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GS Paper II – International Relations

Date: 29.04.26

UAE announces exit from OPEC group

Associated Press

DUBAI

The UAE announced on Tuesday that it will leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) effective May 1, stripping the oil cartel of

one of its largest producers and further weakening its leverage over global oil supplies and prices.

Making the announcement via its state-run WAM news agency, the UAE said it would also be leaving the wider OPEC+

group, which Russia had led in order to try to stabilise oil prices.

“This decision reflects the UAE’s long-term strategic and economic vision and evolving energy profile, including accelerated investment in domestic

energy production, and reinforces its commitment to a responsible, reliable, and forward-looking role in global energy markets,” the UAE said.

**CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10**



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GS Paper II – Polity

Assembly passes resolution on reservation for women

Women are ready to fight their battles now, quota Bill will be implemented, asserts CM; convening the special House session on the eve of voting for second phase of Bengal election a gimmick: AAP

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Assembly on Tuesday passed a resolution condemning the Opposition's attempts to overturn the measures undertaken by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Central government for the empowerment of women through reservation.

On April 17, a united Opposition defeated the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which sought to redistribute Lok Sabha seats on the basis of the 2011 Census to expedite the implementation of 33% reservation for women in Parliament and Assemblies through the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023.

Earlier on Tuesday, BJP MLAs led by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta held a protest at the Assembly against the "anti-women" stance of the Opposition parties.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said the one-day special Assembly session, called on the eve of voting for the second phase of the West Bengal Assembly poll, was a "gimmick".

AAP MLA Kuldeep Kumar said the Opposition had supported the wo-



BJP MLAs, led by CM Rekha Gupta, protesting on the Assembly premises against the Opposition parties' 'anti-women' stance. ANI

men's quota Bill in 2023 and accused the BJP of engaging in "gimmicks" during Assembly elections.

Walkout by Oppn. MLAs

The Opposition legislators later walked out during the discussion alleging that they were not allowed to speak freely in the House. However, Speaker Vijender Gupta claimed that every Opposition member was allotted time. He accused AAP MLAs of "creating drama" by staging the walkout to avoid listening to the ruling party members.

The resolution condemning the Opposition was moved by Ms. Gupta, the only woman CM from the BJP. During the debate,

she said the Centre had proposed to increase the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha as a "win-win situation" to implement reservation for women without affecting the seats held by male representatives.

"No male representative would ever relinquish his seat for a woman. That is precisely why this formula was introduced," she said, adding that the Lok Sabha discussions on April 16 and 17 over the Bill were "disappointing" and that the proceedings would be remembered as a "sad chapter" in the history of Indian democracy.

The CM said that over the past nearly three decades, the Bill to provide re-

servation for women was tabled in the Lok Sabha seven times, but several parties, including the Congress, Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, obstructed it because the ruling dynasties feared losing power to women.

The women's quota Bill was passed by Parliament in September 2023.

The 'reserved' chair

Taking a swipe at AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, Ms. Gupta said he did not allow Atishi to sit in the CM's chair when she took over from him, referring to Ms. Atishi's practice – during her tenure as the CM – of sitting in a smaller chair next to a larger empty red chair "reserved" for her predecessor. Ms. Gupta added that the AAP chief's decision not to appear before Delhi High Court judge Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma in the excise policy case exposed his "anti-women" face. "Women are ready to fight their own battles, and they are united. And this war is going to be ferocious. The demand to implement the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam is being made, and it will be implemented," said the CM.



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GS Paper II – Polity

M.P. govt. sets 60-day deadline for UCC draft Bill, forms committee

Panel headed by ret'd. SC judge to examine legal, social and administrative aspects of personal laws; State govt. plans to bring in law before Deepavali

Mehul Malpani

BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government has constituted a high-level committee, headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana Prasad, to examine the legal, social and administrative frameworks of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the State and prepare a draft Bill.

According to an order issued late on Monday night, the six-member panel will also comprise retired IAS officer Shatrughan Singh, legal expert Anoop Nair, academician Gopal Sharma, social worker Budhpal Singh, and Additional Secretary in the General Administration Department Ajay Katsariya. The committee has been asked to submit the draft Bill, along with a detailed report of its findings, to the State government within 60 days.

