



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

CJP warns of fresh protests over government's 'breach of promise'

Centre violating assurance of not taking action against protesters, says Cockroach Janta Party; hundreds of students held while many are under surveillance, says spokesperson; Bihar withdraws FIRs; Bengal and Assam follow suit, says the CJP

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Monday warned of fresh protests, accusing the Centre of violating its assurance that no punitive action would be taken against protesters.

"We are observing a complete breach of the agreement regarding no police action against the protesters. Hundreds of students have been arrested in Bihar and Bengal, and hundreds are being surveilled/harassed in Delhi and other States," CJP spokesperson Ashutosh Ranka said in a post on X.

The statement came following reports of crackdown on volunteers assisting protesters with logistics in various States. The Bihar government announced later in the evening that it was withdrawing all FIRs against protesters registered before 6 p.m. on July 26. FIRs in West Bengal and Assam have also been withdrawn, the CJP said on Monday night.

However, Mr. Ranka, in a late-night post, said volunteers from Rajasthan were being harassed and demanded coordination between the Centre and State governments to withdraw FIRs. The CJP was awaiting a written agreement from the Centre by Tuesday, he added.

In Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav alleged that many students in Prayagraj have



CJP leaders Saurav Das, centre, and Ashutosh Ranka, right, with Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal and others in New Delhi. R. V. MOORTHY

been abducted by a special team of police in a vehicle without number plates.

Continued crackdown

"Under the guise of the Prayagraj protest, many students have been picked up by the U.P. Police's special team in an unmarked vehicle. When the Union government had promised that no action would be taken against any student, then on whose orders is such deceit taking place," Mr. Yadav wrote in a post on X, also posting a video news report in support of his claims. The Prayagraj police have registered two FIRs at the Civil Lines police station in connection with the alleged vandalism of two SUVs and attack during Saturday's student protest.

Rajya Sabha MP and senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who addressed a press conference with CJP leaders on Monday, said if go-

vernments file FIRs against people who peacefully protested in different parts of the country, the CJP will create a framework to track the affected people.

"They (CJP) will create a website where lawyers who are willing to provide help can register their names, location and the kind of help they can offer. I will personally contribute to it," he said.

In NDA-ruled Bihar, the police issued a statement saying a total of 694 individuals were taken into custody across the State following a protest on July 25. Among those detained, 339 minors and students were released following verification, and 355 individuals involved in violent incidents have been produced before the court.

In BJP-ruled West Bengal, Kolkata Police on Monday arrested two more per-

sons in connection with the violence that erupted at Esplanade area following a police crackdown on protesters demanding the resignation of Mr. Pradhan.

With this, the total number of arrests after the violence rose to 16.

Addressing the press conference, Mr. Ranka reiterated the Centre's assurances given during the third round of talks on July 25.

"We had submitted a written draft of this agreement to J.P. Nadda and Jitendra Singhji, and it was agreed that the government would share its written copy of the agreement with us by Tuesday. If the government does not share the written agreement by tomorrow, and if students, youth, and protesters who have been arrested or detained in different States are not released, the Cockroach Janta Party will once again be forced to protest,"

he said, adding that multiple reports have emerged in Delhi about the detention of volunteers who supported the protesters with logistics.

On Saturday, the CJP called off a 36-day protest at Jantar Mantar in Delhi after the Union government agreed to its three main demands, including the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Education Minister. "We demand that all the FIRs against the protesters be immediately withdrawn, students be released and no future FIRs be filed (in line with our agreement) by Delhi police/Central investigative agencies/police in BJP-ruled States, failing which we will be forced to sit on protest again," Mr. Ranka said.

Congress MP Deepender Singh Hooda said in a post on X, "Multiple platforms are reporting that Jantar Mantar protesters and also protesters elsewhere are being targeted by authorities. This contradicts the promise made by the government. If anyone needs legal aid/support, contact my team by tagging @TeamDeepender."

(With inputs from Nikhil M. Babu in Delhi, Senjuti Sen-gupta in Kolkata, Mayank Kumar in Lucknow, Amit Bhelari and Amarnath Tewari in Patna)

RELATED REPORTS ON
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Static Linkages

- Articles 19(1)(a), 19(1)(b), 19(2), 19(3), 21.
 - State List Entry 1 – Public Order
 - Entry 2 – Police
 - Concurrent List Criminal Law
 - Criminal Procedure
- Rule of Law and Natural Justice.
- D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997) – Arrest safeguards.
- Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006) – Police reforms.
- Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (2020) – Right to protest cannot indefinitely occupy public spaces.

Critical Analysis

Issues

- Balancing Fundamental Rights with maintenance of public order.
- Scope of executive discretion in handling public protests.
- Need for uniform adherence to constitutional safeguards during arrests.
- Importance of dialogue over coercive measures in democratic governance.

Constitutional Perspective

- Peaceful dissent is an essential feature of constitutional democracy.
- Restrictions must satisfy the tests of legality, necessity and proportionality.
- Police action should remain consistent with judicial guidelines and procedural safeguards.

Challenges

- Distinguishing peaceful protesters from violent elements.
- Political polarization during mass protests.
- Coordination between Union and State authorities.
- Preventing misuse of criminal law while ensuring accountability for violence.

Way Forward

- Ensure strict compliance with constitutional protections under Article 19.
- Implement Supreme Court directions on police reforms.
- Strengthen institutional mechanisms for dialogue and grievance redressal.
- Ensure transparent and proportionate policing.
- Expedite judicial review of cases involving peaceful protesters.
- Improve accountability through independent oversight of police actions.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Following the resolution of the nationwide student protests over examination-related issues, allegations emerged regarding continued police action against protesters in several States.
- The issue has brought into focus the constitutional protection of peaceful protest, the scope of reasonable restrictions, and the distribution of powers between the Union and States regarding maintenance of public order.

Key Points

- Right to peaceful protest is protected under Article 19(1)(a) and Article 19(1)(b).
- These rights are subject to reasonable restrictions under Articles 19(2) and 19(3) in the interests of:
 - Sovereignty and integrity of India
 - Security of the State
 - Public order
- Public Order and Police are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule (State List).
- Arrests and criminal proceedings must conform to Article 21 and principles of due process.
- Courts have consistently upheld that peaceful protest is a constitutional right but cannot result in prolonged obstruction of public spaces or violence.

Include independent auditor in temple SIT: SC

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

Calling for a "qualitative and impartial" investigation, the Supreme Court on Monday directed the Uttar Pradesh government to include an independent forensic auditor in the reconstituted Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged theft of donations at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya.

Hearing a batch of petitions seeking an independent probe into the alleged financial irregularities in the affairs of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant also directed the SIT to submit a status report on the progress of the investigation within two weeks.

