DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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Trump pauses Iran strikes, says deal likely

Tehran has 'approved' talks, says the U.S. President while announcing pause on attacks hours after threatening to hit Iran 'very hard', and seize Kharg Island; Hormuz blockade will remain in full force till deal is finalised, he adds; any further escalation would lead to an explosion of energy infrastructure and markets, says Iran's Parliament Speaker

Stanly Johny

After two days of tit-for-tat strikes with Iran, U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday said he would pause further attacks, just hours after threatening to hit the country "very hard" and seize Kharg Island and its energy infrastructure. He claimed that Tehran had "approved" talks.

"Based on the fact that discussions with the Islamic Republic of Iran have been brought to the highest level of Iranian leadership and approved, I have, as President of the United States of America, cancelled the scheduled strikes and bombings against Iran this evening," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post on Thursday night. "Discussions and final points have been, in both concept and great detail, approved by all parties involved, including the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Turkiye, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, and others," he said, adding that the U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports "will remain in full force and effect until this transaction is finalised – time and place of the signing to be announced shortly."

After both sides exchanged fire for two consecutive nights, Mr. Trump had earlier in the day said in another post that he would continue striking Iran. After Thursday's attack, Iran also announced that it closed the Strait of Hormuz to all traffic.

In recent months, Mr. Trump had made several U-turns after making harsh threats against Iran and issuing ultimatums, often claiming progress in talks.

Drastic turn of events

After Mr. Trump threatened to take Kharg Island, Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's Parliament Speaker, had warned that any further escalation would lead to an explosion of energy infrastructure and markets.

"Wrong strategies and impulsive decisions will reset the entire board for the worse, explode energy infrastructure and markets and create an endless quagmire that you will be stuck in for years. You will see a different Iran," he wrote in a social media post.

Mr. Trump's threats, Iran's counter-threats, his abrupt U-turn and claims of progress in talks all came within hours, following another round of U.S. air strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliation against U.S. bases in the region.

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said its forces launched strikes on Iranian military surveillance capabilities, communication systems, and air defence sites across Iran in the early hours of Thursday (local time).

"U.S. Marine Corps, Air Force, and Navy assets fired precision munitions on Iranian targets that posed a threat to U.S. forces and international commercial ships transiting regional waters," the CENTCOM said in a statement, adding that the attacks were "in response to Iran's unwarranted and continued aggression".

Iranian state media confirmed that Hormozgan and other southern regions were attacked by the U.S. In response, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched two waves of strikes targeting American military bases in three countries in the region, the Guards said.

"Eighteen key targets belonging to the criminal U.S. military were struck and destroyed at the Ali al-Salem and Ahmad al-Jaber airbases in Kuwait, as well as the Sheikh Isa airbase in Bahrain," the IRGC said.

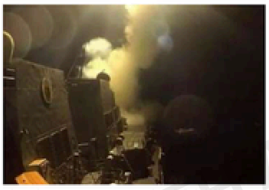
It added that 12 ballistic missiles were launched at the U.S.-operated al-Azraq air base in Jordan. The IRGC Aerospace Force "hit American F-35, F-15, and F-16 fighter jets and important facilities of the U.S. army located at the airbase and a command-and-control centre," the Guards said.

Kharg Island's deep-water terminals handle roughly 90% of Iran's crude oil exports. Iran's maritime authority overseeing the Strait of Hormuz has said the waterway has been closed to all traffic after the U.S. launched its latest air strikes on Thursday morning.

The Iranian military's public relations office claimed that radar systems and communication antennas associated with a Patriot air defence system at the headquarters of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet in Bahrain were targeted by "explosive-laden drones".

Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, the senior-most operational command of the armed forces, said Tehran would continue to respond to "the acts of aggression and mischief of the United States". It also ordered closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA), the body Iran created after the war broke out to manage the waterway, said "applicants who have received a pass [to cross the strait] are requested to be patient and wait for the upcoming PGSA guidance".


A screengrab from a video released by the U.S. CENTCOM on Thursday shows strikes targeting 'Iranian infrastructure'. AFP

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The United States launched fresh air strikes on Iranian military targets, including surveillance, communication, and air-defence systems.
- Iran retaliated by targeting U.S. military bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Jordan through missile and drone attacks.
- U.S. President Donald Trump later announced a pause in further strikes, claiming progress in negotiations with Iran.
- Iran simultaneously announced the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints.
- Concerns emerged regarding disruption of global energy supplies, regional stability, and international maritime security.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- Roughly one-fifth of global petroleum consumption and a significant share of LNG trade transit through the Strait.
- Kharg Island handles nearly 90% of Iran's crude oil exports, making it strategically vital.
- U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) conducted precision strikes against Iranian military infrastructure citing protection of U.S. forces and commercial shipping.
- Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched retaliatory missile attacks on U.S. military facilities in the region.
- Iran's military command ordered closure of the Strait, potentially affecting global shipping routes.
- Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Jordan remain directly affected by any escalation.
- The conflict highlights vulnerabilities in global energy supply chains and maritime trade.

Static Linkages

- Freedom of Navigation under international maritime law and principles governing international straits.
- Energy Security as a component of national security and economic stability.
- Balance of Power and deterrence in West Asian geopolitics.
- Strategic importance of chokepoints in global trade (Hormuz, Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb, Suez Canal).
- Collective Security and regional military alliances.
- Role of international organizations in conflict resolution and maritime security.

Critical Analysis

Opportunities / Significance

- Highlights the importance of diplomatic engagement over military escalation.
- Reinforces global focus on securing maritime trade routes.
- Encourages diversification of energy sources and strategic petroleum reserves.
- May accelerate regional security dialogues among Gulf nations.
- Demonstrates the interconnected nature of energy, security, and global markets.

Challenges / Concerns

- Closure of the Strait could sharply increase global crude oil prices.
- Risks disruption of global supply chains and inflationary pressures.
- Possibility of broader regional conflict involving multiple state actors.
- Threat to international commercial shipping and maritime insurance costs.
- Adverse implications for energy-importing countries, including India.
- Increased geopolitical uncertainty may affect global financial markets.

