DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Village youth track down wildlife wonders in drought-prone Satara

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In a community-led survey, the locals from Maharashtra's Kiraksal, a hilly village in the drought-prone region of Satara, documented over 600 species.

Indian wolf, Bengal fox, striped hyena and many more were spotted using camera traps and GIS mapping. The 606 documented species include 212 birds, 34 herpetofauna, 160 vascular plants, and 18 mammals. The Kukudwad forest landscape, adjoining Kiraksal, hosts 295 distinct floral species.

The findings of the research - started in 2023 under the Kiraksal Conservation Project to document the "pulsating life" of the Mandesh area - was submitted earlier this year to the Chief Conservator of Forest, Kolhapur (Territorial) Forest Circle, Deputy Conservator of Forest (Territorial), Satara Forest Division, Maharashtra Forest Department, and World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF India), who also funded the project.

Stripes and sights: A striped hyena at Kiraksal village in Satara district of Maharashtra; the village youth were trained to install cameras and monitor the captured footage in a community-led survey that documented more than 600 species in the hilly village. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"We confirmed that Kiraksal is a breeding stronghold for the striped hyena, golden jackal, Bengal fox and the Indian grey wolf. We are currently monitoring two wolf packs, mapping active breeding dens and essential rendezvous sites for species persistence, in the rocky crevices of the Dambi Hills and Madladara scrub forests of Kiraksal," said Chinmay Prakash Sawant, project lead and Mumbai-based wildlife biologist.

Involvement of locals

The study recognised that the colonial classification of areas at Maan taluka as wastelands are actually vital open natural ecosystems that constitute approximately 25.6% of the district, totalling 2,686 sq km. Maan taluka alone is spread across 1,451.19 sq. km, of which around 18.2 sq km comprises Kiraksal village on the border of Maan- Khatav tehsil.

The youth of Kiraksal village from Maan were trained to instal cameras and monitor the captured footage. Several villagers, previously involved in hunting and now having knowledge of dense areas, helped the team of biologists to locate sites spotting the hyenas and wolves. "The locals are the guardians. They have better knowledge and we use that knowledge," said Mr. Sawant, who has spent a fair amount of childhood vacations in Kiraksal.

The local community of Kiraksal involved in the project implemented a "tri-system" of self- imposed social prohibitions - *kurhad bandi* (ban on axe or prohibition on cutting trees), *shikar bandi* (hunting ban), and *vanva bandi* (forest fire ban) to maintain ecological health of the landscape. Along with the documentation, the research team also created awareness among the villagers to protect wildlife in the area, making them understand the importance of the food chain.

After the study, a proposal was submitted to the Deputy Conservator of Forests of Satara Forest Division to declare 23 villages, spread across 4,793 hectares of Maan and Khatav forest ranges, as Mandesh Conservation Reserve. "We are also working to include the continuous stretch of three clusters (Kiraksal, Kukudwad, and Kaledhon) to be conserved with legal protection," said Mr. Sawant.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- A community-led biodiversity survey under the Kiraksal Conservation Project (2023) documented 606 species in Kiraksal village, Satara district, Maharashtra.
- The survey employed camera traps, GIS mapping, and participatory biodiversity monitoring.
- Findings have been submitted to the Maharashtra Forest Department and WWF-India.
- Based on the study, a proposal has been submitted to notify Mandesh Conservation Reserve covering 23 villages (4,793 ha) across Maan and Khatav forest ranges.
- The study highlights the ecological importance of open natural ecosystems (grasslands and scrublands), historically classified as "wastelands".

Key Points

  - Total species recorded: 606Birds – 212
  - Vascular plants – 160
  - Herpetofauna – 34
  - Mammals – 18
- Kukudwad forest landscape supports 295 floral species.
- Camera traps confirmed breeding populations of:
  - Indian Grey Wolf
  - Striped Hyena
  - Bengal Fox
  - Golden Jackal
- Two wolf packs are being monitored in Dambi Hills and Madladara scrub forests.
- Around 25.6% (2,686 sq km) of Satara district comprises open natural ecosystems.
- Community-led conservation measures:
  - Kurhad Bandi – Ban on tree felling
  - Shikar Bandi – Hunting ban
  - Vanva Bandi – Forest fire prevention

Static Linkages

- Conservation ReserveProvided under Sections 36A & 36B of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Declared on government-owned land, particularly adjacent to National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries, for protecting landscapes, habitats and wildlife corridors.
- Biological Diversity Act, 2002Provides for Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) and People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs).
- National Wildlife Action Plan (2017–2031)Emphasizes community participation, landscape-based conservation and protection of lesser-known ecosystems.
- Open Natural EcosystemsInclude grasslands, scrublands, savannas and rocky outcrops.
- Recognized as biodiversity-rich habitats supporting endemic and threatened fauna.
- Camera Traps & GISStandard tools for wildlife population assessment, occupancy surveys and habitat mapping.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights ecological importance of India's grasslands and scrub ecosystems.
- Demonstrates effectiveness of community-based conservation.
- Generates baseline scientific data for protected area notification.
- Supports conservation of apex and meso-predators, strengthening ecosystem balance.
- Encourages participatory conservation aligned with national biodiversity goals.

Challenges

- Open ecosystems remain inadequately protected due to their classification as "wastelands".
- Habitat fragmentation from agriculture and infrastructure.
- Increasing human-wildlife conflict.
- Lack of long-term ecological monitoring and dedicated funding.
- Weak legal protection compared to forest ecosystems.

