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GS Paper II - Polity

Lok Sabha applies 'guillotine' to pass Demands for Grants of ₹53 lakh cr. for Ministries

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha passed the Demands for Grants of various Ministries for 2026-27 on Wednesday. The House approved an expenditure of over ₹53 lakh crore by applying the guillotine, passing the Demands for Grants for various Ministries without a discussion. Earlier, it had discussed Demands for Grants for two Ministries – Agriculture and Railways.

Replying to the debate on agriculture, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the Centre is committed to transform society and shaping the future of the nation. He said the Opposition presented half-truths in the name of farmers' welfare. He said during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, out of 140 major irrigation projects, 99 remained stalled.



Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan speaking in the Lok Sabha during the second part of the Budget Session of Parliament. PTI

“The [Narendra] Modi government brought these projects under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana and placed them on priority. As a result, work is moving rapidly to ensure irrigation coverage for nearly 2.7 million hectares of additional agricultural land,” he said.

Maintaining that the new Pesticide and Seed Bills will soon be implemented, he said they were

aimed at guaranteeing quality seeds, standard and reliable fertilizers, as well as safe and effective pesticides for farmers.

Earlier, initiating the debate for the Agriculture Ministry, Congress MP Amrinder Singh Raja Warring said 750 farmers died in Punjab during the agitation against the now-repealed farm laws and sought compensation for their families.



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GS Paper II – Polity

NCERT book ban, a chapter on judicial transparency

Max Boot, former Features Editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, authored the seminal study on the United States judiciary, 'Out of Order: Arrogance, Corruption, and Incompetence on the Bench' (1998). Robert H. Bork, former Solicitor General of the United States, wrote the foreword to it with a striking conclusion – "Our Courts are behaving badly and the public, to the degree it can be brought to understand that, will exert force for reform, a reform that must be structural as well as intellectual and moral."

He observed that the book's subtitle sums up a system in distress. The book underscores the critical role that the media and citizens must play while dealing with the judicial institution in a democracy.

In February this year, the Supreme Court of India, faulting what it felt as selective reference to corruption within the judiciary, directed "a complete blanket ban" on a Class eight social science textbook published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The three-judge Bench, presided over by the Chief Justice of India, further alluded to "an underlying agenda to undermine the institutional authority and demean the dignity of the judiciary".

The Court subsequently ordered that the persons responsible for preparing the passages should be 'disassociated' from future projects by governments and public universities. The Court thus instantly punished them, without due process or hearing. The prohibition by the Court is problematic as it sends critical signals about the shape of India's democracy today.

What appears to have annoyed the Bench were the passages in the book on judicial delay and corruption in judiciary. As per the news report cited by the Court, the textbook has data on the approximate number of pending cases in Indian courts. It refers to the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, which prescribe values for judicial life. It also discusses the in-house procedures evolved by the Supreme Court and the constitutional mechanism for the removal of errant judges.

An undermining of freedom

By itself, a book ban is the most egregious form of censorship. Such a move directly impacts the right to freedom of speech under Article 19, a solemn promise in the Constitution. This right could be restricted only by a law made by the



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The top court's ban on an NCERT textbook exposes gaps in judicial accountability and public trust

state on grounds expressly provided under Article 19(2), such as "the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offence". There is no law made by the state to justify the ban on the book in question. Judicial orders or judgments do not come under the realm of 'law' made by the state, as understood in the context of Article 19 (*Naresh Shridhar Mirajkar vs State of Maharashtra*, 1966).

For an act to amount to contempt of court, there must be material that scandalises the authority of the court or prejudices or interferes with judicial proceedings or the administration of justice, as defined under Section 2(c) of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971. Whether mere references to corruption in the judiciary and case backlogs meet this high threshold for criminal contempt was a question that, unfortunately, did not form part of the Court's deliberations. What was also not examined was whether the statements were too general in nature to suggest any malicious intent to scandalise the Court.

Further, and importantly, going by the scheme of judicial review, courts must put to constitutional scrutiny the law passed by Parliament often violating fundamental rights. When the courts take on the task of book banning, citizens are left without remedy, as constitutional courts are the last resort to safeguard fundamental rights.

Global efforts

In advanced democracies, the credibility of the court is a matter of concern, primarily for the court itself. Transparency International has conducted a number of surveys that show that there is a prevailing notion about judicial corruption. Judiciaries across the world have made efforts to address this problem. In Kenya, the reforms led by Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, between 2011 and 2013, are an illustrative example. During this period, institutions such as judicial ombudspersons, court users' committees, and performance management committees were established.

By 2013, public trust in Kenya in the judiciary had risen to 61%, compared to 27% in 2009. The reforms continued even thereafter. This happened only by acknowledging the issues and trying to address them, rather than suppressing critical voices.

In India, the courts including the top court have acknowledged the menace of delay and corruption. Judges have repeatedly warned about the 'bad apples' within the system. The very existence of the in-house Procedure indicates the possibility that a minuscule number of judges may breach their oath.

In *K. Veeraswami vs Union Of India And Others* (1991), the Court categorically held that judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court fall within the definition of "public servant" for the purposes of prosecution under the Prevention of Corruption Act, while also cautioning against the potential for misuse of this provision by the executive. The Court also said: "We consider that the society's demand for honesty in a judge is exacting and absolute. The standards of judicial behaviour, both on and off the Bench, are normally extremely high. For a judge to deviate from such standards of honesty and impartiality is to betray the trust reposed on him. No excuse or no legal relativity can condone such betrayal. From the standpoint of justice, the size of the bribe or scope of corruption cannot be the scale for measuring a judge's dishonour. A single dishonest judge not only dishonours himself and disgraces his office but jeopardises the integrity of the entire judicial system."

The need for introspection

Therefore, the need to eradicate corruption and delay is also in the best interest of the judiciary. In the interim order directing the book ban, the Court also pointed out that the "book also chooses not to delve into any of the transformative initiatives and measures pioneered by this Court towards overhauling legal aid mechanisms and streamlining the ease of access to justice". Not addressing all counterarguments might render an opinion potentially incomplete. Yet, that is no reason for banning the view expressed. If the exercise of free speech is required to follow a particular form, the right itself becomes illusory. During judicial deliberations, nobody pointed out that the judiciary, like other organs of the state, must be open to dissent and reform.