Way Forward

- Prioritize diplomatic negotiations under international mediation mechanisms.
- Ensure adherence to international maritime law and freedom of navigation.
- Strengthen regional confidence-building measures and crisis communication channels.
- Diversify global energy supply sources and transportation routes.
- Enhance strategic petroleum reserves and energy resilience.
- Promote multilateral cooperation consistent with UN Charter principles and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

Homemakers are 'nation builders', their work is worth at least ₹30,000 a month, says SC

Rizmi Lia M.
CHENNAI

Observing that homemakers deserve to be recognised as "nation builders", the Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that the unpaid domestic work performed by them must be monetised at a minimum of ₹30,000 per month while calculating compensation for deaths in road accidents.

The ruling came in an appeal arising from a motor accident claim in Punjab where a woman named Reshma died in a road accident in November 2001. Her husband and three children approached the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal seeking compensation. While the tribunal awarded compensation in 2003, they approached the High Court to enhance the amount. On appeal, the High Court enhanced the compensation to ₹8.43 lakh with 7.5% interest, providing for a higher rate of interest in case of delay in payment.

The court said motor accident compensation claims should be decided within a year.

A Division Bench of Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice N.K. Singh said the contribution of a homemaker extended beyond the household and played a vital role in nation-building. "We are of the view that the housewife contributes to the growth of the human being and the nation," said the Bench.

Shift to 'homemaker'

Justice Karol stated that "loss of domestic care" would be an additional ground to the heads of damages previously recognised by the court.

The top court also noted the need to shift from the stereotypical terminology of daily usage from "housewife" to "homemaker".

The court said motor accident compensation claims should ordinarily be decided within a year. "Such cases should be decided within a year usually,' the Bench said.

Recognising all aspects of being a homemaker and the unpaid labour that a homemaker undertakes, the court directed the Motor Accidents Claim Tribunal (MACT) to award a separate compensation of ₹30,000 per month under the head of "domestic care" in cases involving death of a homemaker.

It clarified that this amount would be treated as the minimum value of a homemaker's unpaid work and would increase by 10% every three years. If the homemaker also had a paid job, this amount would be awarded in addition to her income.

However, the court resorted to the application of homemaker to the traditional image of woman. The court said, "As a result on one circumstance or another, sometimes unfortunate sometimes not, a man may too need to don the role of a homemaker. It is not to take away from the efforts of these men who also deserve recognition and acknowledgment, but for the purposes of the present case and more particularly the quantification of domestic efforts, we limit its application to the quintessential and traditional image, that of a woman."

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court held that the unpaid domestic work performed by a homemaker must be monetarily recognized while calculating compensation in motor accident death cases.
- The Court fixed a minimum notional value of ₹30,000 per month for homemakers' domestic services.
- The judgment arose from a compensation claim relating to the death of a woman in a road accident in Punjab.
- The Court observed that homemakers contribute significantly to human capital formation, family welfare, and nation-building.
- A new compensation head, "Loss of Domestic Care", was recognized.

Key Points

- Homemakers' unpaid domestic work shall be valued at a minimum of ₹30,000 per month for compensation purposes.
- The amount shall increase by 10% every three years.
- Compensation under "Loss of Domestic Care" will be awarded separately.
- If a homemaker also has paid employment, compensation for domestic care will be awarded in addition to earned income.
- The Court emphasized replacing the term "housewife" with "homemaker".
- Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) cases should ordinarily be disposed of within one year.
- The judgment strengthens judicial recognition of the care economy and unpaid labour performed within households.

Static Linkages

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15(3) – Special provisions for women.
- Article 39(a) – Adequate means of livelihood.
- Article 39(d) – Equal pay for equal work.
- Article 42 – Just and humane conditions of work.

Important Concepts

- Unpaid Care Work: Non-market services such as childcare, eldercare, cooking, and household management.
- Human Capital Formation: Homemakers contribute through child upbringing, education support, and health care within families.
- Gender Economics: Recognition of invisible labour performed predominantly by women.

International Linkages

- SDG 5.4: Recognizes and values unpaid care and domestic work.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Recognizes the economic value of unpaid domestic work.
- Advances gender justice and substantive equality.
- Brings greater visibility to the care economy.
- Creates a more realistic framework for compensation assessment.
- Aligns with India's commitment to SDG 5.

Concerns

- The valuation may not adequately reflect regional and socio-economic differences.
- Unpaid care work still remains outside formal GDP calculations.
- Standardized valuation may not capture the actual contribution of individual homemakers.
- Need for broader policy recognition beyond compensation jurisprudence.

Way Forward

- Institutionalize valuation of unpaid care work using Time Use Survey data.
- Improve gender-sensitive policymaking and budgeting.
- Strengthen awareness regarding the economic contribution of homemakers.
- Ensure timely disposal of MACT cases.
- Promote equitable sharing of household responsibilities.
- Integrate unpaid care work considerations into social protection policies.

Child assessments must be done in custody cases with 'minimum intrusion': SC

Rizmi Lia M.
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The Supreme Court on Thursday held that psychological assessments of children should be conducted only when necessary and with "minimum intrusion" into the child's life in custody disputes, particularly in cases where the child is an alleged victim of sexual abuse.

It says such psychological assessments must be held only when necessary.

The appeal was filed by the mother of a 10-year-old child against orders of the Bombay High Court appointing a panel of experts to assess the child and facilitate restoration of her relationship with her father. The father is alleged to have sexually abused the child when she was two years old.

A Division Bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and N.K. Singh observed that the case involved balancing the father's request to reconnect with his daughter and the need to protect the child, who has accused him of sexual abuse, from any process that could aggravate her trauma.

Referring to the objectives of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act), the court noted that the legislation proceeds on the foundational premise that a child who has allegedly suffered sexual abuse must not be exposed to processes capable of causing further emotional harm, humiliation or secondary victimisation.

Instead of immediately directing an assessment of the child, the Bench ordered the Family Court to first appoint a psychologist to assess the mental and psychological condition of both parents. The court-appointed psychologist will then interact with the psychologist currently treating the child and submit a report to the Family Court.

Based on these reports, the Family Court will determine whether any further psychological assessment of the child is necessary. If such an assessment is required, it must be conducted by a single independent child psychologist with minimal interaction so as not to disturb the child.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court ruled that psychological assessment of children in custody disputes should be conducted only when necessary and with minimum intrusion, particularly where allegations of sexual abuse are involved.
- The judgment emphasized preventing secondary victimisation and protecting the child's mental well-being.

