



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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EXPRESS**

**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

CJI's role in CEC, EC appointments was temporary, pending new law: SC

Court's observation was in response to pleas challenging a 2023 Act, which replaced the CJI with a Union Minister on the selection panel; petitioners argue this law overrides a Constitution Bench judgment which sought a panel of PM, LoP, CJI

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the Chief Justice of India's involvement in the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) was only meant to last until Parliament came up with a law.

The court's observation was in response to multiple petitions challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act of 2023.

The petitioners, who include the Association for Democratic Reforms and activist Jaya Thakur, said the 2023 law clothed the political executive of the day with a dominant, if not "exclusive", control over the appointment of the CEC and ECs.

The law was introduced in December 2023, ostensibly to countermand a Constitution Bench judgment in March the same year.



Are you saying Parliament did not have the power to make the law? Or can a mandamus be given to Parliament to make a law only in a certain way?

This judgment had declared that CEC and EC appointments should be made on the recommendation of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha (LoP) or the leader of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

The court had ordered that its judgment would remain operative till "Parliament makes a law in consonance with Article 324(2) of the Constitution".

Consequently, the government brought the 2023 Act, replacing the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister in the committee.

Kumar, was the first to be appointed to the office under the new law.

"Prime Minister's man" On Wednesday, senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for the petitioners, said the Constitution framers and the Supreme Court itself had never intended the CEC to be the "Prime Minister's baby" or the "Prime Minister's man".

Mr. Hansaria submitted that both the Constitution framers and the Supreme Court had warned against leaving the appointment of Election Commissioners exclusively in the hands of the executive.

He referred to the Supreme Court's own observations in the March 2023 Constitution Bench judgment (Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India) that the "fierce independence, neutrality and honesty" envisaged in the institution of the Election Commission required an end to government monopoly and "exclusive control" over appointments to the highest poll body.

Before the judgment, the CEC and ECs were appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. The judgment had brought the appointment process on par with that of the CBI Director.

However, Justice Datta highlighted that even the Supreme Court had only intended the judgment to be operative till Parliament passed a law.

"Are you saying Parliament did not have the power to make the law? Or can a mandamus be given to Parliament to make a law only in a certain way?" Justice Datta asked.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, also for the petitioners, said their case was not just about the replacement of the CJI with a Cabinet Minister in the committee. It was also about the constitutionality of an Act which had effectively reverted the control over the appointment of CEC and ECs to the Executive.

"The point is Election Commission appointments cannot be under the control of the executive," he submitted.

Mr. Sankaranarayanan said the Anoop Baranwal judgment had addressed a "legislative vacuum". Before March 2023, appointments of the CEC and ECs were made by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. The "arrangement" had ensured that the power of appointment rested with the Political Executive.

"This mechanism ought to have stopped in the 1950s, but whichever parties came to power found the arrangement convenient," Mr. Sankaranarayanan said.

Arguments would continue on Thursday.

Independence and neutrality of ECI may be compromised.

Supreme Court observed that:

Its earlier judgment was an interim arrangement.

Parliament has constitutional authority to legislate on appointments.

Static Linkages

- Free and fair elections form part of the Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Independence of constitutional bodies is essential for democratic governance.
- Separation of powers ensures institutional checks and balances.
- Removal safeguards:
 - CEC can be removed like a Supreme Court Judge.
 - ECs can be removed only on recommendation of the CEC.
- Similar committee-based appointments exist for:
 - CBI Director,
 - Lokpal,
 - Central Vigilance Commissioner.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Executive dominance may affect ECI independence.
- Possibility of political influence in appointments.
- Public trust in electoral neutrality may weaken.
- Lack of transparent and independent selection process.

Government's Stand

- Parliament is empowered under Article 324(2).
- Supreme Court arrangement was temporary.
- Inclusion of Opposition leader provides balance.

Constitutional Dimensions

- Free and fair elections are part of Basic Structure.
- Institutional autonomy is necessary for constitutional morality.
- Raises debate on balance between Judiciary and Legislature.

Way Forward

- Establish a neutral and transparent appointment mechanism.
- Include independent constitutional authorities in the committee.
- Strengthen autonomy and credibility of ECI.
- Implement electoral reform recommendations of:
 - Election Commission,
 - Law Commission,
 - Second ARC.
- Ensure bipartisan consensus on appointments.

KEY POINTS:

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court is hearing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.
- The petitions argue that the law gives excessive control to the Executive in appointing the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).
- The issue emerged after the Supreme Court's judgment in Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023).
- In the 2023 judgment, the Court directed that appointments should be made by a committee consisting of:
 - Prime Minister,
 - Leader of Opposition,
 - Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- The Court clarified that this mechanism would continue only till Parliament enacted a law under Article 324(2).
- Parliament later enacted the 2023 law replacing the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister in the selection committee.

Key Points

- Election Commission of India (ECI) is a constitutional body under Article 324.
- Article 324(2) empowers Parliament to make laws regarding appointment of the CEC and ECs.

Article 324(2)

- Current selection committee under the 2023 Act:
 - Prime Minister,
 - Leader of Opposition,
 - Union Cabinet Minister nominated by PM.
- Petitioners argued that:
 - The Executive has dominant control in appointments.

Vietnam major pillar of India's Act East Policy, says Modi as defence, rare-earth ties renewed

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India's relation with Vietnam is a partnership that does not aim at any other country in the Indo-Pacific region, said senior officials on Wednesday.

The remarks came soon after India welcomed General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Central Committee To Lam, who is also the current Vietnamese President. During a bilateral discussion at Hyderabad House between To Lam and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the two sides elevated the bilateral relation to the level of "enhanced comprehensive strategic partnership" and signed at least 13 documents, including one on cooperation in critical minerals.