The first step in fighting systemic problems such as corruption – whether in the executive or the judiciary – is acknowledging it. After all, it is imperative to curb all kinds of corruption and that civil society is educated about the institutional challenges. A court that continuously reforms itself is the bedrock of any democracy.



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GS Paper II – Social Justice

India's future demographic challenges

A new report by the International Institute of Migration and the Population Foundation of India titled 'Unravelling India's Demographic Future: Population Projections for States and Union Territories, 2021-2051', underscores the demographic risks that are beginning to surface nationwide. India's population is projected to increase from 1,355.8 million in 2021 to 1,590.1 million in 2051, with an average annual increase of 0.5%, suggesting a prolonged period of slower population expansion. These figures fall below earlier estimates, strengthening the case that India is unlikely to face the threat of population explosion that once dominated political and academic debates. These projections point to a turning point, where India is poised to move beyond a youth-led, fast-expanding population into an era of a more urban, steadily ageing, and balanced demographic structure.

A problem for schools

The projections point out that the pre-primary school-going population (0-4 years) is expected to dwindle from 113.5 million in 2021 to 8.6 million by the middle of this century. Since most regions in the country are now close to universal primary school enrolments, the demand for new schooling facilities could ease out, especially in the government sector. A sustained drop in fertility could leave the country with an escalating number of 'uneconomic schools' (schools with lesser enrolment rates that cannot justify their economic costs), raising the threat of teachers losing their jobs, a trend that the State of Kerala has seen play out for more than three decades.

Evidence from different parts of the country suggests that declining fertility rates have already started influencing schooling requirements, with classrooms adjusting to smaller cohorts. Data from the Unified District



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The growing elderly population is set to exert increasing pressure on healthcare and social security, thereby putting a strain on the state's finances

Information System for Education and the Ministry of Education highlights a significant reduction in the number of government schools over the last decade, with schools dropping from 11.07 lakh in 2014-15 to 10.18 lakh in 2023-24, amounting to a reduction of close to 90,000 schools across the country. This decline has been accompanied by a sharp increase in private schools; their numbers grew from 2.88 lakh to 3.31 lakh over the same period, an increase of 43,000 schools.

While falling birth rates have led to a reduction in enrolments and closure of government schools, smaller families and improved capacity to afford education have propelled the demand for private schools. Many parents choose private schools in the hope of giving their wards the education they never had in life, nudged by social pressure and a common perception that government schools generally fall short on quality compared to private schools.

Greying population

As the demographic dividend largely depends on the working age population (15-59), a relatively higher proportion of this specific group can lead to faster economic growth, a dynamic evident in the development phases of several countries, including China, Japan, and South Korea. India has one of the world's largest workforces, rising from 833.8 million (65.2%) in 2021 to a projected peak level of 1,009.0 million (65.5%) in 2041, before declining to 998.1 million (62.8%) by 2051. There is an impending concern that the demographic dividend window will close after 2041, highlighting the urgency of leveraging it before its contribution to economic growth starts to diminish. Nevertheless, close to six out of every 10 persons in the country are expected to be part of the workforce by 2051, which is an encouraging sign.

However, India's population is ageing. In 2021, India's elderly

population (60+) stood at 130.5 million or 9.62% of the population. By 2051, this number is projected to touch 325.3 million (20.5%), highlighting that there will be a profound increment in the ageing population. The median age, a measure that splits the population evenly by age, is projected to climb from 28 years in 2021 to 40 by 2051, signalling India's shift towards a more advanced stage of demographic transition. The growing elderly population is set to exert increasing pressure on healthcare and social security, thereby putting a strain on the state's finances.

Policy signals

The declining child population is expected to offer a better teacher-pupil ratio and expand infrastructural facilities in schools. Further, declining birth rates reduce demand for maternity care, allowing the healthcare system to rationalise the use of resources and offer better quality care. Though fertility levels have been falling, continued investments are required for family planning and to prevent unintended pregnancies, as well as reduce infertility and ensure the reproductive rights of women.

India needs to overhaul its education and skill development system to cope with modern-day challenges. It should also equip the younger generation to seize new opportunities before our demographic leverage disappears in the coming decades. The decline in the working-age population can be offset by bringing in more women to formal work (gender dividend) and by expanding access to better-quality employment. With the rapid growth of the elderly population, India's financial and healthcare systems, especially geriatric care, must be redesigned to support the growing needs of elderly citizens. At the same time, this creates a strong potential for a thriving silver economy, and could help in unlocking a second demographic dividend in the future.



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GS Paper II – International Relations

Children have borne the brunt of Israel-U.S. aggression

Israel accounted for about 41% of all external attacks that ended with a child fatality, while the U.S. accounted for 21% of such attacks

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Nivedha M.

In the morning of February 28, as hundreds of young girls were attending their classes in Minab's Shajareh Tayyeb school, the building was struck by a missile.

Residents and rescuers, who rushed to help seeing black smoke rising from the school, found blood stained backpacks, severed arms, and dead children buried under piles of rubble.

The school was likely struck by one of the U.S.'s Tomahawk cruise missiles, claimed to be one of the most precise guided weapons in the world. The school was one of the casualties in the targeted attacks by the U.S. on Iran, in conjunction with Israel.

Later reports confirmed that around 168 children, mostly aged between seven and 12, were killed in the attack. The school was located adjacent to a naval compound operated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Though U.S. President Donald Trump initially suggested that Iran itself – despite not having Tomahawk missiles – may have been responsible for these attacks, media reports and the U.S.'s preliminary military investigations suggest the attack was a result of the U.S.'s use of outdated targeting data.

The Pentagon elevated its probe into the matter last week. A UN inquiry is also underway to investigate the fatal strike. Amnesty International, this week, said that the strike points to a failure by the U.S. forces to take feasible precautions to avoid civilian harm.

A war on children

However, the girls in Minab weren't the only ones who paid the price of the ongoing war. More children are estimated to have been killed in the daily strikes launched by the U.S. and Israel on

Iran in separate instances.

Less than two thousand kilometres away, in Lebanon, more than a hundred children have been killed by Israel's campaign since March 2. Reports indicate that Israeli airstrikes have completely wiped out generations of families in the country in less than two weeks. The death toll due to the ongoing conflict in Lebanon is reported to be rising faster than any other war that the country had previously endured.