Key Highlights of the Judgment

- Courts must prioritize the Best Interests of the Child while deciding custody-related matters.
- Psychological assessments should not become a routine procedure in custody disputes.
- In cases involving alleged sexual abuse, children should not be subjected to processes that may aggravate trauma.
- The Court directed:
  - Assessment of the parents' psychological condition first.
  - Consultation between the court-appointed psychologist and the child's treating psychologist.
  - Child assessment only if absolutely necessary.
- If required, the assessment should be conducted by a single independent child psychologist with minimal interaction.

Legal & Constitutional Framework

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 15(3): Special provisions for children.
- Article 21: Right to life, dignity, privacy and mental well-being.
- Article 39(e) & (f): Protection of children from abuse and ensuring healthy development.

Relevant Laws

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012

- Enacted to protect children from sexual offences.
- Provides child-friendly investigation and trial procedures.
- Seeks to prevent re-traumatisation of victims during legal proceedings.

Guardians and Wards Act, 1890

- Governs guardianship and custody matters.
- Welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

- Provides a framework for care, protection and rehabilitation of children.

Exam Value Addition

Best Interests of the Child Principle

- Core principle in child rights jurisprudence.
- Recognized by Indian courts and international child protection frameworks.
- Child welfare takes precedence over parental claims.

Secondary Victimisation

- Additional trauma suffered by victims during investigation, judicial proceedings or repeated questioning.
- POCSO seeks to minimize such victimisation through child-sensitive procedures.

Significance

- Strengthens a child-centric justice system.
- Reinforces trauma-informed judicial processes.
- Improves implementation of child protection laws.
- Balances parental rights with child welfare and safety.

Challenges

- Shortage of trained child psychologists.
- Lack of uniform assessment protocols across Family Courts.
- Delays in judicial proceedings due to expert evaluations.
- Difficulty in assessing psychological trauma objectively.

FCRA Bill — expanding state control over civil society

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

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

From oversight to overreach

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

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

The gravest concern is Section 16A under the new Chapter IIIA. It states that when an FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered, or deemed to have ceased, all foreign contributions and assets derived from them automatically "provisionally vest" in a government-designated authority, without prior judicial review or independent adjudication. This means that a simple administrative decision can strip organisations of control over their funds and property. As cancellation under Section 14 can be based on broad and subjective grounds such as "public interest," organisations risk losing control of their assets even for minor, procedural, or disputed violations. Because cancellation under Section 14 triggers the application of Section 16A, organisations risk losing assets even for procedural, minor, or disputed breaches. The designated authority would then be empowered to manage, transfer, or dispose of these assets, with sale proceeds credited to the Consolidated Fund of India. The provision is particularly sweeping because it may cover assets funded both domestically and from abroad—potentially bringing schools, hospitals, orphanages, religious institutions, charitable organisations, and places of worship such as churches, mosques, and temples built over decades under government control. The powers granted to the Designated Authority are extraordinary. It can take control of assets, manage institutions, oversee finances, and alter operations in the vaguely defined "public interest," giving the executive wide discretion. If an organisation fails to secure restoration or re-registration within the prescribed period, the vesting becomes permanent. The Authority may then transfer or sell the assets, with the proceeds credited to the Consolidated Fund of India – effectively enabling executive confiscation through legal process.

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

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

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

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

Limited accountability

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

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

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

Constitutional rights under threat

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

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

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

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 25 March 2026.
- The Bill seeks to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 (FCRA), which regulates the receipt and utilization of foreign contributions by individuals, associations, NGOs, trusts, educational institutions, and religious bodies.
- The proposed amendments introduce provisions relating to automatic cessation of registration, vesting of assets, and enhanced government oversight over organisations receiving foreign funds.
- The Bill has sparked debate regarding the balance between national security concerns and the autonomy of civil society organisations.

About FCRA, 2010

Objective

To regulate foreign contributions and foreign hospitality to ensure that such funds do not adversely affect:

- Sovereignty and integrity of India.
- Security of the State.
- Strategic, scientific, and economic interests.
- Public interest.
- Democratic institutions.

Administered By

- Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)

Important Provisions

- Mandatory registration or prior permission for receiving foreign contributions.
- Registration validity: 5 years.
- Annual reporting and disclosure requirements.
- Regulation of utilization of foreign funds.

Key Provisions of FCRA Amendment Act, 2020

- Mandatory FCRA account at State Bank of India, New Delhi Main Branch.
- Administrative expenditure limit reduced from 50% to 20%.
- Prohibition on transfer of foreign contributions to other NGOs.
- Aadhaar identification for key functionaries.
- Enhanced powers of suspension and cancellation.

Key Provisions of the FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026

1. Automatic Cessation of Registration (Proposed Section 14B)

An organisation's FCRA registration may cease if:

- Renewal application is not submitted.
- Renewal is rejected.
- Registration remains pending under prescribed conditions.

2. Vesting of Assets (Proposed Section 16A)

Upon cancellation, surrender, or cessation of registration:

- Foreign contributions and assets created from such contributions may vest in a Designated Authority.
- The authority may:
  - Manage assets.
  - Administer institutions.
  - Transfer or dispose of assets as per prescribed procedures.

3. Enhanced Government Oversight

- Restrictions on management of assets during suspension.
- Increased control over investigations and enforcement.
- Greater accountability requirements for office-bearers and key functionaries.

Constitutional & Governance Dimensions

Relevant Constitutional Provisions

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 19(1)(c) – Freedom to form associations.
- Article 25 – Freedom of religion.
- Article 26 – Management of religious affairs.
- Articles 29 & 30 – Rights of minorities to conserve culture and establish educational institutions.
- Article 300A – Right to property.

Governance Principles Involved
- Rule of Law.
- Natural Justice.
- Accountability.
- Transparency.
- Due Process.

Significance of the Bill

From Government Perspective
- Strengthens monitoring of foreign-funded entities.
- Enhances transparency in utilization of foreign funds.
- Helps prevent misuse of foreign contributions.
- Supports national security and public order considerations.
- Creates a statutory mechanism for management of assets after cancellation of registration.

Concerns Associated with the Bill

Administrative Concerns
- Increased executive discretion in suspension and cancellation.
- Lack of statutory timelines for approval and renewal processes.
- Possibility of procedural delays affecting organisations.

Constitutional Concerns
- Potential impact on freedom of association.
- Questions regarding autonomy of religious and educational institutions.
- Concerns regarding protection of property rights and due process.

Developmental Concerns
- Impact on NGOs engaged in:
  - Health services.
  - Education.
  - Child welfare.
  - Tribal development.
  - Humanitarian assistance.
- Possible reduction in foreign philanthropic support.

