with the basic structure of the Constitution.

States are fundamental constituent units of the Union of India with a direct constitutional status under Part VI of the Constitution. In contrast, local bodies (panchayats and municipalities) which gained constitutional recognition only through the 73rd and 74th amendments (1992), remain subordinate to the states. Their powers, functions, and finances are devolved by state legislatures, not directly granted by the Constitution. Local bodies as institutions of self-government promote decentralisation but operate but under state oversight with limited and derived autonomy. While strengthening local governance is welcome, equalising or subordinating state-level needs with that of the third tier dilutes the federal compact. Promoting decentralisation should not be used as a pretext to harm federalism.

The writer is former finance minister of Jammu and Kashmir

Shift in Fiscal Architecture Movement from:

- Statutory → Discretionary transfers
- Equity-based → Efficiency/performance-based criteria
- Predictable → Conditional funding
- Third Tier Emphasis Large increase in funding to panchayats and urban local bodies
- Grants include 80% basic + 20% performance-linked + urbanisation incentives

## Static Linkages

- Finance Commission: Article 280
- Grants-in-aid: Article 275
- Discretionary grants: Article 282
- Consolidated Fund of India: Article 266
- Federal structure and division of powers: Seventh Schedule
- 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (Local Bodies)
- GST framework: Article 246A, GST Council (Article 279A)

## Critical Analysis

### Positives

- Strengthening of local governance (3rd tier)
- Incentivisation of performance and fiscal discipline
- Focus on urbanisation and decentralisation

### Concerns

- Weakening of cooperative federalism due to increased central discretion
- Equity concerns due to removal of revenue deficit grants
- Reduced fiscal autonomy of states
- Adverse impact on northeastern and smaller states
- GST-related distortions not addressed
- Blurring distinction between Article 275 and 282 grants

## Way Forward

- Introduce equalisation-based grants using multi-criteria approach
- Include cesses and surcharges partially in divisible pool
- Align devolution formula with GST regime realities
- Maintain clear constitutional distinction between grants
- Ensure predictable and transparent fiscal transfers
- Strengthen cooperative federal institutions (GST Council, FC role)

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- The recommendations of the Sixteenth Finance Commission (SFC) for 2026–31, accepted by the Union government, have raised concerns regarding fiscal federalism in India.
- Despite retaining states' share at 41% of the divisible pool, the effective share declined (~36% to ~32%) due to structural changes.
- Changes include alteration of horizontal devolution criteria, discontinuation of statutory grants, and greater reliance on discretionary transfers.
- A major shift toward increased transfers to local bodies (third tier)—around ₹7.91 lakh crore—has been recommended.

### Key Points

- Horizontal Devolution Changes Several states (especially smaller and northeastern states) receive reduced tax shares.
- Northeastern states' share declined by ~15.5% compared to the 15th FC.
- Decline in Effective Fiscal Space Although nominal devolution is 41%, cesses/surcharges exclusion reduces actual transfers.
- Discontinuation of Grants Revenue deficit grants removed despite inter-state disparities.
- Sector-specific and state-specific grants discontinued under Article 275.
- GST-related Concerns Post-GST shift to destination-based taxation not adequately factored.
- Issues like IGST settlement and consumption-based disparities ignored.

# With Piprahwa relics, Leh's Buddhist history comes home



P STODAN

**T**HE ARRIVAL of the sacred Piprahwa relics in Leh on Buddha Purnima next month will not be a religious event but a moment of civilisational significance. The relics — bone fragments, reliquary caskets, crystal, soapstone — are among the most important Buddhist discoveries in India. Unearthed in 1898 at Piprahwa in present-day Uttar Pradesh, they are widely regarded as part of the tradition of the Śākya clan, the Buddha's own people. Their repatriation to India in 2025, after 127 years abroad and following an attempted auction in Hong Kong, was rightly celebrated as an act of cultural recovery. Their arrival in Leh restores the relics to one of the oldest Buddhist frontiers of Indian civilisation.

In much of mainland India, Ladakh is seen through the lens of strategy: A militarised borderland. But long before it became a theatre of modern geopolitics, Ladakh was one of Asia's great civilisational corridors. It connected India to China, Central Asia, and the wider Buddhist world beyond the Himalaya. From Kashmir and Gandhara, Buddhism moved through the mountain world of Ladakh toward the trans-Karakoram Hindu Kush routes and onward into the oasis kingdoms of the Tarim Basin, especially Khotan. Along with merchants and caravans travelled monks, manuscripts, artistic styles, ritual traditions, and sacred ideas.

