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GS Paper II – Social Issue

Date: 07.07.26

T.N. CM opposes amendment to National Food Security Act

Vijay urges PM to retain existing entitlement of 35 kg foodgrain per month for every household covered under Antyodaya Anna Yojana; says converting entitlement into per capita benefit, would effectively penalise States with smaller families

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Monday urged the Centre to retain the existing entitlement of 35 kg of foodgrains per month for every household covered under Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), irrespective of the number of family members, as has been the practice since the enactment of the National Food Security Act.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he requested the Centre to reconsider the proposed amendment to the first proviso to sub-section (1) of Section 3 of the National Food Security Act, 2013.

"If the proposed amendment is brought into force, it would diminish the food



security of nearly 70 lakh of Tamil Nadu's most vulnerable citizens," he said.

He pointed out that while the existing provision guarantees 35 kg of foodgrains per household every month, irrespective of family size, the proposed amendment seeks to provide 7 kg per person per month, subject to an overall ceiling of 35 kg per household.



If the proposed amendment is brought into force, it would diminish the food security of nearly 70 lakh of Tamil Nadu's most vulnerable citizens

C. JOSEPH VIJAY
Chief Minister

Though the Union government had explained that the amendment was intended to remove intra-category inequities and align entitlements more closely with nutritional requirements, its practical effect would be a substantial reduction in the quantity of foodgrains reaching the poorest households in Tamil Nadu, where the average family size is only 3.54

members, he said.

Tamil Nadu has 18,64,600 AAY ration cards, covering 69,26,983 beneficiaries. These households belong to the most vulnerable sections of society, identified under the Centre's eligibility guidelines, including families headed by widows, persons with disabilities, elderly persons without a regular source of income, tribal families, landless agricultural labourers, daily wage earners, and those suffering from life-threatening illnesses.

"These are precisely the households that the National Food Security Act was designed to protect through an assured, unconditional entitlement. The Act was enacted by Parliament as a measure of last-resort protection for the

poorest of the poor, and its entitlements were deliberately framed to be simple, unconditional and household-based so that no family, regardless of its size, is left without adequate foodgrains or exposed to hidden hunger and malnutrition," the Chief Minister said.

He argued that converting the entitlement into a per capita benefit, while retaining a household-level ceiling, would effectively penalise States with smaller families, particularly those in southern India that have successfully implemented the Union government's family planning programme.

Tamil Nadu is predominantly a rice-consuming State, and the rice supplied to AAY beneficiaries constitutes the staple food for all three meals of the day, Mr. Vijay said.



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GS Paper II – Polity

In India, voting cannot remain merely a statutory right

Recently, a Congress leader revived an old constitutional debate by demanding that voting should be recognised as a fundamental right. At first sight, the demand appears unexceptionable. In a democracy, what could be more fundamental than a citizen's right to choose those who govern? Yet, for more than seven decades, the Supreme Court of India has consistently held that the right to vote is not a fundamental right but merely a statutory right.

This judicial position, though well established, has become increasingly difficult to reconcile with the Court's own evolving jurisprudence. In a series of landmark decisions, the Court has gradually transformed the voter from a passive statutory creature into an active constitutional actor.

The result is a curious paradox: while the act of voting itself continues to be described as statutory, many of its essential facets have already acquired constitutional protection.

The traditional position dates back to *N.P. Ponnuswami vs Returning Officer* (1952), where the Court held that the right to vote and the right to contest elections are not common law rights but rights created by statute. The principle was reaffirmed in *Jyoti Basu & Others vs Debi Ghosal & Others* (1982), where Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy observed that the right to elect, "fundamental though it is to democracy", is neither a fundamental right nor a common law right, but "purely a statutory right". A Constitution Bench reiterated this position in *Kuldip Nayar vs Union of India* (2006), holding that while democracy forms part of the basic structure of the Constitution, the individual right to vote flows from legislation, principally the Representation of the People Acts.

The logic behind this approach is understandable. The Constitution does not expressly enumerate the right to vote among the fundamental rights contained in Part III. Parliament, therefore, enjoys considerable latitude in prescribing qualifications, disqualifications and procedures governing elections.