What happened in Minab and what is unfolding in Lebanon aren't isolated instances. Data points to a more troubling pattern – the U.S. and Israel together accounted for about 62% of "external attacks" that ended with a child casualty since 1996. External attacks refer to acts of aggression or military involvement by an actor on foreign soil.

The Hindu analysed events of external attacks that were recorded by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. While over 66,000 events of external attacks have been lethal (ending with any fatalities), around 4% of such reported attacks have ended up with at least one child fatality.

Incidences of attacks were used as a proxy, as data for child fatalities under external attacks were not separately maintained. These events offer a reliable snapshot of the extent of attacks against children during conflict. However, fatalities in individual events may be significantly higher. The data only pertains to confirmed events of deaths, and therefore cases of missing children or unreported events of deaths are not included in the analysis.

A further look at the 4% reveals that close to 2,500 reported cases of external attacks have ended with a child fatality between 1996 and 2026.

A country-wise analysis of these events show that Israel accounted for about 41% of all external attacks that ended with a child fatality (Chart 1). That is, about one in

every nine lethal attacks (11%) launched by Israel since 1996 has killed at least one child.

No other country has recorded such events as high as Israel. The figures reflect the violent escalations in Gaza and West Bank since October 7, 2023 including instances when children were killed while receiving aid; via airstrikes; and in refugee camps. Close to 20,000 children have been killed in Gaza between October 7, 2023 and August, 2025. Infants alone accounted for 10% of these figures. This is despite the fact that Israel, globally, only accounted for 14% of lethal external attacks. (Chart 2)

Meanwhile, Russia alone accounted for 55% of lethal external attacks since 1996. Less than 2% of them have been reported to kill a child.

As for the U.S. which ranked second, in terms of external attacks carried out by countries that resulted in a child fatality, data shows that roughly around 7% of its lethal external attacks had resulted in a child casualty.

Grave violation

The United Nations Security Council identifies killing and maiming of children as one of the six grave violations against children in times of war. Children in these conflict zones might also be exposed to other atrocities such as recruitment by armed groups, sexual violence, abduction and denial of humanitarian access.

Days after the Minab school strike, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child said in a statement that the strikes on civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, serve as a stark reminder that children are among the most vulnerable in armed conflicts. It added that children must never be treated as collateral damage. However, with intensifying attacks and more buildings falling to rubble, children are at an increasing risk of becoming exactly that.

Nivedha M. is interning with the Hindu Data Team



A heavy toll: Graves are being prepared for the victims following a strike on a school in Minab, Iran, on March 2. REUTERS

Caught in the crossfire

The data for the charts were sourced from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. Data for 2026 pertains only till March 6

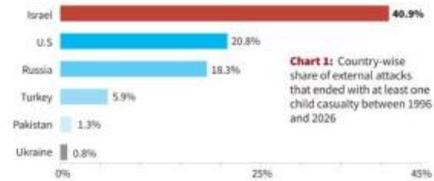
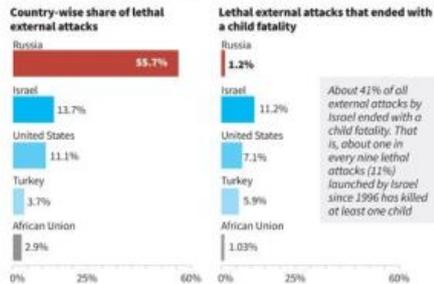


Chart 1: Country-wise share of external attacks that ended with at least one child casualty between 1996 and 2026

Chart 2: Lethal external attacks refer to external attacks that resulted in any fatality. Figures include reported lethal external attacks between 1996 and 2026



About 41% of all external attacks by Israel ended with a child fatality. That is, about one in every nine lethal attacks (11%) launched by Israel since 1996 has killed at least one child

Note: Figures in the charts above may not add up to 100 as they only include the top countries in terms of share

Attacks attributed to the African Union refer to the African Union Mission in Somalia and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia

Attacks attributed to the U.S. include those under the 'Global Coalition Against Daesh', as it was a U.S.-led coalition

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GS Paper II – Polity

Speaker irked by Minister's absence in Question Hour

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Wednesday expressed displeasure over the absence of a senior Minister during the Question Hour when questions about his Ministry were being asked.

Though the Speaker did not name anyone, the question was regarding the Postal Department which comes under Communication Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia.

"Where has the Minister gone," Mr. Birla asked when the question was being fielded by Minister of State for Communication Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani.

When the Minister of State replied that the senior Minister had gone for an "important meeting", Mr. Birla said, "The Question Hour is important, not meeting."

Earlier, the Lok Sabha Speaker had urged members not to speak among themselves when the House takes up obituary references.

LS extends term of panel examining simultaneous polls

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The term of the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the Bills seeking to introduce simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies was extended once again on Wednesday.

The Lok Sabha extended the tenure of the panel, headed by senior BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary, till the last week of the Monsoon Session. The extension, moved by Mr. Chaudhary, was adopted by a voice vote.

The simultaneous polls Bills – The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, were introduced on December 17, 2024 in the Lok Sabha and sent for Parliamentary scrutiny.

The panel has so far held 17 meetings.

Former Chief Justices B.R. Gavai, Sanjiv Khanna, D.Y. Chandrachud, U.U. Lallit, and J.S. Khehar; senior lawyer-MPs Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Singhvi; senior leaders Ghulam Nabi Azad and M. Veerappa Moily; former IMF First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath; and Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (EAC-PM) member Sanjeev Sanyal, among others, have appeared before the panel. The EAC-PM released a working paper titled "Estimating Reduction in Polling Personnel Deployment Under Simultaneous Elections" by Mr. Sanyal and EAC-PM Joint Director Satvik Dev, who argued that "One Nation, One Election" may reduce polling personnel deployment by 28%.



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"The [Narendra] Modi government brought these projects under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana and placed them on priority. As a result, work is moving rapidly to ensure irrigation coverage for nearly 2.7 million hectares of additional agricultural land," he said.

Maintaining that the new Pesticide and Seed Bills will soon be implemented, he said they were

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GS Paper II - Polity

Cabinet okays ₹33,660-cr. BHAVYA plan for 100 industrial parks by '32

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet approved the **Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojna (BHAVYA)**, with an allocation of ₹33,660 crore for the development of 100 'plug-and-play' industrial parks across the country.

The aim was to create 100 "future ready" industrial parks integrated with the PM GatiShakti to make use of the latter's multi-modal connectivity and last-mile access.