Way Forward

- Establish clear timelines for registration, renewal, suspension, and cancellation.
- Strengthen appellate and judicial review mechanisms.
- Ensure adherence to principles of natural justice.
- Differentiate procedural violations from serious offences.
- Promote transparency without undermining legitimate civil society activities.
- Balance national security concerns with constitutional freedoms.

Implementation complete, but workers still vulnerable

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

Kingshuk Sarkar

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

Critical gaps

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

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

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

Labour Code Rules leave workers' concerns unaddressed

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

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

Gig workers remain vulnerable

The Social Security Code (Central) Rules make no attempt to clarify the employment relationship in the gig economy. Gig and platform workers continue to be treated as self-employed and remain part of the unorganised workforce. The Rules are also silent on the mandatory gratuity insurance envisaged under the Code. Such insurance could protect workers against non-payment of gratuity by employers. However, the Rules fail to specify the modalities for implementing this safeguard, leaving an important worker protection mechanism undefined. The Industrial Relations Code (Central) Rules provide that a sole registered trade union must have at least 30% membership to be recognised. This means that registration alone does not guarantee recognition. In large establishments, smaller or newly formed unions may find it difficult to meet this threshold, further weakening their ability to represent workers at a time when the bargaining power of trade unions has already been declining for decades. Notably, the 30% threshold does not appear in the Code itself. The Rules also fail to provide further clarity on the engagement and renewal of fixed-term employees, leaving significant scope for ambiguity and potential misuse.

Missing safeguards for workers

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

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

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

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- In May 2026, the Central Government notified rules under all four Labour Codes, completing the implementation framework of labour reforms enacted during 2019–20.
- The four Labour Codes are:
  - Code on Wages, 2019
  - Industrial Relations Code, 2020
  - Code on Social Security, 2020
  - Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHWC) Code, 2020
- Trade unions and labour experts have criticized several provisions, arguing that the rules fail to address concerns regarding worker protection, job security, social security, and collective bargaining rights.

Key Points

Fixed-Term Employment (FTE)

- Introduced under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020.
- Rules do not specify:
  - Minimum tenure for FTE workers.
  - Limits on contract renewals.
- Concern:
  - Regular jobs may increasingly be replaced by repeatedly renewed fixed-term contracts.

Wage-Related Issues

- Rules provide a broad definition of Floor Wage without clearly differentiating it from Minimum Wage.
- No detailed framework for Centre–State consultation in wage fixation.
- Existing consumption-unit method likely to continue:
  - Adult male = 1 unit
  - Adult female = 0.8 unit
- Criticism:
  - Potential continuation of gender bias in wage determination.
- Hourly wage calculated by dividing daily wage by 8 hours.
- Experts argue hourly wages should be independently determined, especially for gig and domestic workers.

Gig and Platform Workers

- Social Security Rules do not clarify employer–employee relationships in the gig economy.
- Gig and platform workers continue to be treated as part of the unorganised workforce.
- No clear mechanism for implementing gratuity insurance provisions.

Trade Union Recognition

- Rules require a sole registered trade union to have at least 30% membership for recognition.
- May weaken representation of smaller unions and collective bargaining.

Contract Labour and Worker Welfare

- OSHWC Rules do not clearly distinguish between:
  - Core activities
  - Non-core activities
- No clear restrictions on engagement of contract labour in core operations.
- Certain welfare provisions for plantation workers, including housing and medical facilities, are absent.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(c): Right to form associations and trade unions.
- Article 39: Adequate means of livelihood and equitable distribution of resources.
- Article 41: Right to work and public assistance.
- Article 42: Just and humane conditions of work.
- Article 43: Living wage and decent standard of life for workers.
- Labour is placed in the Concurrent List (List III).
- India is a founding member of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Increased employment insecurity through unrestricted FTE renewals.
- Inadequate social security protection for gig workers.
- Weakening of collective bargaining due to higher union recognition threshold.
- Ambiguity regarding contract labour in core activities.
- Gender concerns in wage fixation methodology.
- Missing welfare safeguards for vulnerable workers.

Government's Objective

- Simplification of labour laws.
- Improved ease of doing business.
- Greater labour market flexibility.
- Creation of a unified labour regulatory framework.

Way Forward

- Prescribe minimum tenure and renewal limits for FTE.
- Establish transparent criteria for floor wage and minimum wage fixation.
- Ensure gender-neutral wage determination standards.
- Clarify legal status and social security obligations for gig workers.
- Strengthen implementation of gratuity and social security provisions.
- Clearly define core and non-core activities for contract labour.
- Protect collective bargaining rights while ensuring industrial efficiency.

Lows of the land

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

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

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

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Congress leader Meenakshi Natarajan's nomination for the Rajya Sabha election from Madhya Pradesh was rejected by the Returning Officer (RO).
- The rejection was based on the alleged non-disclosure of a pending private criminal complaint in Hyderabad.
- No FIR, charge sheet, or framing of charges existed against the candidate.
- Following the rejection, BJP candidates were declared elected unopposed.
- The Supreme Court of India agreed to hear the matter, raising concerns regarding electoral fairness and statutory interpretation.

Key Points

- Section 33A, Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951 mandates disclosure of:
    - Criminal cases where charges have been framed.
    - Offences punishable with imprisonment of two years or more.
- The case against the candidate was a private complaint, not a police case.
- No charges had been framed by a competent court.
- The controversy centres on whether the RO exceeded statutory powers during scrutiny of nomination papers.
- Raises concerns about consistency, transparency, and neutrality in election administration.

Static Linkages

- Free and fair elections are part of the Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission.
- Returning Officers perform quasi-judicial functions during nomination scrutiny.
- Rule of Law requires administrative authorities to act within statutory limits.
- Judicial review acts as a safeguard against arbitrary exercise of power.
- Electoral transparency must be balanced with procedural fairness.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Potential misuse of discretionary powers by election authorities.
- Risk of undermining electoral credibility and public trust.
- Possibility of unequal treatment of candidates during scrutiny.
- Judicial intervention becoming necessary due to administrative decisions.

Significance

- Highlights the importance of objective and uniform application of election laws.
- Reinforces the need for institutional neutrality in democratic processes.
- Raises questions regarding accountability of election officials.

Constitutional Dimensions

- Free and fair elections.
- Equality before law (Article 14).
- Democratic representation.
- Institutional independence of election machinery.