"Since the nature of the investigation involves the alleged misappropriation of trust funds, the learned Solicitor General, representing the State of Uttar Pradesh, has fairly agreed that an auditor with experience in forensic auditing shall also be associated as a member of the SIT," the Bench, including Justices Joydip Bagchi and V. Mohana, said.

Appearing for the Uttar Pradesh government, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta informed the Bench that a four-member SIT headed by Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Kiran S. had been constituted to investigate the alleged embezzlement of donations at the temple. He said the panel had been reconstituted in compliance with the top court's earlier directions. Earlier, the Bench had cautioned all parties against "politicising" the investigation and asked the State government to consider placing the ongoing police probe under the supervision of the three-member SIT that had first uncovered *prima facie* evidence of the alleged fraud.

"We would like you to take instructions whether the same SIT that examined the issue earlier can supervise the investigation. Those senior officials have first-hand experience



Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta had apprised the court that IGP Kiran S. would head the probe into Ram Temple donation theft. AFP

of the matter," the Bench had told Mr. Mehta, referring to the committee comprising Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant, Mr. Kiran, and Special Secretary (Finance) Neel Ratan.

On Monday, Mr. Mehta apprised the court that Mr. Kiran would head the investigation. The State government has included Inspector-General of Police (Ayodhya Range) Somen Barma and Senior Superintendent of Police (Ayodhya) Gaurav Grover as members in the reconstituted SIT.

The Chief Justice then said that an "eminent, independent" chartered accountant with expertise in forensic auditing be included in the investigation team. Mr. Mehta agreed to the suggestion.

'Let SIT do its job'

Senior advocate Devdatt Kamat, appearing for one of the petitioners, submitted that there were "large-scale reports" raising doubts over whether donations made by devotees from across the country had actually reached the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi

Teerth Kshetra Trust. He urged the Bench to direct the Trust to upload details of all donation receipts on its website to ensure transparency.

"Receipts were collected for the Trust from all over the country. People have donated ₹100, ₹500 and other amounts. There are large-scale reports that ultimately the money has not reached the Trust. Whatever receipts the Trust has received should be put on the website. That way, people will know whether their money has reached the Trust or not," Mr. Kamat submitted. He added that the proceedings were not adversarial in nature and that there should be "nothing to hide".

The Bench, however, declined to issue such a direction at this stage, observing that the SIT should first be allowed to complete its probe. It instead asked Mr. Kamat to place his suggestions on record so that appropriate directions could be considered at a later stage, if necessary.

The matter has been

posted for further hearing after two weeks. The Bench directed the SIT to place its status report on record and indicated that it would continue to monitor the progress of the investigation.

Several petitions

One of the petitions has been filed by petitioner-in-person Narendra Kumar Goswami, who has sought a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the alleged scam along with an audit of the Trust's finances by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

Another petition, moved by Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MP Sudhakar Singh, seeks a court-supervised CBI probe along with a comprehensive forensic audit of the finances of the temple Trust. Mr. Singh has also urged the top court to ensure the preservation of all financial records, including physical documents, digital ledgers, UPI transaction logs and bank statements, so that the integrity of the evidence is maintained during the investigation.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Supreme Court directed the Uttar Pradesh Government to include an independent forensic auditor in the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing alleged misappropriation of donations of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.
- The Court emphasized an impartial and transparent investigation and sought a status report within two weeks.
- Petitions sought a CBI probe, forensic audit, and preservation of financial records.

Key Points

- Forensic Auditor to be included in the SIT to examine financial transactions.
- Supreme Court is monitoring the investigation through periodic status reports.
- Petitioners sought:
 - Court-monitored investigation.
 - CBI investigation.
 - Forensic audit of trust finances.
 - Preservation of physical and digital financial records.
- Court deferred directions regarding public disclosure of donation receipts until investigation progresses.

Static Linkages

- Article 32 – Right to Constitutional Remedies.
- Article 136 – Special Leave Petition (SLP).
- Article 142 – Power of the Supreme Court to do complete justice.
- Articles 148–151 – Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).
- Special Investigation Team (SIT) – Constituted through executive or judicial orders for complex investigations.

- Forensic Audit Detects fraud, diversion of funds and financial irregularities.
- Findings are admissible as evidence subject to legal provisions.
- Public Trust Doctrine – Public authorities must act as trustees of public interest.
- Rule of Law and Accountability are basic features of constitutional governance.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reinforces judicial oversight in sensitive financial investigations.
- Improves credibility through independent forensic expertise.
- Strengthens accountability of institutions managing public donations.
- Promotes transparency while safeguarding due process.

Challenges

- Balancing judicial oversight with executive investigation.
- Ensuring timely completion of investigation.
- Preserving integrity of digital financial evidence.
- Maintaining public confidence without prejudicing the investigation.

Way Forward

- Adopt time-bound investigations in financial fraud cases.
- Institutionalize forensic audits in cases involving large public donations.
- Strengthen digital record management and evidence preservation.
- Promote periodic independent audits of public charitable institutions.
- Ensure transparency without compromising ongoing investigations.

Beyond compliance, India's road to cleaner mobility

The debate over India's proposed Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) III norms comes at a crucial time for the global automobile industry as it transitions from internal combustion engines (ICE) to electrified powertrains. It also highlights India's vulnerability to imported crude oil amid renewed geopolitical tensions. The framework India adopts today will influence investment, technology choices and energy security for decades.



Kumar Shankar

CAFE III, compliance or transformation
The Power Ministry's July 15 draft notification marks the third iteration of CAFE III after months of industry lobbying. While some manufacturers pushed for stricter norms, others sought flexibility. The proposal attempts a compromise, but the question remains whether it prioritises compliance over transformation.

CAFE norms set annual sales-weighted average fuel-efficiency targets for manufacturers' passenger vehicle fleets rather than individual models. Introduced in the United States in 1975 after the 1973 Arab oil embargo, they aimed to reduce oil dependence and protect consumers from high fuel costs. The rules caused automakers to adopt smaller, more efficient vehicles. This also helped accelerate the rise of Japanese manufacturers.

From the 1990s, fuel-efficiency regulations gained a second purpose: reducing greenhouse-gas emissions. In the United States, the EPA's Endangerment Finding brought greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act, with later emissions standards aligned closely with CAFE rules. While technology-neutral, the rules encouraged innovation in hybrids and electric vehicles (EV). Ironically, the Obama administration's \$465 million Department of Energy loan to Tesla in 2010 helped accelerate an EV industry now dominated by China.

China's experience is even more instructive. It introduced mandatory fuel-consumption standards in 2004, initially regulating individual vehicle models by weight rather than fleet averages. As car ownership surged, concerns over oil imports and urban air pollution grew. The standards tightened over time before China's standards changed direction in 2016 with the introduction of its Dual Credit System.