However, the story does not end there.

Constitutionalising the poll process

Beginning in the early years of this century, the Court embarked upon a process of constitutionalising the electoral process. In *Union of India vs Association for Democratic Reforms* (2002), the Court held that voters have a right to know the criminal antecedents, educational qualifications and financial assets of candidates. This right was located squarely in Article 19(1)(a), the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. The Court reasoned that meaningful participation in democracy is impossible unless voters are adequately informed.



S.Y. Quraishi

Former Chief Election Commissioner of India and author of 'An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election'

A year later, in *People's Union of Civil Liberties vs Union of India* (2003), the Court drew an important distinction. While reiterating that the right to vote is statutory, it held that the freedom of voting – that is, the freedom to make an informed choice – is a fundamental right protected by Article 19(1)(a).

The most intriguing development came in the 2013 *NOTA* judgment. Recognising the option of "None of the Above", the Court held that a voter's decision to reject all candidates is a form of political expression protected by Article 19(1)(a). The Court further held that secrecy of the ballot must extend even to those who choose not to vote for any candidate.

This produces an extraordinary constitutional anomaly. The Court has effectively held that the right to know is fundamental, the freedom to make an informed choice is fundamental, the secrecy of the ballot is fundamental, and even the right to reject all candidates is constitutionally protected. Yet, the act of voting itself continues to be treated as a mere statutory entitlement.

One is tempted to ask: if the Constitution protects the right to reject all candidates, why does it not protect the right to choose one?

Recent constitutional jurisprudence also points in this direction. In *Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India* (2023), Justice Ajay Rastogi, in his separate opinion, expressly favoured recognising voting as a fundamental right. Although this view did not command a majority, the Constitution Bench repeatedly referred to voting as a constitutional right rather than merely a statutory one. This marks an important shift in judicial understanding. The Court may not yet have elevated voting to the status of a fundamental right, but it has undoubtedly moved beyond the narrow statutory conception that dominated earlier decisions.

The anomaly becomes even more striking when viewed through the prism of the basic structure doctrine. Since *Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala* (1973), the Court has repeatedly held that democracy forms part of the Constitution's basic structure. In *Indira Nehru Gandhi vs Shri Raj Narain & Anr.* (1975), the Court underscored that free and fair elections are an essential feature of democracy. Subsequent decisions have consistently reaffirmed this principle.

Democracy begins with votes

But democracy does not exist in the abstract. It operates through elections, and elections derive their legitimacy from the participation of citizens through the ballot. The vote is the very instrument through which popular sovereignty is exercised. It is through the vote that "We, the People" periodically renew the legitimacy of the state and hold governments accountable.

If democracy is a part of the Constitution's

basic structure, and if free and fair elections are indispensable to democracy, it is difficult to explain why the citizen's right to vote should remain outside the constitutional core. To say that democracy is basic to the Constitution while the citizen's vote is merely a statutory right appears incongruous. A democracy without voters is inconceivable.

This does not necessarily mean that every aspect of voting should be elevated into an absolute fundamental right immune from regulation. Parliament must continue to prescribe qualifications, disqualifications and procedures necessary for the conduct of elections. Age requirements, electoral rolls, residency conditions, disqualifications for corrupt practices and other regulatory provisions are indispensable for orderly elections.

What requires constitutional recognition is not every procedural detail but the core right of every eligible citizen to participate in the democratic process.

This becomes particularly evident when one examines Article 326 of the Constitution. The Article mandates that elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be based on universal adult suffrage. Every citizen above the age of 18 is constitutionally entitled to be registered as an elector, subject only to narrowly defined disqualifications. The source of this entitlement is not legislation but the Constitution itself. The Representation of the People Acts merely operationalise that constitutional command.

Thus, while the mechanics of voting may be statutory, the citizen's entitlement to be a voter flows directly from the Constitution. Exclusion from the electoral roll, except in accordance with constitutionally permissible limitations, therefore, strikes at a constitutional guarantee.

A matter for the Court to revisit

The distinction between statutory and constitutional rights may have served a useful purpose in the early years of the Republic, when electoral jurisprudence was still in its infancy. But the Court's own decisions have steadily blurred that distinction by progressively constitutionalising various facets of voting.