Across Ladakh and Kargil, traces of early Buddhist presence survive: Ancient stupas, inscriptions, rock carvings, and monumental sculptures that reflect clear links with Kashmir, Gandhara, and northwestern Indian Buddhist traditions. Sites in the Suru and Dras regions, the old Buddhist remains around Khalise, and iconic sculptures such as the Maitreya at Mulbek all point to a Ladakh deeply embedded in Buddhist history.

Beyond Ladakh, across the passes and desert plateaus, lay the routes leading toward Khotan, one of the great Buddhist kingdoms of ancient Central Asia in present-day Xinjiang. For centuries, Khotan was a major centre of Buddhist learning, and one of the places where Indian Buddhism became a trans-Asian force.

Traditions linking Khotan to Ashokan-era Buddhist expansion may not all be verifiable historically, but capture a deeper truth: Buddhism spread through connected landscapes — passes, caravan towns, monasteries and frontier societies, including Ladakh. The veneration of the relics in Leh should not be seen merely as a devotional event. It is also an act of historical recovery.

India today invokes Buddhism as part of its civilisational diplomacy. Much of that is justified. But too often, this language remains abstract and Delhi-centric. If India is serious about Buddhist diplomacy, Ladakh must be seen not merely as a border to defend, but as a heritage zone to recover, preserve, and present. Leh is uniquely suited to that role. The return of the relics affirms that Ladakh is not simply an administrative unit at the edge of the Republic, but one of the regions through which India's Buddhist inheritance was preserved and transmitted.

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## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context of the News

- Sacred relics associated with Gautama Buddha (Piprahwa relics) were repatriated to India in 2025 after ~127 years abroad.
- Originally unearthed in 1898 at Piprahwa (present-day Uttar Pradesh), linked to the Śākya clan.
- Repatriation followed an attempted auction in Hong Kong, raising global concerns over cultural heritage trafficking.
- The relics have been ceremonially placed in Leh, highlighting Ladakh's historical role as a Buddhist civilisational corridor.
- Event seen as part of India's broader cultural diplomacy and heritage restitution efforts.

### Key Points

- Piprahwa Discoveries: Included bone relics, reliquary caskets, crystal objects, soapstone artifacts, and ornaments.
- Archaeological Significance: Considered among the earliest material remains linked to the Buddha; associated with early Buddhist stupas.
- Civilisational Geography: Ladakh historically connected India with Central Asia, China, and the Tarim Basin via trans-Himalayan trade routes.

- Buddhist Transmission: Spread from regions like Gandhara and Kashmir to Central Asia (e.g., Khotan), aided by monasteries and caravan networks.
- Cultural Diplomacy: India increasingly uses Buddhism as a soft power tool (e.g., International Buddhist Conclave, Nalanda revival).
- Strategic Reframing: Ladakh viewed not only as a border region but also as a cultural and heritage hub.

### Static Linkages

- Buddhism originated in the 6th century BCE; key teachings include Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path (NCERT Ancient India).
- Stupas as relic repositories—important examples: Sanchi, Bharhut (NCERT, Art & Culture).
- Mauryan patronage under Ashoka led to the spread of Buddhism beyond India (Sri Lanka, Central Asia).
- Silk Route facilitated cultural and religious exchanges between India, Central Asia, and East Asia.
- Indian Constitution: Article 49 (protection of monuments and places of national importance).
- UNESCO conventions on cultural property (1970 Convention on illicit trafficking).

### Critical Analysis

- Strengthens cultural identity and heritage restitution efforts.
- Enhances India's soft power in Buddhist countries.
- Promotes Ladakh as a cultural-tourism hub.
- Challenges: infrastructure gaps, ecological fragility, conservation capacity.
- Risk of over-tourism and inadequate heritage management.

### Way Forward

- Develop integrated Buddhist tourism circuits (Ladakh–Sarnath–Bodh Gaya).
- Strengthen institutional mechanisms for artifact repatriation.
- Invest in conservation infrastructure and expertise.
- Promote sustainable tourism in fragile Himalayan ecosystems.
- Use Buddhism as a tool for regional diplomacy and cultural outreach.