"These parks will set new benchmarks in industrial infrastructure, ensuring reliability, reducing in-



Manufacturing boost: KINFRA integrated industrial park in Kerala.
K. K. MUSTAFAH, (FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE ONLY)

efficiencies and enhancing productivity across sectors," the government said.

As per Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade Secretary Amardeep Singh Bhatia,

the scheme's duration would be for six years starting 2026-27. The first phase would see 50 parks being set up.

The minimum land need for the parks would

be 100 acre in most cases, and 25 acre for industrial parks in hilly or North Eastern States. The maximum size is 1,000 acre.

States, pvt. sector

While the Union government will provide up to ₹1 crore per acre, the scheme is meant to involve State governments as well as the private sector.

"At the heart of BHAVYA lies a strong push for de-regulation and ease of doing business, with streamlined approvals, effective single-window systems, and investor-friendly reforms led by States," the government said.



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GS Paper II – Polity

India's national symbols under scrutiny over use, meaning, and law

A complaint against Hardik Pandya draws attention to the rules governing the national flag and the history embedded in it; as debates over *Vande Mataram* resurface, the discussion shows how national symbols evoke emotional responses while being shaped by law and historical tension

Ziya Us Salam

Last week, a Pune-based lawyer filed a complaint against cricketer Hardik Pandya for allegedly insulting the national flag during celebrations following India's victory in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Ahmedabad. According to the complaint, Pandya, who had the flag draped around his body, engaged in objectionable acts in the stadium.

The episode has once again drawn attention to the rules governing the use of the national flag and to the history and symbolism embedded in it.

Evolution of the tricolour

Recent books help us understand the story of the national flag. In *A Flag to Live and Die For – A Short History of India's Tricolour* (Aleph), diplomat and columnist Navtej Sarna traces the evolution of the flag across decades.

The national tricolour was not chosen on a whim. It evolved through several stages, dating back to 1907, when an early version was presented to Surendranath Banerjee, former Congress president, by Bhupendranath Dutt, the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda. Called the Calcutta Flag, it was designed by Sachindra Prasad Bose and Sukumar Mitra. "The design of the flag was inspired by the flag of the French Revolution. The flag had three horizontal stripes of red, yellow and green with eight half-open

lotuses," writes Sarna.

Around the same time, Swami Vivekananda's disciple, Sister Nivedita, conceived a flag featuring the *vajra*, or thunderbolt. Sister Nivedita was a participant in the Swadeshi movement and the flag used religious and spiritual symbols to strike a chord with the masses.

The early decades of the 20th century saw more experimentation with the idea of the national flag. Many leaders of the freedom movement believed that Independence was around the corner and that a national flag could stir emotions in support of its attainment. Bhikaji Cama, a prominent figure in the Independence movement, unfurled a modified version of the Calcutta Flag in Stuttgart in 1907, thereby becoming the first Indian to hoist the Indian flag on foreign soil.

A new version of the flag emerged during Annie Besant's Home Rule movement. In 1917, she hoisted a flag with nine horizontal stripes – five red and four green – in Coimbatore. The effort was supported by several nationalist leaders.

In 1916, Pingali Venkayya, a freedom fighter, published his book *A National Flag for India*, outlining his ideas for a national emblem. Five years later, Mahatma Gandhi asked him to design a flag with the *charkha*, the spinning wheel that had become a powerful symbol of self-reliance. The tricolour as we recognise it today emerged through these iterations. During the Quit India Movement in 1942, the flag was to be

hoisted by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. However, his arrest by the British meant that Aruna Asaf Ali performed the honours in Bombay.

However, as musician and writer T.M. Krishna notes in *We the People of India: Decoding a Nation's Symbols* (Context, Westland), it was not until 2004, in *Union of India v. Naveen Jindal*, that an Indian citizen's fundamental right to fly the national flag was formally recognised. However, there are detailed rules on how the national flag should be displayed, handled, and used, set out in the Flag Code of India, 2002. Insults to the flag are punishable under the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, which prohibits burning, trampling, or improper display.

Explaining the power of a symbol, while speaking at The Hindu Lit for Life, Krishna said, "(When) you walk on the street, see a temple and you do a *namaskaram*, you respond to a symbol... Just recently, I was seeing the flag out of my hotel room in Hyderabad, and it was gorgeously fluttering, and it did something to me. Is it memory? Is it indoctrination? So, you're responding at an emotional level. The thing about symbolism is it's often an emotional activity."

Debating the national song

While the flag has recently taken centre stage, so has another national symbol, the national song. *Vande Mataram* has been a

subject of debate in Parliament in recent times.

Krishna writes about the difference between the national anthem and the national song. "*Vande Mataram* was a cry for freedom against the tyranny of the British in Bengal... Historian Sabyasachi Bhattacharya dates the song to between 1872 and 1875... The first two stanzas were penned during this period. The rest seems to have been written later when Bankim wrote his novel *Anandmath*..."

The debate over *Vande Mataram* involved Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote to Subhas Chandra Bose in 1937, saying, "It is so evident that *Bande Mataram* is in praise of Goddess Durga...no Muslim will accept the ten-headed idol of goddess Durga as a symbol of their country."

This tension helped pave the way for *Jana Gana Mana*, described by Krishna as "a poetic mural that required meditation." He writes, "Long before the constitutional acceptance, Subhas Chandra Bose had named *Jana Gana Mana* the national anthem...Once *Jana Gana Mana* was designated as the national anthem, it transformed into a multi-layered, harmony-laden musical composition."

In the light of these debates, Krishna asks, "Should we treat *Vande Mataram* as one song? An idea worth exploring." His open-ended conclusion gives a certain immediacy in the light of the decision of the Union government in February, making it mandatory to sing the entire song in official functions and schools.



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GS Paper II – International Relations

22 India-bound ships on Hormuz evacuation list

Of these, 20 vessels have been assessed as critical to India's energy security, carrying over 5 lakh tonnes of LNG, LPG and 16.76 lakh tonnes of crude oil; many agencies join hands for evacuation

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

Twenty-two India-bound vessels in the Persian Gulf region have been identified for evacuation for safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz by the Indian government.

Of these, 20 vessels have been assessed as critical to India's energy security, carrying some 2.15 lakh metric tonnes of LNG, 3.21 lakh tonnes of LPG and 16.76 lakh tonnes of crude oil. These vessels are both Indian-flagged and foreign-flagged but all are bound for India.