Perhaps the time has come for the Court to revisit an old doctrine. In a Constitution where democracy and free and fair elections constitute the basic structure, the citizen's vote cannot remain a constitutional orphan. The ballot is not merely a statutory privilege conferred by Parliament. It is the instrument through which popular sovereignty is expressed and the Republic periodically renews its democratic legitimacy.

After all, if the Constitution protects the right to reject every candidate, it can scarcely deny protection to the right to choose one.

The right not to vote enjoys constitutional protection; paradoxically, the right to vote does not

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GS Paper II – Governance

AI governance and a voice for the Global South

In February 2026, India hosted the India AI Impact Summit 2026, that sought to put the needs and challenges of the Global South at the centre of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) discourse. The summit's themes framed by India were rooted in the contextual realities of the Global South with a focus on real-world harms. This was a departure from the previous summits (at Bletchley Park, 2023, U.K.; Seoul 2024, and Paris 2025) that prioritised both catastrophic and existential risks over questions of present harms, equity and inclusion.

As the Summit evolved, the political and policy momentum shifted toward raising capital for AI development in India and accelerating adoption through domestic use cases. In this process, India increasingly began to position itself within the newly framed "middle power" discourse, at the cost of Global South solidarity which underpinned the Summit's original vision. India clarified this stance by joining Pax Silica, signalling strategic alignment with the United States-dominated semiconductor supply chain. As part of the agreement, India agreed to adopt a pro-innovation regulatory approach, thereby compromising its pursuit of strategic autonomy.

Middle power dilemma

This repositioning of India's geopolitical character, as a middle power, has left it in a lonely corner. The middle power narrative is diplomatically attractive but strategically uneasy. India's aspirations to be positioned alongside European and Asian countries such as Japan, which do not consider India a peer in technological capability or economic development, is also in dissonance with its colonial past and low per capita – realities that firmly anchor India within the Global South.

Accompanying the friction between India's ambition and its realities is the U.S.'s foreign policy push for global AI adoption of U.S. tech, bringing into question whether it will be a reliable



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India faces a choice between dependency and leadership in AI governance

partner in the AI adventure to India. The U.S. has declared its disinterest in AI governance, especially global multilateral or multistakeholder governance. This raises fundamental questions for India and the Global South on concentration of infrastructure, and economic power in the U.S. Will this be a repeat of the social media story – when U.S. foreign policy pushed back against regulating for user harms to safeguard the interests of social media platforms concentrated in the U.S.? Furthermore, economic value primarily accrues to American industry despite significant business and users outside its borders, while disproportionate externalities and harms also persist in domestic markets.

Pertinent issues

In the AI story, numerous questions arise. Will India mainly be a consumer of U.S. tech with Indian users bearing disproportionate harm? Will India be a site for extraction of data, labour for data labelling, minerals for manufacturing, and land, water, electricity and resources for data centres, primarily enabling the growth of American Big Tech?

Since the summit in February, India has sanctioned land for data centres displacing communities, triggering protests. There are no meaningful guardrails to protect local communities as American companies scrape public content to build language and indigenous knowledge datasets. The non-profit ecosystem is signing memoranda of understanding to diffuse AI and adopt use cases. However, fundamental AI innovation has been slow – India remains unable to compete with global foundational models, its semiconductor development is focused on low-value assembly and there is a question of adequate capital to invest and grow the national AI ecosystem.

But perhaps all is not lost for India. The first of a two-part UN Global Dialogue on AI is underway in Geneva (July 6-7, 2026). Stakeholders will

convene to discuss how the multilateral and multistakeholder ecosystem can come together to collectively define the rules for the governance of AI.

A window for leadership

India can use the opportunity to stitch together a fractured AI policy agenda that currently lacks a leader. It remains one of the few countries with the political heft, the technical capacity, and a diverse market to play this role. Rather than positioning itself merely as a destination for investment or a market for AI, India could reassert a vision of technological development rooted in public purpose, user safety, strategic autonomy, and international cooperation.