"Vietnam is a major pillar of India's Act East Policy and Vision MAHASAGAR. We have a common outlook in the field of Indo-Pacific. With our strengthening ties in the field of defence and security, we are helping rule of law, peace, stability and prosperity. India will expand its ties with ASEAN through its relation with Vietnam,"



Key partners: Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Vietnamese President To Lam in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

House by Mr. Modi. Mr. Lam referred to India's support to Vietnam's liberation and said, "We will never forget that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the first foreign leader to visit Vietnam in 1954, just one week after the liberation of Hanoi."

In a joint statement, the two sides welcomed the steady progress in the implementation of the defence Lines of Credit (LoC) extended by India to Vietnam, acknowledging that the LoC helped "Vietnam's defence capabilities" and advanced bilateral defence cooperation.

The Ministry of Public Security in Vietnam also

firmly up plans to enhance work with the National Security Council Secretariat of India.

The visiting side also sealed thirteen documents

with India, including an MoU between the Reserve Bank of India and the State Bank of Vietnam on cooperation in the area of Payment Systems and innovation in digital payments as well as an MoU on radioactive and rare earth minerals.

Earlier in the day, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a bilateral meeting with Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence, Phan Van Giang in New Delhi reaffirming the strong momentum in India-Vietnam defence relations.

The discussions focused on expanding cooperation in maritime security; defence industry collaboration; and joint research. The two sides also stressed the need to enhance regular military interactions

- Vietnam is strategically important due to its location near the South China Sea.

Static Linkages

- ASEAN is central to India's Act East Policy.
- UNCLOS (1982) governs maritime rights and freedom of navigation.
- Rare earth minerals are essential for:
 - Semiconductors
 - Electric vehicles
 - Renewable energy technologies
- SAGAR doctrine:
 - "Security and Growth for All in the Region."
- Indo-Pacific region is critical for global maritime trade and energy routes.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Strengthens India's strategic role in Indo-Pacific.
- Enhances maritime security cooperation in South China Sea.
- Supports diversification of critical mineral supply chains.
- Expands defence exports and defence diplomacy.
- Reinforces India-ASEAN engagement.

Challenges

- China may perceive stronger India-Vietnam ties strategically.
- ASEAN nations maintain cautious balancing approaches.
- Delays in implementation of defence projects and connectivity initiatives.
- Environmental concerns linked to rare earth mining.

Way Forward

- Enhance naval exercises and maritime cooperation.
- Strengthen critical mineral partnerships.
- Improve India-ASEAN connectivity.
- Expand defence technology collaboration.
- Promote resilient supply chains and digital partnerships.

KEY POINTS:

Context of the News

- India and Vietnam upgraded bilateral ties to an "Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" during the visit of Vietnamese President To Lam.
- Both countries signed 13 agreements/MoUs in areas such as:
 - Defence cooperation
 - Maritime security
 - Critical and rare earth minerals
 - Digital payments
 - Technology cooperation
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi described Vietnam as a major pillar of:
 - India's Act East Policy
 - Vision MAHASAGAR
- Bilateral trade currently stands at nearly \$16 billion, with a target of \$25 billion by 2030.

Key Points

- Bilateral ties upgraded from:
 - "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" (2016)
 - to "Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership".
- India and Vietnam reiterated support for:
 - Free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific
 - Freedom of navigation
 - Rule-based international order
 - UNCLOS principles
- Defence cooperation includes:
 - Maritime security
 - Joint military interactions
 - Defence industry collaboration
 - Capacity building
- India's defence Lines of Credit (LoC) are helping strengthen Vietnam's defence capabilities.
- MoUs signed on:
 - Rare earth and radioactive minerals
 - RBI-State Bank of Vietnam digital payment cooperation

Overall crime rate drops 6%; cybercrime up by 17%: NCRB

Deaths due to drug overdose saw a 50% increase in 2024 from the previous year's figures. TN records the most fatalities, 5,194 cases of offences 'against the state' registered, a rise of over 6%

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The overall crime rate in India declined in 2024 from the 2023 figure, but there was an increase of over 17% in cybercrime cases, show the Crime in India, 2024 report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) on Wednesday.

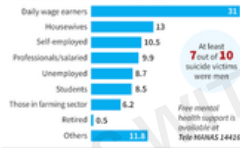
A total of 1,01,928 cybercrime cases were registered in 2024 over 86,420 such cases in the previous year.

"During 2024, 72.6% of cybercrime cases registered were for the motive of fraud (73,987 out of 1,01,928 cases) followed by sexual exploitation with 3.1% (3,190 cases) and extortion with 2.5% (2,536 cases)," the report said.

The NCRB recorded 58.86 lakh cognisable crimes across the country in 2024, marking a 6% decline from the previous year's figure. Of these, 35.44 lakh cases were registered under the Indian Penal Code and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and 23.41 lakh cases under special and local laws. There

Grim numbers

As many as 1,70,746 persons died by suicide in 2024, according to figures from the National Crime Records Bureau. A look at the percentage distribution according to profession shows that nearly a third of them were daily wage earners



were 5,194 cases of offences "against the state" registered in 2024 as against 4,873 in 2023, showing a rise of 6.6%.

"Out of 5,194 cases, 4,395 (84.6%) cases were registered under The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, followed by 649 (12.5%) cases under The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act," the report said.

Crime against SC/ST
The report revealed that a total of 55,698 cases were registered for crimes

against Scheduled Castes (SCs), showing a decrease of 3.6% over the 2023 figure of 57,789 cases. Crimes against Scheduled Tribes showed a sharp decline of 23.1%, dropping to 9,966 cases from 12,960 in 2023.