Among the 20 energy-critical vessels, 10 are Indian-flagged. The 20 vessels include three LNG carriers, 10 LPG carriers, and seven crude oil tankers.



Indian-flagged vessel *Jag Laadki* carrying approximately 81,000 MT of crude oil, berthed at Adani Port, Mundra on Wednesday. ANI

Marshall Island, Liberia, Greece, Malta and Portugal are some of the other flags these ships carry.

In addition, two Indian-flagged container vessels have also been identified for evacuation to ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

Coordination is ongoing

with the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways; Directorate of Naval Operations (DNO); Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG); and the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region for the evacuation of the vessels from the Persian Gulf region.

Two LPG carriers and

one oil tanker – *Shivalik*, *Nanda Devi* and *Jag Laadki* – were evacuated earlier, escorted by the Indian Navy from the Gulf of Oman region. The three ships have reached India. The two LPG ships were carrying some 97,000 tonnes of the fuel. Navy sources had told *The Hindu* that the escorting will continue in future as well.

Shivalik has been partially discharged at Mundra and is awaiting commencement of ship-to-ship operations by the charterer, IOC. *Nanda Devi* has doubled-banked with *BW Birch* for ship-to-ship transfer at Vadinar. Cargo operations are expected to start soon.

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GS Paper II – Polity & Social Justice

Jharkhand Assembly passes motion against VB-G RAM G

'Centre-State financial funding ratio of 60:40 under the new Act is against federal structure'; proposal, moved by Rural Development Minister, was passed by voice vote; BJP MLAs protest

Press Trust of India
RANCHI

The Jharkhand Assembly on Wednesday adopted a resolution urging the Centre to continue with the framework of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) instead of its new modified version, Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act.

Rural Development Minister Dipika Pandey Singh moved the proposal in the House, which was passed by voice vote amid protests by BJP MLAs. Opposing the Centre's VB-G RAM G, Ms. Singh proposed to continue with the centrally-sponsored framework of MGNREGA to protect the livelihoods of the rural population in the State.

"I propose that the demand-based, rights-based,



Jharkhand Rural Development Minister Dipika Pandey Singh said the new Act will put financial burden on States. FILE PHOTO

and fully Centrally-sponsored structure of the MGNREGA scheme be maintained. No tampering of any kind should be done with the provisions of the original Act of 2005 to protect the interests of lakhs of job card holder families in Jharkhand," Ms. Singh said. The guarantee of 100

days of employment under MGNREGA should be increased to 150 days to stop migration, she said.

Lifeline for families

Ms. Singh said MGNREGA has been a lifeline for families in Jharkhand, which played a historical role in reducing poverty, curbing

migration and women's empowerment.

"There are apprehensions that provisions of VB-G RAM G may lead to violations of the rights of rural people. The proposed Act eliminates the legal guarantee to demand work and secure employment. It also adversely affects the system of demand-driven employment in Jharkhand, particularly for the landless, labourers, and women," she said.

The Minister said the new Act imposes an additional burden on the States.

"Under the new Act, the Centre-State's 60:40 financial funding ratio is against the federal structure and will impose an unbearable financial burden on States with limited resources, such as Jharkhand.

The Centre should continue to provide financial support as it has done in the past," she said.



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GS Paper II – Polity

Karnataka govt. takes up Bill to check caste-based killings

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU

The State government on Wednesday tabled the Karnataka Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prevention and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition (*Eva Nammava, Eva Nammava*) Bill, 2026, in the Assembly.

It aims to curb the killings and other violence arising from caste-based objections to inter-caste marriages.

The Bill notes that caste-based discrimination continues in the State and often manifests in brutal forms of violence, including honour killings, particularly against young adults who exercise their constitutional right to choose their life partners through

The Bill guarantees protection for adults who enter into inter-caste marriages against the wishes of family or community

inter-caste marriages.

The proposed legislation seeks to ensure freedom of choice in marriage, prevent caste-based crimes, safeguard human rights, and promote dignity in inter-caste unions.

It also proposes the creation of an '*Eva Nammava, Eva Nammava* (he/she is ours)' Vedike in every district to solemnise and support inter-caste marriages.

The government decided to introduce the Bill in view of rising incidents of

violence and killings linked to inter-caste marriages.

Stringent punishment

The Bill guarantees protection for consenting adults entering into marriage and provides safeguards against family or community coercion.

It proposes a minimum punishment of five years' imprisonment in cases where a person or couple is killed in the name of "honour". In cases of injury, a minimum of two years' imprisonment along with a fine of ₹2 lakh is proposed.

The legislation also prohibits the assembly of five or more persons with the intention of condemning or opposing a marriage on grounds of caste, tribe, community, tradition, or family objections.



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GS Paper II – Polity

LS extends term of panel examining simultaneous polls

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The term of the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the Bills seeking to introduce simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies was extended once again on Wednesday.

The Lok Sabha extended the tenure of the panel, headed by senior BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary, till the last week of the Monsoon Session. The extension, moved by Mr. Chaudhary, was adopted by a voice vote.

The simultaneous polls Bills – The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, were introduced on December 17, 2024 in the Lok Sabha and sent for Parliamentary scrutiny.

The panel has so far held 17 meetings.

Former Chief Justices B.R. Gavai, Sanjiv Khanna, D.Y. Chandrachud, U.U. Lallit, and J.S. Khehar; senior lawyer-MPs Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Singhvi; senior leaders Ghulam Nabi Azad and M. Veerappa Moily; former IMF First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath; and Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (EAC-PM) member Sanjeev Sanyal, among others, have appeared before the panel. The EAC-PM released a working paper titled "Estimating Reduction in Polling Personnel Deployment Under Simultaneous Elections" by Mr. Sanyal and EAC-PM Joint Director Satvik Dev, who argued that "One Nation, One Election" may reduce polling personnel deployment by 28%.



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GS Paper II – Polity

Lok Sabha applies 'guillotine' to pass Demands for Grants of ₹53 lakh cr. for Ministries

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha passed the Demands for Grants of various Ministries for 2026-27 on Wednesday. The House approved an expenditure of over ₹53 lakh crore by applying the guillotine, passing the Demands for Grants for various Ministries without a discussion. Earlier, it had discussed Demands for Grants for two Ministries – Agriculture and Railways.

