DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

DATE - 18/07/2026

SOURCE : THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS

CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

SC opposes use of SIR data for non-poll tasks

- Court issues notice to the Election Commission and Bengal govt. after Congress leader's petition
- Court declares that SIR cannot be used for other purposes, least of all to determine citizenship
- Petitioner says State denying welfare, cancelling caste certificates of those excluded from poll rolls

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court stated on Friday that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is only linked to elections as a petition said the West Bengal government is using SIR data to delete names from schemes ensuring food security, women's welfare and Backward Caste certifications.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, one of the three judges on the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, said the Supreme Court, in its May 27 judgment in the Bihar SIR case, had made it very clear that the SIR outcome cannot be used for any other purpose, least of all to conclusively determine citizenship.

"The Election Commission has a corresponding duty to refer the matter to the government for adjudication under the Citizenship Act... Until and unless that is done, for all other purposes, the status must go on. The EC is not a constitutional authority regarding Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12 [dealing with citizenship rights] of the Constitution," Justice Bagchi observed. The court issued notice to the EC, West Bengal government, and the Chief Electoral Officer of the State on a petition filed by Congress leader Prasenjit Bose that deletion from electoral roll has resulted in serious civil consequences extending beyond the right to vote.

Mr. Bose, represented by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan and advocate Neha Rathi, drew the court's attention to three orders passed by the West Bengal government. The petition said the State issued a notification on May 19 that purged voters must not remain beneficiaries of the Annapurna scheme for cash transfer to women unless they had filed appeals before the SIR tribunal.

On June 4, the State directed the deletion of beneficiaries under the Public Distribution System (PDS) on the basis of the outcome of the SIR. On May 14, it issued an order calling for authorities to reverify and cancel caste certificates of names deleted from the SIR list.

"They have even linked the PDS to voting," Mr. Sankaranarayanan submitted.

Key concerns

Petition raises issues on Bengal government's use of SIR data

1. Deletion from electoral rolls has led to serious civil consequences
2. SIR data is being linked with PDS and other government schemes
3. Only 38,000 of 34 lakh appeals have been heard so far; at present rate, the appellate process is likely to take nearly 21 years to complete
4. Absence of publicly available guidelines on filing of documents, conduct of hearings and entitlement of excluded electors to file appeals

The petition sought directions for streamlining the appellate process before the SIR tribunals, disclosure of data, publication of standard operating procedure and a time-bound disposal mechanism.

He said these orders coincide with the snail's pace at which the tribunals are hearing appeals of persons excluded from the electoral rolls of the State. Only 38,000 appeals have been disposed of out of a total 34 lakh filed in West Bengal. Out of the 38,000 appeals, 70% have been cleared for re-inclusion in the electoral roll.

"If only 38,000 appeals of the 34 lakh appeals have been disposed of, over 33.5 lakh appeals are still pending adjudication by the 19 tribunals... The delay in the hearing of the appeals are affecting civil rights. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure transparency and accountability in the appellate process. The 19 tribunals should have a website to upload their orders and their standard operating procedure," the senior counsel submitted.

He said that since 70% of the appeals heard by the tribunals have been allowed, there ought to be only a "minimum documentary threshold" for faster disposal of the appeals. "If you have a passport, that should be a clear pass for citizenship," Mr. Sankaranarayanan argued.

The petition flagged the absence of publicly available guidelines on the filing of documents, issuance of notices, conduct of hearings, entitlement of excluded electors to file appeals, supply of reasoned orders or timelines for disposal of the appeals. "These adversely affect those whose names have been deleted in the SIR process and could possibly lead to their names being deleted as beneficiaries," the senior counsel contended.

"Civil rights of voters are at risk here. Many of the voters excluded from the electoral rolls are poor, illiterate and uneducated. It is impossible for them to file appeals either online or offline unless ground-level legal assistance is provided and comprehensive guidelines are issued in local languages," the petition said.

Considering the issues involved, the apex court agreed to hear the case at an early date.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court reiterated that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is only an election-related exercise and cannot be used to determine citizenship or deny welfare benefits.
- While hearing a petition concerning West Bengal, the Court referred to its May 27, 2026 judgment in the Bihar SIR case.
- The petition challenged State government orders allegedly linking electoral roll deletions with:
    - Public Distribution System (PDS) benefits,
    - Annapurna cash transfer scheme,
    - Verification/cancellation of Backward Class certificates.
- The Court issued notices to the Election Commission of India (ECI), the West Bengal Government, and the Chief Electoral Officer, West Bengal.

Key Points

- SIR is exclusively for preparation and purification of electoral rolls.
- Deletion from the electoral roll does not amount to loss of citizenship.
- ECI is not the authority to determine citizenship under the Constitution.
- Citizenship disputes must be decided under the Citizenship Act, 1955 by the competent authority.
- ECI may refer doubtful citizenship cases to the government but cannot adjudicate them.
- The petition highlighted:
    - 34 lakh appeals filed against electoral roll deletions.
    - Only 38,000 appeals disposed of.
    - Around 70% of decided appeals resulted in re-inclusion, indicating possible wrongful exclusions.
- The petition sought:
    - Uniform SOPs,
    - Time-bound disposal of appeals,
    - Publication of tribunal orders,
    - Transparency and legal assistance for affected voters.

Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Superintendence, direction and control of elections vested in the Election Commission.
- Article 326 – Elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies based on adult suffrage.
- Article 327 – Parliament's power to make laws relating to elections.
- Article 328 – State Legislature's power regarding elections (subject to parliamentary law).
- Articles 5–11 – Constitutional provisions relating to citizenship.
- Article 11 – Parliament empowered to regulate citizenship by law.
- Citizenship Act, 1955 – Governs acquisition and termination of citizenship.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 – Preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951 – Conduct of elections and election disputes.
- Natural Justice – Right to notice, hearing and reasoned decision before adverse administrative action.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reinforces the distinction between electoral eligibility and citizenship status.
- Prevents misuse of electoral roll revision for administrative or welfare purposes.
- Upholds constitutional principles of due process and natural justice.
- Protects vulnerable sections from arbitrary exclusion from welfare schemes.

Challenges

- Huge pendency of SIR appeals delays electoral justice.
- Lack of uniform procedures across tribunals.
- Inadequate transparency in appeal disposal.
- Limited legal awareness and access among marginalized groups.
- Administrative overlap between electoral data and welfare databases.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Constitutional Issues

- Limits of ECI's constitutional jurisdiction.
- Due process in administrative decision-making.
- Federal accountability of State governments.
- Equality before law (Article 14).
- Protection of life and dignity (Article 21).
- Free and fair elections as part of the Basic Structure Doctrine.