Way Forward

- Notify Mandesh Conservation Reserve under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Integrate open natural ecosystems into conservation planning and land-use policies.
- Strengthen Biodiversity Management Committees and People's Biodiversity Registers.
- Expand community-based biodiversity monitoring.
- Promote landscape-level conservation to maintain habitat connectivity.

Keeping humanity at the centre of the AI revolution

Ashwani Kumar
Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India, an author and a former Union Minister for Law and Justice

At the peak of human history, the Artificial Intelligence (AI) revolution stands out as a transformative moment, harnessing the infinite potential of science and innovation in the service of humankind. The endless possibilities of AI in every sphere of human activity and its empowering potential to deal with the unprecedented challenges of our times, is a tribute to mankind's collective ingenuity that validates the boast of accomplishments of which 'even the gods might be envious'. The automating of tedious tasks involving repetitive work and freeing time for leisure, expanding access to essential services, breakthroughs in medicine, ensuring longevity and better health care including cancer screening and prediction of terminal illnesses, robotic nursing of the sick, a more effective targeting of economic aid to the marginalised, enhanced accessibility of education and knowledge to all and its vast contribution to environmental sustainability in several ways including disaster management and weather forecasting are some of the crowning contributions of AI toward a more inclusive development agenda.

Technology and human values

Even so, questions about the future of human society and the 'destiny of intelligence' are most vigorously debated by philosophers, scientists, statesmen and the technology czars, some of whom have pleaded for a pause in the further development and deployment of AI that could hijack our idea of humanity. The claims of the AI protagonists about the 'amazing abundance' of goods and services and the caution against slowing down of scientific progress through regulation must contend with the compelling questions about the necessity of ethical guardrails warranted by humanitarian considerations and emotions embedded in the deepest recesses of our being through a cultural evolution spanning the millennia. The question of who we are, and whether we are ready for a new narrative of humanity in which functional efficiency and promised material abundance prevail over the yearnings of the human soul and the dignity of emotion, is an unavoidable and larger inquiry that has resisted the seduction of technological wonders. This is particularly important given that AI is able to replicate, and in some cases even outperform, cognitive skills, including the ability to understand human emotions and intuition.

Are we ready for an endless technological disruption and a 'global epidemic of stress' caused by a prolonged volatility in the job market and a predicted 'useless' class of millions caused by an unmanageable stress in coping with the effects of technological disruption? Whether we have new social and economic models that protect individual self-worth and ensure for all a life of belonging and emotional well-being are larger philosophical questions arising from a humanist perspective founded on the sacrosanctity of the values we carry as a badge of humanity.

Clearly, the fact that passionate propounders of AI have cautioned against 'summoning the devil without a kill switch', must awaken us to the urgency of serious reflection on how to preserve 'the hidden realm of the mind from which emotions emerge, from which inspiration flows, from which our desires pulse – the subjective part of the human spirit that makes each of us ineluctably who we are'.

Data privacy vulnerabilities, proliferation of misinformation, electoral manipulations, the possibility of super intelligent weapons systems going rogue, AI-enabled phishing campaigns, and surveillance and censorship are some of the ominous portends that can cause social upheavals without effective global regulation.

Preserving the digital sovereignty of nation-states remains a challenge, given that control over data is intrinsically linked to national security and the strategic autonomy of nations. The establishment of a global regulatory regime that respects national sovereignty and ensures effective enforcement can no longer be postponed.

A moral compass

The world of AI that could rewrite the code of humanity, therefore, needs a moral vision that can harmonise technological advancement with the preconditions of a virtuous and happy society. Terry Eagleton's caution in relation to a sense of seductive self-assurance is eloquent and I quote: 'An inflated self- belief can earn its calamitous comeuppance, which caused the ancient Greeks to shudder and look fearfully to the skies'.

Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset reminded us that 'we live at a time when man believes himself fabulously capable of creation, but he does not know what to create. Lord of all things, he is not Lord of himself. He feels lost amid his own abundance. With more means at its disposal, more knowledge, more technique than ever, it turns out that the world today goes the same way as the worst of worlds that have been; it simply drifts'.

AI's promise must be guided by ethics, dignity and accountability

The encyclical letter of His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV on 'Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence', clinches the moral debate on the humanist dilemmas in relation to AI. Recognising that technology is not antagonistic to humanity, the Pope has stressed the duty to remain 'profoundly human' in an era of AI when 'human dignity is threatened by new forms of dehumanization'.

Emphasising the need to establish standards of ethical discernment based on the dignity of the individual, His Holiness has warned against the 'illusion' of 'self assertion' and cautioned against progress that exacerbates inequalities and is incapable of healing peoples' wounds. He has called for a rejection of the 'idolatry of profit that sacrifices the weak, a uniformity that neutralizes differences and the pretense that a single language – even a digital one – can translate everything, including the mystery of the person into data and performance'. These assertions by the Pontiff are moral injunctions in a world that needed a reminder of the 'splendour and grandeur of humanity' beyond its creations and of the limitations of AI in terms of its 'affective, relational or spiritual capabilities'.

The moral code propounded by the Pope, a product of an encounter between lived experiences, spiritual consciousness and historical memory, asserts that humanity flourishes in the 'fragility and finitude' of the human person and in its limitations.