India should reiterate the need for international norms that empower Global South countries to focus on building local AI ecosystems and fostering innovation, safeguarding users, enhancing regulatory capacity, enabling skilling and developing domestic infrastructure. It should also advance critical debates on competition and consumer protection and ensure economic value accrues within national markets.

Concurrently, India must create pathways for international cooperation on AI within the Global South. The Geneva dialogue is a critical moment for Global South countries to come together to enable enhanced agency and strategic autonomy.

This requires developing innovative approaches to pool capacity and resources including cooperation on data, compute, interoperable standards and shared protocols and governance, and strengthening institutional capacity both regulatory and technical across the Global South.

As heterogeneous as the Global South is, it can be a counterweight to the hegemony of Big Tech. India can lead this march to ensure that shared governance norms are created and benefits are shared with the people in the Global South, appropriately protecting them from harm.



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GS Paper II – International Relations

BRICS nations call for stronger ties to curb drug trafficking

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

Representatives of member countries, who converged in Guwahati for the two-day BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies' Meeting, 2026, on Monday emphasised the need for stronger international cooperation to combat drug trafficking.

An intergovernmental organisation of major emerging markets and developing countries, BRICS initially comprised Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Indonesia.

These countries represent almost half the global population, and more than 40% of the world's Gross Domestic Product.

Lucas Barbosa of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs lauded India for hosting the event. "The BRICS anti-drug working group has a long history of cooperation, and we intend to strengthen collaboration in law enforcement and intelligence sharing further. Drug trafficking is a transnational threat that requires coordinated action by all member countries,"



National flags of the BRICS countries. AP

he told journalists.

Anurag Garg, Director-General of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), said the impact of drug abuse was a factor behind India hosting the heads of anti-drug agencies from the BRICS nations for the first time.

International scourge

"Drugs have become an international scourge. Our youth is getting involved in drugs, and it is a problem that different nations have to fight together," he said, adding that the delegates would focus on emerging challenges in narcotics enforcement, including dark-net marketplaces, cryptocurrencies for illicit transactions, and maritime routes for drug trafficking.



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GS Paper II – Polity

How the right to walk is integral to modernity

That we would need a court of law to remind us that the Right to Walk should be a fundamental right at this moment in history when activists are trying to stop government-corporations from restricting the natural flow of rivers cannot be just a coincidence. The Right to Walk on footpaths, to be specific. There is a restriction on the freedom of nearly all parts of the human body imposed by the state – the hands cannot touch whatever they want to, one can't spit or defecate wherever one might want to, one cannot rest one's back against every available wall, and our legs are prevented from taking us to anywhere the mind wants to.

Hence the unnoticed privilege of having a mind – "*Kothao aamar hariye jawar nei mana monay monay*" (I can get lost anywhere, in my mind), is a Rabindranath song sung as much with hope as with the intuitive acknowledgement that only the mind has that kind of unrestricted freedom. At the other end of the head are our legs, and one would imagine that they would also like a similar degree of freedom as the mind has in the Tagore song. It must be in acknowledgement of this need that the Supreme Court has asked for the Right to Walk on footpaths to be included as a fundamental right.

Walking with(in) literature

It seems almost tautological – the need for such a right. However, under a Facebook post from a decade ago, which detailed the experience of being a pedestrian in India, among the many disrespectful and inhuman responses was one by a young engineer. The pedestrian does not pay road tax and therefore cannot make a claim on the road, he said. The abrasive character of new capitalist energy soon became visible; he insisted that like the poor, the pedestrian was a burden on the Indian economy. What would he then make of the recent Supreme Court ruling that



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Even the gods had a history of walking: the goddess Lakshmi's footprints, drawn as part of folk rituals of worship, are evidence of that

declared the Right to Walk safely on footpaths a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(d) (freedom of movement) and Article 21 (right to life), a ruling that gives pedestrians a claim on public pathways over automobiles?

Five kilometres away from the Supreme Court, where this ruling was given, Gandhi was walking, his walk frozen into a statue along with others in the piece of sculpture called "Gyarah Murti", built by Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury. Could that have played a role in the ruling? Or, since they knew the Indian Constitution so well, could they have been unconsciously thinking of Nandalal Bose, whose art frames the words that guarantees our relationship with this country, and whose linocut from 1930, "Bapuji", which showcases Gandhi standing with the most well-known walking stick in the world, has conditioned the way we imagine Gandhi? Or could they have been thinking of Rabindranath's song "*Aekla chalo re*" (Walk alone), which sings of the conviction necessary to walk alone?