Way Forward

- Clearly separate electoral roll management from citizenship determination.
- Ensure that SIR outcomes are not used for welfare exclusion unless supported by due legal process.
- Establish uniform SOPs for SIR appeals across all States.
- Increase the number of appellate tribunals for speedy disposal.
- Publish tribunal orders and timelines to improve transparency.
- Strengthen legal aid and multilingual assistance for excluded voters.
- Enhance coordination between ECI and competent authorities while respecting constitutional boundaries.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Wangchuk persists with hunger strike; more support pours in

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk continued his indefinite hunger strike on the 20th day on Friday, demanding Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation as more political parties extended support to him.

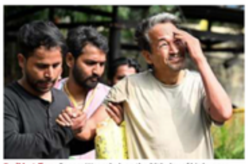
Mr. Wangchuk lost 350 grams in weight and was experiencing mild dehydration, his physician Satish Lamba said, according to a statement issued by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP). His blood pressure was 108/68mmHg, blood sugar at 80mg/dL and pulse rate 72bpm. He still remained "mentally alert," Dr. Lamba said.

Congress leaders, including Pawan Khera, called on Mr. Wangchuk. A Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar lawmaker also paid visit while Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker expressed solidarity with students.

The activist is under watch by government-appointed doctors following a Delhi High Court order that compelled the Ministry of Health to ensure timely medical intervention if his condition deteriorates.

In a video message shared at the end of the 20th day of his fast, Mr. Wangchuk urged people to join the CJP's proposed Parliament march on July 20 in large numbers, saying public participation was the movement's biggest strength. "Yes, I am still alive. Twenty per cent of my body is gone. After fats, muscles are gone. After that, organs will go. Finally, the brain. The time has not come yet," he said.

"Neha's blood sugar level has been severely low, and doctors have suggested that she break the fast and be hospitalised before the hypoglycemia worsens," Mr. Balaji said in a statement. "Aameen has incredibly high uric acid buildup in his body and has also lost almost 14% of his body weight. Manish has lost more than 10kg of weight and has been on the brink of losing consciousness, needing constant support for basic life activities." Three other students who had started the hunger strike ended it after their condition worsened.



Frail but firm: Sonam Wangchuk on the 20th day of his hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi on Friday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

'Insensitive govt.'

Mr. Wangchuk was visited by Congress MP Pawan Khera and former Delhi Minister Rajendra Pal. They enquired about his health and expressed solidarity with the striking AISA students. "A very insensitive government is sitting at the top that does not understand the language of democratic opposition," Mr. Khera told reporters after urging Mr. Wangchuk to end his fast.

Congress leaders have increasingly started visiting Mr. Wangchuk, even as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi addressed a programme in Dehradun on issues similar to those being raised by the CJP and the Ladakhi activist. "The party once again urges the Government of India to immediately engage with the protesters, address the demands for examination reforms and respond to the growing concerns of students across the country," the CJP said in a statement.

Former Union Minister of Law and Justice Ashwani Kumar also visited Mr. Wangchuk.

Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar (NCP-SP) MP Supriya Sule also met Mr. Wangchuk and urged him to end his fast. "I commit to you that all eight NCP-SP MPs will join you on the march to Parliament on July 20," Ms. Sule said addressing the gathering. "This is not a fight for our children, but for everyone's children."

Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker expressed solidarity with students affected by the NEET re-exam and alleged irregularities in the CBSE paper evaluation this year. "We owe every child a future where they can learn, grow, and dream without fear," Ms. Bhaker wrote on Instagram.

Two notable incidents

Mr. Dipke clashed with a national TV channel reporter over her what he described as a "provocative" line of questioning. The CJP founder later said, "The media that ignored the Jantar Mantar protest all this time has finally arrived." He accused the channel of spreading "baseless propaganda".

The other took place in London, where a journalist asked actor Aamir Khan– who played Phunsukh Wangdu in the 2009 film *3 Idiots*, a character long understood to have been inspired by Mr. Wangchuk– about the hunger strike.

It was a "misconception" that Mr. Wangchuk had inspired that character, Mr. Khan said.

On the ongoing fast, he added: "I think all of us are very concerned for his health, and we hope he ends his fast."

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Activist Sonam Wangchuk continued his indefinite hunger strike demanding reforms in the examination system and accountability for alleged irregularities.
- The Delhi High Court directed the Ministry of Health to ensure timely medical care for the fasting protesters.
- The protest has received support from political leaders, civil society, and student groups, highlighting concerns over transparency and credibility of public examinations.

Key Points

- Raises concerns over:
  - Transparency and integrity of competitive examinations.
  - Institutional accountability.
  - Fair grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Demonstrates the role of peaceful democratic protests in a constitutional democracy.
- Highlights judicial intervention to protect the Right to Life (Article 21) while respecting the Right to Peaceful Assembly (Article 19(1)(b)).

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 19(1)(b) – Right to Assemble Peacefully.
- Article 21 – Protection of Life and Personal Liberty.
- Article 226 – High Court's power to issue writs.
- Article 32 – Constitutional Remedies.
- Article 19(3) – Reasonable restrictions on peaceful assembly.
- Rule of Law and Natural Justice in public recruitment and examinations.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reinforces democratic methods of expressing dissent.
- Highlights the need for transparent examination institutions.
- Reflects the judiciary's role in safeguarding constitutional rights.

Challenges

- Maintaining public trust in examination agencies.
- Balancing the right to protest with public order and health.
- Preventing politicisation of student-related issues.
- Strengthening institutional accountability.

Way Forward

- Establish an independent examination oversight mechanism.
- Enhance digital security and audit systems in examinations.
- Strengthen grievance redressal and transparency.
- Conduct periodic third-party audits of examination agencies.
- Promote continuous dialogue between government and stakeholders.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

India's Parliament must not stage its Cadaver Synod

In January 897 CE, Rome witnessed the strangest trial in the history of the Church. Pope Stephen VI ordered the corpse of his predecessor, Pope Formosus, dug up from its grave. Formosus had been dead for about nine months. His body was dressed in papal vestments and propped upon a throne in the Lateran basilica. A trembling deacon stood beside the corpse and answered questions on its behalf. The dead pope was charged with perjury and with violating canon law. He was, unsurprisingly, found guilty. His election was declared void. His acts were annulled. The three fingers of his right hand, the fingers of consecration, were hacked off. The body was then flung into the Tiber.