"In Madhya Pradesh,



M.P. CM Mohan Yadav chairing a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday. ANI

marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, and other related matters are governed by separate provisions under various personal and family laws. In the current context, there is a need to comprehensively examine these laws and develop a uniform, balanced, and practical legal framework, ensuring equality, justice, and legal clarity for citizens," stated the order issued by the Law and Legal Affairs Department.

It added that to achieve this objective, a high-level committee is "required to be formed to study the legal, social, and administra-

tive aspects of the subject and submit appropriate recommendations".

The panel will evaluate models adopted by other Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled States, especially Uttarakhand and Gujarat. While Uttarakhand became the first State to implement the UCC in 2024, Gujarat passed the Bill in March this year. Chhattisgarh has also formed a similar panel to prepare a draft UCC Bill for the State.

CM's appeal

Earlier this month, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav told Ministers during a Cabinet meeting that the State government is working towards implementing the UCC and asked them to be well-versed in the subject.

According to government sources, Mr. Yadav is overseeing progress on the matter and the government hopes to introduce the Bill in the Assembly to implement the UCC before Deepavali this year.



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GS Paper II – Governance

A recusal test the Delhi High Court failed

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma of the Delhi High Court refused to recuse herself from hearing the Delhi liquor policy case – *Central Bureau Of Investigation vs Kuldeep Singh and Ors.* (April 20, 2026) – involving the former Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, and others. This episode marks an unfortunate deviation from India's jurisprudence on judicial recusal.

Mr. Kejriwal argued the recusal plea by appearing as party in person in the High Court. He submitted that the judge should not hear the Central Bureau of Investigation's plea against the discharge of the accused, including himself, in the excise policy case, as ordered by the trial court. The prominent grounds cited in his plea included adverse findings by the judge in earlier proceedings in the same case; the judge's alleged ideological proclivity, as reflected in her attendance at events organised by the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad, or ABAP (a lawyers' organisation inclined towards the political philosophy of the ruling regime at the Centre); the fact that the judge's children were working as panel advocates under the Centre/government, with case files to be allotted by the Solicitor General, who, incidentally, was representing the opposing side in the case; and a statement by Home Minister Amit Shah implying that Mr. Kejriwal would lose the case in the High Court. Because of these factors, he contended that he reasonably apprehended bias in the process of adjudication.

Law on recusal

The law on recusal of a judge is not codified in India. It is more an ethical issue than a technical one. Yet, the jurisprudence on recusal is rich as it takes in precedents and best practices across the globe. The 19th century idea about judges with its Victorian overtones is reflected in the British case of *Leeson vs General Council of Medical Education and Registration* (1889) where Lord Bowen said that like Caesar's wife, judges should be above suspicion. The proverbial idea that justice should not only be done but also be seen to have been done was articulated by Lord Hewart in *R vs Sussex Justices* (1923).

What transpired in the Delhi High Court exposes the risk of judges not strictly adhering to the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, the draft of which was finalised at the Round Table Meeting of judges from many countries at The Hague in 2002. They enumerate independence, impartiality, integrity, propriety, equality, competence and diligence as accepted 'judicial values'. Among other things, they say that "a



Kaleswaram Raj

Lawyer at the Supreme Court of India

Judicial recusal principles have been tested in the Delhi liquor policy case

judge shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety in all of the judge's activities".

In *Ranjit Thakur vs Union Of India And Ors.* (1987), the Supreme Court of India explained that the 'proper approach' for a judge when faced with a request for recusal "is not to look at his own mind and ask himself, however, honestly, 'Am I biased?', but to look at the mind of the party before him". In *P.K. Ghosh, I.A.S. and Ant. vs J.G. Rajput* (1995) the Court said that when the litigant feels on reasonable basis that a particular judge should not hear his case, and when there are alternatives, recusal by the judge is the appropriate course, for maintaining public confidence in the system. In *State Of Punjab vs Davinder Pal Singh Bhullar and Ors. Etc.* (2011), the Court said that "a mere ground of appearance of bias and not actual bias is enough to vitiate the judgment/order".

In *Supreme Court Advocates-On-Record Association vs Union Of India* (2015), the Court reiterated some of the judicial values. The judgment said, "The simple question is, whether the adjudication by the Judge concerned, would cause a reasonable doubt in the mind of a reasonably informed litigant and fair-minded public as to his impartiality." Unlike administrative decision making, where the adjudicative authority is often stipulated in the statute or the rule, there is no doctrine of necessity in judicial proceedings when there are alternatives.