The judges who had delivered this judgment, Justices P.S. Narasimha and A.S. Chandurkar, must have been raised by a literary consciousness that would have influenced such an outlook. To give an example, a poem such as Jibanananda Das's "*Bonolata Sen*", that begins, 'For a thousand years I've been walking earth's paths,/from Sinhala's seas to the waters of Malaya in night's darkness'. A poem like that was in the air, and influenced the way a community spoke and loved and laughed. There were bound to be equivalents of this trust placed in walking in all literary and artistic cultures of India.

Walking has been integral to the creation of a political instinct in India – from Subhash Chandra Bose's 'Delhi chalo' to Gandhi's Dandi March, various protest marches have marked resistance before and after 1947. These had been sharpened by a spiritual

history that had been a harvest of walking – by figures such as Siddhartha, Nanak, Chaitanya, and other mendicant-seekers. Even the gods had a history of walking: the goddess Lakshmi's footprints, drawn as part of folk rituals of worship, are evidence of that. As had ways of storing information or writing a poem or telling a story, for, '*pada*' (foot), is a metric stanza and also a foundational group in Indic knowledge categories.

A symbol of modernity

At university, the author of this article had once told her teacher that modernity came to exist because Baudelaire – who coined the term in his 1863 essay "The Painter of Modern Life" – walked the streets of Paris. One wasn't thinking specifically of the flâneur, but of walking without purpose, and what it does to our mind and its circulation of thoughts. We've all benefitted from walking unknitting the clots in our self-accusatory consciousness.

"The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organisations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors). Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other's blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice. These diverse aspects provide the basis of a rhetoric. They can even be said to define it," Michel de Certeau writes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. The Supreme Court's judgment, in rehabilitating the sense of life as a long poem, to "wander lonely as a cloud", restores to Indians their quiet modernity.



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GS Paper II – Polity

A defection wave in Tamil Nadu

The switch-over of AIADMK MLAs is evidence of a deeper shift in the State's politics

STATE OF PLAY

B. Kolappan

Tamil Nadu is witnessing an unusual political phenomenon ever since the Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), led by actor-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay, came to power. Several MLAs, most of them from the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), have resigned their hard-won Assembly seats to join the ruling party, hoping to be renominated by the TVK in the ensuing by-elections. Before their switch over, as many as 25 MLAs even voted in favour of the TVK government during the Assembly floor test.

Although the TVK emerged as the single largest party in the Assembly, it fell short of a majority by 10 seats. It eventually formed the government after the Congress switched allegiance from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-led camp, while the two communist parties and the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi initially extended outside support. The have now joined the government along with the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). The ruling party, however, does not appear content with a working majority. Instead, it seems intent on strengthening its own numbers so that it need not depend on allies for its survival.

A trend reversal

The continuing stream of resignations and defections has been described by the Opposition as "horse trading" – a phenomenon largely unfamiliar to Tamil Nadu politics. So far, six AIADMK legislators have quit and joined the TVK. Governments in the State have traditionally enjoyed comfor-



table legislative majorities and, even when they fell short of the required numbers, have generally refrained from encouraging defections to secure their position.

The trend began with the shift in loyalty of S. Kamaraj, an MLA of the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) led by T. T. V. Dhinakaran. When Chief Minister-designate Mr. Vijay presented to Governor Rajendra Arlekar a letter of support purportedly signed by Mr. Kamaraj, Mr. Dhinakaran alleged that the document had been forged. The allegation, however, was soon disproved when Mr. Kamaraj voted in favour of the government during the confidence motion. He was then expelled from the AMMK.

What surprised political observers even more was the defection of MLAs from the AIADMK, a party that ruled Tamil Nadu for decades under towering leaders such as M. G. Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa. Within days of the election results, three MLAs – Maragatham Kumaravel, S. Jayakumar and P. Sathyabama – met Speaker J. C. D. Prabhakar and submitted their resignation letters. They were followed by Esakki Subaya. All of them joined the TVK right after.