History remembers this spectacle as the Cadaver Synod. It settled nothing. It disgusted Rome, provoked an insurrection, and Stephen VI himself was imprisoned and strangled within months. Successor popes reburied Formosus with honour and burned the record of the trial. The lesson has endured for centuries. A tribunal that sits in judgment over someone who no longer holds the office it can take away does not do justice. It performs theatre, and the theatre degrades the tribunal more than the accused.

An impossible impeachment

India's Parliament now stands at the edge of its own Cadaver Synod. The Lok Sabha Speaker has announced that the report of the inquiry committee constituted under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, into allegations against Justice Yashwant Varma will be tabled when Parliament reconvenes on July 20. The report was submitted on May 18, 2026. The difficulty is stark. Justice Varma resigned on April 9, with immediate effect, giving up his official residence, vehicles and amenities. His judicial salary has ceased. He has revived his enrolment with the Bar Council and may resume practice as an advocate. Whatever the Allahabad High Court website may say, the man is no longer a judge in any sense that the Constitution recognises. The question before Parliament is whether it should proceed against a judicial corpse.

Begin with first principles. The Constitution treats the conduct of judges as a subject beyond ordinary parliamentary debate. Article 121 forbids any discussion in Parliament of the conduct of a Supreme Court or High Court judge in the discharge of his duties, except upon a motion for an address praying for his removal. The bar is deliberate. The framers knew that a legislature free to debate judicial conduct at will would soon hold judges hostage to majorities. So they permitted one exception – and one alone. Parliament may discuss a judge's conduct only when it is actually engaged in the solemn business of removing him. The discussion is incidental to removal. It has no independent existence.

Sanjay Hegde

Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of India

Parliament must avoid a purposeless exercise over the Justice Yashwant Varma report

Removal, in turn, presupposes an office to be vacated. Article 124(4), applied to High Court judges through Article 217(1)(b), speaks of a judge being "removed from his office." The Judges (Inquiry) Act creates elaborate machinery, a motion, an inquiry committee, a report, an address to the President, all directed to a single constitutional consequence. The Act knows no lesser penalty. It cannot censure, fine or disqualify. It can only remove. Once the judge has already left, the machinery grinds on with nothing to grip.

A judge is a constitutional functionary

Has Justice Varma left? The Supreme Court answered that question nearly half a century ago. In *Union Of India vs Shri Gopal Chandra Misra And Ors.* (1978), a Constitution Bench held that a High Court judge's resignation under the proviso to Article 217 is a unilateral constitutional act. It requires no acceptance by the President or anyone else. A judge who resigns with immediate effect severs the constitutional link at the moment of his own choosing. A judge is not a government servant whose resignation lies on some desk awaiting orders. He is a constitutional functionary who holds office by the Constitution and may relinquish it by the Constitution. Justice Varma's letter said "with immediate effect". The link snapped on April 9. That his name lingers on a website is an administrative carryover, not a statement of law.

Precedent points the same way. Justice P.D. Dinakaran resigned in 2011 while impeachment proceedings were pending; the inquiry committee was dissolved, and no report reached Parliament. When Justice Soumitra Sen resigned (2011) after the Rajya Sabha had actually adopted the removal motion, the proceedings simply ended. Parliament thereafter never took the matter up. In both cases, the institution understood that resignation extinguishes the removal jurisdiction. The Varma committee, unusually, continued its work after his resignation and submitted a sealed report after his resignation. Tabling that report as a formal record may perhaps be defended as closure of the file, but even that is strictly not necessary. The Speaker can just inform Parliament that such a report has been received, but no further action is deemed necessary. Before Parliament proceeds further, members must demand that it be advised by the Attorney General, who must be summoned to the House. Anything beyond tabling would take Parliament into realms that no legislature has gone before.

Consider what that territory looks like. If Parliament can proceed to debate and vote upon the removal of a man who is no longer a judge, then the resignation of the judge is no barrier. Neither, logically, is retirement. Nor, indeed, is death. Every safeguard in Article 121 rests on the premise that the discussion serves a live removal. Remove that premise, and a future Parliament could constitute committees against judges who retired a decade earlier, or whose judgments displeased a later majority. It could posthumously arraign a Chief Justice for a verdict delivered in another political era. The special majority requirement would remain, but special majorities have been mustered before and will be again. Judicial independence does not depend on judges being brave on the day of judgment alone. It depends on their knowing that no legislature will hold a synod over their record after they have gone.

Close the file

None of this means that Justice Varma escapes accountability. Impeachment is not punishment. It is the removal of an unfit occupant from a constitutional office, and that purpose stands fully achieved. The office is vacant. If the burnt currency notes found at his residence discloses an offence, the criminal law applies to former judges exactly as it applies to the rest of us. Investigation, prosecution and trial remain open, and are indeed the proper forum for questions of guilt. His pension and terminal benefits raise separate statutory questions that the government may lawfully examine. What Parliament cannot do is dress the corpse in robes and conduct a trial that can end only in removing a man from an office he does not hold.

Rome eventually understood this. Pope Theodore II reinstated the ordinations of Formosus and reburied him with honour in St. Peter's Basilica. Pope John IX condemned the synod and burned its acts. The Church survived Formosus. It nearly did not survive the trial of his corpse. Parliament should table the report, note it, and close the file. Let us not dig up old corpses just for the stink.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Justice Yashwant Varma resigned from the office of Judge of the Allahabad High Court on 9 April 2026, before Parliament could initiate removal proceedings.
- The Inquiry Committee constituted under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968 submitted its report on 18 May 2026.
- The Lok Sabha Speaker has announced that the report will be tabled during the Monsoon Session.
- The issue raises a constitutional question: Can Parliament continue impeachment proceedings after a judge has resigned?

Key Points

- Article 121: Parliament cannot discuss the conduct of a Supreme Court or High Court Judge except during a motion for removal.
- Article 124(4): Provides for removal of Supreme Court Judges on grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity by a special majority in both Houses.
- Article 217(1)(b): Applies the same removal procedure to High Court Judges.
- Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968: Prescribes the procedure for investigation and removal of judges.
- A judge's resignation under the Constitution is a unilateral constitutional act and does not require acceptance by the President.
- Union of India v. Gopal Chandra Misra (1978): Supreme Court held that resignation becomes effective from the date specified by the judge.
- Justice P.D. Dinakaran (2011): Resigned before completion of impeachment proceedings; proceedings ended.
- Justice Soumitra Sen (2011): Resigned after Rajya Sabha passed the removal motion; Lok Sabha did not continue proceedings.