Ethical AI governance

Thus viewed in the framework of core human values anchored in the dignity of man, global leaders are expected to opt for a 'humanist centric' approach in the deployment and regulation of AI for the larger good of humanity with the individual at the centre of their decisions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stressed at both the VivaTech 2026 conference in Paris (June 2026) and the India-AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi (February 2026) that such an approach would require a robust and enforceable regulatory framework, rather than voluntary and non-binding commitments, to govern the use of AI. Such a framework could democratise access to frontier AI and help build a shared, trustworthy AI ecosystem in an age that 'levels everything and reveres nothing'. How nations deal with this epochal challenge will define the quality of political leadership and our commitment to inclusive democracy anchored in equality and human dignity as the ultimate civilisational aspiration.

The views expressed are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- AI governance has emerged as a major global policy issue amid rapid advancements in Generative AI and frontier AI models.
- At the India AI Impact Summit 2026 and VivaTech 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi advocated a human-centric, inclusive and globally governed AI ecosystem backed by a robust regulatory framework.
- The debate focuses on balancing innovation, economic growth, ethics, privacy, national security, and human dignity.

Key Points

- AI applications:
  - Healthcare (early diagnosis, cancer screening, robotic surgery)
  - Agriculture (precision farming)
  - Disaster management
  - Weather forecasting
  - Education
  - Governance and public service delivery
- Major concerns:
  - Data privacy violations
  - Algorithmic bias
  - Deepfakes and misinformation
  - AI-enabled cyberattacks
  - Autonomous weapons
  - Job displacement
  - Mass surveillance
- AI governance principles:
  - Transparency
  - Accountability
  - Fairness
  - Explainability
  - Privacy
  - Human oversight
  - Safety
- India's approach:
  - AI for All (NITI Aayog)
  - Human-centric AI
  - Trusted and responsible AI
  - Global cooperation on AI governance

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life includes Right to Privacy (K.S. Puttaswamy Judgment, 2017).
- Article 51A(h) – Scientific temper, humanism and spirit of inquiry.
- Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.
- NITI Aayog's National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (AI for All), 2018.
- UNESCO Recommendation on Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021).
- OECD AI Principles (2019).
- Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) – India is a member.

Critical Analysis

Benefits

- Improves governance and service delivery.
- Boosts healthcare and education outcomes.
- Enhances agricultural productivity.
- Strengthens disaster preparedness.
- Increases industrial productivity and innovation.

Challenges

- Threat to privacy and data security.
- Spread of misinformation through deepfakes.
- Employment disruption due to automation.
- Ethical issues in AI decision-making.
- Algorithmic discrimination and bias.
- National security risks from autonomous AI systems.
- Regulatory gaps at the global level.

Way Forward

- Establish a comprehensive AI regulatory framework.
- Strengthen data protection and cybersecurity.
- Ensure human oversight in high-risk AI systems.
- Promote Explainable and Responsible AI.
- Invest in AI skill development and workforce reskilling.
- Enhance international cooperation for AI governance.
- Balance innovation with ethics, privacy and human rights.

India's shipbuilding ambitions can set sail with Korea

In April this year, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India, his first visit to India and the first by a Korean leader in eight years. The meeting was remarkable in many ways, as it revived high-level political interaction at the leaders' level, resulting in the expansion of partnership in strategic sectors. However, the visit was special for another reason: it paved the way for strong collaboration between India and South Korea in the shipbuilding industry, a strategic sector that India is seeking to revive.

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Seoul plugs into India's shipbuilding drive

Mr. Lee's visit has given positive momentum to the slowly progressing India-South Korea shipbuilding partnership, as seen in the slew of memoranda of understanding (MoU) and agreements signed during his trip. While the big three of the South Korean shipbuilding industry – Samsung Heavy Industries (SHI), HD Korea Shipbuilding & Offshore Engineering, and Hanwha Ocean – had already announced their investment plans, partnerships, or interests in India, Mr. Lee's support reiterates the South Korean government's strategic commitment to shipbuilding collaboration with India. Last year, a subsidiary of Hyundai signed an MoU with Cochin Shipyard Limited and has since announced plans to invest $4 billion in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, to construct a green shipyard. Similarly, SHI has signed a partnership with Swan Defence and Heavy Industries to build ships in India. These developments showcase India's attractiveness as a shipbuilding destination for global giants.

South Korea is also interested in developing a complementary supply chain that includes ancillary industries. For instance, the Korea Marine Equipment Association (KOMEA), which comprises 304 enterprises across ship design, shipbuilding, marine equipement, and ship repair, has opened an office in Mumbai. This is expected to pave the way for the development of a robust shipbuilding ecosystem in India. Such steps will help foster a shipbuilding cluster encompassing ancillary industries and other critical facilities required for scaling up the sector. Further, these partnerships are expected to provide the Indian shipbuilding industry with much-needed support, including design and engineering expertise as well as production know-how. This will help India develop human capital and adopt technology at scale, making its shipyards more competitive internationally. In addition, the various MoUs signed between India and South Korea – at both the government-to-government and business-to-business levels – on workforce development, maritime education, research, and innovation will further strengthen the shipbuilding ecosystem. Together, these efforts could help establish a holistic, cluster-led development model inspired by the success of the city of Ulsan in South Korea.

What has been accomplished in such a short time is commendable, but the task is far from complete. To emerge as a leading shipbuilding nation, India will have to pursue multiple objectives simultaneously. It must support the industry through proactive policy and fiscal measures while also responding effectively to external crises that could disrupt supply chains and affect demand. The sector will require sustained hand-holding until it becomes self-sufficient and capable of competing globally, particularly with established giants such as China.

South Korean partnerships could help accelerate India's ambitions to become a shipbuilding powerhouse

Fill the gaps

There must be a focus on human capital development, policy and fiscal support, and bringing in ancillary industries. India's Maritime Vision 2030 and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 clearly state the objective of being among the top 10 shipbuilding nations by 2030 and in the top five by 2047.