More striking, however, was the decision of senior AIADMK leaders and former Ministers, including C. Vijayabaskar, M. R. Vijayabaskar and

Udumalai K. Radhakrishnan (former MLA), to cross over to the ruling party. While they blamed former Chief Minister and AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami for their decision, their actions suggest a broader political calculation. They appear to have concluded that the bipolar political order that long defined Tamil Nadu – dominated by the AIADMK and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) – has come to an end with the rise of the TVK, and that an AIADMK bereft of a charismatic leader has little prospect of regaining power.

Counter allegations

As the trend continued, the DMK accused the TVK of inducing two of its MLAs – S. Austin and Anbazhagan – to resign their seats and join the ruling party. The allegation came close on the heels of the TVK's charge that former Minister V. Senthilbalaji had attempted to lure its MLA N. Elaiyaraja with an offer of ₹35 crore. The police subsequently arrested a few persons in connection with the TVK's complaint. The DMK also alleged that the TVK had sought to persuade two MLAs (who contested on its symbol), originally from the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, to resign and recontest.

The spate of resignations, which began barely 20 days after the formation of the new government, evoked strong reactions from the communist parties. They described the developments as an unhealthy trend that could undermine democratic norms. Yet they appear to have little influence over the unfolding events, watching helplessly as the political drama continues to play out day after day.

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GS Paper II – Polity

Can Bar Associations refuse to represent an accused?

What has the Supreme Court said about Bar resolutions denying legal representation?

LETTER & SPIRIT

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

The Faizabad Bar Association's resolution to not represent the accused in the Ayodhya Ram Temple embezzlement case has prompted the question of whether a Bar Association could collectively decide not to represent a particular accused.

What is the Supreme Court's take?

The Supreme Court has consistently held that every accused has the right to fair trial and legal representation and it is illegal, unconstitutional and contrary to professional ethics to deny that right.

In a Supreme Court judgment in 2010, *A.S. Mohammed Rafi v. State of Tamil Nadu*, the case arose out of a confrontation between lawyers and police personnel in Coimbatore.

Following the incident, a local Bar Association passed a resolution that none of its members would represent the accused police personnel. A Division Bench of Justices Markandey Katju and Gyan Sudha Misra held that such resolutions by Bar bodies were "wholly illegal, against all traditions and professional ethics".

The court declared in the judgment that "all such resolutions of Bar Associations in India are null and void and the right-minded lawyers should ignore and defy such resolutions if they want democracy and rule of law to be upheld in this country".

What is the accused's right to be defended?

Article 22(1) of the Constitution guarantees that no arrested person shall be denied the right "to consult, and to be defended by, a legal practitioner of his choice". Article 14 provides for equality before the law and equal protection of the

laws within the territory of India.

The Supreme Court has recognised the right to a fair trial as an integral part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21.

Article 39A, a Directive Principle of State Policy, further requires the State to ensure that the legal system promotes justice on the basis of equal opportunity and that no citizen is denied access to justice because of economic or other disabilities, including through free legal aid.

What do the Bar Council of India Rules say?

The 'Standards of Professional Conduct and Etiquette' chapter of the Bar Council of India Rules says that "an advocate is bound to accept any brief in the Courts or Tribunals or before any other authorities in or before which he proposes to practise at a fee consistent with his standing at the Bar and the nature of the case. Special circumstances may justify his refusal to

accept a particular brief."

However, the Uttarakhand High Court in *Kuldeep Agarwal v. State Of Uttarakhand And Others* (2019) clarified that "special circumstances mentioned in Clause II, justifying refusal of an advocate to accept a particular brief, refers, by the use of the word "his", to the advocate in his individual capacity, and not to the Bar Association whose members are advocates".

Have such resolutions been passed before?

Yes. Following the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, a Bar resolution opposed legal representation for arrested terrorist, Ajmal Kasab. The legal aid lawyer initially assigned to him declined to appear, while another advocate who agreed to defend him faced political threats before a lawyer was eventually appointed under police protection.