Under this framework, manufacturers must meet both Corporate Average Fuel Consumption (CAFC) standards and New Energy Vehicle (NEV) credit requirements. Fuel-efficiency compliance alone is insufficient. Companies that fail to earn enough NEV credits through EV or plug-in hybrid production must purchase credits from those with surplus EV production, creating a market that rewards innovation and penalises delayed electrification. For example, in India, Maruti Suzuki could remain NEV credit-deficient by 18%

Weak fuel efficiency norms risk keeping the country dependent on imported oil

despite having highly fuel-efficient ICE models if it had no EVs in its portfolio. It would need to buy credits from companies such as Tata Motors or Mahindra, which generate NEV credits through their EV portfolios. While CAFE credits can be banked, carried forward or transferred within corporate groups, NEV credits cannot be offset in the same way. The results are evident. According to the International Energy Agency's Global EV Outlook 2024, China sold more than 13 million electric cars in 2023, accounting for almost 55% of new passenger vehicle sales. Comparable figures were about 27% in the European Union, nearly 10% in the U.S. and around 4% in India.

India's own debate has centred on differences between Maruti Suzuki, Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra. An earlier proposal effectively carved out lighter small cars from the full stringency of CAFE III. That exemption has since been removed. The current proposal seeks to reduce average emissions from around 113 gCO₂/km to 77 gCO₂/km by FY2031-32. On paper, that appears ambitious. Yet, the headline target tells only part of the story.

The cost of flexibility

The revised framework introduces several flexibility mechanisms that, taken together, substantially reduce its effective stringency.

The first is the Carbon Neutrality Factor, which awards compliance benefits for vehicles compatible with higher ethanol blends and other fuels. Yet, the government has informed Parliament that no decision has been taken to move beyond E20 blending (20% plant-based ethanol with 80% regular petrol). Manufacturers therefore receive compliance advantages for technologies whose long-term policy trajectory remains uncertain. Ethanol is also more expensive than petrol, and has lower energy density, and therefore delivers lower mileage – a fact belatedly acknowledged by the Centre after it drew severe criticism.

The second is the use of super credits. Battery EVs, plug-in hybrids, strong hybrids and flex-fuel vehicles receive additional weight in fleet calculations. While this encourages cleaner technologies, it also means that fewer actual low-emission vehicle sales are required to offset higher-emission models. Strong hybrids, which generally rely primarily on the ICE while using electric propulsion over relatively short distances and at lower speeds, also receive super-credit benefits despite offering only partial electrification.

The third mechanism is banking and trading of compliance credits. Manufacturers outperforming their targets can accumulate credits and sell them to others. In addition, the draft allows companies to buy credits directly from the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) at administratively fixed prices if deficits remain

after trading. The BEE is therefore not a market exchange but effectively a seller of last resort. In theory, this introduces efficiency into the system. In practice, it allows companies that are lagging to meet compliance requirements without upgrading their own technology. Moreover, the draft notification allows manufacturers to buy compliance credits from the BEE at ₹2,500 per gram of CO₂/km in FY2028, rising to ₹4,500 by FY2032. By comparison, the Energy Conservation Act prescribes additional penalties of ₹25,000 or ₹50,000 per vehicle depending on the extent of non-compliance. Expressed in CAFE terms, the lower penalty threshold is broadly equivalent to a little over ₹5,000 per gram of CO₂/km, implying that the proposed buyout price begins at less than half that level.

Finally, compliance is assessed over three-year blocks before shifting to two-year blocks, allowing manufacturers to average performance across multiple years rather than meeting targets annually. Therefore, delays in one year can be compensated in another.

The case of CNG

Taken together, these mechanisms significantly alter the stringency of these regulations. Which raises a fundamental question: What is the purpose of a regulation?

Regulation should shape markets rather than simply accommodate prevailing market preferences. India's own experience with compressed natural gas (CNG) illustrates the point. Once policy support aligned with regulatory certainty, manufacturers rapidly introduced CNG variants. Regulation can create markets as much as respond to them.

To put this in perspective: manufacturers' voluntary commitments already average nearly 20% EV share by 2030, with several original equipment manufacturers aiming for 30% or higher. In effect, the revised regulation attempts only half of what the industry itself has committed to. The timing also matters. India remains heavily dependent on imported crude, exposing the economy to geopolitical shocks, imported inflation and currency pressures. Strengthening fuel-efficiency standards is therefore not merely an environmental objective. It is an energy-security strategy, an industrial policy and a macroeconomic imperative.

These developments highlight the urgency and significance of revising India's CAFE norms, as they offer an opportunity to address a macroeconomic vulnerability while helping meet India's Glasgow commitment on energy efficiency. India should seize this opportunity to position itself alongside the world's leading automotive markets in the transition to low-carbon mobility.

kumar.shankar@thehindu.co.in

- Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs)
- Strong Hybrid Vehicles
- Flex-fuel Vehicles

- Banking and trading of compliance credits.
- Manufacturers can purchase compliance credits from BEE if required.
- Compliance assessed over multi-year blocks instead of annually.

Global Best Practices

- USA: Introduced CAFE standards in 1975 after the oil crisis.
- China: Adopted the Dual Credit System (2018) combining fuel-efficiency standards with mandatory New Energy Vehicle (NEV) credits.
 - IEA Global EV Outlook 2026 China: ~55% EV share in new passenger vehicle sales (2025)
 - EU: ~27%
 - USA: ~10%
 - India: ~4%

Why is it Important for India?

- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- Improves energy security.
- Supports Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions and fuel consumption.
- Encourages innovation in clean mobility technologies.

Static Linkages

- Energy Conservation Act, 2001
- Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)
- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)
- Paris Agreement
- Net Zero by 2070
- Bharat Stage (BS-VI) emission standards
- National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP)
- PM E-DRIVE/FAME schemes
- Ethanol Blended Petrol (E20) Programme
- India's Energy Security

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Reduces dependence on imported crude oil.
- Promotes fuel-efficient and cleaner vehicles.
- Supports India's climate commitments.
- Encourages technological innovation.
- Strengthens long-term energy security.

Concerns

- Multiple flexibility provisions may dilute emission reductions.
- Super credits can reduce actual EV adoption.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Ministry of Power released the draft CAFE III norms (July 2026) for passenger vehicles.
- The norms propose reducing fleet-average emissions from ~113 gCO₂/km to 77 gCO₂/km by FY2031-32.
- The objective is to improve fuel efficiency, reduce crude oil imports, lower carbon emissions, and promote cleaner mobility.
- The proposal assumes significance in the context of India's Net Zero by 2070 target and increasing energy security concerns.

Key Points

What is CAFE?

- CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency) prescribes fleet-average fuel efficiency/emission targets for automobile manufacturers.
- Compliance is based on the sales-weighted average of all passenger vehicles sold by a manufacturer, not individual models.
- Implemented in India under the Energy Conservation Act, 2001 through the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).