Complementing initiatives such as the Maritime Development Fund, Shipbuilding Development Scheme, and Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy make it clearer that India is serious about attracting foreign investment in the shipping and shipbuilding sector.

However, policy and operational gaps persist. To rectify these gaps, India will have to focus on implementing a series of reforms related to regulatory consistency and legal predictability and also providing access to low-cost and long-term capital. Steps such as the creation of the Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited (SFCL), India's first non-banking financial company for the maritime sector, are a positive and welcome development.

However, the greater challenge will be establishing a comprehensive industrial ecosystem for shipbuilding. To achieve this, India will need to move quickly on workforce development, supplier localisation, and the creation of dedicated maritime institutions. In addition, Indian academia and research institutions will have to play a larger role in this developmental partnership to support the country's shipbuilding ambitions.

India must continue to focus on three key priorities: providing sustained policy and fiscal support, developing the capacity to absorb transferred technologies, and formulating a sectoral strategy with clearly defined goals and targets. The in-principle approval of the greenfield project in Tamil Nadu is a welcome development, signalling that approval and implementation bottlenecks need not be insurmountable. To capitalise on this opportunity, however, State governments, alongside the central government, must ensure timely follow-through at every stage, facilitate the entry of foreign investors, and provide continuous support throughout the investment process.

A proven pathway

While India's shipbuilding ambitions are ambitious, they are not impractical. South Korea's shipbuilding journey, from a minor player to a global leader in just 15 years, beginning in the 1970s, demonstrates what is possible. India can replicate that success by focusing on three priorities: sustained policy and financial support, competitive shipbuilding and industrial capacity, and a skilled workforce.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India and South Korea have renewed cooperation in the shipbuilding sector following the recent high-level bilateral engagement.
- South Korean shipbuilding companies have announced investments, technology partnerships, and skill development initiatives in India.
- The partnership supports India's goal of becoming a Top 10 shipbuilding nation by 2030 and Top 5 by 2047 under Maritime Vision 2030 and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.

Key Points

Recent Developments

- Hyundai subsidiary signed an MoU with Cochin Shipyard Limited.
- Proposal for a US$4 billion greenfield shipyard at Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu.
- Samsung Heavy Industries partnered with Swan Defence & Heavy Industries.
- Korea Marine Equipment Association (KOMEA) established an office in Mumbai to strengthen India's marine equipment ecosystem.

Significance

- Technology transfer in ship design and engineering.
- Development of indigenous shipbuilding capability.
- Creation of a domestic marine equipment supply chain.
- Employment generation in coastal regions.
- Integration into global maritime value chains.
- Strengthening of India's Blue Economy and maritime security.

Government Initiatives

- Maritime Vision 2030.
- Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.
- Sagarmala Programme.
- Maritime Development Fund.
- Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy.
- Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited (SFCL).
- PM Gati Shakti.
- Make in India.

Static Linkages

- India has a coastline of 7,516 km.
- India has 12 Major Ports and over 200 Non-major Ports.
- Nearly 95% of India's merchandise trade (by volume) is transported through the maritime sector.
- Shipbuilding is a strategic industry with economic and defence significance.
- Blue Economy promotes sustainable utilization of ocean resources.
- Port-led industrialisation is a core objective of the Sagarmala Programme.

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Diversification of global shipbuilding supply chains.
- Access to advanced shipbuilding technology.
- Boost to indigenous manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Employment and MSME growth.
- Enhanced maritime security through domestic capacity.

Challenges

- Strong competition from China, South Korea and Japan.
- Limited indigenous marine equipment manufacturing.
- High capital intensity.
- Regulatory and approval delays.
- Shortage of skilled manpower.
- Need for long-term low-cost finance.

Way Forward

- Develop integrated shipbuilding clusters.
- Promote localization of marine equipment manufacturing.
- Expand maritime skill development and R&D.
- Ensure stable policy and fiscal support.
- Improve ease of doing business through faster clearances.
- Strengthen financing through maritime-focused institutions.
- Enhance industry–academia collaboration for technology development.

Onerous rules

The newly amended FCRA Rules point to a renewed attempt to stifle NGOs

Civil society organisations play a vital role in areas such as health, education, disaster relief, and civil liberties and rights, stepping in where the state falls short. Yet, the Indian state has treated NGOs with suspicion, using the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, to impose stringent restrictions on their functioning. Earlier this week, the FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026 were notified, which require all NGOs registered under the FCRA, 2010, to confine their work to activities specified for their category and to the States and Union Territories named in their registration. They must also disclose their social media handles, websites and publications and are barred from carrying "political content". The new rules impose stringent penalties for using funds for unapproved purposes and require NGOs to pay separate fees for each category of work and to each State or Union Territory in which they operate, replacing the earlier system of a single registration fee. These increase compliance costs and paperwork. While the government argues that such measures promote transparency, even-handedness and national security, the rules are clearly meant to stifle the work of NGOs. The operation of the FCRA regime has been far from transparent. As CPI(M) MP John Brittas recently complained, parliamentary questions on FCRA cancellations and non-renewals have been disallowed as "secret", even though more than 20,000 registrations have reportedly been revoked over the past decade on opaque grounds. Far from improving transparency, the new rules burden NGOs with greater barriers and commitments, raising concerns that the Centre intends to create a chilling effect.