After the December 16, 2012 Delhi gangrape case, lawyers at the Saket courts passed a similar resolution refusing to represent the accused. Likewise, lawyers declined to defend the accused in the 2019 Hyderabad veterinary doctor's rape and murder case.

How have courts dealt with such resolutions?

The Uttarakhand High Court had in 2019 declared null and void a resolution passed by the Kotdwar Bar Association

threatening to terminate the membership of any lawyer who represented an accused in the murder of an advocate.

In 2020, the Karnataka High Court criticised the Hubballi Bar Association after lawyers objected to advocates representing Kashmiri students accused of raising pro-Pakistan slogans. The Bench described the conduct of lawyers on the Dharwad court premises who prevented advocates from filing bail applications as "sheer militancy". It also indicated that such resolutions could amount to criminal contempt.

More recently, the Madras High Court in *Manikandan Nair v. State of Tamil Nadu* in 2025 reiterated that Bar Associations cannot formally or informally prevent advocates from appearing for any accused.

In the case of *J. Jayalalithaa v. State of Karnataka* (2014), the Supreme Court observed that "fair trial is the main object of criminal procedure and such fairness should not be hampered or threatened in any manner. Fair trial entails the interests of the accused, the victim and the society. Thus, fair trial must be accorded to every accused in the spirit of the right to life and personal liberty and the accused must get a free and fair, just and reasonable trial on the charge imputed in a criminal case".

Thus, the Supreme Court has consistently held that the right to legal representation is a core feature of a fair trial.



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GS Paper III – Geography

'El Nino set to dent India's wind, hydropower output'

Study projects rise in coal-fired power; it says weaker wind and hydropower output, combined with rising demand for air conditioning, could open a generation gap of nearly 18 TWh

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

India's power system stands to be strained more by the developing El Nino than that of any other country, according to an analysis by the think tank Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA). It projects that weaker wind and hydropower output, combined with rising demand for air conditioning, could open a generation gap of nearly 18 TWh (terawatt hour) over a period of one year, till June 2027.

Set against India's total electricity generation of about 1,846 billion units in 2025-26, the shortfall CREA models is small or under 1% of annual output. Non-fossil sources supplied 29.2% of that generation.

The group's concern is less the size of the gap than how it is filled. The projected median output puts it at 17.7 TWh and its most severe at 24 TWh – one TWh is a billion units of electricity – and says the likeliest outcome is a surge in coal-fired power, which will re-



Generating power: A wind farm at Gudimangalam in Tiruppur district of Tamil Nadu. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

lease an estimated 17 million tonne of carbon dioxide. It stresses that these are scenario projections, not forecasts.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) confirmed last month that El Nino conditions had emerged over the equatorial Pacific and were expected to strengthen through the monsoon.

It has forecast below-normal southwest monsoon rainfall at 90% of the long-period average, with a 60% chance of a deficient season.

June rainfall closed with

an all-India rainfall deficit of about 40%, the fifth-lowest for June since 1901, and the cumulative shortfall stood at 20% below normal by July 6. IMD Director-General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra has said rainfall in July is likely to stay below normal across most of the country.

Record generation

India entered the season with record electric generation capacity. As on March 31, non-fossil installed capacity reached 283.46 GW – 150.26 GW of solar, 56.09 GW of wind,

51.41 GW of large hydro and 8.78 GW of nuclear – after a record 44.6 GW of solar and 6 GW of wind were added in 2025-26. Coal remains the largest single source of power, at about 42% of installed capacity, though coal generation fell 3.69% over the year. Peak demand touched 270.82 GW on May 21, according to official data.

CREA, which reports that solar now meets 24% of daytime demand, argues that storage could have absorbed more of it. Grid operators curtailed about 2.1 TWh of solar and wind last year to keep coal plants running – waste that CREA, citing energy analytics firm Ember, says roughly 10 GWh of battery storage could have averted.

India must "move much faster on batteries and grid upgrades", said Nandikesh Sivalingam, CREA's director, so that clean energy can meet future demand surges. The country is lining up around 130 GW of new coal capacity that provides on-demand power and helps buffer against record peaks such as in May.



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GS Paper III – Geography

Will El Niño weaken India's economy?