Replying to the debate on agriculture, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the Centre is committed to transform society and shaping the future of the nation. He said the Opposition presented half-truths in the name of farmers' welfare. He said during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, out of 140 major irrigation projects, 99 remained stalled.



Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan speaking in the Lok Sabha during the second part of the Budget Session of Parliament. PTI

"The [Narendra] Modi government brought these projects under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana and placed them on priority. As a result, work is moving rapidly to ensure irrigation coverage for nearly 2.7 million hectares of additional agricultural land," he said.

Maintaining that the new Pesticide and Seed Bills will soon be implemented, he said they were

aimed at guaranteeing quality seeds, standard and reliable fertilizers, as well as safe and effective pesticides for farmers.

Earlier, initiating the debate for the Agriculture Ministry, Congress MP Amrinder Singh Raja Warring said 750 farmers died in Punjab during the agitation against the now-repealed farm laws and sought compensation for their families.



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GS Paper II – Polity

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What is new in transgender rights Bill?

How is the government proposing to alter the definition of transgender person? What is the right to self-perceived gender identity? What does the new Bill propose on gender certification and SRS? Why are transgender communities opposing the amendments?

EXPLAINER

Arbitary Lakshman

The story so far:

Two years after the Supreme Court recognised the transgender identity and held that "self-determination of gender is an integral part of personal autonomy and self-expression", falling within the realm of personal liberty guaranteed by the Constitution of India, the Union government on March 13 introduced a Bill in the Lok Sabha to take away transgender people's "right to self-perceived gender identity" and redefine a "transgender person" by proposing amendments to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. Transgender community leaders, activists, and people across the country reacted with shock, arguing that the amendments go against the fundamental principles underlying their long struggle for recognition.

What are the changes being brought about?

The key changes being proposed have to do with the definition of a "transgender person" and the expansion of the section on offences against transgender people and punishments for them.

In the amendment Bill, the Centre has called for the omission of sub-section (2) of Section 4 of the Act, which says: "A person recognised as transgender under sub-section (1) shall have a right to self-perceived gender identity."

In addition to this, a new definition of "transgender person" is proposed. It describes them as people "having such socio-cultural identities as kinnar, hijra, aravani, and jogta, or eunuch", people with intersex variations, and people who have "congenital variations" in "male or female development" in their "primary sexual characteristics, external genitalia, chromosomal patterns, gonadal development, endogenous hormone production or response or such other medical conditions".

The definition also includes any person or child who has been "compelled to assume, adopt, or outwardly present a transgender identity, by mutilation, emasculation, castration, amputation, or any surgical, chemical, or hormonal procedure or otherwise". However, it adds that this definition shall not include "persons with different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities".

Compared to this definition, the Act currently defines transgender person as someone "whose gender does not match with the gender assigned at birth and includes trans men and trans women (whether or not such person has undergone Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) or hormone therapy or laser therapy or such other therapy), person with intersex variations, genderqueer and person having such socio-cultural identities as kinnar, hijra, aravani and jogta."

Further, a specific definition for "people with intersex variations" is also being proposed to be omitted.

Apart from these, the Bill suggests introducing the terminology for "authority", defining it as "a medical board, headed by a Chief Medical Officer or a Deputy Chief Medical Officer, as may be appointed by the Central government, State government or Union territory Administration".

Another key amendment is on the issuance of transgender certificates. While the law currently mandates the District Magistrate to issue a certificate based on a self-declared affidavit and without



Activists and members of the community during a demonstration against the bill on Wednesday.

physical or medical examination, the proposed amendment requires the District Magistrate to "examine the recommendations of the authority", and decide, if deemed necessary or desirable, and after consulting other medical experts, before issuing the certificate.

A new section has also been proposed, which curbs the right of transgender people to have their last names changed in birth certificates and other identification documents, with the caveat that the person should be a "transgender person" under the revised definition.

The Bill also mandates that individuals apply for a revised gender certificate after undergoing SRS, as opposed to the current law, which leaves this to the individual.

Additionally, medical institutions performing SRS would be required to furnish details of such procedures to the District Magistrate.

The Bill also significantly expands provisions relating to offences and penalties, introducing graded punishments, including rigorous imprisonment up to life and fines of up to 25 lakh, for crimes against transgender persons and children.

However, it remains to be seen what further changes could come through in the form of Rules, if this amendment Bill is passed by Parliament.

How did the amendment Bill come about?

Union Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar introduced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, in Lok Sabha on March 13. Days earlier, media reports cited that the Union Cabinet had approved amendments to the 2019 Act, though details were not disclosed. It remains unclear how long the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Centre had been preparing these changes.

Transgender activists, including Tamil Nadu-based Grace Barna, who had been central to the drafting of the 2019 Act, told The Hindu that the amendments seem to have been brought in without consultation with the community. Several leaders and members have described their initial reaction as one of "shock", calling the changes "sudden".

Interestingly, just hours before the Bill was introduced, the Ministry had posted on X, promoting the 2019 version of the Act and advertising the fact that this Act allowed the right to self-perceived gender identity as a key feature.

A few days back, on March 4, the Ministry had posted, "The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, safeguards the rights and dignity of transgender persons."

In February, the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) informed the Supreme Court that it had developed teacher training modules to build sensitivity towards transgender issues.

It substantiated this by saying that the 2024 module specifically spoke of the difference between gender and sexuality and discussed the idea that sex identity ascribed at birth may be at odds with a person's perceived sex identity at a later stage. The NCERT added that it had been conducting capacity building and training programmes based on similar modules till as late as November 2025, with more planned this year.

Why is there a concern?

A primary concern raised by the transgender community is the omission of the right to self-perceived gender identity, followed by the new definition, which appears to contradict the principles laid down in the landmark 2014 NALSA judgment recognising the right to self-determination of gender.

Ms. Barna said, "there is an issue that the government seems to be including only those in the definition of transgender who may have been accommodated in Hindutva's history and is using terms that indicate Hindutva's accommodation of transgender identity like 'hijra, kinnar, aravani,' etc." And there seems to be some sort of refusal to use respectful terms that have evolved for transgender people in other parts of the country, like in Tamil Nadu, where there is now a vocabulary of thiravargi and thirunarai.