In *Noel Harper* (2022), the Supreme Court upheld the stringent 2020 FCRA amendments, accepting the state's invocation of sovereignty and national security. Yet, in in 2020, the Court had read down rules that would have classified the rights activism of civil society bodies, including protests and demonstrations as work "of a political nature", drawing a distinction between party politics and the everyday work of social and economic betterment. The new Rules seek to treat advocacy and "political content" as grounds for disqualification. In March 2026, the Centre had proposed amendments allowing a government-appointed authority to take over the assets of NGOs whose registrations were cancelled, surrendered, or not renewed. Following strong protests, particularly from minority institutions, it put the proposal on hold. Now, the newly notified rules seem another way of throttling NGOs that utilise foreign funding for civil society work. The Centre should withdraw the punitive provisions, particularly those on multiple fees and political content, and adopt fairer rules.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has notified the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2026 under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010.
- The Rules introduce stricter compliance requirements for NGOs receiving foreign contributions.
- NGOs must restrict their activities to the purposes and States/UTs specified in their FCRA registration.
- The amendments have raised concerns regarding freedom of association, governance, transparency, and civil society participation.

Key Points

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010

- Regulates acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions by individuals, associations and NGOs.
- Administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- Objective:
  - Protect sovereignty and integrity of India.
  - Safeguard national security and public interest.
  - Ensure transparency in utilisation of foreign funds.

Major Provisions of FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026

- NGOs can undertake only approved activities mentioned in their registration.
- Operations restricted to approved States/UTs.
- Mandatory disclosure of:
  - Website
  - Social media handles
  - Publications
- Restriction on dissemination of "political content."
- Separate registration fees for:
  - Each category of activity.
  - Each State/UT of operation.
- Higher penalties for utilisation of foreign funds beyond approved purposes.

Related Developments

- FCRA (Amendment) Act, 2020Administrative expenditure capped at 20%.
- Transfer of foreign contribution to another NGO prohibited.
- Mandatory FCRA account in State Bank of India, New Delhi Main Branch.
- Aadhaar identification mandatory for key functionaries.

Important Judicial Decisions

- Noel Harper v. Union of India (2022)Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the 2020 amendments.
- Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF) v. Union of India (2020)Peaceful advocacy and public campaigns cannot automatically be treated as activities of a "political nature."

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 19(1)(c) – Freedom to form Associations.
- Article 19(2) & 19(4) – Reasonable Restrictions.
- Article 14 – Equality before Law.
- Rule of Law.
- Principle of Proportionality.
- Civil Society as an important component of participatory democracy.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Improves monitoring of foreign funds.
- Enhances financial accountability.
- Addresses concerns related to money laundering and national security.
- Promotes greater transparency through mandatory disclosures.

Concerns

- Increases compliance burden on NGOs.
- Higher registration costs may affect small organisations.
- Ambiguity regarding the term "political content."

- May restrict policy advocacy and rights-based campaigns.
- Raises concerns regarding freedom of association under Article 19(1)(c).
- Greater executive discretion in registration and renewal.

Way Forward

- Clearly define "political content."
- Ensure transparent and time-bound registration and renewal.
- Simplify compliance for genuine NGOs.
- Strengthen independent appellate mechanisms.
- Balance national security with constitutional freedoms.
- Adopt risk-based regulation instead of excessive compliance.

Prelims Value Added Facts

- FCRA enacted: 1976
- Present Act: FCRA, 2010
- Administered by: Ministry of Home Affairs
- Major Amendment: 2020
- Nodal FCRA Bank Branch: SBI, New Delhi Main Branch
- Administrative expenditure limit: 20%
- Foreign contribution cannot be transferred to another FCRA-registered NGO.

Silicon Valley to Seoul, watch AI exuberance

THE LAST few days have seen stock markets across the world wobble as concerns over the AI cycle weigh heavy on investors. On Tuesday, Asian markets fell sharply, led by South Korea's Kospi, which plunged by nearly 10 per cent. Japan's Nikkei 225 was down 3.5 per cent and Nasdaq, too, witnessed weakness, falling by almost 4 per cent since last week. Questions are increasingly being raised over monetisation of capital spending by tech firms and the high valuations they command. As per Goldman Sachs, the AI hyperscalers are expected to spend more than $5 trillion on technology and data centres by 2030. Parallels are now being drawn with the dotcom bubble. Then, as now, investor exuberance had dramatically driven up share prices of tech firms. And when the bubble burst, it took Nasdaq years to fully recover.

Despite these concerns, capital has been flowing to companies linked to the AI cycle in all parts of the world. In Korea, for instance, SK Hynix and Samsung have seen euphoric investor interest. As per reports, the two now account for a sizeable share of the South Korean market. In Japan, companies like Advantest, Tokyo Electron and Kioxia have all seen their shares surge. In the US, AI behemoths — Anthropic and OpenAI — have begun the process to launch their initial public offerings. These will follow SpaceX's recent mega IPO, pulling in even more capital. Investor exuberance is, however, likely to run up against a macro reality. In the past, asset bubbles have tended to be pricked by central banks raising interest rates. And with inflation edging upwards in the US — CPI rose to 4.2 per cent in May — it raises the possibility of the Federal Reserve tightening policy in the months ahead.