Major Features of Draft CAFE III

- Fleet-average emission target reduced to 77 gCO₂/km by FY2031-32.
- Removal of preferential treatment for small cars.
- Carbon Neutrality Factor for vehicles compatible with alternative fuels (e.g., higher ethanol blends).
- Super Credits for:
 - Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs)

- Credit purchase mechanism may weaken compliance incentives.
- Charging infrastructure and battery ecosystem remain inadequate.
- Regulatory uncertainty over higher ethanol blends.

Way Forward

- Gradually tighten CAFE standards in line with global benchmarks.
- Strengthen EV charging infrastructure.
- Promote domestic battery manufacturing.
- Develop a transparent carbon credit market.
- Align fuel-efficiency regulations with long-term energy security and climate goals.
- Ensure stable policy support for clean mobility technologies.

AI's next test — reaching India's informal women worker

India's journey towards Viksit Bharat by 2047 rests on whether the productivity gains unlocked by artificial intelligence (AI) are broadly shared or concentrated among those already well-served. AI is reshaping value chains across agriculture, logistics, health care and financial services. The design choices in these systems, who they are built for, whose data they train on, and whose languages they speak, will determine whether this transformation amplifies India's inclusive growth story or adds a dimension to structural inequalities.

About 82% of working women in India are in informal employment according to a 2018 ILO report, spanning agriculture, home-based production, domestic services and micro-enterprises. The gender implications of AI adoption are, above all, a question of economic inclusion. India's AI Governance Guidelines, released in November 2025, set out seven guiding principles, including fairness and equity, translating these into gender-responsive outcomes is both a governance priority and a development opportunity. As UN Women has warned, AI is already reimagining reality for billions, but it is still getting women wrong: without gender-responsive design, testing and oversight, it risks amplifying stereotypes, discrimination and digital violence instead of expanding opportunity.

In agriculture and informal work AI holds considerable promise for Indian farmers through precision agriculture applications, real time advisory on crop health, input optimisation and market access. With 76.9% of rural women engaged in agriculture as in Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24 reporting, women are a primary concern. Early evidence is telling: a 2024 study of Farmer.Chat, deployed across 12 States, found that 61% of women users reported improved quality of life within 45 days, with engagement levels two to three times those of male users. While the specific design features driving this outcome



S. Krishnan
Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India



Shoko Ishikawa
Country Representative, UN Women India and part of Team UN in India

Artificial Intelligence (AI) must empower informal women workers for truly inclusive economic growth

require further documentation, the results suggest that when AI agricultural tools reach women, keeping in mind language, land access patterns, mobility constraints, and relevance, meaningful engagement follows. Building on this foundation, three areas merit focused attention as India scales its AI deployment.

Governance priorities

First, gender impact assessments. The India AI Governance Guidelines' principles of fairness and equity require operationalisation through proportionate gender impact assessments for AI systems affecting economic opportunity, welfare access or safety for women and girls. These should examine whether outcomes vary by sex, location, caste, disability and work status, and whether redressal mechanisms are accessible in regional languages. Where AI decisions on credit, employment or welfare cannot be explained, trust suffers disproportionately among marginalised groups. Similarly, Gender Responsive Budgeting offers a practical test for decisions on AI spend. For any significant AI investment, four questions can be applied: which women will benefit; which specific barrier (access, language, safety or capability) is being addressed; how outcomes will be measured; and which budget line will finance corrective action if results fall short.

Second, AI literacy as public infrastructure. Access to tools is a necessary but not sufficient condition for inclusion. Training programmes for women in informal work must be designed around their time constraints, literacy levels and livelihood contexts. Embedding AI literacy within Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and Skill India, with linkages to Mission Shakti's Sakhi network, would allow trusted community infrastructure to carry new digital capability. The measure of success should be outcome-based: did this help a woman access an entitlement, navigate a platform, or move to

better-paid work? Third, digital safety as a condition for economic participation. Technology facilitated gender-based violence, including deepfakes, online harassment and non-consensual imagery, creates a measurable "chilling effect", discouraging women from participating fully in digital economic spaces. The IT (Amendment) Rules, 2023 require grievance mechanisms for harmful content; the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)'s proposed mandatory labelling of AI-generated synthetic content adds further protection. Effective implementation, with accessible survivor-facing remedies in regional languages, is a prerequisite for women's sustained digital participation.

The National Commission for Women's review of cyber laws provides evidence-based recommendations warranting timely inter-ministerial action.

AI prosperity for all India has built substantial AI infrastructure in a short period: the IndiaAI Mission, the BHASHA Interface for India (BHASHINI) multilingual platform, the AI Governance Guidelines and targeted cross-sector partnerships. The India AI Impact Summit 2026 showed that these ambitions are matched by a growing ecosystem of practitioners, innovators and civil society. The opportunity is to ensure that the productivity gains from this infrastructure reach those at the base of the economic pyramid, viz., women farmers, home-based workers, self-help group members, platform participants. This requires deliberate design: in procurement standards, training programmes, safety frameworks and the measurement of success. By 2047, the measure of India's AI success should not be aggregate indicators alone, but whether women in informal work have gained meaningful, productive access to the tools and opportunities that AI enables. That is the standard consistent with Viksit Bharat, and it is within India's reach.

- Employment
- Welfare delivery
- Promote AI literacy through:
 - DAY-NRLM
 - DDU-GKY
 - Skill India Mission
 - Mission Shakti

Digital Safety

- Address:
 - Deepfakes
 - Online harassment
 - AI-generated harmful content
- Strengthen implementation of IT Rules, 2021 and AI content labelling.

Static Linkages

- Equality before Law.
- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex.
- Right to Life (dignity and privacy).
- Directive Principles promoting equal livelihood opportunities.
- Women empowerment and inclusive growth.
- Digital Public Infrastructure.
- Ethical AI:
 - Fairness
 - Transparency
 - Accountability
 - Explainability

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Improves agricultural productivity.
- Enhances women's financial inclusion.
- Better access to markets and government services.
- Promotes multilingual digital inclusion.
- Supports inclusive economic growth.

Challenges

- Gender bias in AI algorithms.
- Digital divide.
- Low AI literacy.
- Data privacy concerns.
- Deepfakes and cyber violence.
- Limited explainability of AI systems.

Way Forward

- Institutionalize Gender Impact Assessment for AI.
- Expand AI literacy through livelihood missions.
- Strengthen multilingual AI platforms like BHASHINI.
- Improve digital infrastructure in rural areas.
- Strengthen cyber safety and grievance redressal.
- Ensure transparent and explainable AI in public services.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India is strengthening its AI ecosystem through the IndiaAI Mission, AI Governance Guidelines (2025) and BHASHINI.
- The current policy debate focuses on ensuring that AI-driven economic growth is inclusive, particularly for women in the informal sector, to achieve Viksit Bharat@2047.
- The issue highlights the need for gender-responsive AI governance, digital inclusion and ethical AI deployment.