The NCRB released the Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI), 2024 report according to which 1,70,746 suicides were recorded in 2024. Those associated with the agriculture sector, the unemployed, and daily wage workers accounted

for a substantial share of suicidal deaths.

A total of 10,546 persons involved in the farming sector (consisting of 4,633 farmers/cultivators and 5,913 agricultural labourers) died by suicide in 2024, accounting for 6.2%.

Out of 4,633 farmer/cultivator suicides, a total of 4,481 were by men and 152 by women, the report said. Around 31% of the total suicides were reported among the daily wagers, the report said. The number of unemployed people who died by suicide was 14,778 while the number of students and homemakers who ended their lives stood at 14,488 and 22,013, respectively.

Deaths due to drug overdose saw a 50% increase in 2024 from the previous year's figure. The report stated that 978 people died due to drug overdose in 2024, up from 650 deaths in 2023.

Tamil Nadu reported 313 deaths, the highest number of drug overdose deaths, followed by Punjab with 106, Madhya Pradesh 90, Rajasthan 69 and Mizoram 65, according to the NCRB data.

Farmer Suicides

- Total: 10,546
- Cultivators: 4,633
- Agricultural labourers: 5,913

Drug Overdose Deaths

- 2024: 978 deaths
- Increase: 50% rise
- Highest:
 - Tamil Nadu
 - Punjab
 - Madhya Pradesh

Static Linkages

- NCRB functions under Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Established in 1986 on recommendation of National Police Commission.
- "Police" and "Public Order" are State List subjects.
- Cybercrime governed mainly by IT Act, 2000.
- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023 replaced IPC.
- UAPA deals with unlawful and terrorist activities.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Overall decline in crime rate.
- Better digital monitoring and reporting.

Concerns

- Rapid rise in cyber frauds.
- Mental health and agrarian distress.
- Increasing drug abuse deaths.
- Underreporting affects NCRB reliability.

Way Forward

- Strengthen cyber policing and digital literacy.
- Expand mental health and counselling services.
- Improve social security for farmers and labourers.
- Strengthen anti-drug enforcement and rehabilitation.
- Modernise police and forensic infrastructure.

KEY POINTS:

Context

- National Crime Records Bureau released:
 - Crime in India 2024
 - ADSI 2024 Report
- Key trend:
 - Overall crime declined, but cybercrime rose sharply.

Key Highlights

Overall Crime

- Total cognisable crimes: 58.86 lakh~6% decline from 2023.
- Under IPC/BNS: 35.44 lakh
- Under Special & Local Laws: 23.41 lakh

Cybercrime

- Cases:
 - 2023: 86,420
 - 2024: 1,01,928 (17% rise)
- Motives:
 - Fraud: 72.6%
 - Sexual exploitation: 3.1%
 - Extortion: 2.5%

Crimes Against State

- Total cases: 5,194 (6.6% rise)
- Major laws:
 - Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act
 - UAPA

Crimes Against SC/ST

- SC cases: 55,698 (3.6% decline)
- ST cases: 9,966 (23.1% decline)

Suicide Data (ADSI)

- Total suicides: 1,70,746
- Vulnerable groups:
 - Daily wage workers (~31%)
 - Farmers/agricultural labourers
 - Students
 - Homemakers
 - Unemployed persons

Understanding inequality in India's growth story

There have been some significant policy changes in the recent past – this includes the implementation of the new Labour Codes and the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025 replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) – which have raised serious concerns regarding the welfare of informal workers and those belonging to rural India. These changes are accompanied by the official understanding that inequality is much less of a concern today than it was in the early 2000s, even though data comparability itself is an issue.

Inequality estimates, initial observations
Analysis of inequality warrants clarification on a few issues, among other things.

The first is inequality of what – income, wealth, consumption expenditure? Second, how is it measured? Third, along which axis it is assessed – caste, class, gender, religion?, and fourth, data source and comparability of estimates generated from multiple surveys, if



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marked with methodological changes. Our estimate from the Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES 2023-24), conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), suggests that overall consumption expenditure inequality, measured by the Gini Index, is 0.29 – higher than the widely cited World Bank estimate of 0.25. The World Bank's method too, in this regard, came under scrutiny. With further disaggregation, one finds that inequality is much higher for the same compared to food expenditure. This is true for the rural and urban sectors, the inequality for both being higher in case of the urban sectors, and relatively more for non-food expenditure.

Since most growth-inducing activities are urban-centric and agricultural distress persists, it is imperative to examine the urban-rural gap, which is shown by the mean ratio here. A higher than unity mean ratio would reflect a relatively better position than the respective all-India average. Lesser than unity would imply otherwise. There is a substantial gap between urban and rural sectors in this regard and the disparity is more striking in the case of non-food expenditure. For example, average urban non-food monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) is about 1.5 times higher than the all-India average, while that for rural is much lower than the same point of reference.

Our disaggregated analysis also reveals a considerable gap between the consumption share and per-capita spending of overall MPCE-based deciles. In the urban sector, the top 10% of the population above contributes 27% of the total non-food expenditure, implying that the rest of the 90% contributes only 73% of the same. The mean MPCE of the topmost decile is six times that of the bottom most decile for the urban sector, compared to 4.5 times in the rural sector. Strikingly, the mean MPCE of the top most decile in the urban sector is nine times that of the bottom most decile in the rural sector. Once we proceed a step further and decompose total inequality into within- and between group components, it appears that – in urban India, within-decile and between-decile inequalities account for about 33% and 67% of food expenditure inequality, respectively, and about 10% and 90% of non-food expenditure inequality. The relative importance of between-decile group

inequality for non-food consumption holds true for the rural sector too. Further, the per-capita consumption expenditure of the richest 5% is six times higher than that of the poorest 5% in the rural areas; the same is nine times for urban areas. In short, the urban sector, which is more affluent, is more unequal than its rural counterparts.