Dr. Aqsa Shaikh has raised the issue of transgender people across the country having to now deal with the existential question of whether they continue to remain transgender as per the proposed new definition, while another Delhi-based transwoman spoke of concerns that this might create divides within the community about who has legitimacy to use the transgender identity.

What does the NALSA judgment say? The landmark 2014 judgment in National Legal Services Authority vs Union of India, delivered by Justices K.S. Radhakrishnan and A.K. Sikri, remains central to India's understanding of gender identity.

When the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019, was introduced, the Statement of Objects and Reasons in it noted that it flowed from this very judgment of the Supreme Court, adding that one of the principal goals of bringing this Bill was to "confer right upon transgender persons to be recognised as such, and a right to self-perceived gender identity". In the judgment that notably

recognised a third gender beyond male and female, and the fundamental right of persons to self-determination of gender identity, the court accepted the principle that the concepts of gender and sexuality are different and that gender identity is on a spectrum.

The court said, "Gender identity is one of the most fundamental aspects of life which refers to a person's intrinsic sense of being male, female or transgender or transsexual persons."

The judgment explained that "a person's sex is usually assigned at birth, but a relatively small group of persons may be born with bodies which incorporate both or certain aspects of both male and female physiology. At times, genital anatomy problems may arise in certain persons and their innate perception of themselves is not in conformity with the sex assigned to them at birth and may include pre and post-operative transsexual persons and also persons who do not choose to undergo or do not have access to operation and also includes persons who cannot undergo successful operations."

On sexual orientation, the court defined it as an individual's enduring emotional, romantic, or physical attraction to others.

Importantly, the court held that no person should be forced to undergo medical procedures – such as SRS, sterilisation, or hormone therapy – as a condition for legal recognition of their gender identity.

It concluded that self-determination of gender is integral to personal autonomy, dignity, and freedom under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Justice Sikri, in his judgment concurring with Justice Radhakrishnan, expanded on this, saying, "If democracy is based on the recognition of the individuality and dignity of man, as a furtherer we have to recognise the right of a human being to choose his sex/gender identity which is integral to his/her personality and is one of the most basic aspects of self-determination, dignity and freedom."

What is the government's reasoning? In the Statement of Objects and Reasons, the government said that since the 2009 Act was enacted, "certain doubts and difficulties" have arisen in implementing it with regard to the "definition of transgender persons and how the identification of such persons is to be done".

It noted that the existing definition of "transgender person" was "vague", arguing that this made it "impossible to identify the genuine oppressed persons to whom the benefits of the Act are intended to reach". It added that this existing definition renders several provisions "unworkable", further saying that this definition was "not compatible" with several statutory provisions enacted by both Parliament and State legislatures.

The government has argued that the intent of the legislative policy was always to "protect only those who face severe social exclusion due to biological reasons" for no fault or choice of their own. It went on to say that the purpose of the legislation was never to "protect each and every class of persons with various gender identities, self-perceived sex/gender identities or gender fluidities".

Noting these aspects, the government argued for a "precise" definition of transgender people, saying, "The protection and benefits that are provided under the Act are vast in nature, and therefore, care has to be taken that such identification cannot be extended on the basis of any acquirable characteristics or personal choice or claimed self-perceived identity of an individual."

THE GIST

The Amendment Bill proposes removing the 'right to self-perceived gender identity' and introducing a new definition of a 'transgender person', focusing on socio-cultural identities, intersex variations, and congenital conditions.

It introduces a medical board-led certification process, requires scrutiny by the District Magistrate, mandates a revised certificate after SRS, and expands provisions on offences and punishments.

Transgender activists argue the changes contradict the NALSA judgment on self-determination of gender, could exclude sections of the community, and have been brought without consultation.



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GS Paper III – Science & Technology

Ethyl chloroformate imports from China: India opens probe

India on Tuesday opened an anti-dumping investigation into ethyl chloroformate imports from China after a domestic producer alleged the chemical used in pharmaceutical and agrochemical manufacturing was being sold at unfairly low prices. The Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), under the federal trade ministry, said it initiated the probe following an application by Paushak that alleged that imports from China had caused “material injury” to domestic producers. The Chinese embassy in New Delhi did not immediately respond to a request for comment. In December, India imposed a three-year import tariff of 11% to 13% on some steel imports, in an effort to curb cheap Chinese products. **Ethyl chloroformate is an organic chemical intermediate widely used in pharmaceutical and agrochemical manufacturing.** REUTERS



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GS Paper III - Environment

Plastic goods prices to rise 60% as war impacts polymer

Prices of polymer, derived from crude oil and natural gas, have risen by 50-60% creating margin pressure; plastic manufacturers managing with stocks procured prior to W. Asia war outbreak

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

Plastic product prices are expected to rise by 50-60% from April if the West Asia crisis continues to impact supply of key raw material, mainly crude oil, industry officials said. They said the prices of polymer, derived from crude oil and natural gas, have risen by 50-60% in the last few days, creating margin pressure.

Plastic manufacturers said they are yet to fully pass on the additional financial burden to customers as they are managing with the inventory procured well before the war broke out. But stocks are fast depleting, they said.

"Manufacturers are procuring raw material based on the order on a day-to-day basis and pricing the supplies based on the raw material price," said Sunil Shah, president, All India Plastics Manufacturers' Association (AIPMA).



Burden of cost: The price of a small water bottle, which is ₹2 now, is expected to go up to more than ₹3. R. VENGADESH

"The cost of a small water bottle is about ₹2 and if prices rise it would cost more than ₹3. It all depends on the bottled water brand to either absorb that cost or pass it on to buyers. Similarly, the price of a 20-litre plastic water bottle, which is about ₹110 now, can go up sharply," industry officials said.

Confirming that polymer prices had gone up over the last few weeks, Arvind M Mehta, chairman, All India Plastics Manufacturers

Association said despite the price hike, exports could continue. "For exports, we are positive because our international competitors will have the same raw material price," Mr. Mehta said. The increasing cost of packaging materials has also threatened to inflate the price of food items in the retail market. Rice producers in Kangayam, a rice mill hub in Tamil Nadu, said the bags they used to pack 26 kg of rice used to cost ₹23 a

piece. Now, it is ₹29 a piece. "We have local suppliers who get the packing material in rolls and stitch it for us according to our requirement. There is a delay in getting those bags too. We buy another type of bag from Gujarat. The prices of both these varieties of bags have shot up," said Palaniswamy, president of the Kangayam Rice Mill Association.