Key Points

Workforce & Gender

- 82% of working women are employed in the informal sector (ILO, 2018).
- 76.9% of rural women workers are engaged in agriculture (PLFS 2023-24).

AI Governance

- India AI Governance Guidelines (2025) emphasize: Fairness, Equity, Transparency, Accountability, Privacy, Safety

AI in Agriculture

Applications include:

- Precision farming
- Crop disease detection
- Weather advisories
- Market intelligence
- Input optimization

Evidence

- Farmer.Chat Study (2024):
 - Conducted across 12 States.
 - 61% of women users reported improved quality of life.
 - Women showed 2–3 times higher engagement than men.

Governance Priorities

- Gender Impact Assessment for AI systems affecting:
 - Credit

All art, no deal

Donald Trump miscalculated timing and substance of Saudi nuclear deal

The announcement of a United States-Saudi Arabia civil nuclear deal, in the midst of a U.S.-Iran war that began over Tehran's nuclear programme, could hardly have come at a worse time. Matters became more complicated when U.S. President Donald Trump, after the agreement had been signed, added a new condition: that Saudi Arabia should join the Abraham Accords. Saudi Arabia has long sought to develop a civilian nuclear programme. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, or MBS, wants to end the kingdom's "addiction" to oil. His Vision 2030 aims to diversify the economy through finance, megaprojects, tourism and power-hungry artificial intelligence (AI) data centres. The kingdom currently relies heavily on oil and gas for electricity generation. Saudi officials believe that nuclear power would help meet rising domestic energy demand, while freeing more oil and gas for export. MBS first took up his nuclear ambitions with Mr. Trump during the latter's first presidential term. His successor Joe Biden offered a deal but made it contingent on Riyadh joining the Abraham Accords. At that time, Saudi Arabia appeared open to normalising ties with Israel, but Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel and Israel's genocidal war on Gaza prompted the Saudis to shelve the idea. The July 22 deal suggested that Riyadh and Washington continued talks and remained keen on nuclear cooperation.

As a signatory to the NPT, Saudi Arabia has every right to pursue a peaceful nuclear programme. But the agreement announced by U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright leaves open the possibility of nuclear enrichment on Saudi soil. This flies in the face of the U.S. opposition to any Iranian enrichment on its soil. The agreement, according to U.S. media reports, does not require Saudi Arabia to adopt the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which grants inspectors broad powers to conduct short-notice inspections. The omission has fuelled concerns that the kingdom could eventually acquire the technical capability to weaponise its nuclear programme. Facing domestic criticism, Mr. Trump declared that the deal would proceed only if Saudi Arabia joined the Abraham Accords – a condition which was conspicuously absent when the agreement was signed. This apparent reversal is unlikely to reassure Riyadh, which is already questioning the reliability of U.S. security guarantees. If the deal eventually goes ahead, Tehran is likely to harden its position on enrichment in any future nuclear talks with the U.S. If Mr. Trump's objective was to reassure a long-standing ally while signalling strategic leverage over a regional rival, the execution of the deal has had the opposite effect. Ill-timed diplomacy, ambiguous provisions and shifting conditions have deepened Saudi concerns and strengthened Iran's resolve. That is the result of Mr. Trump's version of the "art of the deal".

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The U.S. and Saudi Arabia announced a civil nuclear cooperation agreement.
- The announcement came amid heightened tensions following the U.S.-Iran conflict over Iran's nuclear programme.
- The U.S. later linked the deal to Saudi Arabia joining the Abraham Accords.
- Reports suggest the deal may permit uranium enrichment in Saudi Arabia without mandating adoption of the IAEA Additional Protocol, raising proliferation concerns.

Key Points

- Saudi Arabia aims to develop nuclear energy under Vision 2030 to diversify its economy beyond oil.
- Nuclear power would:
 - Meet rising electricity demand.
 - Support AI and industrial growth.
 - Increase oil exports by reducing domestic oil consumption.
- Saudi Arabia is a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- The deal reportedly allows the possibility of uranium enrichment, unlike the U.S. position on Iran.

- Non-mandatory adoption of the IAEA Additional Protocol has raised concerns regarding transparency and verification.
- The agreement could influence:
 - Iran-U.S. nuclear negotiations.
 - Middle East strategic balance.
 - Global non-proliferation regime.

Static Linkages

- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), 1968 Effective from 1970.
- Three pillars:
 - Non-proliferation
 - Peaceful use of nuclear energy
 - Nuclear disarmament
- India is not a signatory to the NPT.
 - International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Established: 1957
 - Headquarters: Vienna, Austria
 - Objective: Promote peaceful use of nuclear energy through safeguards.
 - IAEA Additional Protocol Expands inspection powers.
 - Enables short-notice inspections.
 - Uranium Enrichment Low-Enriched Uranium (LEU): Civilian reactors.
 - Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU): Potential use in nuclear weapons.
 - Abraham Accords (2020) Normalisation agreements between Israel and several Arab nations.
 - Vision 2030 Saudi Arabia's economic diversification programme.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Supports Saudi Arabia's energy diversification.
- Reduces dependence on fossil fuels.
- Strengthens U.S.-Saudi strategic partnership.
- Expands peaceful nuclear energy cooperation.

Challenges

- Risk of nuclear proliferation through uranium enrichment.
- Weakens consistency of the global non-proliferation regime.
- Absence of mandatory IAEA Additional Protocol reduces transparency.
- May intensify nuclear competition in West Asia.
- Could complicate future Iran nuclear negotiations.

Way Forward

- Strengthen IAEA safeguard mechanisms.
- Encourage adoption of the IAEA Additional Protocol.
- Maintain uniform standards for civilian nuclear cooperation.
- Promote diplomatic engagement to prevent regional nuclear arms competition.
- Ensure peaceful use of nuclear technology through transparent verification.

Fixing exam system won't be enough. Bigger task is restoring trust

THE APPOINTMENT of a high-powered task force by the Prime Minister to reform India's public examination system is welcome, and Nandan Nilekani is a natural choice to lead it. Having worked with him briefly on the National Knowledge Commission, I know he combines intellectual clarity with a rare ability to translate large ideas into workable institutions. He understands technology; he also understands that it must ultimately serve public trust. The man best equipped to build a technological fix is also perhaps the one most likely to warn that technology alone will not be enough.

India is still absorbing the enormity of what happened at Jantar Mantar. A youth-led protest compelled the resignation of the Union Education Minister and forced the government to concede that the crisis could not be managed through routine assurances. Ministerial resignations have become exceedingly rare; responsiveness is usually dispersed until it disappears. This one represented the return, however briefly, of political accountability. Yet what the protesters exposed was larger than the fate of one minister. They exposed a crisis of trust.