Static Linkages

- Independence of Judiciary is part of the Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Judges enjoy security of tenure to protect judicial independence.
- Removal of judges is deliberately made difficult to prevent legislative or executive interference.
- Parliament has no power to remove judges except through the constitutional impeachment process.
- Criminal liability of a judge is separate from constitutional removal proceedings.

Critical Analysis

Constitutional Issues

- Constitution provides only removal from office, not post-resignation impeachment.
- Continuing proceedings after resignation may exceed the constitutional purpose of Articles 121 and 124.
- Accountability should continue through criminal investigation or other legal mechanisms where applicable.

Concerns

- Resignation should not become a means to evade institutional accountability.
- Constitutional silence on post-resignation proceedings creates legal ambiguity.
- Need to balance judicial independence with public accountability.

Way Forward

- Clarify the legal position through suitable amendments to the Judges (Inquiry) Act.
- Strengthen the judiciary's In-House Procedure for judicial accountability.
- Ensure time-bound inquiry into complaints against judges.
- Separate constitutional removal proceedings from criminal prosecution.
- Preserve judicial independence while enhancing institutional transparency.

A trade deal that tests India's competitive confidence

V. Anantha Nageswaran

The 18th Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India

A trade agreement is usually sold on its potential for export facilitation. Its deeper worth often lies in what it obliges the country to import. The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between India and the United Kingdom, which came into force earlier this month, is a good agreement on the first count. It may prove an even better one on the second.

The first fruits lie here

Start with exports, because that is where the immediate gains lie and where they matter most. Effective July 15, nearly all of India's exports – about 99% by value – will enter the U.K. free of duty. The tariffs that fall to zero are not on the goods that fill headlines but on the goods that matter to India's workers: textiles and garments, leather and footwear, marine products, processed food, engineering items, and auto components. These are labour-intensive sectors. They employ precisely the workers India most needs to draw into productive, formal jobs. A garment unit in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, or a footwear cluster in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, competes on thin margins; a duty of 12% or 16% at the British border is often the difference between winning an order and losing it.

Hitherto, India has carried a handicap in this aspect. Bangladesh, Pakistan and Cambodia already shipped their garments into Britain duty-free while India's exports paid the tax. That gap is now closed. This is the part of the agreement that deserves to be recognised, because it bears directly on employment. Trade policy is, in the end, about jobs.

A gain of a different character deserves mention. India is the world's largest supplier of generic medicines, and Britain buys close to $30 billion of pharmaceuticals a year. Removing the duty lets Indian generics compete on price. This is not a labour story but a scale one – a mature Indian industry meeting one of its largest markets on equal terms.

Another aspect of the agreement too deserves special mention. It settles an old unfairness. An Indian professional posted to Britain for a few years has had to pay into the British social security system money he would almost never see again, while still contributing at home. The Double Contribution Convention that takes effect alongside the trade pact now exempts such workers, and their employers, from that double payment for up to five years. More than 75,000 workers and some 900 companies stand to save on the order of $600 million a year. It is money returned to Indians who go abroad to work, and the removal of a real grievance that had long irritated an otherwise warm relationship.

Opening markets, raising standards

Now to the imports – and to the part of the agreement that will make some people uncomfortable. India has agreed to bring its duty on cars built in Britain down from about 110% towards 10%, and to lower the tax on Scotch whisky from 150% towards 40% over a decade. The cuts are phased across years, capped by quotas, and drafted so that India's own passenger vehicle industry has the time to enhance its competitiveness. They are, in short, cautious. But they point in the right direction, and the direction is the point.

This is a good place to record what protection does when it is never-ending. It does not build strong industries; it preserves weak ones. An industry that is never made to face a better product never has to make one. India's own record proves this in both directions. Where its carmakers have had to compete – in small and mid-sized vehicles, at home and abroad – they have become genuinely good. Where they have sheltered behind very high walls, they have had little reason to improve. Letting a limited number of British cars in at a lower duty will not overwhelm anyone. It will do something more useful. It will remind India's producers that the customer, not the tariff schedule, is the person they must satisfy. Exposure to competition is not a concession to a trading partner. It is a favour we Indians do ourselves. A domestic industry pushed to raise its game confers significant economic benefits over time.

Trade agreements reward nations ready to compete

Use the open door

In the end, trade agreements are living arrangements, not monuments. Signing an agreement and making it work are two different tasks, and the second is the harder and longer one. The gains promised today will become real only if India's exporters are ready, its procedures are clean, and its enterprises are informed and educated of the opportunities that trade agreements create. There is considerable scope for improvement in the utilisation rate of free trade agreements in India. The government and premier industry bodies must actively and continuously engage with small industry and enterprise associations.

India and Britain now intend to double their trade, from about $56 billion, by the end of the decade. Whether they get there will depend less on the text signed last year than on the confidence with which India uses it. That, in the end, is what an agreement like this asks of a nation: to compete. Thiruvalluvar said it more economically than any government could. Those who strive without slackening, he wrote, will see even destiny retreat before them. An open door puts that conviction to the test. India should be glad of the test.

The views expressed are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The India–U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) came into force in July 2026.
- The agreement provides duty-free market access to nearly 99% of India's exports (by value) to the U.K.
- It aims to boost bilateral trade, investment, services, and mobility of professionals while enhancing India's manufacturing competitiveness.

Key Points

Trade & Exports

- 99% of India's exports (by value) receive duty-free access to the U.K.
- Major beneficiary sectors:
  - Textiles & Garments
  - Leather & Footwear
  - Marine Products
  - Engineering Goods
  - Auto Components
  - Processed Food
  - Pharmaceuticals (Generic Medicines)

Professional Mobility

- Double Contribution Convention (DCC):Exempts Indian professionals temporarily working in the U.K. from dual social security contributions.
- Applicable for assignments up to 5 years.
- Expected to benefit 75,000+ professionals and 900+ companies.

Market Access

- Tariff on British automobiles to be reduced gradually (subject to quotas).
- Tariff on Scotch whisky to decline gradually over a phased period.

Economic Significance

- Supports labour-intensive manufacturing.
- Enhances export competitiveness.
- Promotes integration into Global Value Chains (GVCs).
- Encourages technology transfer and productivity gains through competition.

Static Linkages

- Free Trade Agreement (FTA): Agreement to reduce/eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers between partner countries.
- Comprehensive Economic Agreement: Covers trade in goods, services, investment, intellectual property, and mobility.
- Comparative Advantage: Countries specialize in producing goods with relatively lower opportunity costs.
- Global Value Chains (GVCs): Production processes distributed across multiple countries.
- Social Security Agreements (SSA): Prevent double social security contributions for temporary overseas workers.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Boosts labour-intensive exports and employment.
- Improves competitiveness of Indian industries.
- Expands pharmaceutical exports.
- Reduces financial burden on Indian professionals abroad.
- Strengthens India–U.K. economic partnership.
- Enhances India's participation in GVCs.

