GS Paper II – Polity **Date:** 25.04.26

India among countries where Meta 'automatically' blocks flagged content

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

India is now among a set of "limited countries" where Facebook and Instagram "automatically restrict content, at scale and based on local law requirements," a company source told *The Hindu*.

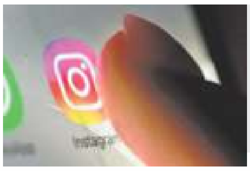
Meta, the parent firm of both social media platforms, has complied with censorship orders on a large scale in recent weeks, as the firm has been hit with a barrage of takedown notices from State police authorities as well as the Union government. Precise numbers of local law-related takedowns on the platforms will only be published by the firm in the second half of 2026.

The Sahyog portal, which provides a web link for authorised police officials to send takedown notices to social media platforms, operates under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, under which social media platforms could lose "safe harbour" for content posted by users, and end up in court alongside the people whose content has been targeted by authorities.

Meta did not provide written responses to questions from *The Hindu*. The firm's receptivity to non-binding takedown notices appears to have increased since the IT Ministry in February reduced timelines from 36 hours to three hours.

Limited access

Meta has complied with censorship orders after a barrage of takedown notices from the Centre and State police



- India is now among a set of "limited countries" where Facebook and Instagram 'automatically restrict content, at scale, based on local law requirements'
- The Sahyog portal works as a centralised platform for issuing takedown orders to internet intermediaries, including social media platforms
- The portal operates under section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, which has provisions to take away 'safe harbour' for platforms for non-compliance with notices

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GS Paper II – Governance

Days after students protest, J&K Police arrests six under PSA

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

A protest over an alleged inappropriate behaviour by a teacher has sparked a major police crackdown in north Kashmir's Sopore. Six youth were taken into prevention detention under the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA), which allows detention without trial for up to two years, on Friday and were shifted to a jail that is 275 km away from their hometown.

The arrested youth were identified as Umar Akbar Hajam, Salman Ahmed Shala, Altaf Ahmed Sheikh, Mubashir Ahmed Gilkar, Muzammil Mushtaq Changa, and Majid Firdous Dar, who are residents of different parts of Sopore.

On April 13, scores of girl students marched outside the campus of the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Sopore, and launched a forceful protest against a teacher whom they accused of "inappropriate behaviour".

Lecturer suspended

In the face of protests, the Directorate of School Education Kashmir suspended the teacher and ordered an inquiry with a 15-day deadline.

The incident also forced the authorities to close three colleges in Sopore for three days. The police also registered a FIR over the incident.

In the wake of the protest, the police launched night-long raids to trace "miscreants who had infiltrated a peaceful protest by students and created law and order disturbances, including acts of vandalism resulting in damage to public property".

The police said more than 13 "miscreants" had been identified.

GS Paper II – Governance

The crisis of urban electoral disenfranchisement

Tikender Singh Panwar

Author, urban practitioner, former Deputy Mayor, Shimla, and Member, Kerala Urban Commission

Electoral system 'reforms' risk undermining universal adult franchise in India's cities

The framer of the Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, while presenting the Constitution, stated: "From one person, one vote, it should lead to one person, one economic unit." However, this spirit has not materialised and the divide amongst people has widened.

In the growing marginalisation of large sections of the population, including the poor, migrants, and ethnic, social, and religious minorities, the first stepping stone in this set of structural tools is the right to adult franchise.

Universal adult urban franchise

It may sound uncomfortable, but the fact of the matter is that over the last few decades, the urban population has been subject to systematic disenfranchisement.

The debate over the recent Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in contemporary times serves to reinforce and further substantiate the marginalisation and continuing disenfranchisement of urban voters.

Former Chief Election Commissioner of India, T.N. Seshan held that "an address did not mean a luxury home, but merely a place where the person resided, even if that was under a tree or on the pavement, ensuring they had the right to vote". The journey of the right to adult franchise has unfortunately reached a point where people are being omitted from the voter list through various exclusionary processes and bureaucratic hurdles.

In urban India, the population under 18 years of age is approximately in the mean of 28%. If this percentage is added to the figures in the table, it shows that a huge number of people are excluded from the list of eligible voters. Most of those living in slums and informal settlements are also among the disenfranchised. It is no great surprise that, according to the World Bank, around 40% of India's urban population currently lives in slums.

Another major challenge to the right to adult franchise is the compromised secrecy of the electoral process. In the current electronic voting machine system, the booth-wise revelation of votes poses a serious challenge to the confidential nature of the franchise. In small towns, a booth comprises only a few hundred votes, and the voting patterns of different demographic groups can be easily inferred by the system and political parties.

The exclusion of the urban poor

Why will SIR hit the urban poor the most? Dalits, marginalised sections, and ethnic and religious minorities, apart from the economically poor and unorganised sector workers, were among the groups with the highest rates of deletion in urban India – a process that is still ongoing. This represents a dual burden for these sections: on one hand, they are unable to get themselves registered as voters, and on the other, those who were already registered are now facing a high incidence of deletions.