Inequality dynamics in India

First, it is almost unanimously agreed upon that the super-rich segment of the Indian population is hardly captured by the NSS surveys (consumption or wealth), thus any inequality estimation based on the same is a gross underestimation. Our own calculation based on this data suggests that about one-fourth of even the richest 10% in India benefited from the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMKAY) and about 13% of them have access to Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards.

Second, for a nuanced understanding of inequality dynamics in India, one must go beyond inter-personal or solely income/spending groups-based (for example, decile, percentile) inequality calculations and analyse disparity along various socio-economic axes such as caste and class. Deploying an alternative class-based analysis alongside a closer examination of the growth process and policy changes since Independence, Varni Vakilabharanam of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in his book, *Class and Inequality in China and India, 1950-2010*, shows that since the 1980s (even before the 1991 reforms), urban owners, managers, and professionals have gained disproportionately, contributing to India's consumption boom.

In contrast, urban informal workers, rural small farmers, and agricultural labourers have lagged markedly behind. All these added to increasing between-class inequality vis-à-vis within-class inequality in India's evolving urban landscape. Over the last decade or so, there has not been any systemic change despite various social measures to counter or reverse such trend in class-based inequality. Typical explorations of inequality often overlook this growth-class inequality nexus. Moreover, a large share of Indians remains engaged in debt-led consumption. The complexities involved in the issue of inequality in India warn us that policies formulated on the presupposition of lower disparity could be misleading and may produce adverse, albeit unintended, welfare implications.

Consumption expenditure inequality in India

Locating inequality by space and consumption type

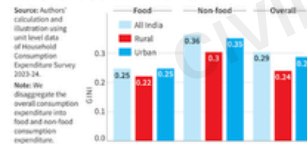


Figure 21 Urban - rural gap by consumption type



Source: Authors' calculation and illustration using unit level data of Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2023-24.

Note: We disaggregate the overall consumption expenditure into food and non-food consumption expenditures.

Source: Same as Figure 21. Respective mean ratio is in parentheses.

Note: Here, mean ratio implies the ratio of average MPCE to that of all-India MPCE.

For example, mean ratio for urban non-food consumption is calculated as the ratio of average urban non-food MPCE to that of all-India (rural and urban combined) average non-food MPCE.

SECTOR: Urban

SECTOR: Rural

SECTOR: Overall

Consumption Type: Food

Consumption Type: Non-food

Consumption Type: Overall

Gini Index (0.0 to 0.3)

All India

Urban

Rural

Mean Ratio (0.8 to 1.4)

Urban non-food (1.53)

Urban overall (1.43)

Urban food (1.27)

Rural non-food (0.89)

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Fixing structural deficits in India's health system

On March 11, 2026, the Minister of State for Health, Anupriya Patel, informed Parliament that 43 new medical colleges have been established and 11,682 MBBS seats along with 8,967 postgraduate seats have been approved for the 2025-26 academic year.

Will this address India's problem of non-availability of doctors in the public health system? Of the 8,967 new postgraduate doctors, how many will actually have the inclination to serve in aspirational districts or underserved areas? Of the 43 newly sanctioned medical colleges, only eight are under State governments, eight are in the Employer's State Insurance (ESI) sector, and 27 are in the private sector. Private medical colleges, after charging high capitation fees, have no obligation to post their trainees in government service, nor can they be compelled to do so. There is also no clearly defined policy or stipulations to ensure that public health institutions benefit maximally by filling existing vacancies in specialist cadre posts.

Merely investing in capital expenditure and infrastructure alone will not yield the desired improvement in health services in hilly, tribal, and other remote underserved areas. Eleven out of 18 All India Institutes of Medical Sciences report around 40% vacancies in their teaching and research faculty positions. Without adequate research and teaching capacity, how can we effectively train specialists?

Glaring vacancy rate
According to The Health Dynamics of India 2022-23 report, the vacancy rate in 5,478 rural Community Health Centres (CHCs) across 757 districts in India is 79.9%, with only 4,413 specialists available against a requirement of 21,964. Since 2014, the shortfall of specialists in CHCs has remained at around 17,500, despite the creation of additional postgraduate medical seats - 72,627 across 731 medical colleges. Newly graduated specialists are often unwilling to work in remote and underserved areas due to inadequate facilities, including lack of equipment, decent staff quarters, schools for their children,



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and adequate peer medical support. If specialists were available at CHCs, patients from rural and tribal areas would not need to travel long distances to district headquarters hospitals or medical colleges.

A CHC serves as a first referral unit for a population of about 1.6 lakh to 2 lakh and is expected to have 30 beds with five specialists - physician, surgeon, obstetrician, paediatrician, and anaesthetist. However, the majority of CHCs remain crippled due to a persistent shortage of specialists, a problem that has continued for many years.

Yet, States continue to construct more CHCs to utilise available central government funds, even though many of them function effectively as primary health centres. There are 5,478 CHCs across 757 districts - about seven CHCs per district - which is not a feasible model. With only 4,413 specialists available at present, just 882 CHCs can be fully operationalised, effectively leaving only one functional CHC per district in addition to the district hospital for specialised care.

Flawed budgetary focus
The central health Budget is largely focused on infrastructure, without matching allocations for drugs, diagnostics, ambulance services, emergency care, or salaries for temporary staff. If the goal is to improve people's health, it must prioritise operational outcomes rather than merely investing capital in building construction, leaving the rest to be managed by State budgets.