Challenges

- Greater competition for domestic automobile manufacturers.
- Utilisation of FTA benefits remains low among MSMEs.
- Compliance with Rules of Origin and quality standards.
- Non-tariff barriers may continue despite tariff reductions.

Way Forward

- Increase FTA awareness among MSMEs.
- Improve logistics and trade facilitation.
- Strengthen quality infrastructure and standards certification.
- Promote export diversification and value addition.
- Enhance integration with Global Value Chains.
- Improve competitiveness through innovation and productivity.

Promise of chips

Chipmaking is more than a seasonal obsession in India now

The second phase of the India Semiconductor Mission's outlay far outpaces the first, with a ₹1.27 lakh crore corpus directing the government's purse on a wide range of the electronics manufacturing ecosystem. As with the first phase, the outlay is likely to be spent lavishly on select individual projects in the form of a capital subsidy (with the government shelling out a smaller share than last time's 50%), and manufacturing-linked incentives disbursed at a per-unit level once sales are done. Incremental incentive boosters have been promised for products that leverage domestic capabilities and components. The second phase promises to take forward the government's goals to make India a strategic destination for the electronics value chain, and to grow such capabilities at home in human capital and intellectual property where select countries dominate different parts. The government has long held that this will be a decades-long project, and its follow-through with a larger corpus is welcome. This industry may not become a massive employer, but in a geopolitically fraught environment, the wisdom of spending public money in these capabilities is clearer. Much of the returns on the initial chipmaking bet remains unknowable as most facilities and projects approved in the first phase are yet to begin commercial production.

Some technologies remain out of the grasp of even the most advanced economies: Dutch extreme ultraviolet lithography machines are complex, and only Japan is close to cracking the code. The prospect of India deploying investments towards such frontier technology is hard to imagine, but tantalising. Capabilities such as these create hard strategic leverage – which will in turn lead to resistance to India quickly attracting talent and developing these capabilities. The corpus is not insignificant, but advanced economies are prepared to beg, borrow and steal, with deeper pockets, to retain their spot in the pecking order. The same applies for AI, which sits on a foundation of memory and processing infrastructure whose manufacture India hopes to undertake some day. There are bright spots in India's talent ecosystem, with semiconductor engineers and designers sought worldwide amid a looming global talent shortage. Leveraging these talents and giving them worthwhile work and academic pursuits in highly technical fields is key in ecosystem-building. Else, India risks repeating its decades-old mistake of developing the West's premier technical human capital. The coming decades demand that India find its rightful spot in global chipmaking value chains. The bad news is that the capacity to inflict pain is the best deterrent against supply chain shocks. The good news is that the hard work of avoiding supply chain shocks through global competition in key areas could deliver the kind of economic boom that made the Asian Tigers who they are today.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Union Cabinet approved India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0 with an outlay of ₹1.27 lakh crore.
- It aims to strengthen India's semiconductor and electronics manufacturing ecosystem through capital support and production-linked incentives.
- The initiative seeks to position India as a trusted global semiconductor manufacturing hub and reduce dependence on imports.

Key Points

- Launched: 2021 under the Semicon India Programme.
- Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- ISM 2.0 Outlay: ₹1.27 lakh crore.
- Focus Areas:
  - Semiconductor fabrication (Fab)
  - Assembly, Testing, Marking & Packaging (ATMP/OSAT)
  - Compound semiconductors
  - Semiconductor design
  - Electronics manufacturing ecosystem
  - Domestic Intellectual Property (IP)
  - Skilled workforce development
- Incentives include:
  - Capital subsidy for approved projects.
  - Manufacturing-linked incentives based on production.
  - Additional incentives for higher domestic value addition.
- India contributes around 20% of the global semiconductor design workforce (MeitY/NASSCOM).

Static Linkages

- Semiconductor: Material with conductivity between a conductor and an insulator.
- Silicon is the most widely used semiconductor material.
- Semiconductor value chain:
  - Design
  - Wafer Fabrication (Fab)
  - ATMP/OSAT
  - End-product manufacturing
- Critical applications:
  - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
  - Defence
  - Space
  - Telecommunications
  - Electric Vehicles
  - Consumer Electronics
- Advanced chip manufacturing requires:
  - EUV lithography
  - Ultra-pure water
  - Stable electricity
  - Clean-room infrastructure
  - Highly skilled manpower

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reduces dependence on imported semiconductor chips.
- Strengthens strategic and technological autonomy.
- Supports AI, defence, telecom and EV industries.
- Promotes domestic manufacturing and innovation.
- Enhances India's role in resilient global supply chains.

Challenges

- High capital requirement and long gestation period.
- Dependence on imported equipment and advanced technologies.
- Limited domestic ecosystem for semiconductor materials.
- Global competition from Taiwan, South Korea, the USA and Japan.
- Need for continuous R&D investment and skilled manpower.

Way Forward

- Build an integrated semiconductor ecosystem from design to fabrication.
- Strengthen R&D through industry–academia collaboration.
- Develop indigenous semiconductor equipment and materials.
- Expand semiconductor skill development.
- Promote domestic IP and higher value addition.
- Ensure long-term policy stability and infrastructure support.

Battling drug abuse

Kerala has shown initiative in coordinated action against cartels

For a few years now, a growing section of Kerala's youth has been consumed by a festering addiction to narcotic drugs and contraband/psychotropic substances. The signs of the State teetering towards substance abuse were apparent in the wake of the liquor ban a decade ago. But it grew to gargantuan proportions with synthetic drug cartels using digital technologies and social media to outpace law enforcement. While the COVID-19-stricken years of 2020-21 saw a drop in NDPS cases registered in the State, cases surged to 26,619 in 2022 from 5,695 in 2021. The number rose to 36,314 in 2025, alongside large-scale seizures of commercial quantities of contraband. Commercial capital Ernakulam city accounted for a substantial number. Despite efforts by multiple agencies, success has been limited. The UDF government sought to streamline the anti-drug enforcement drive by launching Operation Toofan in June, with the State police joining hands with the police forces in the southern States, central agencies, and State education, health and excise departments.