The judgment of the top court in *State of W.B. vs Shivananda Pathak* (1998) was an admonition against judicial obstinacy. Thus, with the possible exceptions such as Justice Arun Mishra's refusal to recuse in *Indore Development Authority vs Manoharlal And Ors.* (2019), the Supreme Court has, by and large, rejected the "duty to sit doctrine" evolved in the United States.

The challenge before the judge

Legal scholar James Sample opined that "the teachable moments on disqualification are in the Court's Court". This, again, is a call not only for ensuring fairness but also for maintaining the appearance of fairness. The real challenge before the judge is to overcome the possibility for subjectivity in adjudicative process especially when the very same judge whose recusal is sought is deciding the question of recusal.

Distinguished American jurist Benjamin N. Cardozo famously wrote, "We may try to see things as objectively as we please. None the less, we can never see them with any eyes except our own." The maxim that no one should sit in judgment in her own cause is too well settled.

Viewed in the light of these principles, Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma should have recused herself or at least insisted that the recusal plea should be placed before another judge for hearing. Such a course would have facilitated a more objective evaluation of the contentions raised by Mr. Kejriwal apart from averting the present scenario. But neither of these happened and the present judgment followed.

Fairness of process

The judgment issued on April 20, 2026 does not reflect the correct judicial approach. The judge said that she had to decide between a litigant and herself. It was further stated in the judgment that the suspicion of bias expressed in the recusal plea was unfounded and that the allegations were manufactured. The judge asked, "... if the children of politicians can enter politics, how would it be just to question the children of a Judge who study like others, struggle like others, and prove themselves in Court like others to earn their livelihood?" One would wonder if this was the argument made by Mr. Kejriwal.

Mr. Kejriwal, in his rejoinder, had reportedly said that "conflict arises not from prior participation in the present proceedings, but from the admitted existence of a live, active and ongoing professional relationship with the prosecuting side". The judge also justified her attendance at an event organised by the ABAP, and stated that she had attended events conducted by academic bodies as well. The judgment mistakes criticism of the judge as one of judicial establishment. The verdict is also self defensive, argumentative and accusational rather than analytical. It is vulnerable to further legal challenge. After the judgment, Mr. Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia wrote letters to the judge stating that they would not participate in further proceedings before her in the present matter.

In a case with serious political ramifications, the grounds raised by Mr. Kejriwal and others were relevant and required a more objective assessment, rather than a subjective affirmation based on a notion of a "presumption of impartiality", as stated in the judgment. The verdict substitutes the well-settled legal position that a reasonable apprehension of bias is sufficient for a plea of recusal with a requirement to demonstrate actual bias. This is patently erroneous.

The judge rightly said that, in the recusal plea, she was effectively being tried by the litigant. But the outcome of this "trial", unless corrected, will remain an embarrassing precedent for a system already in crisis.



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GS Paper II – Polity

The RTE Act and the idea of social inclusion

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In its January 2026 judgment, the Supreme Court of India reaffirmed the purpose of Section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, the landmark provision that reserves 25% of seats in private schools for students from economically weaker sections and socially disadvantaged groups. In words that are deeply symbolic, the Court observed that this provision makes it possible for “the child of a multi-millionaire or even of a Judge of the Supreme Court of India to sit in the same classroom and at the same bench as the child of an autorickshaw driver or a street vendor”. The judgment reasserted that this provision is a deliberate constitutional strategy to operationalise equality of status by creating shared learning spaces for all children.

This sentiment of social integration often comes alive in thousands of stories across the country. Take Karthik, a footwear vendor, and his wife, Sunita, for example. They always dreamed of providing their children with quality education despite their modest income. This became possible when their younger son joined a reputed private school through this provision. The boy thrived in the new environment, excelling in academics and his favourite sport, kabaddi. Teachers nurtured his growth, while classmates became close friends. For Karthik and Sunita, the RTE Act did not just change their son’s future; it altered their family’s life trajectory, with the potential to lift them out of poverty. Stories such as Prem’s are often told as narratives of access – of doors opened and opportunities unlocked. But at stake is not simply where a child studies, but whether the circumstances of their birth continue to determine the boundaries of their social world.