Let us take the example of a few cities where the largest deletions have taken place. Patna in Bihar recorded very high deletions, with 16.5 lakh names removed from the draft rolls. Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh saw deletions of around 36.67%, driven by the high mobility of its urban and unorganised workforce. Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh witnessed 30.88% voter deletions after the SIR. Purnia in Bihar saw 2.73 lakh voters deleted from the rolls. Kanpur, the well-known industrial town in Uttar Pradesh, witnessed 25.62% of names marked for removal, mainly among unorganised sector workers. In Kolkata, in one particular locality, Gulshan Colony, 90% of voters were found missing. In Mumbai, under the 2025 SIR, it is estimated that 14 lakh names were deleted, and around 50% of residents living in informal housing were registered.

It is very evident that the SIR process of enumeration is highly exclusive and bureaucratic controlled. Instead of promoting maximum outreach, this process appears to dissuade the urban poor from even registering as voters. In a country such as India, where migration is one of the defining features of urbanisation, producing evidence of voter registration from 2002/2005 poses a significant challenge.

Selective filtration

The struggle for the urban right to adult franchise is a long one; however, with SIR, it has taken two steps back. SIR is not just an administrative exercise but a systematic attack on the democratic base. Its reliance on rigid documentation, and proof of stable residence, which is a matter of considerable concern in urban India, leads to the large-scale deletion of working-class populations. There is a selective filtration of the electorate, where those who do not suit the ruling dispensation or are perceived as a potential threat to capital investment are excluded.

Demography and urban voter mismatch

S. NO.	NAME OF CITY	POPULATION (IN LAKH)		ELECTORS IN 2026
		2011	2026	
1	Shimla	1.69	2.52	55,385 (21% voters)
2	Chandigarh	10.54	12.93	6,33,475 (48.9% voters)
3	Delhi (NCT)	110.07	226.74	145 lakh (63% voters)
4	Chennai	46.46	69.99	28.30 lakh (40% voters)
5	Bengaluru	84.4	128	85 lakh (66.4% voters)
6	Kolkata	44.97	67.7	36.5 lakh (53.9% voters)
7	Guwahati	9.62	14	9.2 lakh (65% voters)
8	Bhopal	17.9	27	5.39 lakh (20% voters)
9	Patna	16.8	30	12.7 lakh (42% voters)
10	Lucknow	28.15	42	28 lakh (66% voters)

GS Paper II – Polity

Opposition parties move fresh motion in Rajya Sabha seeking removal of CEC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties moved a fresh notice in the Rajya Sabha on Friday seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, accusing him of acting in a partisan manner.

The 13-page notice, which was submitted by senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and Trinamool Congress member Sagarika Ghose to the Rajya Sabha Secretary-General, was signed by 73 Opposition members of the Upper House.

Citing examples from West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Uttar Pradesh, the MPs levelled nine charges against him. Accusing the CEC of "asymmetrical enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct", they said the poll body ignored the violation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who used the public broadcaster to denounce the Opposition through his address to the nation.

Gyanesh Kumar

They also flagged an EC post on X against the Trinamool Congress ahead of the election in West Bengal; the spat between Mr. Kumar and a Trinamool Congress delegation during a recent meeting at EC headquarters in Delhi; "mass disenfranchisement" in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, ignoring complaints filed by the Opposition parties; and the "illegal abuse" of power by transferring and posting of bureaucrats in Tamil Nadu. They also criticised the EC's "institutional proximity" to the BJP, pointing to an incident in Kerala where an official election document reportedly carried the seal of a BJP State unit.

The notice, addressed to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, was moved under Article 324(5) of the Constitution, read with Article 124(4), Section 11(2) of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, and the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.

If the Rajya Sabha Chairman accepts the notice, he will order a probe. The MPs demanded that Mr. Kumar, pending the inquiry, recuse himself from poll-related functions in States where elections are under way. According to the signatories, Friday's motion pertains exclusively to Mr. Kumar's actions after March 15 and is distinct from an earlier notice submitted on March 12, which was rejected by the chair of both Houses.

GS Paper II – Polity

Industry body flags concern over proposed pesticides Bill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

An industry body of pesticide manufacturers has urged the Union Agriculture Secretary to bring in targeted changes in the draft Pesticides Management Bill to ensure farmers get faster access to effective crop protection technologies.

This comes even as Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said in Lucknow on Friday that the Union government will bring an amended Seeds and Pesticide Management Bill in the upcoming session of Parliament.

CropLife India, the industrial body of pesticide and crop protection chemicals manufacturers, also called for inclusion of time-bound Protection of Regulatory Data (PRD) framework for new molecules and new uses. In its recommendations to the Ministry on the proposed law, the body said the current draft does not address the policy gap contributing to this innovation lag.

Farmers need faster access to crop protection technologies, the industry body said.