The oil mill owners in Kangayam said they pack edible oil in plastic bottles or pouches. A bottle that used to cost ₹10 is now sold for ₹15. The oil mills have told their bulk buyers that they may increase the end product prices if this continues for a month. In Tiruppur, leading brands and all hosiery manufacturers for the domestic market have announced that hosiery products will be priced ₹7 more apiece as the cost of inputs have shot up.

(With inputs from Soudariya Preetha in Coimbatore)



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GS Paper III – Economy

The opportunity in Cameroon to rebalance the WTO

Today, trade is no longer just about economics. It is increasingly used as a geopolitical tool. Tariffs are imposed as pressure tactics, and economic dependence is sometimes used strategically. In this context, the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s Ministerial Conference (MC14), to be held in Yaounde, Cameroon, Africa (March 26-29, 2026), comes at an important moment. The real issue is not whether the WTO needs reform, but whether it can adapt fast enough to stay relevant in a world moving toward more transactional and power-based trade relations.

WTO in turmoil

The WTO is facing its biggest crisis since its founding in 1995. Its dispute settlement system is still effectively paralysed because the Appellate Body appointments have been stalled for years. This weakens trust in the system, since rules matter only when they can be enforced. At the same time, WTO negotiations have struggled to keep pace with major shifts in global trade. Digital commerce is growing rapidly and now forms a large part of cross-border economic activity. Yet, WTO rules have not evolved at the same pace.

Decision-making has also become slow and difficult. With 166 members at very different levels of development, consensus is hard to reach and cumbersome. As a result, many negotiations produce limited outcomes and long-pending issues remain unresolved.

Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions and the growing use of tariffs as political tools have distorted markets. However, these problems should not be mistaken for irrelevance. Most global trade still operates under WTO rules. If enforceable multilateral rules weaken, global trade would become unpredictable and unstable. Smaller and poorer countries would suffer the most, because they rely on common rules to protect themselves from pressure by stronger economies.

The WTO's challenges are also part of a wider shift in the global order. The Munich Security



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The World Trade Organization's Ministerial Conference must ensure that trade is governed by rules rather than coercion

Report 2026 describes this as a move toward "wrecking-ball politics", where countries prefer disruption and short-term deals instead of gradual institutional reform. In trade, this is visible in the rise of unilateral tariffs, economic coercion and bilateral deals that bypass multilateral commitments. If this continues, rule-based trade could be replaced by ad hoc arrangements shaped mainly by power rather than shared principles.

Global production has changed

Against this backdrop, the MC14 offers a chance not just to fix technical problems but to also restore balance between predictability and fairness. The original balance of rights and obligations in the WTO no longer reflects today's reality. Emerging economies now export advanced and technology-intensive products, climate-related trade measures are expanding, and digital networks are reshaping how global production works.

Rules designed for a late 20th century trading system cannot fully govern a 21st century one.

Reform must start with restoring credibility to enforcement. Without a functioning dispute settlement system, commitments lose their value. Members need to rebuild a binding, trusted mechanism rather than relying mainly on temporary alternatives that lack universal acceptance. A robust dispute-resolution system helps remove politics from conflicts and keeps confidence in multilateral rules.

At the same time, predictability must go hand in hand with fairness. Long-standing disputes over agricultural subsidies, market distortions and unequal openness need transparent solutions. Many developing countries argue that while WTO rules ensure the rule of law, they do not always deliver the rule of justice. In other words, rules may be legally correct but still produce outcomes that feel unequal or developmentally unfair.

Reform should, therefore, improve transparency on subsidies, create credible

responses to distortive practices, and revisit special and differential treatment so that it remains meaningful in today's economic conditions.

Institutional adaptability is also important. The WTO's structures were designed for a smaller and less complex membership, which contributes to today's deadlock. Some countries are moving ahead in smaller groups on issues such as e-commerce, investment facilitation, and services. These efforts can help progress, but they must remain transparent, inclusive and connected to the wider WTO framework. Flexibility should help the system move forward, not divide it. If such initiatives remain open to all members and eventually become part of common WTO rules, they can support reform instead of fragmentation.

Ultimately, WTO reform is not only technical but also normative. The Munich Security Report warns that a world shaped mainly by transactional deals would favour the powerful and leave weaker countries vulnerable.

The choice is clear

The WTO's value lies in preventing exactly this outcome by ensuring that trade is governed by rules rather than coercion. In an era of strategic competition, rules do not weaken sovereignty; they protect countries from economic domination.

The choice before the MC14 is crystal clear. Members can undertake serious reform, preserving the WTO's stabilising core while updating its rules, procedures and developmental balance, or allow the system to drift further into fragmentation. Achieving reform will require political will and shared responsibility.

Rebalancing the WTO is ultimately about securing a workable framework for cooperation in a world where economic interdependence is still unavoidable. If the MC14 seizes this opportunity, it can show that meaningful reform remains the most credible path to sustaining global trade governance.



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GS Paper III – Environment

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GS Paper III - Environment

Producers make a pitch for increasing use of ethanol

The Hindu Bureau

COIMBATORE

The Indian Sugar & Bio-energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) has written to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), urging the Government for a fast-tracked and calibrated roadmap for ethanol blending beyond E20.

'Initiate a pilot'

The Grain Ethanol Manufacturers Association recently appealed to the Centre to initiate a study or pilot programme to examine technical feasibility, safety standards and economic viability of ethanol-based cooking solutions.

With the Iran war resulting in higher oil prices and



An ethanol based cook stove.

LPG shortage, they want the government to promote the use of ethanol.

India now imports almost 85% of crude oil. The West Asia tensions and disruptions in global shipping routes showed vulnerabilities in global energy supply chains, ISMA said.

India now has an in-

stalled distillation capacity of almost 2,000 crore litre (including both sugar- and grain-based ethanol), with sugar sector contributing about 900 crore litre. The ethanol need for achieving E20 blending is estimated at about 1,100 crore litre a year indicating only about 55% of the installed capacity will be used.

"India possesses adequate local ethanol production capacity to move beyond E20, making this an opportune moment for a calibrated and forward-looking roadmap," said Deepak Ballani, DG, ISMA,

"Advancing higher ethanol blends, phased roll-out of flex-fuel vehicles will boost value retention within domestic economy."