A constitutional strategy

Despite its intent, Section 12(1)(c) is frequently mischaracterised as a tool to promote private



Ayushi Khare

Senior Lead,
Government
Relations,
Indus Action



Karthika Annamalai

Consultant,
Right to Education
(RTE), Indus Action

The Supreme Court of India’s judgment strengthens the vision of a socially integrated education system

schooling or to allow the state to outsource its constitutional duty to public education, citing falling government school enrolment alongside rising private school admissions.

This reading is misplaced. First, Section 12(1)(c) does not dilute the state’s duty to invest in public schools, but recognises that the right to free and compulsory elementary education, and the creation of shared learning spaces, must be realised within a schooling ecosystem where private schools are not incidental actors but natural participants in fulfilling a constitutional mandate. The RTE Act does not create a zero-sum contest between public and private institutions; it seeks to foster integrated educational spaces.

Second, the shift towards private schooling predates the RTE Act. The Annual Status of Education (ASER) Report of 2006 documents significant movement into private schools “at the expense of government school enrolment”. Declining admissions in government schools are rooted in deeper concerns around infrastructure, teacher presence, and perceived quality – not in Section 12(1)(c) itself.

Evidence from the ground

Since its rollout, over five million children have walked through the doors of educational spaces previously out of reach, with retention rates averaging over 90%. In cities such as Delhi and Ahmedabad, blended classrooms are no longer exceptions; they are the norm. Research (such as that by Rao, Gautam, 2019) indicates that mixed classrooms lead to increased generosity, reduced discrimination, and stronger pro-social behaviour, without any adverse impact on academic outcomes or classroom discipline. At scale, implementation has also stabilised: reimbursements under Section 12(1)(c) are centrally streamlined, and State-level online Management Information Systems (MIS) ensure

transparent, low-discretion processing.

For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, these classrooms offer more than just academics. They provide access to social capital, previously unexplored aspirations, peer networks, and institutional cultures. These experiences translate into higher self-belief, enhanced ambition, and a broader worldview.

Acknowledging challenges

There is no denying the challenges that persist in the implementation of Section 12(1)(c). Some private schools continue to resist full inclusion, while families often bear hidden costs for uniforms, books and materials. Implementation remains uneven across States, with persistent gaps in transparency, grievance redress, and last-mile outreach and disbursements.

These challenges do not change the fact that Section 12(1)(c) was not meant to rely solely on moral persuasion – it requires clear, enforceable rules to succeed. Encouragingly, recent experience demonstrates that these gaps are neither inevitable nor insurmountable. State-driven digital admission systems and improved monitoring mechanisms – particularly in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Delhi – have significantly strengthened access and accountability.

The Court’s reaffirmation of Section 12(1)(c) makes clear that it is neither a retreat from public education nor an endorsement of private schooling. The challenge now is administrative. States must ensure timely reimbursements, remove hidden costs by private schools, strengthen grievance redress, and enforce inclusion norms so that equality is experienced. The real test is whether we can operationalise the constitutional promise of social integration with the seriousness needed to match the ambition we hold for our children.



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GS Paper II – Social issue

The fight to eliminate cervical cancer

In 2008, Professor Harald zur Hausen received the Nobel Prize for his discovery that persistent infection with high-risk strains of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the cause of cervical cancer, an important cause of morbidity and mortality globally, but more so in low and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs). His discovery paved the way for the development of prophylactic vaccines as well as tests to detect the infectious agent. A decade later, in 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced an initiative for the elimination of cervical cancer, and the global strategy was formally launched on November 17, 2020, endorsed by 194 countries, India among them.

Disease and prevention

Cervical cancer is a source of extreme physical misery, emotional strife and financial hardship. It is the second most common cancer among women in India, with approximately one lakh new cases every year, and half as many deaths, which is one quarter of the global burden. The years of life lost to cervical cancer are more than that of other cancers as these women are relatively younger, with active family and social responsibilities. Women diagnosed with stage 4 cervical cancer could develop urinary fistulas, postmenopausal bleeding, extreme sciatic and lumbar pain, obstruction to their ureters and renal failure. If one is lucky enough to get diagnosed at an earlier stage, the cancer is curable, but only with radical surgery or chemo and radiation therapy. There is also a risk of recurrence which will require even more difficult exenteration procedures, stomas etc. That is, while the cancer is curable by providing symptom relief, hormone replacement and other supportive care, it comes at a physical and financial cost.