Focusing on integrated enforcement, public engagement, rehabilitation of victims and a speedy and effective prosecution, the operation has, until July 15, netted over 7,600 drug peddlers in some 7,100 cases, with synthetic drugs accounting for a significant share of the haul. Given that narcotics cases are often weakened by questionable forensic reliability, the issue has gained sharp focus during the ongoing campaign. The network of drug cartels is often too intricately webbed, with investigations often netting only the small fish. Besides bringing the community on board as Toofan warriors, the campaign aims to strengthen national intelligence-sharing and coordination systems under the NCORD framework, including the NIDAAN database of arrested narco-offenders. Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala is meeting Chief Ministers to solicit jointness in the operations. The States are in the process of assigning nodal officers for close coordination, with a platform in the pipeline. Since the rackets employ innovative means to recruit carriers, coordinate among themselves and carry out delivery, Kerala needs to upskill the District Anti-Narcotics Special Action Force (DANSAF) personnel at the cutting edge to bust these networks. Equally important is to strengthen cyber forensic capabilities so that neither investigation nor prosecution is found wanting in taking these cases to their logical conclusion. The crippling effects of narcotics on society are manifold, and it is never too late to build a defence against them.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Kerala launched Operation Toofan (June 2026) to curb the rising menace of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (NDPS).
- The operation involves Kerala Police, neighbouring State police forces, Central agencies, Excise, Health and Education Departments.
- It is integrated with the Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD) framework and the NIDAAN (National Integrated Database on Arrested Narco-Offenders) for intelligence sharing.
- The focus is on drug trafficking networks, synthetic drugs, rehabilitation, and effective prosecution.

Key Points

- NDPS cases in Kerala:
  - 2021: 5,695
  - 2022: 26,619
  - 2025: 36,314
- By 15 July 2026, Operation Toofan had:
  - Arrested 7,600+ drug peddlers.
  - Registered 7,100+ NDPS cases.
  - Seized significant quantities of synthetic drugs.
- Priority areas:
  - Intelligence-led policing.
  - Cyber forensic investigations.
  - Inter-State coordination.
  - Community participation.
  - Rehabilitation of drug users.

Static Linkages

- NDPS Act, 1985
  - Regulates narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
  - Provides punishment for production, possession, trafficking and financing illicit drugs.
- Article 47 (DPSP)
  - Duty of the State to prohibit intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health except for medicinal purposes.
- NCORD
  - Apex coordination mechanism under the Ministry of Home Affairs for anti-narcotics enforcement.
- NIDAAN
  - National database of arrested narcotics offenders for intelligence sharing.
- National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR)
  - Implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.
- Golden Crescent
  - Afghanistan–Iran–Pakistan.
- Golden Triangle
  - Myanmar–Laos–Thailand.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Integrated multi-agency approach.
- Strengthens intelligence sharing.
- Targets synthetic drug trafficking.
- Focus on rehabilitation along with enforcement.

Challenges

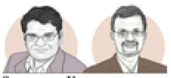
- Encrypted communication and darknet-based trafficking.
- Weak cyber forensic capacity.
- Cross-border and inter-State trafficking networks.
- Low conviction due to forensic and procedural gaps.
- Rising youth vulnerability.

Way Forward

- Strengthen cyber forensic laboratories.
- Upgrade NCORD-based real-time intelligence sharing.
- Enhance capacity of anti-narcotics units.
- Expand de-addiction and rehabilitation facilities.
- Improve forensic infrastructure for higher conviction rates.
- Intensify awareness campaigns in educational institutions.
- Strengthen monitoring of cryptocurrency and darknet transactions.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

India now has the funds, the talent and the opening for a research leap



SHIVKUMAR KALYANARAMAN AND V ANANTHA NAGESWARAN

For three months this spring, the most consequential number in the Indian economy was the distance between a tanker and the Strait of Hormuz. When the strait closed in March, a country that imports the overwhelming share of the oil it uses found its lifeline pinched at a single point and re-routed at a cost to longer voyages for Russian crude. The lesson was salutary, but incomplete. In the end, oil can be rerouted. A nation that is aspiring to be self-reliant in critical technologies enjoys no such latitude.

The deeper lesson is not that supply chains are fragile, but that they have become instruments of policy — an export licence a lever, a chokepoint a weapon, a technology freely traded one year, an object of denial the next. China spends 2.41 per cent of its output on research and development, three-quarters of it financed by its own companies, with one ambition: To end its dependence on technologies others control and deepen the world's dependence on those it controls.

India knows where it stands, because it has taken its own measure without flinching. As of 2023, it spends 0.64 per cent of GDP on research and development — against a global average more than twice that — and barely two-fifths of even that is financed by private enterprise, whereas in China, Korea and America the share is three-quarters or more. However, the state has, for the first time, put real weight behind the proposition.

The Anusandhan National Research Foundation, notified in 2024 — a statutory body chaired by the Prime Minister, convening academia, industry, start-ups, philanthropy and the diaspora — exists to change the arithmetic of risk. Its Research, Development and Innovation Fund commits Rs 1 lakh crore over six years to the private sector alone, a fund of funds supplying patient capital built to outlast the quarterly cycle; its ANRF Core adds Rs 50,000 crore over five years for underlying science. The design is catalytic: For every rupee companies invest in pre-commercial research in partnership with the foundation, they are likely to commit five to 10 of their own to commercialise and scale up these research outputs. All-of-government and all-of-society collaboration is a means to higher productivity and impact for all parties. And it goes beyond the cheque, aligning government procurement and regulation with the landscape it is building.

A firm may enter as a limited partner alongside the foundation's anchor capital in a second-level fund manager; participate directly as an eligible technology entity; or do so through a joint venture with start-ups and the global capability centres (GCCs) already here. On the science side, it may partner on a national mission, set a pre-competitive challenge for the foundation to co-fund, route its corporate social responsibility (CSR) through the ANRF Innovation Fund, or share the cost of a single project before committing further. So many doors exist for one reason: The threshold should never be what keeps a willing firm outside.

But the argument must move on from what is offered to what is required, for a catalyst is not a substitute, or a crutch. The foundation can lower the risk of the climb; it cannot make it. Three acts remain the industry's own. The first is to mobilise one's own capital behind the public catalyst. The second is to choose, with strategic seriousness, the arenas that matter — the technologies in which dependence is most dangerous and capability most valuable — over the incremental gains a captive market rewards. The third, least glamorous and most important, is institutional: To build inside the firm the machinery long-horizon goals demand — dedicated research units, corporate venture arms, planning functions insulated from the tyranny of the next quarter. India can be the world's research and development partner. All of us have to build it together: The foundation's logic is partnership with academia and deep-technology start-ups that outpace incumbents. Building it yields a dividend, no income statement records: Employment, for the doctoral talent India trains at cost and too readily watches depart, with the world-class research culture and context.