As vice-chancellor of the University of Jammu for six years, I came to understand the almost sacred character of a public examination. The jurisdiction was vast — from Poonch and Rajouri to Doda and Kishtwar in the mountains — and lakhs of students appeared in its examinations, often travelling over hard terrain merely to reach a centre. For each of them, the integrity of the system was the foundation of their faith in the university. An examination is a covenant between the university and the student. The student submits to its discipline on the assumption that the institution will protect the

integrity of the process. Once that faith is broken, every mark becomes suspect, and every honest candidate diminished.

During my years as vice-chancellor, there was not a single leakage of a question paper. It was not because we possessed miraculous technology or it required "rocket science", but because we invested authority in officers of impeccable integrity. No one, not even the vice-chancellor, held unnecessary information; institutional integrity often depends on ensuring that those who do not need to know are not permitted to know.

There was only one occasion when an attempt was made to twist my arm. A serving cabinet minister wanted his doctor's assistant daughter awarded the marks she needed to pass a paper. The request carried all the weight of political office. There was no question of yielding. Had one student been given undeserved marks, the injury would not have been confined to one examination. Every honest student would have been cheated, every conscientious teacher insulted, and the university's word emptied of meaning.

This is why the present crisis cannot be understood as a technical malfunction alone. Technology can secure databases, track the custody of papers and authenticate candidates, and Nilekani's task force can undoubtedly design a more robust architecture. But no digital system can compensate indefinitely for compromised appointments, weak institutions or the absence of moral courage. Technology cannot manufacture integrity.

For millions of Indian families, a competitive examination is often the narrowest bridge between inherited circumstances and a different future, for which parents exhaust savings and students surrender years to coaching rooms. I have lived that world: cycling at six each winter morning to Gokal Nath's smoky room, where he taught a huddle of six or eight of us, his notes pressed through carbon paper into acopy for each — knowing that as a Kashmiri Pandit, I would have to fare better merely to have a chance. A leaked paper therefore inflicts more than procedural damage: it becomes the leakage of faith in the republic. That is what the young at Jantar Mantar understood more quickly than many in authority.



AMITABH MATTOO

As dean of SIS at JNU, I work among students who question power almost instinctively. They can be perceptive, courageous and morally compelling; they can also be doctrinaire, theatrical and impatient with complexity. But youthful dissent must never be answered with condescension. I had learnt this much earlier in Srinagar, when the stone had become a form of political expression. Some of the young were driven by grievance, some by forces willing to exploit their anger; but nearly all believed that established institutions had stopped hearing them. I condemned stone-throwing then and do so unequivocally now. Yet treating every angry young person as a mere law-and-order problem is not strength but the abandonment of politics.

This is what makes Jantar Mantar significant. Gen Z did not invent anger: what distinguishes it is the speed with which private frustration becomes collective action. The so-called Coderach Janta Party was both comic and politically astute: a creature associated with neglect and extermination became a symbol of survival — you may ridicule us or disperse us, but we will not disappear. Humour became resistance. The meme walked out of the mobile phone and occupied Jantar Mantar. But this moment should not be romanticised. Virality is not organisation; outrage is not policy. A movement can secure a resignation without possessing the institutional imagination to redesign an examination system. Gen Z can expose, mobilise and disrupt; it must now acquire the less glamorous capacity to remain engaged after the barricades are removed.

Nor should the government regard the task force as the end of the matter. Its recommendations must be made public, recruitment to examination bodies transparent, responsibility clearly assigned, and penalties swift. The new architecture must begin with a simple principle: Everyone entrusted with an examination must be chosen for integrity before efficiency, for independence before convenience.

The young at Jantar Mantar forced India to remember that democratic power is not invulnerable. The resignation of a Union minister was not a humiliation of democracy; it was democracy functioning as it should — citizens demanding an answer and political authority accepting consequence. The larger responsibility belongs to all of us who administer universities and educate the young. We cannot ask students to believe in merit or lecture them about patience while institutions repeatedly betray their trust. The task before the Nilekani committee is to create a leak-proof examination system. The task before the republic is larger: To become worthy once again of the faith of its young.

The writer is dean, School of International Studies, JNU

No digital system can compensate indefinitely for compromised appointments, weak institutions or the absence of moral courage. Technology cannot manufacture integrity

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Union Government has constituted a high-level committee chaired by Nandan Nilekani to recommend reforms in India's public examination system following recurring incidents of examination paper leaks and irregularities.
- The committee will suggest measures to improve the security, transparency, credibility and integrity of public examinations through technological and institutional reforms.
- The issue has highlighted the need for stronger governance, accountability and public trust in examination bodies.

Key Points

- Public examinations are the primary basis for:
 - Government recruitment
 - Higher education admissions
 - Merit-based selection
- Major concerns:
 - Question paper leaks
 - Organised cheating
 - Weak institutional accountability
 - Loss of public trust
- Technology-based reforms proposed:
 - End-to-end encryption
 - Secure digital transmission
 - Biometric authentication
 - AI-enabled monitoring
 - Digital audit trails
- Technology must be complemented by:
 - Transparent appointments
 - Institutional integrity
 - Independent oversight
 - Strict accountability mechanisms

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before Law.

- Article 16 – Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment.
- Rule of Law.
- Principles of Good Governance:
 - Transparency
 - Accountability
 - Efficiency
 - Responsiveness
- Ethics in Public Administration:
 - Integrity
 - Probity
 - Objectivity
 - Accountability
- E-Governance for efficient public service delivery.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Protects meritocracy.
- Ensures fair recruitment.
- Strengthens public confidence.
- Improves institutional credibility.
- Supports constitutional equality.

Challenges

- Cybersecurity threats.
- Organised examination mafias.
- Administrative corruption.
- Weak institutional accountability.
- Technology alone cannot ensure integrity.

Way Forward

- Independent examination regulator.
- End-to-end encrypted examination process.
- Regular security audits.
- Transparent appointments in examination bodies.
- Time-bound investigation of paper leaks.
- Strict criminal penalties for organised cheating.
- Capacity building of examination authorities.
- Strengthen ethical governance along with technology.

Modi's commitment to Gen Z: State listens, responds, reforms



GOURAV
VALLABH

IN FOUR days, Prime Minister Narendra Modi translated the concerns of young Indians into a clear sequence of democratic action. On July 23, he promised fast-track courts for paper-leak cases. On July 24, after negotiations with the Centre, Sonam Wangchuk ended his 26-day hunger strike. On July 25, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, after which protest leaders called off their 36-day Jantar Mantar sit-in. On July 26, Modi announced a high-powered task force headed by Nandan Nilekani to help make examinations trustworthy, transparent and technology-led. The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha on July 27, proposes stronger penalties, time-bound investigations and special fast-track courts. These steps show a government that listens, accepts accountability and converts public concern into durable reform.