However, such suffering was preventable. Since the 1940s, secondary prevention by regular



Neerja Bhatla

Professor Emeritus,
National Cancer
Institute Jhajjar,
Former Head of
Department of
Obstetrics &
Gynaecology, All India
Institute of Medical
Sciences, Delhi

Cumulative data from systematic trials and post-marketing surveillance show no increase in adverse events among vaccinated women than in the general population

pap smear screening had been set up in the West, enabling detection of not just cancer but also precancerous stages. The natural history of cervical cancer has been well documented for over a century. It has a long precancerous phase of 10-15 years termed Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia (CIN) which can be detected by the microscopic examination of cells collected on a slide by brushing the cervix. At this stage, the cancer can be easily treated by simple day care procedures that do not require the removal of the uterus.

However, in India and other LMICs, we lacked the infrastructure and manpower to implement a screening of all women over the age of 30 years even once, let alone the recommended three-year interval period. Even in good tertiary centres, the laboratory placed a limit on the number of women that could be screened in a day. Outreach camps were conducted at regular intervals by gynaecologists and pathologists around the country, but these were merely a drop in the ocean. Even today, despite a national programme for screening with visual inspection, the screening coverage does not exceed 5%. Moreover, bringing women who test positive into the hospital for a confirmatory biopsy and treatment has extremely poor compliance rates.

The promise of a vaccine

HPV vaccination entered this scenario in 2006 like a superhero for the primary prevention of cervical cancer. Starting off as a three-dose vaccination, research showed that it could be reduced to two, and then it was found that just one dose was sufficient to provide protection against 85-90% of cancers. Over 500 million doses have been delivered worldwide, and nearly four million in India.

Cumulative data from systematic trials and post-marketing surveillance show no increase in adverse events

among vaccinated women than in the general population. Transient mild reactions have been observed that are common to all vaccines. There have been no negative effects on reproductive performance, fertility rates, congenital malformations or menstrual patterns. The efficacy of the HPV vaccine is remarkable, with nearly complete protection against the strains which are present in the vaccine. The first generation of vaccines were directed against the two most virulent strains, HPV 16 and 18, that account for 70% of cervical cancers globally but 85% in India. Countries like Australia and the U.K. which introduced the HPV vaccine soon after its launch in 2007-8 have already witnessed significant reductions in pre-cancer and cancer. Similar reports have come from other countries like Sweden, Denmark, Canada and the U.S.

Widespread accessibility

The WHO's cervical cancer elimination initiative envisions making cervical cancer a rare cancer, with an incidence rate of four per 1,00,000. To reach this goal, we must achieve certain targets by 2030: HPV vaccination of 90% of girls before the age of 15 years, screening of 70% of women with an HPV test at 35 and 45 years, and treatment of 90% of those detected with lesions. While the country has already crossed the halfway point since the launch of the global declaration, we are still far away from reaching these targets. However, the launch of the National HPV Vaccination Campaign on February 28, 2026 by the Prime Minister himself signals the highest political commitment to women's health and reproductive rights. All parents need to be aware of this opportunity so that their 14-year-old daughters can avail free vaccination at the nearest government health facilities. One small jab will take us towards a cervical cancer-free future and a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

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GS Paper II – Social Issue

On TCS harassment and conversion case

Concerns have been raised about the Tata Consultancy Services sexual exploitation and alleged forcible conversions case that involves nine FIRs, related to complaints of alleged sexual exploitation, rape and forcible conversion at the company's office in Nashik, Maharashtra, between 2022 and 2026.

EXPLAINER

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:

Last month, Nashik Police claimed that they had busted a racket of alleged forced conversions and sexual exploitation at a multi-national company's office in the city. Nine FIRs were registered and eight persons were arrested. Police said they were looking for one more accused, who they claimed is on the run. A Nashik court has heard her anticipatory bail plea and will give an order on May 2. TCS has ordered an internal probe, suspending all the persons named in the FIRs, adding that no formal complaint has been registered with it yet.

Overview of the sexual harassment and forcible conversions case

The TCS case involves nine FIRs. They are related to complaints of alleged sexual exploitation, rape and forcible conversion at Tata Consultancy Services in Nashik, Maharashtra, between 2022 and 2026.