All of us have to build it together: The foundation's logic is partnership with academia and deep-technology start-ups that outpace incumbents

Indian industry can rise to such a challenge and history provides the evidence. When India accepted the World Trade Organisation's intellectual property regime in the mid-1990s, agreeing to honour product patents in pharmaceuticals, the expectation was that the domestic drug industry, built on reverse-engineering molecules others had discovered, would be overrun by the very multinationals whose patents it had worked around. That is not what happened. Indian firms chose to build rather than retreat. They mastered process chemistry and the world's strictest regulatory requirements, and made themselves the pharmacy for much of the world. The inflection now before Indian enterprise is broader; its logic is identical.

The climb, moreover, can be swifter than it was for those who went before. India faces the task with the pieces in place at once — a demographic dividend available now, not forever; unmatched digital public infrastructure; funds and architecture now in place; and a global moment that rewards any economy offering an alternative to a single dominant supplier. These are the conditions under which a country does not merely catch up but leaps — from the consumer of intellectual property it has too long been, to the generator its aspirations demand. But the window is the one thing the state cannot hold open alone. Hormuz showed what it costs to depend on others for what one needs; the technological independence that will enhance resilience and, eventually, build indispensability can be achieved only by building capabilities from the ground up. The state has walked the first stretch of that road; the laboratories are ready; the capital is available, and industry's commitment will complete the compact.

The writers are respectively the CEO of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation and the Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India. Views are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Geopolitical disruptions and technology export restrictions have highlighted the need for technological self-reliance.
- India has operationalised the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) to strengthen research, innovation, and industry-academia collaboration.
- ANRF aims to increase private sector investment in R&D and build indigenous capabilities in critical technologies.

Key Points

- ANRF established under the Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023 (operational from 2024).
- Replaces the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB).
- Chairperson: Prime Minister.
- India's Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD): ~0.64% of GDP (2023).
- Global average R&D expenditure is above 2% of GDP.
- Private sector contributes less than 40% of India's GERD, compared to over 70% in major innovation-driven economies.
- Research, Development & Innovation (RDI) Fund: ₹1 lakh crore over six years to catalyse private-sector R&D.
- ANRF Core Fund: ₹50,000 crore over five years for basic scientific research.
- Priority sectors:
  - Semiconductors
  - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
  - Quantum Technology
  - Biotechnology
  - Space Technology
  - Advanced Materials
  - Defence Technology
  - Clean Energy
- Promotes:
  - Industry-academia collaboration
  - Deep-tech startups
  - Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)
  - Technology commercialisation
  - CSR support for research

Static Linkages

- Innovation is a key driver of economic growth and productivity.
- Higher R&D investment improves global competitiveness.
- Technology is a critical component of strategic autonomy and Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Public investment in basic research addresses market failure due to positive externalities.
- Strong Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) ecosystem promotes innovation.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Enhances technological sovereignty.
- Reduces dependence on foreign technologies.
- Encourages private-sector R&D.
- Bridges academia-industry gap.
- Supports deep-tech innovation.
- Strengthens strategic sectors such as semiconductors and AI.
- Generates high-skilled employment.

Challenges

- India's GERD remains among the lowest for major economies.
- Low private-sector participation.
- Weak research-commercialisation ecosystem.
- Brain drain of researchers.
- Limited world-class research infrastructure.
- Long gestation period of deep-tech investments.

Way Forward

- Increase GERD towards 2% of GDP.
- Incentivise industry-led R&D through tax and policy support.
- Strengthen university-industry partnerships.
- Promote deep-tech startups and venture funding.
- Improve patenting and technology transfer ecosystem.
- Develop world-class research infrastructure.
- Retain scientific talent through better research opportunities.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

The bittersweet realities of the India-UK FTA

ANISREE SURESH

DESPITE THE turbulence of recent leadership transitions in London and last-minute friction over steel protectionism, India and the UK have finally put their FTA into effect as of July 15. India was able to carve out an 85 per cent exemption for its baseline exports at the eleventh hour, just days ahead of the UK's new steel trade measures hitting on July 1. However, the deal coexists with a bittersweet reality that the market access and export opportunities of modern FTAs remain massive, yet the trade deals have become hyper-transactional, defensive, and limited. While an 85 per cent volume exemption for India's existing steel trade with the UK applies, the simultaneous rollout of the EU's compressed steel import limits from July 1 undermines the UK's potential to serve as a tariff-free safe haven for Indian steel exports squeezed out of Europe.

The sweet part of the deal is that India secured immediate zero-duty market access across 99 per cent of its tariff lines. Under the initial agreement, concluded in 2025, the steel sector was slated to move towards zero-duty access to India's $893 million steel trade. However, the recent pivot in the UK's steel trade measures rewrites the rules for market access. By cutting global tariff-free import caps by 51 per cent and doubling the over-quota penalty to a 50 per cent tariff, the UK effectively built a tariff wall around its borders on steel. Given that roughly $484 million of India's steel exports consists of semi-finished slabs, raw inputs, and speciality alloy wires that British steelworks lack the capacity to manufacture, the UK removed 11 specific commodity codes from the safeguard scope, allowing such exports from India without any restrictions.

However, the remaining 15 per cent across 188 tariff lines, such as standard Category 1 hot-rolled sheets, are now locked behind a rigid Country-Specific Quota (CSQ) of just 33,456 tonnes per year. If Indian exporters exhaust their dedicated CSQ for the quarter, they will have to compete in a shared global reserve pool to secure additional shipments at zero duty before the 50 per cent penalty tariff triggers.

While it's good news that 85 per cent of India's baseline trade is unaffected under this framework, it becomes a challenge when read alongside the EU's simultaneous cap from July 1, which limits total global steel imports to 18.3 million tonnes. Under the new EU regulation, the out-of-quota customs duty, which currently stands at 25 per cent, has been increased to 50 per cent. Under the EU country-specific quota announcement, there is a 33 per cent reduction in quota for India's Hot Rolled Coil (Category 1) steel exports to Europe, which might be forced to seek alternative destinations. The India-UK FTA is also now unable to provide a safe haven for the additional steel that might be forced to reroute. Indian steel exporters have already been facing a global export squeeze. Taken together, the India-UK FTA was able to protect the baseline trade volume, but might not be enough to cushion the blow when the world's largest consumer blocs turn inward to insulate their domestic industrial bases.

Modern FTAs no longer guarantee unfettered, comprehensive market access; instead, they are highly transactional and limited in scope. India must aggressively recalibrate its geopolitical and economic leverage to secure exemptions and reliable market access to thrive in the new world order.