Way Forward

- Uniform application of provisions under the RPA, 1951.
- Clearer guidelines for Returning Officers regarding nomination scrutiny.
- Publication of reasoned orders for rejection of nominations.
- Strengthening accountability and training of election officials.
- Timely judicial resolution of election-related disputes.
- Enhancing public confidence in electoral institutions through transparency.

Fair and square

T.N. Assembly Speaker is going by the letter and spirit of Tenth Schedule

Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Speaker J.C.D. Prabhakar has followed democratic principles by deciding not to pursue disqualification proceedings against 21 AIADMK MLAs after the party's general secretary, Edappadi K. Palaniswami, condoned the actions of the rebel legislators. Contrary to their party's whip, the MLAs had supported the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK)-led government during the trust vote on May 13. Mr. Prabhakar also stood by his assurance, made on May 24, that his eventual decision would demonstrate his impartiality. Actually, 25 MLAs of the Dravidian major had violated the party's directive and favoured the new regime but four of them including two women legislators subsequently resigned their seats. This is why the Speaker's action pertained only to 21 MLAs, after receiving letters from Mr. Palaniswami stating that he had condoned the dissidents' violation of the party whip. As the official group and the rebels reached a truce on May 27, the AIADMK chief decided to condone the dissidents' actions within 15 days from the date of such voting, as prescribed under the Tenth Schedule and the Tamil Nadu Assembly's disqualification rules.

Notwithstanding Mr. Prabhakar's track record as a non-controversial politician, many wondered whether he would act fairly, given that Mr. Palaniswami and his colleagues are political adversaries of TVK. Besides, Tamil Nadu has not been free from the unfortunate tendency of Assembly Speakers acting in a partisan manner. P.H. Pandian, who served as Speaker from 1985 to 1989, had even said that the presiding officer of the Assembly possessed "sky-high powers". The discretionary powers enshrined in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, which deals with defection, have been used by Speakers in various States for the wrong reasons. By dropping the proceedings against the 21 dissidents, Mr. Prabhakar has upheld constitutional morality. However, he should have initiated disqualification proceedings against the four others before accepting their resignation. The Assembly Secretariat also duly notified that vacancies had arisen in the four constituencies, following which the election authorities advised the District Election Officers to appoint Returning Officers. Mr. Prabhakar rightly went by Mr. Palaniswami's submission wherein only the names of 21 MLAs were mentioned, and decided to pursue the matter against the other four. But, this will be of a purely technical nature as the bar is only on disqualified members becoming Ministers before getting elected again. Even as Mr. Prabhakar's next course of action is awaited, it is a healthy sign that he has so far demonstrated fairness in dealing with the petitions seeking disqualification.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker J.C.D. Prabhakar dropped disqualification proceedings against 21 AIADMK MLAs who had voted in favour of the TVK-led government during a trust vote, contrary to the party whip.
- AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami condoned their actions within 15 days, as permitted under the Tenth Schedule.
- Four other MLAs who violated the whip had resigned before the Speaker's decision.

Key Points

- Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law) provides for disqualification if a member:
    - Voluntarily gives up party membership.
    - Votes/abstains contrary to the party whip without permission.
- Disqualification is not attracted if the political party condones the action within 15 days.
- The Speaker/Chairman is the authority to decide defection cases.
- The case highlights issues of:
    - Speaker's neutrality.
    - Anti-defection law implementation.
    - Constitutional morality in legislative functioning.

Static Linkages

- 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985 – Inserted the Tenth Schedule.
- 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 – Strengthened anti-defection provisions.
- Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992):
    - Speaker's decision subject to judicial review.
- Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker (2020):
    - Supreme Court recommended timely disposal of disqualification petitions.
- Anti-defection law aims to:
    - Ensure political stability.
    - Prevent horse-trading and unethical defections.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reinforces the legal provision of party condonation under the Tenth Schedule.
- Demonstrates impartial exercise of the Speaker's constitutional role.
- Strengthens confidence in legislative institutions.

Concerns

- Speaker's discretionary powers remain susceptible to political influence.
- Delay in deciding defection cases continues across States.
- Acceptance of resignations before disposal of defection petitions may weaken the anti-defection framework.

Way Forward

- Prescribe a time-bound mechanism for disposal of defection cases.
- Consider transferring adjudicatory powers from Speakers to an independent authority.
- Ensure greater transparency and reasoned decisions in defection matters.
- Strengthen safeguards against misuse of resignation and defection provisions.

R&D underspending in India has no one cause. It's systemic as well as cultural

V ANANTHA NAGESWARAN

WHEN ANALYSTS encounter the observation that Indian businesses chronically underinvest in research and development, the instinct is to reach for systemic explanations and to resist cultural ones. The resistance is not unreasonable. Cultural explanations, carelessly deployed, slide into stereotypes, and stereotypes foreclose rather than illuminate. Yet the categorical rejection of culture as an explanatory variable creates its own blind spot, because some of the most persuasive systemic explanations turn out, on inspection, to incorporate cultural elements — not as fixed ethnic traits but as historically conditioned orientations that may change as the circumstances that produced them change.

The truth, as usual, lies in the interaction between multiple causes, none of which is individually sufficient.

The captive market and its seductions

Begin with the most structurally respectable explanation: India's domestic market is vast, and vastness, paradoxically, can be an impediment. A large captive market insulates producers from the bracing pressure of export competition, which has historically been the driving force behind quality improvement and technological upgrading. This is the R&D equivalent of Dutch disease — the same abundance that appears to be an asset quietly erodes the competitive muscle that exposure to harder markets would build. Companies that can grow for decades by serving a billion-plus consumers without venturing beyond the Subcontinent have little incentive to invest in the costly, uncertain process of frontier innovation. Why develop a better product when the existing one sells readily?

The long shadow of colonial deindustrialisation

A second explanation reaches further back. Indian commercial communities have historically been trading rather than manufacturing communities, and while this characterisation admits exceptions, it reflects a genuine historical reality. Whatever manufacturing instincts and capabilities existed before colonial rule were, in many cases, systematically suppressed. The de-industrialisation documented by economic historians — the destruction of India's textile industry, among others — was not merely an economic event; it reshaped the orientation of Indian enterprise toward commerce, intermediation, and arbitrage rather than production and innovation. The few families that retained or rebuilt a manufacturing identity stand as evidence of what might have been more widespread had history taken a different course.