Timeline of the complaints

On March 26, 2026, the first FIR was registered at Deolali Camp Police station. It was filed by a 23-year-old woman employee of TCS, claiming that since 2022, an accused had tried to convince her into a relationship with him. She said that the accused had asked her to apply to TCS, where he was already working. She claimed that after she got selected, she was allegedly forced into physical relations by the accused, on the pretext of marriage. She further alleged that another co-accused, on learning of their relations, also sought physical favours from her.

She has claimed that three accused – Danish Sheikh, Tausif Akhtar and Nida Khan, used to allegedly speak ill about Hinduism, trying to dissuade her from following Hinduism. She claimed that she learnt in February 2026, that the main accused was already married with two



GETTY IMAGES

children. She further alleged that the three accused hurt her religious sentiments, that Danish Sheikh kept physical relations with her on the promise of marriage, and that Tausif Akhtar sexually harassed her multiple times.

Police have claimed that the three accused taught her Islamic practices, and convinced her to follow them. The original FIR accessed by *The Hindu* does not mention it, and supplementary statements, if any, could not be accessed.

After the first FIR was registered, till April 3, 2026, eight more FIRs were registered in quick succession, at Mumbai Naka Police station. While seven FIRs were registered by women, one was filed by a man who alleged that he was forced to convert, Nashik Police said. The complainant claimed that he was allegedly forced to eat beef, offer namaz and recite *kalma*. He has told the police that the efforts allegedly started in 2023-24. When the victim's father suffered from paralysis, the accused allegedly said he would only recover if the victim accepted Islam, he told the police.

The other cases pertain to rape, obscene comments, insult of modesty, and hurting religious sentiments by

making fun of Hindu gods and goddesses to impress on the victims that they should accept Islam. Police say that the cases pertain to incidents in the last four years, starting 2022. The police have claimed that the accused held senior or influential positions, and allegedly misused their position to take advantage of vulnerable men and women, influencing them or attempting to forcibly convert them.

Steps taken by the police

Nashik Police have formed a 12-member Special Investigation Team led by an Assistant Police Commissioner to investigate the matter. Several stringent sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, have been invoked for sexual intercourse through deceitful means, sexual harassment, stalking, insulting the modesty of a woman, abetment, criminal defamation, intentional or malicious acts to outrage religion, intentionally wounding religious sentiments, common intent, etc. The sections include Sections 69, 75, 78, 79, 49, 356, 302, 299, 3(5) of BNS. In the first FIR, Sections 3(1)(w)(i), 3(1)(w)(ii), 3(2)(v)

and 3(1)(s) of the SC, ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989, have been invoked.

According to the police, they were alerted by a local social-political activist after the parents of the first complainant allegedly expressed apprehensions about her changed behaviour pattern. The police thereafter conducted a covert operation in the concerned TCS office, where police teams went disguised as housekeeping staff to gather intelligence. The FIRs were registered after the police spoke with several complainants and asked them to register formal complaints. A woman officer played a key role in gathering information from women survivors of alleged sexual harassment, police said.

Concerns raised in the issue

Civil rights activists have raised concerns about the process, narrative, and impartiality of the probe. They have claimed that cases of sexual harassment are allegedly being portrayed as 'corporate jhaad' or 'love jhaad'. They have sought an impartial probe into the alleged sexual harassment faced by the women, and about the structural lapses in addressing them. They have also raised concerns about an alleged 'media trial', where a woman accused was allegedly termed an HR professional. TCS later clarified that she was neither an HR manager nor responsible for recruitment, but that she was employed as a process associate without any leadership responsibilities. Civil rights groups have raised concerns about the lack of evidence for any externally funded religious conversion network or organised conspiracy.

Arguments by the defence

The lawyers of the accused have primarily argued on two issues: There is no law against conversions in Maharashtra. They have questioned the legal basis for booking the accused for alleged forcible conversions. They also contend that acts of voluntary choice are being incriminated.

THE GIST

Nashik Police have formed a Special Investigation Team to probe the sexual harassment and forcible conversions case. Several sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, have been invoked.

Civil rights activists have questioned the process, narrative and impartiality of the probe, calling for an independent inquiry into the alleged harassment faced by the women, and the structural lapses in addressing it.



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GS Paper II – Polity

9,400 accounts banned for being linked to digital arrests

In documents before Supreme Court, WhatsApp says its probe began from the initial input from govt. sources to identify and run down the creators or administrators behind scam operations

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

Documents placed on record in the Supreme Court show WhatsApp asserting to the Home Ministry that it detected and banned up to 9,400 accounts linked to “digital arrests” and “law enforcement impersonations” after independent investigations.