How do we manage better with what we have in hand? We need to put the brakes on overly enthusiastic declarations of new CHCs, which often serve populist political mileage rather than functional need.

Classify all PHCs and CHCs into normal, difficult, and most difficult areas based on defined criteria, as was done in Chhattisgarh under the Rural Medical Corps Scheme. The most difficult areas are those with persistently high staff vacancies over long periods. Introduce special incentives such as additional

compensatory financial allowances, priority for postgraduate seats, staff quarters, and quality schooling facilities for children, among others.

Additional steps to take

Hereafter, all government-sponsored postgraduate seat allocations must be linked to existing vacancies in CHCs or district hospitals. Candidates willing to fill a specialist vacancy in a CHC should be allotted a seat in the corresponding speciality, with the assurance that upon completion of training, they will be posted there immediately.

Conversely, aspirant doctors must provide an undertaking to serve in the designated government facility first. Priority may be given to those who commit to a 10-year service bond in difficult areas CHCs, along with additional incentives under the National Health Mission. We must strictly follow an "all or none" principle in posting specialists - either all five specialists are placed in a CHC or none at all - avoiding piecemeal deployment or the dilution of services by spreading specialists too thinly.

Urgent construction of staff quarters and renovation of operation theatres, labour rooms, intensive care units, and 24-hour emergency units must be undertaken in such CHCs, which may number two or three per district. Similar undertakings and post graduate training can be awarded to nurses willing to serve in remote needy areas. When adequate specialists are posted as a team at the sub-district or town level, the image of government hospitals improves in the public eye. The workload is better distributed, and optimal sharing reduces stress on doctors on duty. Interpersonal communication with patients also improves. This, in turn, enhances patient satisfaction and reduces conflicts between the public and doctors and other health staff.

We can no longer afford to see nearly 70,000 specialists graduating from 731 medical colleges without adequately filling the vacant posts in the public health system, which remains the only source of care for the poor and marginalised.

- Health budgeting remains infrastructure-centric rather than outcome-centric.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 → Right to Health (Judicial Interpretation)
- Article 47 → Duty of State to improve public health
- Health placed in State List
- National Health Mission (NHM)
- Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS)
- National Health Policy 2017
- Doctor-population ratio norms of WHO
- Cooperative federalism in social sector governance

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Expansion of medical colleges increases long-term healthcare capacity.
- Rise in PG seats may improve specialist availability.
- Greater regional spread of medical institutions can improve accessibility.

Concerns

- Quantity increase without rural deployment policy has limited impact.
- Private-sector dominance reduces public accountability.
- Rural healthcare suffers due to weak retention policies.
- Infrastructure creation without operational support leads to underutilisation.
- Faculty shortages in AIIMS affect quality of specialist training.

Administrative Issues

- Poor coordination between Centre and States.
- Weak monitoring of rural service obligations.
- Excessive focus on capital expenditure over service delivery outcomes.

Way Forward

- Link PG admissions with compulsory rural service bonds.
- Introduce hardship allowances for difficult areas.
- Provide:
 - Staff quarters,
 - Schooling support,
 - Insurance and career incentives.
- Strengthen selected CHCs as fully functional referral centres.
- Increase operational expenditure on:
 - Drugs,
 - Diagnostics,
 - Emergency care,
 - Human resources.
- Adopt "all-or-none" specialist deployment model in CHCs.
- Strengthen telemedicine and digital health infrastructure.

KEY POINTS:

Context of the News

- Union Government informed Parliament (March 2026) about:
 - Approval of 43 new medical colleges.
 - Addition of 11,682 MBBS seats and 8,967 PG medical seats for 2025-26.
- Despite expansion in medical education, rural India continues to face severe shortage of specialist doctors.
- Health Dynamics of India 2022-23 highlights nearly 80% vacancy of specialists in Community Health Centres (CHCs).
- Debate centres on whether infrastructure expansion without human-resource reforms can improve public healthcare delivery.

Key Points

- Rural CHCs require 21,964 specialists but only 4,413 are available.
- Specialist shortfall has remained around 17,500 since 2014 despite increase in PG seats.
- Of the 43 new medical colleges:
 - 27 are private,
 - 8 belong to State governments,
 - 8 are under ESI sector.
- Private medical colleges are not bound to provide doctors for government service.
- CHCs are expected to have:
 - Physician,
 - Surgeon,
 - Obstetrician,
 - Paediatrician,
 - Anaesthetist.
- Doctors avoid remote postings due to:
 - Poor infrastructure,
 - Lack of staff quarters,
 - Limited schooling facilities,
 - Inadequate peer support,
 - Weak emergency and diagnostic facilities.

Operation Sindoor's key lesson: Future conflicts will not resemble the past

A YEAR after Operation Sindoor, it is possible to move beyond the immediacy of events and assess its deeper strategic meaning. Op Sindoor was more than a successful response to provocation. It marked the maturing of India's ability to employ calibrated force under a nuclear overhang, while retaining control over escalation. In doing so, it offered a template for the management of sub-conventional conflict in a complex, multi-domain environment.

The most striking feature of Sindoor was not the scale of force employed, but the discipline with which it was applied. India chose not to be drawn into wider conventional conflict, despite having both the capability and the provocation to do so. Instead, it demonstrated a doctrine of aggression blended with restraint — precise, time-bound, and politically directed. This was not a restraint born of hesitation, but of strategic confidence. The message was clear: India could escalate, but chose not to. Yet, credible retribution against the perpetrator, rather than territorial ambition, defined the operation. This was a carefully chosen strategy from a spectrum of available options.