Financialisation before its time

The third explanation may be the most consequential, and is the one with the richest empirical corroboration from other markets. India's corporate sector underwent a degree of financialisation — a shift in priorities from productive investment to financial return — somewhat earlier than its level of industrial development warranted. This sequencing mattered enormously.

The empirical record from developed markets is sobering. William Lazonick's research, published in the Harvard Business Review in 2014, documented how the shareholder-value doctrine drove American corporations toward stock buybacks and dividends at the expense of investment in capabilities. Between 2003 and 2012, the 449 companies that had been continuously listed in the S&P 500 spent 54 per cent of their earnings on buybacks and another 37 per cent on dividends, leaving precious little for R&D. The central argument was that "maximise shareholder value" had been operationalised as "maximise short-term stock price", with predictable consequences for long-run competitiveness. The distortions introduced by executive stock option schemes compound this problem. Research by John Core, Wayne Guay, and David Larcker on equity-based compensation has shown that options tied to short-term stock performance create incentives to manage earnings rather than invest in projects with distant payoffs. R&D expenditure, by its nature, suppresses near-term profits while creating competitive advantage over a horizon of five to 10 years — a horizon that typically outlasts both the executive's tenure and the vesting period of their compensation package. The gains accrue to the executive's successors; the costs fall on the executive's own balance sheet. John Asker, Joan Farre-Mensa, and Alexander Ljungqvist, in a widely cited 2015 study comparing investment behaviour between publicly listed and privately held firms in the US, found that public companies invest substantially less — and are significantly more sensitive to short-term stock price movements — than comparable private firms facing no such scrutiny. The mechanism was precisely the quarterly reporting cycle.

> India's corporate sector underwent a degree of financialisation — a shift in priorities from productive investment to financial return — somewhat earlier than its level of industrial development warranted

India's corporate sector absorbed the structural features of financialised capitalism before it had fully developed the manufacturing depth and technological capabilities that American and European corporations possessed when they eventually succumbed to the same pressures. Germany, Japan, and South Korea financialised their economies only after generating decades of compounding returns on investment in real productive capability. India attempted the transition earlier, with less accumulated capability to draw upon, and is now paying a portion of the price in an R&D intensity that remains well below what its strategic ambitions require.

Democracy, uncertainty, and the discount rate

Competitive popular democracy in a large developing economy generates its own structural uncertainty about the long-term future. Reconciling the demands of a vast and diverse electorate, multiple levels of government, a hostile neighbourhood, and stakeholders with sharply competing interests makes confident long-run prediction genuinely difficult — not as an intellectual failure, but as a rational response to the environment. Businesses internalise this uncertainty directly: The greater the uncertainty about the conditions under which a long-horizon investment must eventually pay off, the higher the discount rate applied to it. R&D expenditure — which suppresses near-term profitability in exchange for competitive returns that may take a decade to materialise — is precisely the kind of commitment that suffers most when discount rates are high. The result is not irrationality; it is the correct pricing of genuine uncertainty. That it produces underinvestment in the capabilities India most needs is the tragedy of the situation, not its justification.

The writer is chief economic advisor, Government of India. This is the first article in a two-part series. The second article will appear tomorrow

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Recent discussions on India's innovation ecosystem have highlighted the persistently low level of private-sector investment in Research & Development (R&D).
- Despite aspirations of becoming a global manufacturing and technology hub, India's R&D expenditure remains significantly below major economies.
- Experts attribute this to structural, historical, financial, and institutional factors.

Key Points

R&D Status in India

- Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD): ~0.64% of GDP (DST).
- Government contributes the majority of R&D spending.
- Private sector contribution remains comparatively low.
- India lags behind countries such as China, South Korea, Japan, and the USA in R&D intensity.

Factors Behind Low R&D Investment

Large Domestic Market

- Large domestic demand reduces pressure to compete globally.
- Firms can remain profitable without significant technological upgrading.

Colonial Legacy

- Colonial deindustrialisation weakened indigenous manufacturing capabilities.
- Shift towards trade and commerce rather than manufacturing-led innovation.

Financialisation of Corporate Sector

- Greater focus on:
  - Shareholder returns
  - Dividends
  - Stock-market performance
- Long-term investments such as R&D receive lower priority.

Short-Term Corporate Incentives

- Executive compensation often linked to short-term financial performance.
- R&D projects involve high costs and delayed returns.

Policy and Market Uncertainty

- Regulatory and economic uncertainties discourage long-gestation investments.
- High uncertainty increases risk associated with innovation expenditure.

Static Linkages

- Technological progress is a major driver of long-term economic growth.
- Innovation is central to Schumpeter's theory of economic development.
- Colonial deindustrialisation adversely affected India's manufacturing base.
- Industrial competitiveness depends on continuous technological upgrading.
- Human capital, innovation, and productivity are key determinants of economic development.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Higher R&D spending promotes:
  - Technological self-reliance
  - Manufacturing competitiveness
  - Productivity growth
  - High-value employment

Challenges

- Low private-sector participation.
- Weak industry-academia collaboration.
- Dependence on imported technologies.
- Inadequate commercialization of research.
- Limited availability of risk capital for deep-tech sectors.

Way Forward

- Increase GERD towards 2% of GDP.
- Strengthen implementation of the National Research Foundation (NRF).
- Enhance private-sector R&D through fiscal incentives.
- Promote industry-academia collaboration.
- Develop innovation clusters and research parks.
- Improve ease of doing business and policy certainty.
- Strengthen intellectual property protection and technology commercialization.

From Qatar to US: Changing standards of sports justice

MIHIR VASAVDA

FOUR YEARS ago, much of the Western football world discovered its conscience. Ahead of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, federations from Norway, Denmark and Germany — and many more — questioned the host's human rights record. The tournament became a referendum on Qatar itself.

Fast forward to 2026, and the contrast is hard to ignore.

Days before the kick-off, Somali referee Omar Artan — selected by FIFA and due to become the first from his country to officiate at a men's World Cup — was denied entry into the US despite holding a valid visa.

FIFA confirmed that he would miss the tournament because all referees are required to operate from the World Cup's central training base in the US.

Artan is one of Africa's most respected referees and was named the continent's best male referee last year. Yet, his World Cup dream ended at an immigration desk.

Former tennis great Martina Navratilova was among the few prominent sporting voices to question the episode. But compared to the moral outrage directed at Qatar before 2022, the silence has been deafening.