Indian markets have not been part of this AI play. Foreign capital has, in fact, been exiting the country. In 2025, foreign portfolio investors took out $18.9 billion from the stock markets, and so far this year, outflows have been just shy of $30 billion. Alongside, net FDI flows dwindled to $1 billion in 2024-25 and $7.7 billion in 2025-26. Along with high crude prices, this put pressure on the rupee. In recent weeks, however, oil prices have softened considerably, and measures have been taken to boost capital flows and help stabilise the currency. But more needs to be done. Steps should be taken to improve the country's attractiveness as an investment destination, for both domestic and foreign investors.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Global stock markets witnessed sharp corrections amid concerns over overvaluation of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-related companies.
- Investors are questioning whether massive investments in AI infrastructure will generate sufficient future returns.
- Comparisons are being drawn with the Dot-com Bubble (1995–2000).
- Rising inflation in the United States has increased the possibility of tighter monetary policy by the US Federal Reserve, affecting global capital flows.
- India has witnessed Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) outflows, while net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has moderated, impacting the rupee and domestic financial markets.

Key Points

- AI Hyperscalers: Large cloud computing companies investing heavily in AI infrastructure and data centres.
- Goldman Sachs estimates AI infrastructure investment may exceed $5 trillion by 2030.
- Asset Bubble: Situation where asset prices significantly exceed their intrinsic value due to speculative demand.
    - Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI):Investment in financial assets (shares, bonds).
    - Short-term and volatile.
    - Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):Investment in productive assets/businesses.
    - Long-term and relatively stable.
- Higher US Federal Reserve interest rates generally:
    - Reduce global liquidity.
    - Strengthen the US Dollar.
    - Trigger capital outflows from emerging economies.
- India follows a Managed Floating Exchange Rate System, where RBI intervenes only to curb excessive volatility.

Static Linkages

- Difference between FPI and FDI.
- Exchange Rate Systems:
    - Fixed Exchange Rate
    - Floating Exchange Rate
    - Managed Float (India)
- Role of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in forex market intervention.
- Relationship between:
    - Interest Rate ↑ → Capital inflow to developed economies ↑
    - Capital Outflow → Rupee Depreciation → Imported Inflation.
- Current Account and Capital Account under the Balance of Payments (BoP).
- Effects of crude oil prices on India's external sector.
- Monetary tightening and global financial stability.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- AI is emerging as a key driver of future economic growth.
- Large-scale investments can improve productivity and technological innovation.
- AI can enhance competitiveness across manufacturing, healthcare and governance.

Concerns

- Excessive AI valuations may create an asset bubble.
- Higher US interest rates can reduce capital flows to emerging economies.
- Persistent FPI outflows increase exchange rate volatility.
- Declining FDI affects long-term capital formation.
- India risks lagging in global AI value chains without stronger innovation and manufacturing ecosystems.

Way Forward

- Improve ease of doing business to attract long-term FDI.
- Strengthen AI ecosystem through research, innovation and semiconductor manufacturing.
- Deepen domestic capital markets to reduce dependence on volatile FPI.
- Maintain macroeconomic stability through prudent fiscal and monetary policies.
- Enhance financial market regulation to monitor speculative asset bubbles.
- Promote AI adoption under initiatives such as IndiaAI Mission and Digital Public Infrastructure.

In West Bengal, keep egg on the menu

THE FIRST budget of the Suvendu Adhikari government in West Bengal has drawn attention for two contrasting decisions on school nutrition. On the one hand, it has substantially increased the per-child allocation for mid-day meals, raising the material cost from Rs 6.78 to Rs 10, signalling a welcome recognition that better nutrition requires greater public investment. Yet the decision to hand the running of mid-day meals in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation area to the religious organisation ISKCON effectively excludes one of the staples from the menu — eggs. The defence by CM Adhikari — "You will get good food to eat. You will get pure food, nothing to worry about" — and by state education minister Dipak Burman — "There is no logic behind the idea that children must consume eggs, especially to fulfil their nutritional needs" — only exacerbates concerns. By imposing a vegetarian ideal in a culturally varied state, the move depletes the menu of one of the country's most important welfare programmes.

The nutritional case for retaining eggs is compelling. The National Family Health Survey-6, released last month, shows that although stunting among children under five years has declined, nearly three out of every 10 children continue to be affected. West Bengal has long grappled with significant levels of child undernutrition and anaemia among both children and women. Eggs remain one of the most effective, economical and familiar sources of protein. The proposed substitutes — paneer, soyabean, rajma and pulses — undoubtedly have nutritional value, but ensuring their availability and acceptance at scale is far more complex.

Food in India has long been bound up in questions of caste, religion, and social power. In the weeks before the watershed assembly elections in April, the BJP went to great lengths to reassure voters that Bengal's culinary traditions would remain untouched under its stewardship. The removal of eggs from mid-day meals in schools — a template followed in several BJP-ruled states — sits uneasily alongside those assurances, particularly in a state where 98 per cent of people consume non-vegetarian food. The Adhikari government must reconsider its decision.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The West Bengal Government increased the per-child material cost under the PM POSHAN Scheme from ₹6.78 to ₹10.
- The government also decided to entrust the preparation of PM POSHAN meals in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) area to ISKCON, resulting in the exclusion of eggs from the menu.
- The decision has sparked a debate on child nutrition, food security, welfare delivery, constitutional principles, and evidence-based public policy.