For Pakistan, this posed a dilemma it was ill-prepared to handle. Its strategic culture remains anchored in binary responses to either escalate conventionally or retreat into denial. Sindoor forced it into a grey zone where neither option was viable. Its military response lacked coherence, constrained by both surprise and capability gaps in handling limited, multi-domain operations. Its attempts to compensate through information warfare only diluted its credibility, as exaggerated claims failed to withstand scrutiny. More

significantly, Pakistan's repeated invocation of the nuclear threat appeared increasingly formulaic, even fatigued. Nuclear signalling, once a potent deterrent, risks losing salience when overused without corresponding credibility.

India, by contrast, demonstrated mastery over escalation control. Without overt signalling, it maintained a posture of readiness that was understood, if not articulated. The operation reaffirmed that limited conflict remains possible — even effective — within a nuclearized environment. Sindoor's calibrated force, military capability, and communication are aligned. The stability-instability paradox, long debated in the South Asian strategic conversation, found a contemporary expression in Operation Sindoor.

Equally important was the execution. In just a few years, the Indian armed forces have adapted to multi-domain operations without compromising their conventional edge. Operation Sindoor reflected a level of jointness that went beyond the traditional integration. Cyber capabilities, electronic warfare, intelligence, surveillance, and precision strike systems were brought together in a manner that compressed decision-making timelines and enhanced effectiveness. This integration did not replace conventional strengths; it layered new capabilities atop it, creating a more agile and responsive force structure.

The role of civil-military convergence stood out starkly. Sindoor was not merely a military operation. It was a whole-of-government effort. Political clarity enabled operational flexibility. Diplomatic engagement ensured



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that India's actions were understood internationally as measured and necessary. Economic stability was maintained, with minimal disruption to markets and civilian life. Narrative management, though not flawless, was significantly more coherent than in earlier crises. Yet, the operation also revealed cracks that merit attention — particularly the need for faster, institutionalized communication frameworks and deeper inter-agency integration that does not rely on personalities.

The Pahalgam attack that preceded Sindoor was inescapably Pakistan-led, but the Kashmiri consciousness and to protect its continuing relevance. It sought to disrupt a narrative of normalcy built around economic revival, tourism, and declining local recruitment. A year later, that objective appears to have failed. Local recruitment into militancy remains limited, and the economic momentum in the Valley continues. Broader Indian society's engagement through investment, connectivity, and opportunity has played a role in stabilizing the environment. A return to pre-Covid levels of terrorism in Kashmir appears unlikely, though complacency would be misplaced.

The nature of the threat, however, is evolving. While local human resources for militancy may have diminished, this cannot be assumed across the border. Pakistan retains the ability to re-mobilize manpower, and emerging technologies are lowering the threshold for disruption. Terror financing, though under greater scrutiny, is also adapting. The shift from traditional channels to hybrid models — including digital and crypto-based mechanisms —

pose new challenges. In a global financial environment marked by flux, these channels could facilitate the reconstruction of proxy support networks. This will require sustained monitoring and adaptive responses from agencies such as the National Investigation Agency.

Operation Sindoor also underscores a broader lesson: Future conflicts will not resemble the past. They will be shorter, sharper, and fought across domains that blur the line between war and peace. Urban centres, digital infrastructure, and societal cohesion may become as significant as traditional battlefields. The ability to absorb shocks, maintain normalcy, and control narratives will be as critical as military success.

For India, the challenge now is one of sustainability. Sindoor has set a benchmark, but its lessons must be institutionalized. Jointness must be deepened, technologies continuously integrated, and decision-making processes further streamlined. Above all, the delicate balance between aggression and restraint must be preserved — not as a slogan, but as a practiced doctrine.

The legacy of Operation Sindoor, therefore, lies not just in what it achieved, but in what it revealed. It showed that India can act with precision without losing control, that it can send a decisive message without inviting uncontrolled escalation, and that it can align its instruments of national power in pursuit of clear strategic objectives. In an environment where provocations will persist and conflicts will evolve, that may be its most enduring contribution.

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Static Linkages

- Stability–Instability Paradox.
- Nuclear deterrence and No First Use doctrine.
- Proxy warfare and cross-border terrorism.
- Integrated Theatre Commands.
- Role of NIA in terror financing investigations.
- Cyber security as part of national security.
- Whole-of-government approach in internal security.
- Hybrid warfare and information warfare concepts.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthened India's credible deterrence posture.
- Showed capacity for precise and limited military response.
- Enhanced India's image as a responsible power exercising restraint.
- Demonstrated progress in technological and military modernization.

Challenges

- Persistent risk of escalation in a nuclearized region.
- Increasing use of hybrid and cyber warfare.
- Difficulty in monitoring crypto-based terror financing.
- Need for stronger institutional coordination and crisis communication.
- Information warfare can influence diplomatic and domestic narratives.

Way Forward

- Accelerate defence modernization and theatre command reforms.
- Strengthen cyber and electronic warfare capabilities.
- Improve intelligence-sharing and inter-agency coordination.
- Enhance monitoring of terror financing through digital platforms.
- Develop institutionalized strategic communication mechanisms.
- Continue socio-economic stabilization efforts in Jammu & Kashmir.

KEY POINTS:

Context of the News

- One year after Operation Sindoor, strategic experts assessed its implications for India's security doctrine and India-Pakistan conflict management.
- The operation highlighted India's use of calibrated military force while avoiding full-scale escalation under a nuclear environment.
- The operation followed the Pahalgam terror attack aimed at reviving instability in Jammu & Kashmir.
- The episode demonstrated increasing importance of multi-domain warfare involving cyber operations, intelligence integration, precision strikes, and information warfare.