# Don't overlook cancer among children

INDIA'S PAEDIATRIC cancer burden, underscored by the latest findings from the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2023 study published in *The Lancet Oncology*, reveals a landscape marked by persistent gaps. Cancer is now the tenth leading cause of death among children, with an estimated 17,000 deaths in 2023, even as global mortality has steadily declined. Studies estimate that there are roughly between 50,000 and 75,000 new paediatric cancer cases each year in India, though the true figure may be higher — cancer registries cover barely 10–15 per cent of the population. Set against the global picture — low- and middle-income countries account for the overwhelming majority of childhood cancer deaths — India's experience reflects both its demographic weight and its uneven health infrastructure. Many childhood cancers are among the most treatable of malignancies, yet survival outcomes continue to remain uneven.

Paediatric cancer occupies a nebulous place in public health priorities. India's core national cancer-control priorities focus largely on adult variants. This omission is compounded by weak surveillance systems and significant underdiagnosis. Primary care systems are not uniformly equipped to recognise early warning signs, and specialist services remain concentrated in urban centres, leading to delayed diagnosis, referrals and treatment. Inequalities, especially financial and logistical, continue to shape outcomes. As a result, many children are brought in when the disease has already progressed to an advanced stage; a sizeable section discontinues treatment before completion.

Yet, the evidence also points, rather cautiously, towards possibilities. Where timely diagnosis and uninterrupted treatment are available, survival rates, especially for cancers such as leukaemia, have improved significantly. This suggests that India's childhood cancer burden is not intractable. The next phase must focus on scaling up — embedding paediatric oncology in national cancer-control strategies, expanding decentralised treatment capacity, training frontline providers to recognise early signs, and building robust data systems, alongside research into genetic and environmental determinants. India's alignment with global efforts, including the WHO's childhood cancer initiative, offers a guiding framework. Policy must now focus on translating incremental gains into equitable outcomes.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### Context

- A recent study published in *The Lancet Oncology* highlights the growing burden of paediatric cancer in India.
- India reports 50,000–75,000 new childhood cancer cases annually, with nearly 17,000 deaths in 2023.
- Cancer has emerged as a leading cause of death among children, even as global mortality is declining.
- Cancer registry coverage is limited (10–15%), leading to underestimation of the true burden.
- India's situation mirrors trends in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where the majority of childhood cancer deaths occur.

### Key Points

#### Burden and Nature

- Paediatric cancers include leukaemia, lymphomas, brain tumours, and solid tumours.
- Unlike adult cancers, many childhood cancers are highly curable if detected early.
- India's demographic size amplifies the absolute burden globally.

#### Systemic Challenges

- Delayed Diagnosis Weak primary healthcare system unable to detect early symptoms.
- Lack of awareness among parents and frontline workers.
- Infrastructure Gaps Specialised oncology services concentrated in urban tertiary centres.

- Rural areas face severe shortages of diagnostic and treatment facilities.
- Financial Barriers High out-of-pocket expenditure despite schemes.
- Treatment abandonment due to cost, travel, and long duration of therapy.
- Data Deficiency Inadequate cancer registries hinder evidence-based policymaking.

#### Emerging Positives

- Improved survival rates in cancers like acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL).
- India's participation in World Health Organization Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer (target: 60% survival by 2030).
- Expansion of tertiary care under public and private sectors.

#### Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to life includes right to health (SC interpretation).
- Directive Principles (Art. 47) – Duty of State to improve public health.
- Health as State Subject → inter-state disparities in cancer care.
- Ayushman Bharat (PMJAY) – financial protection for secondary/tertiary care.
- NHM – strengthening primary healthcare and early detection.
- NPCDCS – national programme for NCDs (limited paediatric focus).
- Epidemiological concepts: Incidence, Mortality, Survival rate (NCERT Biology).

#### Critical Analysis

- Positives Improving survival with timely treatment.
- Global policy support (WHO initiative).
- Negatives Data deficiency and underreporting.
- Inequitable access (rural–urban divide).
- Financial toxicity leading to treatment dropout.
- Core Issue Not lack of treatment, but lack of access + early detection.

#### Way Forward

- Integrate paediatric cancer in national cancer policy.
- Universalise cancer registries.
- Strengthen primary-level screening and referral systems.
- Decentralise oncology services to district level.
- Expand financial risk protection (PMJAY coverage).
- Capacity building of paediatric oncologists.