Key Points

- PM POSHAN Scheme
    - Formerly known as the National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools (Mid-Day Meal Scheme).
    - Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Education.
    - Type: Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
    - Covers students of Classes I–VIII in Government and Government-aided schools.
    - Objectives:
        - Improve nutritional status.
        - Increase enrolment, attendance and retention.
        - Promote social equity.
        - Enhance learning outcomes.
- National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013
    - Provides legal entitlement to nutritious meals for school children through PM POSHAN.
- NFHS-6 (2025–26)
    - Stunting has declined but remains a significant public health concern.
    - Child undernutrition and anaemia continue to affect a substantial proportion of children and women.
- Eggs in School Nutrition
    - Rich source of high-quality protein, Vitamin B12, Vitamin D, Choline and essential amino acids.
    - Recommended by several nutrition experts as a cost-effective source of animal protein.
    - States have flexibility regarding menu composition; eggs are not mandatory under PM POSHAN guidelines.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life includes the right to live with dignity, including adequate nutrition (judicial interpretation).
- Article 21A – Right to Education.
- Article 39(f) – Protection of children's healthy development.
- Article 47 – Duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition and public health.
- Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs) emphasize improving nutrition and public health.
- National Food Security Act, 2013.
- POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission).
- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 – Zero Hunger.
- SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being.

Critical Analysis

Arguments in Favour of Including Eggs

- Cost-effective source of high-quality protein.
- Helps address protein-energy malnutrition.
- Supports reduction in stunting and anaemia.
- Improves cognitive development and learning outcomes.
- Widely consumed across most Indian states.

Concerns Raised

- Religious and dietary preferences vary across communities.
- Vegetarian alternatives require effective supply chains and quality assurance.
- Welfare policies should be guided by scientific nutritional evidence.
- Uniform dietary policies may not reflect regional food habits.
- Balancing cultural diversity with public health objectives remains a policy challenge.

Way Forward

- Adopt evidence-based nutrition policy guided by ICMR/NIN recommendations.
- Allow State-specific and locally acceptable menus while maintaining nutritional standards.
- Provide equivalent vegetarian alternatives where required without reducing nutritional value.
- Strengthen monitoring under PM POSHAN and POSHAN Tracker.
- Improve convergence among PM POSHAN, POSHAN Abhiyaan, Health and Education Departments.

If passport is not proof of citizenship, what is

Articles 5 to 11 of the Constitution and the Citizenship Act, 1955 define who is an Indian citizen. Neither identifies any single document as citizenship proof

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY

THE MINISTRY of External Affairs (MEA) Wednesday clarified that a passport is primarily a travel document and not a standalone proof of citizenship. The statement, made on Passport Seva Divas, triggered confusion. For most Indians, the passport is the most authoritative document issued by the state — carrying the Republic's name, accepted across the world and issued only after verification by government authorities.

The MEA's clarification, however, reflects a longstanding position: a passport is issued because the government is satisfied a person is an Indian citizen, but it does not create citizenship, nor is it conclusive proof of citizenship if challenged in law.

Citizenship a legal status

Articles 5 to 11 of the Constitution and the Citizenship Act, 1955 define who is an Indian citizen. Significantly, neither identifies any single document as proof of citizenship.

Instead, citizenship is treated as a legal status arising from facts such as birth, parentage, domicile, or naturalisation. Documents serve as evidence of those facts. For a person born in India, citizenship depends on when they were born and, in certain cases, the citizenship status of their parents. For someone naturalised, it depends on compliance with statutory conditions.

This distinction is reflected in an answer given by the Ministry of Home Affairs in Parliament in February 2020. Asked whether Aadhaar, passport, voter ID, PAN card or birth certificate constitute valid proof of citizenship, the government said: "Acquisition of Indian Citizenship is governed by The Citizenship Act, 1955 and rules made thereunder. Citizenship of India can be acquired by birth or descent or registration or naturalisation or incorporation of territory. The eligibility criteria for acquisition and determination of citizenship is as per the provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955."

Notably, it did not identify any of the documents as citizenship documents. Yet, under the Citizenship Rules, 2003, those seeking Indian citizenship under certain provisions produce a copy of their parents' passports to prove they are Indian citizens.

Eligibility for passport

Section 20 of the Act empowers the Centre to issue a passport or travel document even to non-Indian citizen if it considers such issuance necessary in public interest.

MEA sources said the provision is used in special cases. "Largely, cases where say an Indian origin person becomes stateless due to geo-political developments, or someone stateless is in India and must travel abroad," an official said. Historically, Tibetan refugees and Sri Lankan Tamils in India have been issued special travel documents when visiting other countries, sources said. In 2023, the Madras High Court asked the Centre to grant a passport to a Sri Lankan Tamil Refugee under Section 20 of the Passport Act.

What courts have held

During hearings on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar last year, a Supreme Court bench of Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi observed: "We would like you to clarify...we have repeatedly passed order that the list illustratively indicates 11 documents...if you see those 11, apart from passport and birth certificates, none are conclusive proof of citizenship."

The observation appeared to place passports and birth certificates in a higher evidentiary category than other documents accepted by the Election Commission for voter verification. Yet, in cases dealing directly with citizenship disputes, courts have often looked beyond passports.

In 2013, the Bombay High Court refused relief to four persons accused of being illegal immigrants despite their producing passports (which were later terminated), Aadhaar cards and birth certificates.

In the 2005 *Sarbananda Sonowal v Union of India* judgment, the Supreme Court underscored that the burden of proving citizenship rests on the person claiming it. "There is good and sound reason for placing the burden of proof upon the person concerned who asserts to be a citizen of a particular country," the court said.

In *State of Andhra Pradesh v Abdul Khader* (1962), the SC treated a passport as evidence of nationality but examined constitutional criteria such as birth, domicile and migration history for citizenship.

The bigger problem

Unlike many countries, India does not issue a universal citizenship certificate for all citizens. Certificates of citizenship are for a limited category of people — those who acquire citizenship through registration or naturalisation under Sections 5 and 6 of the Citizenship Act. But the overwhelming majority of Indians are citizens by birth.