Los Angeles will host the 2028 Olympics, likely during the final months of Trump's presidency. The IOC's charter promises universality. Ensuring that promise may be one of the Games' biggest administrative challenges

The Artan affair is not an isolated incident. Iran, one of the qualified teams, has spent the build-up navigating a maze of restrictions. FIFA regulations guarantee each federation a share of tickets for distribution among supporters, yet Iran says that allocation has effectively been withdrawn.

Journalists, officials and ticket-holding fans from other countries, too, have complained about visa troubles. Last weekend, Iraq striker Aymen Hussein was questioned for nearly seven hours, and his phone was checked when the team arrived in Chicago. The team's photographer was held for more than 10 hours and was denied entry.

This comes against the backdrop of broader American travel restrictions that affect citizens from several nations. Security concerns and the Ebola outbreak are cited as other reasons for the strictness.

In 2019, when India denied visas to Pakistani shooters ahead of the shooting World Cup in New Delhi following the Pulwama terror attack, the reaction from the Olympic body was swift and severe. It suspended discussions on future events in India and advised international federations against awarding Olympic qualification competitions to the country until guarantees were provided.

The message was clear: Host nations cannot selectively exclude eligible participants.

That principle appears considerably harder to enforce when the host is the world's most powerful country. FIFA's commercial future is tied to the North American market. Broadcasters, sponsors and governing bodies understand where influence resides.

Much of the criticism of Qatar was justified. The US, too, should be held to a difficult standard. Every host nation faces legitimate security concerns and immigration challenges. But consistency matters.

In two years, Los Angeles will host the 2028 Olympics, likely during the final months of Donald Trump's presidency. The International Olympic Committee's charter promises universality. Ensuring that promise may become one of the biggest administrative challenges of the Games.

Earlier World Cups have shown that great goals, underdog stories and unforgettable matches have a way of pushing politics into the background. That may happen again.

But long after the final is played, the memory of this World Cup may not simply be about football. It may also be remembered for exposing a truth about global sport: That principles are often applied unevenly, outrage is frequently selective, and morality sometimes depends on who holds the power.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, Somali referee Omar Artan was denied entry into the United States despite possessing a valid visa, leading to his exclusion from the tournament.
- Concerns have also been raised regarding visa and entry restrictions affecting participants, journalists, and supporters from countries such as Iran and Iraq.
- The issue has revived debate on the consistency of human rights standards applied by international sporting bodies across different host nations.
- The controversy gains significance in the context of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, where universal participation remains a core principle.

Key Points

- International sporting events increasingly intersect with:
  - Human rights
  - Freedom of movement
  - Sports diplomacy
  - Global governance
- FIFA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) advocate non-discriminatory participation in global sporting events.
- Visa restrictions can affect athletes, referees, officials, journalists, and supporters.
- Questions have emerged regarding the uniform application of governance and human rights standards across host countries.
- The issue highlights tensions between:
  - National sovereignty and security
  - International commitments and inclusiveness

Static Linkages

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948.
- Principle of equality and non-discrimination in international law.
- Soft Power concept (Joseph Nye).
- Global governance and role of international institutions.
- Sovereignty versus international obligations.
- Ethical principles of fairness, justice, and impartiality.

Critical Analysis

Issues Involved

- Uneven application of human rights standards across countries.
- Conflict between national security concerns and universal participation.
- Credibility challenges for international sporting institutions.
- Influence of geopolitical and economic power in global governance.

Significance for International Relations

- Sports as an instrument of diplomacy and soft power.
- Impact on international image and reputation of host nations.
- Importance of rule-based and non-discriminatory global governance.

Ethical Dimensions

- Equality versus selective treatment.
- Fairness and impartiality in decision-making.
- Consistency in application of international norms.

Way Forward

- Develop uniform participation standards for all host nations.
- Ensure non-discriminatory visa access for accredited participants.
- Strengthen independent oversight mechanisms within international sporting bodies.
- Improve transparency and accountability in host-country obligations.
- Promote sports as a platform for international cooperation and people-to-people ties.

ED in dock again, needs to be held to account

THE DELHI High Court's order, released Wednesday, on the Delhi Police Economic Offences Wing (EOW) and Enforcement Directorate's (ED's) cases against online portal NewsClick and its founder editor Prabir Purkayastha is an indictment, but not of the accused. Calling the continuation of the Delhi Police's FIR "a gross abuse of the process of law", the court has quashed the proceedings by the two agencies. "Aside from bald assertions of there being a criminal conspiracy, there is not a whisper of any incriminating allegation," the HC said in a verdict that raises serious questions about the motives and competence of the investigating bodies and the prosecution. Purkayastha, who spent seven months in jail, still faces cases under UAPA, FCRA and income tax laws. That's why the broader question now is about accountability for what appears to be an attempt to weaponise legal proceedings against a media outlet.

From Purkayastha's arrest under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), voided by the Supreme Court in 2024, to the lack of legal grounds for the charges under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and Indian Penal Code against NewsClick, it is clear that scant regard was paid to the letter and spirit of the law. This cavalier attitude is even more disturbing given the frequency with which the ED and other agencies invoke "special" laws like the UAPA and PMLA, all but shifting the burden of proof onto the accused and significantly increasing the threshold for the grant of bail. The HC also underlined the hollowness of the ED's demand for more time to investigate over a year and a half after it began its inquiries. As the SC observed last year in *Robert Lalchungnunga Chongthu v. State of Bihar*, investigations cannot continue endlessly. Earlier in *Vakil Prasad Singh v. State of Bihar* (2009), the Court had said the right to a speedy trial falls under the purview of Article 21, and this includes a speedy investigation. The SC has also repeatedly asserted, including in the Purkayastha case, that bail should be the rule and jail the exception, even when charges are brought under special laws.

For some time now, legal scholars have argued that the process of establishing guilt or innocence often becomes the punishment. There are no disincentives or consequences, particularly in cases that have a certain political hue, for lapses in investigation and prosecution. Earlier this week, the Allahabad HC held magistrates and police officers liable for illegal preventive detentions. It is time to take this conversation forward and evolve a framework to ensure accountability without hampering investigations.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Delhi High Court quashed the FIR and Enforcement Directorate (ED) proceedings against NewsClick and its founder-editor Prabir Purkayastha.
- Court termed the continuation of proceedings a "gross abuse of the process of law" due to lack of incriminating evidence.
- The judgment follows the Supreme Court's 2024 decision setting aside Purkayastha's arrest under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).
- The case has renewed debate on the use of special laws, due process, media freedom, and accountability of investigative agencies.