The platform said it had focused on bringing down the entire network of scamsters, mostly active in Cambodia.

Not isolated

Warning signals sent from probe agencies and the Union government are not treated as isolated or one-off reports, but as a “seed” to map and disrupt the entire criminal network, the platform said.

The platform said its probe fanned out from the initial “seed” input from government sources to identify and run down the creators or administrators behind scam operations such as digital arrests or accounts actively promoting scam activity within groups and channels.

The communication between WhatsApp and the Home Ministry was annexed to a status report filed on behalf of the In-

Curbing virtual fraud

The government and industry stakeholders are taking coordinated measures to fight digital scams

- WhatsApp is working on SIM binding — linking the account with physical SIM card — to detect SIM swapping and cloning

- Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning systems being used to detect impersonation of law enforcement agencies, misuse of official logos and synthetic content



- Impersonation patterns are systematically tracked to send warnings to users

dian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) by the Ministry. Attorney-General R. Venkataramani appears for the Ministry in the Supreme Court.

The report said several steps were discussed in a meeting convened by the Inter-Departmental Committee under the chairmanship of the Special Secretary (Internal Security) in March. WhatsApp, along with major telecom service providers (TSPs) such as Airtel, Vodafone-Idea, Reliance Jio, and BSNL, were invited.

WhatsApp said its work on SIM binding — linking the account with the physical SIM card — was on and the platform would comply with the provisions of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Eth-

ics Code) Rules, 2021. These include the provisions related to identification and labelling of ‘Synthetically Generated Information’ (SGI) commonly used in video calls made for ‘digital arrests’.

The Ministry and other stakeholders also agreed on introducing mechanisms for identifying and blocking device IDs used in digital arrest scams. WhatsApp said it would continue to strengthen Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning-based systems to detect impersonation of law enforcement agencies, misuse of official logos and synthetic content.

Detection models

The report said the online platform has introduced detection models and warning mechanisms to

identify impersonation patterns and alert users. It had further agreed to retain data of deleted accounts for a minimum period of 180 days to assist law enforcement investigations.

Recently, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant had flagged digital arrest scams the “most disturbing” and lethal among cybercrimes, which not only result in merely financial loss to victims but also a “blistering sense of violation”. The CJI had said that such crimes must not be seen as mere economic offences, but an offence against human dignity.

The Home Ministry had clocked over 2.41 lakh complaints related to digital arrests scams alone, involving losses of approximately ₹30,000 crore.

The CJI’s Bench had taken *suo motu* cognisance of digital arrests scams in January this year, saying that victims were psychologically coerced by fraudsters dressed up convincingly as police officers and judicial officers to cough up huge sums of their savings to avert fictional arrests or punitive action. One of the cases before the Supreme Court was that of a 78-year-old woman lawyer, who was duped by fraudsters in a digital arrest scam.



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GS Paper II – Social Issue

Why science and scientists must learn to celebrate failures

Narratives that present scientific experiments as a smooth story of success are counter-effective; to ensure science remains dynamic, innovative, and honest, it is necessary to foster a culture of appreciating and learning from failure rather than hiding it

Biju Dharmapalan

Failure is part and parcel of research but many scientists consider discussing it in a scientific forum to be taboo. Laboratories are littered with unfinished experiments and inconclusive facts and theories that failed to stand the test of study. However, when science is being communicated – whether to funding bodies, professional journals, or audiences – it comes across as a smooth story of success. Just narratives are counter-effective.

To ensure science is dynamic, innovative, and honest, we have to foster a culture of appreciating and learning from failure rather than hiding it.

In its essence, science progresses by trial and error. A scientist postulates hypotheses while anticipating that many of them will be discarded. Every unsuccessful experiment sharpens the edges of knowledge and guides further investigation.

However, systems of science such as funding, publication, and career progression are skewed towards successes alone. Grants are generally awarded on the basis of promising results and a large volume of papers, and in favour of those with positive results. Unsuccessful or negative outcomes are often overlooked, leading to a biased ecosystem in which only success is allowed to be seen.