India's civil registration system evolved unevenly, and universal birth registration is a relatively recent phenomenon. For millions of older Indians, citizenship has traditionally been inferred from a combination of records — electoral rolls, school certificates, land records, birth certificates, passports and other government documents — rather than through a single definitive credential.

The closest India came to creating such a document was through the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The legal architecture was put in place under the Vajpayee government through the Citizenship Rules, 2003. The rules envisaged a National Register of Indian Citizens, along with local and state-level registers, and contemplated the issuance of identity cards linked to citizenship. The idea resurfaced during the UPA years in a tussle between the Home Ministry and the UIDAI over whether identity verification should precede citizenship verification.

In a conversation with *The Indian Express*, former Union Home Secretary R K Singh recalled that senior Home Ministry officials repeatedly argued that Aadhaar could not serve as proof of citizenship. "At that time, we said it would enable large number of infiltrators to get documents. The PM held a meeting on this. Nandan Nilekani was there. We put our point. I was very clear it cannot be a proof of citizenship. Nilekani agreed that his verification was peripheral."

"As far as passport is concerned, its verification levels are stronger. But passport was not designed to be a document of citizenship. It was always imagined as a travel document. The idea of NRC was tied to providing a proof of citizenship," he added.

However, the NRC was never rolled out nationwide. The exercise became politically contentious and was eventually overtaken by the controversy surrounding the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and fears of a nationwide citizenship verification exercise.

The only large-scale implementation occurred in Assam between 2015 and 2019, where applicants had to establish links to legacy records predating March 24, 1971. Nearly 19 lakh people were left out of the final list, many because of documentary inconsistencies, spelling variations, missing records and difficulties in proving family linkages.

• WHO IS AN INDIAN CITIZEN?

Under the Citizenship Act of 1955, there are four ways to obtain citizenship:

1. Citizenship by birth: For birthright citizenship, those born in India between 1950 and 1987 are citizens.

- For those born between 1987 and 2003, citizenship is accorded only if either parent is a citizen of India at the time of their birth.
- For those born after 2003, citizenship is accorded if only if either parent is a citizen at the time of their birth and the other is not an illegal immigrant.

2. Citizenship by descent: A person born outside India and who has at least one Indian parent will be granted citizenship, provided that the birth is registered within one year with the Indian consulate in the jurisdiction.

3. Citizenship by registration: This is for persons related to an Indian citizen through marriage or ancestry.

- Citizenship is treated as a legal status arising from facts such as birth, parentage, domicile or naturalisation.
- Documents serve as evidence of those facts. A **passport** is issued because the government is satisfied a person is a citizen. It does not create citizenship.

4. Citizenship by naturalisation: Naturalisation certificate can be granted to a person who isn't an illegal immigrant and has lived in India for 12 months continuously before applying.

- In the 14 years before the 12-month period, the person must have lived in India for at least 11 years. This is relaxed for some categories.

Waiver clause: If the Centre believes the applicant has rendered distinguished service to science, philosophy, art, literature, world peace or human progress, it may waive all or any of the conditions in the Act. This is how the Dalai Lama or Adnan Sami, the Pakistani singer, got Indian citizenship.

- BY APURVA VISHWANATH

Common principle

In the UK and US, too, passports are issued because the state has determined that a person is a citizen; they do not themselves create citizenship.

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The difference is that both countries have more robust civil registration systems and, for naturalised citizens, formal citizenship certificates.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) clarified on Passport Seva Divas that a passport is primarily a travel document and not conclusive proof of Indian citizenship.
- The clarification assumes significance in the context of debates on citizenship verification, electoral roll revision, NRC, and documentation.
- Legally, citizenship is determined under the Constitution of India and the Citizenship Act, 1955, not merely by possession of a passport.

Key Points

- Articles 5–11 deal with citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution.
- Article 11 empowers Parliament to regulate citizenship through law.
- Citizenship Act, 1955 provides five modes of acquiring citizenship:
  - Birth
  - Descent
  - Registration
  - Naturalisation
  - Incorporation of territory
  - Passport Act, 1967Passport is a travel document, not a citizenship certificate.
  - Section 20 allows the Central Government to issue passports/travel documents even to non-citizens in exceptional public interest.
- No law in India designates any single document (Passport, Aadhaar, PAN, Voter ID, Birth Certificate) as conclusive proof of citizenship.
- Under the Citizenship Rules, 2003, a National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) is envisaged.
- NRC has been implemented only in Assam.

Static Linkages

- Articles 5–11 of the Constitution.
- Article 11 – Parliament's power to regulate citizenship.
- Citizenship Act, 1955.
- Citizenship Rules, 2003.
- Passport Act, 1967 (Section 20).
- Difference between:
  - Citizenship
  - Nationality
  - Domicile
- Fundamental Rights available only to citizens:
  - Articles 15, 16, 19, 29, 30.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reinforces the legal distinction between identity documents and citizenship status.
- Highlights that citizenship is determined through statutory eligibility, not possession of a particular document.
- Ensures judicial scrutiny in citizenship disputes.

Challenges

- India lacks a universal citizenship certificate for citizens by birth.
- Documentary inconsistencies remain due to uneven birth registration.
- Citizenship verification can disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.

Way Forward

- Strengthen Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS).
- Improve universal birth registration and digital record management.
- Increase public awareness on citizenship laws.
- Ensure transparent, legally robust and rights-based citizenship verification mechanisms.