"When farmers remain dependent on older chemistries for too long, resistance builds faster, spray intensity rises, and it becomes harder to meet tightening residue expectations in domestic and export markets," CropLife India said in a statement, adding that newer crop protection technologies are more targeted, lower-dose and better aligned to evolving pest pressures, yet their introduction in India is often delayed.

It said bringing a new molecule or new use to India requires major investment in safety, efficacy, residue and environmental data. "Without a clear framework governing how that data is used, there is limited incentive to introduce newer technologies early in the Indian market. The association has therefore proposed a limited, time-bound PRD framework of about five years from first registration, which would create a more predictable pathway for newer solutions to reach farmers faster, while allowing competition through independent data generation," the statement added.

GS Paper III – Environment

Incremental change

Emissions can be significantly curbed only through electrification

In mid-April, news broke that India's automakers had unanimously agreed to a new fuel efficiency and emissions reduction target proposed by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), the sector's standards-setting body. This follows a controversy late last year, driven largely by differences between Maruti Suzuki – which commands an overwhelming share of the small-car segment – and other manufacturers. The earlier proposal had effectively created a carve-out for small cars, a segment that accounts for about 14%-15% of passenger vehicle sales, delaying the shift to cleaner fuels and technologies. Larger carmakers, meanwhile, were required to meet more stringent targets, putting them at a relative disadvantage in terms of pricing and investment. While this triggered a relook at the proposed emissions norms, what has emerged is only marginally better. In fact, some provisions appear counterproductive to reducing emissions and decarbonising the transport sector – India's third-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. At first glance, the headline reduction in Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) targets – from about 113 grams of CO_2 per kilometre under CAFE-II to 77 g/km by 2031-32 under CAFE-III – appears ambitious. The new cycle is proposed to run from April 2027 to March 2032. However, the framework's flexible design may weaken compliance and slow the urgent transition to cleaner technologies, especially electrification.

To be sure, the explicit carve-out for small cars has been removed, but it has been replaced by several alternative compliance pathways. These include credits for higher ethanol blending (from E20 to E85-compatible vehicles) and for incremental efficiency technologies such as start-stop systems, regenerative braking, and tyre pressure monitoring systems. While useful, these are marginal improvements that allow manufacturers to meet targets without a structural shift to electric mobility. The BEE has also proposed super-credits, where certain technologies count multiple times towards compliance – for instance, a battery electric vehicle could count as three vehicles. Combined with credit banking and trading, this creates a system in which manufacturers with an early technological lead can accumulate surplus credits and sell them to laggards. Further, compliance is to be assessed over three-year blocks rather than annually, allowing manufacturers to average performance over time. This reduces immediate pressure and weakens the signalling effect that regulations are meant to provide. At a time of fossil fuel volatility, this policy appears too weak to drive meaningful change in a sector that is central to climate mitigation, India's energy security, and macroeconomic stability. Without sharper incentives, CAFE-III risks becoming a framework that manages emissions on paper rather than transforming them in practice.

GS Paper III – Economy

RBI cancels banking licence of Paytm Payments Bank

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday cancelled the banking licence issued to Paytm Payments Bank Limited under Section 22 (4) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 ('BR Act') effective from close of business on April 24, 2026.

"Consequently, Paytm Payments Bank Limited is prohibited from conducting the business of 'banking' as defined in Section 5(b) or any additional business specified under Section 6 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 with immediate effect," the RBI said in a circular.

The regulator said it would make an application for winding up of the bank, before the High Court.

Paytm Payments Bank had enough liquidity to repay its entire deposit liability upon winding up, the RBI said.

The action was taken because the bank failed to comply with the conditions stipulated in the Payments Bank licence issued to it, thereby violating the provisions of Section 22 (3) (g) of the BR Act.

Earlier, the bank was directed to stop onboarding of new customers with effect from March 11, 2022.

Thereafter, on January 31, 2024 and February 16, 2024, certain business restrictions were also imposed on the bank, disallowing any further deposits or top-ups in existing customer accounts, prepaid instruments, and wallets.

Meanwhile, Paytm (One 97 Communications Ltd.), which had floated Paytm Payments Bank, has distanced itself from the payments bank, calling it a "separate entity."

RBI said it would make an application before the HC for winding up of the bank.

"As previously disclosed on March 1, 2024, the company [Paytm] does not have any exposure to PPBL or any material business arrangements with PPBL. No services provided by the company are in partnership with PPBL," it said in a filing with exchanges.

"As informed earlier, the services, which have been operating without interruption, will continue to operate uninterrupted. These include the Paytm app, Paytm UPI, Paytm Gold and all other services offered by its subsidiaries and associated companies such as Paytm QR, Paytm Soundbox, Paytm card machines, and Paytm Payment Gateway, Paytm Money among others," Paytm said.

"We [Paytm] would point out to all stakeholders that this matter is related to PPBL, a separate entity, and any reference to this matter should be made solely in the context of PPBL, and not attributed to the company," it added further.