Not to be stigmatised

In the early 1980s, Australian scientists Barry Marshall and Robin Warren claimed that a bacterium called *Helicobacter pylori* caused peptic ulcers. Papers on the idea were however rejected by journals and dismissed by the gastroenterological establishment; the latter had long held that the stomach was too acidic for microbes. (Of course, there was also reasoned scepticism in pockets of the research community, which did not think that the duo had provided sufficient evidence for their hypothesis.)

They were unable to get their findings published and were also not taken seriously, but they had reasons to believe they were right. Then, in 1984, Mr. Marshall famously drank a broth containing *H. pylori* bacteria, expecting he would develop ulcers in around a year and thus prove to the research community that their idea had merit. Rather than a year, he developed symptoms of gastritis within a few days.

The duo won a Nobel Prize in 2005 for their work on identifying *H. pylori* as a cause of gastritis and peptic ulcers. It was a testament to how publication bias allowed a treatable condition to go untreated for years because the system had no process or culture to deal with what it perceived to be a failure.

To really embrace failure, science may need to draw inspiration from domains



Knowledge gambit: Science progresses by trial and error and every unsuccessful experiment guides further investigation. SAGUN BUGHORAW/UNSPASH

beyond academia. The technology sector, particularly in entrepreneurial ecosystems, has long embraced a “fail fast, fail often” philosophy. Here, failure is not to be stigmatised but treated as a stepping stone, an essential part of iterative learning.

Psychological aspect

While academic science cannot replicate this model entirely, given its different stakes and responsibilities, it can certainly adopt its underlying mindset: that failure is informative rather than shameful. Another valuable analogy is in sports. Athletes incorporate replays and coaching sessions to analyse their failures and convert them into learning opportunities. However, failures in science do not tend to include well-orchestrated reflection.

Some changes are commendable. New publication formats like ‘registered reports’ – where scientists commit to publishing the results of an experiment even before they begin it, whether they are positive or negative – are shifting the focus from results to research design and thus to methodological rigour. Nonetheless, these efforts are still spreading their wings. The major transformation the enterprise as a whole requires in mainstream practice is pending.

There is always the possibility that experiments do not pay off without a clear explanation, and researchers internalise failure as personal rather than as a natural occurrence in the process of intricate enquiry. This psychological

There is always the possibility that experiments do not pay off without a clear explanation, and researchers internalise failure as personal rather than as a natural occurrence

aspect is especially important to novice researchers.

In a highly competitive environment where not everyone feels safe at work, the fear of failure may lower the incentive to take risks. This makes researchers more inclined towards safer, incremental projects rather than risky, innovative ideas. Such a fear of risk can eventually impede the pace of scientific development.

Communicating science

A culture change is thus much needed. Younger scientists would like to see their senior counterparts and principal investigators set good examples by talking openly about their failures and uncertainties. Mentorship should also not be limited to success; it should also openly deal with setbacks. People can become more resilient and honest in their intellectual practices by acknowledging that doubt and failure are parts of science.

Funding bodies and institutions can also play a role. The criteria of evaluation need to shift from the success of specific research outcomes to the quality of the

research questions, research methods, and the lessons learnt. Grant proposals and academic CVs can include sections that document and articulate failures as part of the research experience. Establishing platforms to share negative findings and failed experiments could also contribute to a richer scientific ledger. Through open science projects and online archives, novel possibilities are available to share such knowledge, minimise repetition, and foster collaboration.

Notably, the public communication of science needs to change as well. The representation of science as a succession of discoveries creates unrealistic expectations and diminishes confidence in the face of failure. Scientists can raise a more informed and appreciative population by showing that science is a messy, iterative, and sometimes uncertain process. This is necessary, especially in the case of developing drugs or going to space, where errors are bound to happen, and it could be the most important lesson to go through.

Science in practice is a long journey characterised by perseverance, failure, and slow success. Science should not conceal these features but accept them. That is when every failure can serve as a stepping-stone to significant and hopefully sustainable breakthroughs.

(Biju Dharmapalan is Dean (Academic Affairs), Garden City University and an adjunct faculty member at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru. bijudharmapalan@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Science in practice is a long journey characterised by perseverance, failure, and slow success

In a highly competitive environment where not everyone feels safe at work, the fear of failure may lower the incentive to take risks which can eventually impede the pace of scientific development

A culture change is thus much needed where mentorship is not limited to success with criteria of evaluation focused on quality of the research