These are not concessions extracted from a reluctant state; they reflect confident democratic leadership. In a constitutional democracy, peaceful protest is a right of the citizen. The government's response shows how that right and responsible governance can reinforce each other. By keeping channels open, negotiating with protesters and moving decisively from dialogue to action, the PM reaffirmed that the voice of India's youth has a place at the centre of governance. The episode rebuts the claim that Indian democracy has lost the capacity for dissent or course correction. An agitation continued for weeks, forced a national conversation, brought the government to the negotiating table and produced a legislative and structural response. Indian democracy showed that dissent can lead to dialogue and reform.

History points towards the stakes, although parallels must be drawn with care. The JP movement gathered strength through 1974 and 1975; hours after Jayaprakash Narayan's Ramjilala Maidan rally on June 25, 1975, Emergency was proclaimed. Civil liberties were suspended, the press was censored, and opposition leaders, including JP, were imprisoned. The anti-Mandal protests of 1990 arose from a different context, but they too brought turmoil and violent clashes. The movements are not equal. But the present episode offers a contrast: Instead of repression or prolonged drift, the Modi government chose engagement, accountability, legislation and institutional reform.

Modi's response is also consistent with a longer conversation with aspirational India. Since 2018, 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' has brought examination anxiety, parental pressure and time management into a regular national dialogue. The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue invites young Indians to contribute ideas to the country's future. Together, these initiatives form a wider approach combining dialogue with expanding opportunity and stronger institutions. The last few days reveal a defining quality of Modi's leadership: Political generosity. A secure leader can absorb criticism and place institutional interest above personal prestige. By accepting a colleague's resignation and moving from listening to action, Modi chose reconciliation over confrontation.

Nilekani's appointment makes a larger point: Public knowledge is national property. He is joined by S Somnath, Tapan Deka, V Kamakoti, Anita Karwal and Amrit Lal Meena, bringing expertise across technology, security, education and logistics. Reform must combine secure question banks, encrypted transmission, randomisation, controlled access, independent audits and strict vendor oversight, with computer-based or secure on-site printing wherever feasible. An independent examination-security board, annual audits and a national testing calendar can further strengthen the NTA.

Finally, fast-track courts will be most effective when paired with fast, specialised investigation. The proposed two-month trial framework can be backed by digital-forensics teams, experienced prosecutors, witness protection and coordination with states and high courts. These measures can ensure offences are detected, proven and punished without prolonged uncertainty for students.

A credible examination system rests on four assurances: A breach must be extraordinarily difficult, rapidly detected, transparently remedied and credibly punished. The PM's initiatives bring these into a coherent framework. Modi has spent a decade telling India's youth that they are partners in Viksit Bharat. The last four days have given that commitment institutional form: Listen, respond, correct and reform.

The writer is professor, XIRI and part-time member, EAC-PM. Views are personal

An agitation continued for weeks, forced a national conversation, brought the government to the negotiating table and produced a legislative and structural response. Indian democracy showed that dissent can lead to dialogue and reform

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Following recent incidents of paper leaks in public examinations, the Union Government has initiated major reforms to strengthen the integrity of recruitment and entrance examinations.
- A High-Level Task Force headed by Nandan Nilekani has been constituted to recommend technology-driven reforms for secure and transparent examinations.
- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 has been introduced to strengthen the legal framework against examination malpractices.
- The reforms aim to improve the functioning of examination agencies such as the National Testing Agency (NTA) and restore public confidence.

Key Points

Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024

- Enacted to prevent unfair means in specified public examinations.
- Covers examinations conducted by:
 - UPSC, SSC, Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs), NTA, IBPS, Other notified Central authorities
- Targets organised paper leaks and cheating syndicates.
- Provides stringent punishment including imprisonment and heavy fines.

Major Proposed Reforms (2026)

- High-Level Task Force under Nandan Nilekani.
- Fast-track courts for examination-related offences.
- Time-bound investigation and prosecution.
- End-to-end encryption of question papers.
- Controlled digital access and audit trails.
- Randomisation of question papers and examination centres.
- Third-party security audits.
- Greater accountability of technology vendors.
- Expansion of Computer-Based Testing (CBT).

National Testing Agency (NTA)

- Established in 2017.
- Functions under the Ministry of Education.
- Conducts major entrance examinations such as:
 - NEET (UG), JEE (Main), CUET, UGC-NET
- Objective:
 - Standardised, Transparent, Efficient testing system.

Static Linkages

- Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment (Article 16)
- Rule of Law
- Transparency and Accountability in Governance
- E-Governance
- Digital Public Infrastructure
- Cyber Security in Public Administration
- Good Governance Principles
- Criminal Justice Administration
- Merit-based Recruitment
- Public Trust in Institutions

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Protects merit-based recruitment.
- Improves credibility of public examinations.
- Reduces organised examination fraud.
- Strengthens digital governance.
- Enhances public trust in institutions.
- Supports Ease of Living through efficient recruitment.

Challenges

- Cybersecurity threats to digital examinations.
- Capacity constraints of investigation agencies.
- Digital divide affecting CBT.
- Coordination issues between Centre and States.
- Dependence on private technology vendors.
- Need for robust data protection mechanisms.

Way Forward

- Establish an independent National Examination Security Authority.
- Adopt AI-based monitoring and anomaly detection.
- Mandatory annual cybersecurity audits.
- Strengthen digital forensic capabilities.
- Standardised examination security protocols across agencies.
- Capacity building of examination officials.
- Greater Centre-State coordination.
- Continuous review of legal provisions against emerging cyber threats.

Nilekani panel mandate must be expansive

THE MORE than a month-long protests by the country's youth have brought long-overdue political attention to education reform. The Centre's decision to constitute a high-level task force, barely a day after Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation, is a necessary acknowledgement of the crisis of confidence in a system that determines the fate of millions of young Indians. The committee's composition — technology and education experts and former bureaucrats — suggests that the government is looking beyond immediate crisis management. Such an outlook is welcome. It is also heartening that the panel will be chaired by Nandan Nilekani, whose stewardship of Aadhaar and India's digital public infrastructure combined technological innovation with changes in institutional architecture on an unprecedented scale. His proven ability to bring together government, industry and civil society around far-reaching reforms should stand the task force in good stead as it confronts one of the most consequential public policy challenges the country faces.

The recent agitation may have been triggered by repeated examination failures, but at its heart lay a larger question: Does the country's education system open doors at a time when the world of work is undergoing profound transformations — AI is reshaping white-collar employment, automation is altering the skill-related demands of employers, and India's IT and outsourcing industries are entering a period of technological disruption. The youth face a double uncertainty — an examination system whose credibility has repeatedly been called into question and a labour market whose contours are rapidly changing. This is where Nilekani's presence on the panel assumes significance. He has maintained that investments in digital infrastructure, skilling and continuous learning can make AI a job multiplier. He has also argued that AI will reshape India's outsourcing industry, making it imperative for professionals to move towards higher-value expertise. Such insights can help the task force become a forum for sustained engagement with the changing knowledge economy.