Key Points

- India followed a strategy of “measured retaliation with escalation control.”
- Demonstrated India's capability to conduct limited conflict under nuclear deterrence conditions.
- Reflected growing military jointness and integrated operations.
- Highlighted use of:
 - Cyber warfare
 - Electronic warfare
 - Precision strike capability
 - Intelligence and surveillance integration.
- Pakistan's response exposed limitations in handling limited multi-domain conflict.
- Declining local recruitment into militancy in Kashmir and continuing economic activity were highlighted.
- Emerging threats:
 - Hybrid warfare
 - Digital terror financing
 - Crypto-based funding channels
 - Information warfare.

In war-torn world, India needs autonomy, consensus at home



SUBRATA MITRA

AS THE war in the Gulf enters its third month, the daily bombardment is on pause though the ceasefire looks more fragile than durable. There is no escaping the horrific visuals of non-combatants — wounded men, women, and children — and the destruction of homes, hospitals, and schools. Iran seems to be holding its ground; its talks with the US sputter amid President Donald Trump's threats and reports of a rift within the Tehran regime. Yet to blame the caprices of a single individual for a global catastrophe is to trivialise the deeper, structural forces that underpin it.

Our first thought must go to the suffering of ordinary people across all conflict zones: Iran, Gaza, Lebanon, the Gulf, Russia, Ukraine. Beyond that, one must ask: What lessons does this moment hold for the citizens and states of the Global South?

Foremost is the structural crisis convulsing the West. Western economies are in serious disrepair, and the extreme Right has risen in direct proportion to the liberal democratic establishment's loss of credibility. The coalition sustaining Trumpism is a volatile amalgam: Blue-collar workers displaced by deindustrialisation, evangelical Christians alarmed by what they perceive as the erosion of traditional values, a military-industrial complex that is the principal beneficiary of perpetual conflict. It is the projection of state power, at home and abroad, that holds this otherwise incoherent alliance together.

Were the West's afflictions confined to Western societies, the Global South — long subjected to lectures on modernity, democracy, and productivity — might shrug them off with forgivable Schadenfreude. But the tsunami unleashed by the Middle East war is spreading worldwide. No country remains immune. Closer to home, the consequences are already visible: The 1-crore-strong Indian diaspora in the Gulf lives under daily uncertainty; oil prices remain stubbornly elevated; queues for gas cylinders lengthen; small eateries shutter; and growth projections are revised downward.

This should serve as an incentive to introspect, decolonise our mindset and reach toward a genuine, endogenous modernity. China's synthesis of Confucian values with modern technology, however different its

political dispensation, offers a model for how civilisational roots and contemporary ambition need not be mutually exclusive. Yet one must not lose sight of the world's interconnectedness. Global challenges — energy security, climate change — do not respect the boundaries of the nation-state.

What, then, is the future of multi-alignment in an age of uncertainty? For India, the moment calls for a measure of Kautilyan realism. According to Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, the primary responsibility of the king (*swami*) is the protection, security, and welfare of his subjects (*praja-palana*). Legitimacy, therefore, flows from the contentment and prosperity of the people — not from grandstanding on the world stage. New Delhi would do well to set its foreign policy case by case, protect the diaspora, and secure access to vital supply chains through pragmatic bilateral arrangements. The wisest course remains strategic autonomy.

Domestically, the imperatives are equally pressing. The government must prepare Indian society to shoulder greater responsibility for its own security, revive manufacturing to generate employment, transcend partisan divisions in the pursuit of structural reform and, most urgently, foster social cohesion rather than polarisation.

The all-party briefing on global security was a step in the right direction; more such meetings would strengthen the case for national consensus. India is a civilisational state with the rare capacity to combine cultural depth with a modernising agenda. Its democratic ethos, rooted in pluralism, positions it credibly as a consensus-builder.

Each of today's major war theatres lays bare the collision between two sacred principles: National sovereignty and the universal right to life and dignity. Confronted with this moral dilemma, those calling on the Indian state to take sides would do well to recall Wittgenstein's counsel in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Whereof one cannot speak (clearly), thereof one must be silent."

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Ongoing conflict in West Asia/Gulf region has intensified geopolitical instability and humanitarian crises.
- Rising tensions involving Iran, Gaza, and broader regional actors have raised concerns over:
 - Global energy security.
 - Supply-chain disruptions.
 - Economic slowdown.
- India is directly affected due to:
 - Dependence on Gulf oil imports.
 - Large Indian diaspora in West Asia.
 - Trade and remittance linkages.
- Debate has emerged on India's foreign policy approach of:
 - Strategic autonomy.
 - Multi-alignment.
 - National-interest based diplomacy.

Key Points

- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- Gulf region is critical for:
 - Crude oil and gas supply.
 - Remittances from Indian diaspora.
 - Maritime trade routes.
- Conflict in West Asia can lead to:
 - Inflationary pressures.
 - Higher current account deficit.
 - Rupee depreciation.
 - Fiscal stress.

- India's foreign policy increasingly reflects:
 - Strategic autonomy.
 - Issue-based alignment.
 - "India First" approach.
- The article stresses:
 - Domestic manufacturing revival.
 - National security preparedness.
 - Social cohesion.
 - Consensus-based governance.
- Reference to Kautilya highlights:
 - Welfare and security of citizens as primary duty of the state.

Static Linkages

- Strategic autonomy in foreign policy.
- Non-alignment and multi-alignment.
- Energy security and strategic petroleum reserves.
- Strait of Hormuz as strategic chokepoint.
- Diaspora diplomacy.
- Kautilya's Rajamandala theory.
- National interest in international relations.
- Current Account Deficit (CAD) and imported inflation.
- Soft power and civilisational diplomacy.
- Constitutional value of fraternity and pluralism.
- Welfare state principle.
- Globalisation and interdependence.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strategic autonomy provides diplomatic flexibility.
- Multi-alignment helps India engage with:
 - US-led groupings.
 - BRICS.
 - SCO.
 - Global South.
- Neutral and balanced diplomacy protects:
 - Energy interests.
 - Trade routes.
 - Diaspora welfare.
- Domestic manufacturing push supports economic resilience.