Key Points

Delhi High Court Observations
- Mere allegations cannot sustain criminal prosecution without supporting evidence.
- Investigations cannot continue indefinitely.
- Criminal law should not be used as a tool of harassment.
- ED failed to justify prolonged investigation despite substantial time already elapsed.

Supreme Court Principles Reaffirmed
- Article 21 includes the right to a speedy investigation and trial.
- Bail is the rule, jail is the exception.
- Personal liberty cannot be curtailed except through a fair, just and reasonable procedure.

Issues Highlighted
- Frequent invocation of stringent laws such as:
  - UAPA
  - PMLA
- Prolonged investigations causing hardship even before conviction.
- Concerns regarding misuse of investigative powers.
- Chilling effect on media freedom and democratic dissent.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a): Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 21: Right to Life and Personal Liberty.
- Article 22: Protection against arbitrary arrest and detention.
- Rule of Law.
- Presumption of Innocence.
- Natural Justice.
- Judicial Review.
- Separation of Powers.
- Independence of Media in a Democracy.

Critical Analysis

Significance
- Strengthens constitutional protections under Article 21.
- Reinforces judicial oversight over executive actions.
- Upholds due process and rule of law.
- Protects freedom of expression and press freedom.

Concerns
- Increasing use of special laws with stringent bail provisions.
- Lengthy investigations becoming punitive in nature.
- Absence of accountability for wrongful prosecution.
- Erosion of public trust if investigative agencies are perceived as politically influenced.

Constitutional Dimension
- Balancing national security with civil liberties.
- Ensuring state power remains subject to constitutional limitations.
- Protecting democratic dissent while safeguarding public order.

Way Forward

- Establish statutory timelines for investigations.
- Strengthen judicial scrutiny before invoking special laws.
- Create accountability mechanisms for malicious prosecution.
- Ensure greater transparency and professionalism in investigations.
- Implement police and criminal justice reforms.
- Safeguard media freedom while maintaining national security concerns.
- Strengthen adherence to Article 21 and due process standards.

Green energy can't yet bend climate curve

LAST YEAR, renewable energy installations scaled a landmark, globally. Solar, wind and hydro edged out fossil fuels as the predominant source of power. The world's two most populous countries, India and China, led the charge in adding clean energy installations. Yet, human activities pushed global warming to 1.37 degrees Celsius in 2025, according to the latest Indicators of Global Climate Change (IGCC) report, published on Wednesday in the journal *Earth System Science Data*. That the increase in warming comes at a time when the appetite for clean energy is at record levels frames the scale of the challenge for policymakers the world over. The expansion in renewables, though significant, is still not enough to check the rise in GHG emissions.

Unlike the power sector and, to an extent, the transport sector, large sections of the industry continue to be driven by fossil fuels. Transitioning to cleaner alternatives — green hydrogen, for instance — takes time and requires investments. In the short run, national policies can help by nudging manufacturers towards adopting energy-efficient machines, using recyclable materials, and minimising waste. Recycled aluminium, for instance, requires much less energy than new aluminium. However, sustainable equipment often has high upfront costs. Integrating green technologies with traditional systems requires research and development. All this can be contingent on cooperation between academia and governments, and among governments. Unfortunately, know-how transfer has been the Achilles Heel of global warming mitigation.

At the current emission rate, the carbon budget — the GHG that can still be emitted if global warming can be kept below the Paris Climate Pact's threshold of 1.5°C — could be completely depleted in about three years, according to the IGCC report. The report comes at a time when national representatives have assembled at Bonn for mid-year climate talks. With the heatwave sweeping Europe and several other parts of the world, the report's warnings should resonate among the participants.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Indicators of Global Climate Change (IGCC) Report 2025 reported that human-induced global warming reached 1.37°C above pre-industrial levels in 2025.
- The report was published in the journal Earth System Science Data.
- Despite record growth in renewable energy installations, global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions continue to rise.
- India and China led global renewable energy capacity additions.
- At the current rate of emissions, the remaining carbon budget for limiting warming to 1.5°C may be exhausted within about three years.
- The report was released during the UNFCCC Bonn Climate Change Conference.

Key Points

- Global renewable energy deployment reached record levels in 2025.
- Renewable energy is increasingly replacing fossil fuels in power generation.
- Industrial sectors remain major contributors to GHG emissions.
- Decarbonization of hard-to-abate sectors requires:
  - Green Hydrogen
  - Energy-efficient technologies
  - Circular economy practices
  - Low-carbon manufacturing
- Technology transfer and climate finance remain major challenges.
- Recycled aluminium requires significantly less energy than primary aluminium production.
- Rapid depletion of the global carbon budget raises concerns about achieving Paris Agreement goals.

Important Data

- Human-induced warming: 1.37°C (2025)
- Paris Agreement threshold: 1.5°C
- Remaining carbon budget may be exhausted in ~3 years at current emission rates.

Static Linkages

- Greenhouse Effect and Global Warming.
- Carbon Budget Concept.
- Carbon Sink and Carbon Cycle.
- Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR-RC).
- Polluter Pays Principle.
- Precautionary Principle.
- Sustainable Development.
- Circular Economy.
- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- Climate Justice.
- SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).
- SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Demonstrates that renewable energy expansion alone is insufficient to limit warming.
- Highlights urgency of decarbonizing industrial and manufacturing sectors.
- Reinforces the need for enhanced climate action before crossing the 1.5°C threshold.

Challenges

- Continued dependence on fossil fuels in industry.
- High cost of clean technologies and green hydrogen.
- Inadequate climate finance from developed countries.
- Weak technology transfer mechanisms.
- Rising energy demand in developing economies.

Implications for India

- Need to balance economic growth with decarbonization.
- Opportunity to emerge as a global leader in renewable energy and green hydrogen.
- Increased vulnerability to heatwaves, floods, droughts, and extreme weather events.

Way Forward

- Accelerate renewable energy deployment.
- Promote Green Hydrogen Mission implementation.
- Improve industrial energy efficiency.
- Strengthen circular economy and recycling practices.
- Enhance climate finance and technology transfer.
- Support innovation through R&D investments.
- Strengthen NDC implementation.
- Promote low-carbon industrialization and sustainable consumption patterns.