For that to happen, the government should resist the temptation of framing the task force as a supra National Testing Agency (NTA) and instead treat its work as the starting point for broader reform. Its recommendations must be accompanied by clear timelines and measurable milestones. The government must be careful, too, to eschew the prevarication that followed the submission of the K Radhakrishnan committee report in 2024 — most of the major measures, including accountability, institutional restructuring and technological upgrades suggested by the panel formed after the NEET failure that year, have been unevenly implemented. The outrage that spilled onto the country's streets last week should be warning enough that the old ways will work no more.

- Article 21A – Right to Education (6–14 years).
- National Education Policy (NEP), 2020
 - Competency-based assessment.
 - Technology-enabled education.
 - Digital governance.
- Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024
 - Prevents paper leaks and unfair means in notified public examinations.
 - Prescribes stringent punishment for organized examination fraud.
- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as a governance tool.
- Principles of Good Governance:
 - Transparency
 - Accountability
 - Efficiency
 - Rule of Law

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Following nationwide protests over recurring paper leaks and examination irregularities, the Union Government constituted a High-Level Task Force to recommend reforms in India's public examination system.
- The committee is chaired by Nandan Nilekani and includes experts from technology, education, and public administration.
- The objective is to improve the credibility, transparency, security, and efficiency of public examinations.

Key Points

- Focus on systemic reforms, not merely crisis management.
- Likely areas of reform:
 - Secure digital examination ecosystem.
 - Strengthening institutional accountability.
 - AI-enabled monitoring and fraud detection.
 - Transparent recruitment and admission processes.
 - Time-bound implementation of reforms.
- Highlights the need to align examinations with the changing AI-driven labour market.
- Emphasizes improving governance of examination bodies like the National Testing Agency (NTA).

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 16 – Equality of opportunity in public employment.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Restores credibility of public examinations.
- Promotes merit-based recruitment.
- Strengthens institutional governance.
- Supports Digital India and AI adoption.
- Enhances trust in public institutions.

Challenges

- Weak implementation of previous reform recommendations.
- Cybersecurity risks in digital examinations.
- Coordination among multiple examination agencies.
- Digital divide affecting accessibility.
- Need for continuous technological upgradation.

Way Forward

- Implement recommendations through a time-bound roadmap.
- Strengthen accountability of examination agencies.
- Use AI and secure digital infrastructure to prevent malpractice.
- Conduct regular third-party security audits.
- Establish an independent examination regulatory mechanism.
- Improve grievance redressal and transparency.
- Align examination reforms with future skill requirements under NEP 2020.

Trump & Netanyahu: The cracks are showing

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's meeting with President Donald Trump this week comes at a time of growing strain in the US-Israel relationship. This is because of diverging interests over the war with Iran, Israel's military campaigns in Lebanon and Gaza, and signs that the personal rapport between the two leaders who face elections later this year is waning. Netanyahu has long presented his close ties with Trump as a political asset, while Trump confronts an electorate increasingly angry about the war. How each reconciles these competing pressures will shape the outcome of this meeting. The US-Saudi nuclear deal has also raised concerns in Israel that it could, over time, erode its strategic edge in the region and weaken its leverage in securing the normalisation of ties with Riyadh.

The US and Israel have been steadfast allies since the 1967 Six-Day War, their alliance is underpinned by strategic interests and what they perceive as shared democratic and Judeo-Christian values. That consensus appears to be fraying. With a new generation of Americans coming of age, Israel no longer commands the instinctive public backing it once enjoyed. Polls consistently show that support for Israel in America has fallen to historic lows amid the war in Gaza. The old bipartisan consensus on military aid is also weakening. Earlier this month, more than a hundred House Democrats voted to cut US military assistance to Israel, indicating a growing unease within the party even as New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani called on the federal government to enforce the ICC's arrest warrant against Netanyahu. The Republican consensus on Israel will depend on the outcome of the war in Iran.

Ahead of the meeting, Netanyahu offered Trump significant concessions, including cooperation on a US-brokered security arrangement in southern Lebanon and cabinet approval for the entry of a multinational security force into Gaza under Trump's 20-point plan. Whether these will satisfy the US president remains to be seen. With sections of the American public increasingly sceptical of Washington's support for Israel, the question is how much more Trump will demand and how much more Netanyahu can concede as both prepare to face their electorates.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Recent meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump highlighted differences over:
 - Israel-Iran conflict.
 - Gaza war.
 - Israel's military operations in Lebanon.
 - U.S.-Saudi Arabia Civil Nuclear Cooperation.
- The developments indicate evolving geopolitical dynamics in West Asia, with implications for regional security and India's interests.

Key Points

- The United States remains Israel's principal strategic, military and diplomatic partner.
- Israel is concerned that the proposed U.S.-Saudi civil nuclear cooperation could alter the regional strategic balance.
- The U.S. seeks:
 - Ceasefire and hostage negotiations in Gaza.
 - Greater humanitarian access.
 - Regional stability through Arab participation.
- Israel has shown willingness to discuss:
 - Security arrangements in Southern Lebanon.
 - Multinational administration/security mechanism in post-conflict Gaza.
- Domestic political opinion in the U.S. is becoming increasingly divided regarding military assistance to Israel.

Static Linkages

- Six-Day War (1967) and its geopolitical significance.
- Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Palestine issue.
- Two-State Solution.
- Abraham Accords (2020).
- International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Geneva Conventions (1949).
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- IAEA safeguards for civilian nuclear cooperation.
- UN Security Council and conflict resolution.
- Strategic importance of West Asia for:
 - Energy security.
 - Maritime trade (Suez Canal, Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb).
 - Indian diaspora.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reflects changing strategic priorities within the U.S.-Israel alliance.
- May reshape the security architecture of West Asia.
- Impacts regional power balance involving Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Challenges

- Escalation of regional conflicts.
- Humanitarian crisis in Gaza.
- Risk of wider regional war involving Iran and its proxies.
- Nuclear proliferation concerns arising from civilian nuclear cooperation.
- Declining bipartisan political support for Israel within the U.S.

Implications for India

- Energy security due to dependence on West Asian oil imports.
- Safety of the Indian diaspora.
- Stability of maritime trade routes.
- Continuation of India's policy of strategic autonomy and balanced engagement with all regional stakeholders.

Way Forward

- Promote diplomatic resolution through dialogue.
- Support humanitarian assistance and adherence to International Humanitarian Law.
- Strengthen regional confidence-building measures.
- Prevent nuclear proliferation through robust international safeguards.
- Continue India's balanced and issue-based diplomacy in West Asia.