Challenges

- High oil dependence increases vulnerability.
- Prolonged conflict may:
 - Increase inflation.
 - Slow economic growth.
 - Affect exports/imports.
- Indian diaspora in Gulf remains exposed to security risks.

- Pressure may increase on India to take sides in global conflicts.
- Weak global governance mechanisms limit conflict resolution.

Ethical Dimension

- Conflict highlights tension between:
 - National sovereignty.
 - Humanitarian concerns.
- India must balance:
 - Realpolitik.
 - Humanitarian diplomacy.
- Constitutional values of peace, pluralism, and fraternity remain relevant.

Way Forward

- Diversify energy import sources.
- Expand renewable energy and green hydrogen mission.
- Strengthen strategic petroleum reserves.
- Enhance evacuation and diaspora protection mechanisms.
- Boost domestic manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Maintain strategic autonomy with issue-based partnerships.
- Promote social cohesion and national consensus on security issues.
- Strengthen maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Advocate reform of multilateral institutions.

Amid disruptions, a timely lifeline

IN MAY 2020, the Centre had launched the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) to support firms, especially MSMEs, in dealing with the fallout of the Covid pandemic. The facility had benefitted 1.19 crore borrowers, with guarantees adding up to Rs 3.61 lakh crore being issued. With the West Asia conflict now disrupting economic activities once again, though the current disruptions are of a lower order of magnitude, the government has launched a similar credit guarantee scheme — ECLGS 5.0. This is a welcome measure, which could help firms bridge short-term liquidity mismatches.

The scheme targets additional credit of Rs 2.55 lakh crore, including Rs 5,000 crore for airlines. Credit will be extended to MSMEs and non-MSMEs (excluding aviation) up to 20 per cent of their peak working capital utilised during the fourth quarter of the last financial year, capped at Rs 100 crore. For airlines, it will be extended up to 100 per cent, capped at Rs 1,500 crore. The moratorium under the scheme is for a period of one year for MSMEs and two years for the airline sector. This should provide relief. Economic activities have been disrupted across a range of sectors. Considering that MSMEs are unlikely to have deep pockets to absorb the surge in input costs and have limited capacity to absorb supply-chain disruptions, they are the worst-affected. In the last MPC meeting, committee member Ram Singh noted that "high input costs driven by energy spikes and supply-side disruptions have disproportionately affected the MSME sector, which lacks the working capital bandwidth to tide over these shocks". Nagesh Kumar, another member, had said that the shortage of natural gas has "affected many MSMEs that use it as a fuel". Airline companies, too, have been hit by the conflict. The world over, there are reports of airlines cutting flights and raising ticket prices. In the US, the surge in jet fuel prices, combined with existing financial stress, has pushed Spirit Airlines to the brink. In India, oil marketing companies raised the price of aviation turbine fuel for international flights last week, while keeping it unchanged for domestic flights — providing some relief.

The scale of disruption warrants that the government continue to monitor the situation. More measures may be needed if the supply-chain dislocations persist and deepen. Navigating this period will require policymakers to be nimble and surefooted.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Union Government launched ECLGS 5.0 to address liquidity stress caused by disruptions arising from the ongoing West Asia conflict.
- The earlier Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) was launched in May 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The previous scheme benefited:
 - 1.19 crore borrowers
 - Guarantees worth ₹3.61 lakh crore
- Current disruptions include:
 - Rising fuel and energy costs
 - Supply-chain disruptions
 - Increased logistics costs
 - Pressure on MSMEs and aviation sector

Key Points

- Additional credit support targeted: ₹2.55 lakh crore
- Includes:
 - ₹5,000 crore for airlines
- MSMEs and non-MSMEs:
 - Eligible for additional credit up to 20% of peak working capital utilisation
 - Cap: ₹100 crore
- Airlines:
 - Eligible up to 100% additional credit
 - Cap: ₹1,500 crore

- Moratorium:
 - MSMEs: 1 year
 - Airlines: 2 years
- Aim:
 - Address short-term liquidity mismatch
 - Prevent employment losses
 - Maintain business continuity

Static Linkages

- MSMEs contribute significantly to:
 - GDP
 - Exports
 - Employment generation
- Credit guarantee schemes reduce lending risk for banks.
- Supply-side shocks lead to:
 - Cost-push inflation
 - Reduced industrial production
- Geopolitical conflicts impact:
 - Crude oil prices
 - Trade flows
 - Inflation and fiscal stability
- Working capital availability is essential for MSME survival.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Provides immediate liquidity support during external economic shocks.
- Helps MSMEs manage rising input costs.
- Prevents large-scale job losses.
- Supports aviation sector affected by fuel price rise.

Concerns

- Increased dependence on debt may worsen financial stress.
- Risk of rising NPAs if disruptions continue.
- Fiscal burden due to sovereign guarantees.
- Informal enterprises may not fully benefit.

Challenges

- Timely credit disbursal.
- Monitoring misuse of funds.
- Sustained geopolitical instability may deepen disruptions.
- Balancing fiscal support with fiscal discipline.

Way Forward

- Strengthen targeted support for vulnerable MSMEs.
- Improve access to formal credit channels.
- Diversify energy import sources.
- Enhance domestic manufacturing resilience.
- Improve supply-chain infrastructure.
- Promote long-term MSME competitiveness through technology and digitalisation.