> Modern FTAs no longer guarantee unfettered, comprehensive market access; instead, they are highly transactional and limited in scope

The writer is a research associate at Takshashila Institution

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The India–UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) came into force on 15 July 2026.
- India secured an 85% exemption for its baseline steel exports from the UK's new safeguard measures.
- Simultaneously, the European Union (EU) tightened steel import quotas and increased safeguard duties.
- The development highlights the growing trend of trade liberalisation through FTAs alongside rising protectionism.

Key Points

- India receives zero-duty access on 99% of tariff lines under the India–UK FTA.
- 85% of India's existing steel exports remain exempt from UK safeguard restrictions.
- The UK excluded 11 steel product categories (semi-finished steel, slabs, specialty alloys) from safeguard measures.
- Remaining 15% of steel exports (188 tariff lines) are covered under Country-Specific Quotas (CSQs).
- Exports beyond the quota attract a 50% safeguard tariff.
- The EU:
  - Reduced steel import quotas.
  - Increased out-of-quota safeguard duty from 25% to 50%.
  - Reduced India's quota for Hot Rolled Coil exports.
- Demonstrates that modern FTAs provide preferential access but do not eliminate trade defence measures.

Static Linkages

- Free Trade Agreement (FTA): Eliminates/reduces tariffs between partner countries.
- Safeguard Measures: Temporary import restrictions under the WTO Agreement on Safeguards to protect domestic industries from import surges.
- Country-Specific Quota (CSQ): Import quota allocated to a particular exporting country.
- Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ): Lower tariff within quota; higher tariff beyond quota.
  - Trade Remedies under WTO:Anti-Dumping Duty
  - Countervailing Duty
  - Safeguard Duty
- Article XIX of GATT 1994 provides the legal basis for safeguard measures.
- FTAs generally do not prohibit members from using WTO-consistent trade remedies.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Enhances India's preferential access to the UK market.
- Strengthens India–UK strategic economic partnership.
- Boosts export competitiveness.

Challenges

- Rising protectionism reduces FTA benefits.
- Quota restrictions limit expansion of steel exports.
- EU and UK safeguard measures restrict export diversification.
- Increasing use of trade defence instruments globally.

Way Forward

- Diversify export markets beyond Europe.
- Promote value-added steel exports.
- Improve competitiveness through lower logistics costs.
- Negotiate sector-specific safeguards in future FTAs.
- Strengthen India's role in WTO negotiations.
- Expand domestic manufacturing under Make in India and National Steel Policy 2017.

CIVILS WITH AKASH

Sleepless nights, a public health challenge

RISING TEMPERATURES are keeping Indians up at night. A recent study by a US-based climate advocacy group, which assessed the loss of sleeping hours in over 1,300 cities across the world, has found that the average person has lost nearly 56 hours of sleep annually between 2020 and 2025 due to unusually high night-time temperatures. At least 10 per cent of this sleep loss is directly attributable to climate change. In some of India's largest cities, people are losing significantly more sleep than the global average, from 93 hours in Chennai to 84 hours in Mumbai and 67 hours in Delhi. As summers get longer, hotter and more humid, these findings should be seen as a warning. Sleep is often treated as an individual problem to be fixed with better lifestyle choices. But when the environment makes rest difficult, sleep becomes a public health challenge.

Heat is just one of the factors that is causing Indians to toss and turn in their beds. A review of literature on sleep disorders, published last year in the *Indian Journal of Public Health*, found a widespread prevalence of sleep disorders across India. Sleep loss/deprivation connected to rapidly changing lifestyles, excessive screen time, social-media addiction, erratic eating habits and shift-based work schedules compound the challenges. Sleep is essential for cellular repair, immune function and regulating inflammation. Even modest reductions in sleep, when repeated over weeks or months, can have lasting effects, with chronic sleep deprivation being associated with hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, obesity and cognitive impairment, while also reducing workplace productivity and increasing the risk of accidents.

India needs to recognise healthy sleep as an essential pillar of public health. Heat action plans should account not only for daytime exposure but also for dangerously warm nights, particularly in dense urban settlements where the heat island effect is strongest. Urban planning, affordable cooling solutions and better housing design all have a role. Equally important is integrating sleep health into public health campaigns. As India deals with non-communicable diseases, protecting the country's sleep may prove to be an important investment in its long-term health.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- A global study covering 1,300+ cities reported that people lost an average 56 hours of sleep annually (2020–2025) due to unusually high night-time temperatures.
- Around 10% of this sleep loss is attributable to anthropogenic climate change.
- Indian cities recorded higher-than-global-average sleep loss:
  - Chennai: 93 hours/year
  - Mumbai: 84 hours/year
  - Delhi: 67 hours/year
- The findings underline the growing public health impacts of climate change, especially in rapidly urbanizing regions.

Key Points

- High night-time temperatures prevent effective body cooling, disrupting sleep cycles.
- Urban Heat Island (UHI) Effect intensifies night-time temperatures in cities.
- Chronic sleep deprivation increases the risk of:
  - Hypertension
  - Type-2 Diabetes
  - Cardiovascular diseases
  - Obesity
  - Cognitive decline
- Vulnerable groups:
  - Elderly
  - Children
  - Outdoor workers
  - Low-income urban households
- Climate adaptation should include warm-night risk alongside daytime heatwaves.

Static Linkages

- Urban Heat Island (UHI): Urban areas remain warmer than surrounding rural areas due to concrete surfaces, reduced vegetation and anthropogenic heat.
- Heatwave: Declared by India Meteorological Department (IMD) based on prescribed temperature thresholds.
- National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC): Promotes climate adaptation and resilience.
- National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health (NPCCHH): Ministry of Health & Family Welfare initiative addressing climate-sensitive diseases.
- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being.
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.
- SDG 13: Climate Action.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Demonstrates indirect health impacts of climate change.
- Highlights the need to integrate public health with climate adaptation.
- Emphasizes climate-resilient urban planning.

Challenges

- Heat Action Plans largely focus on daytime heat, ignoring warm nights.
- Rapid urbanization aggravates the Urban Heat Island effect.
- Limited awareness of sleep as a public health indicator.
- Rising cooling demand may increase energy consumption and emissions.

Way Forward

- Include night-time heat exposure in Heat Action Plans.
- Promote cool roofs, urban green spaces and climate-resilient housing.
- Strengthen implementation of NPCCHH.
- Integrate sleep health into public health awareness programmes.
- Enhance urban climate adaptation under sustainable city initiatives.

CIVILS WITH AKASH