How could a weak monsoon affect farm output, inflation and economic growth? Why does El Niño remain a major risk for India's economy? How have past El Niño years affected agriculture and inflation? Is India's irrigation and water storage system prepared for another weak monsoon?

ECONOMIC NOTES

V. Nivedita

The story so far:

After the first month of this year's monsoon ended in a massive 40% deficit, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast that rainfall in July will also be "below normal" or less than 94% of what is usual for the month. "Below-normal rainfall can pose significant challenges for agriculture, water resources, hydropower generation, ecosystem sustainability, and drinking water availability," the agency warned. The outlook for July comes on the back of weak rainfall in June. This comes weeks after Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan sounded the alarm, warning about the impact of a potential 'super' El Niño.

How could a poor monsoon damage India's economy?

A poor monsoon can damage the economy in three ways: it affects agricultural output, reducing the sector's contribution to the economy; it hits rural income, denting aggregate demand; and it threatens to push up food prices, causing inflation.

India came into this kharif season from a position of strength – foodgrain output in 2024-25 jumped to 357.73 million metric tonnes, up 25.43 MMT from the previous year. A weak monsoon now puts that momentum at risk.

In a report, CRISIL notes that while paddy acreage is expected to expand in Punjab, Haryana and Bihar, maize acreage is expected to decline as farmers shift towards more remunerative crops. Farmers might also prefer pulses because of lower cultivation costs and water requirements, and may choose not to plant vegetables at all. Irrigation, MSP, procurement support and market conditions also factor in the decision-making process.

This could trigger food and beverage inflation. In its June bulletin, the Reserve



Several of India's worst droughts fell in El Niño years – 1972, 1982, 2009, and 2015. FILE PHOTO

Bank of India warned: "An adverse south-west monsoon, if materialised, may weigh on the domestic growth-inflation outlook."

The report noted that daily price data up to June 18 showed food inflation continued to rise and the prices of edible oils, potatoes, onions and tomatoes edged up. A weak monsoon will only push them higher.

Agriculture accounts for only one-fifth of India's Gross Value Added (GVA) but employs 46% of the workforce and supports nearly 55% of the population. "It will have a direct impact on the lives of people," said Prof. R. Ramakumar, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Prof. Bharat Ramaswami, Department of Economics, Ashoka University, believes farm incomes could fall by up to 10%.

"The rural non-farm sector consists mostly of non-traded services such as construction. These sectors contract when agriculture is adversely affected. Industries that depend on rural demand will be affected," he said.

This stress moves into the wider economy. Automobile sales are a reliable early signal; two-wheelers and tractors are among the first sectors to feel the squeeze, followed by real estate in smaller towns and cities. Kotak Mutual Fund, in a blog, has noted that a combined El

Niño-plus-drought scenario may shave 20-65 basis points off GDP growth.

Compounding the pressure are pests and fertilizer supply constraints caused by the Iran war.

The Union Cabinet approved a ₹41,533 crore Nutrient-Based Subsidy for Phosphatic and Potassic fertilisers for the kharif season, covering 28 grades. If output still falls short, the government will have to release buffer stocks and import commodities, widening the Current Account Deficit and putting pressure on the rupee.

India's agri-exports face a threat too. "Agriculture exports have clocked a CAGR of 8.2% between fiscals 2020 and 2025, contributing 12% to India's core exports," said Dipti Deshpande, Principal Economist, CRISIL.

How did El Niño impact the economy?

Several of India's worst droughts fell in El Niño years – 1972, 1982, 2009, and 2015. "In the 11 instances of below-normal or deficient monsoon performance at an all-India level since 2000, six were classified as El Niño years by the IMD. Of these, five saw deficient rainfall," Ms. Deshpande said.

The 2009 and 2015 failures illustrate the different impact poor monsoons can have on the economy. "Two subsequent

years of rainfall stress and all-India average irrigation cover less than 45%, caused agriculture output to suffer – crop GVA contracted 2.5% and 3.2% in fiscals 2009 and 2010, respectively. Inflation was in double digits," she said.

El Niño conditions moved from weak to strong in 2014 and 2015, and both years saw monsoon disruptions. Crop GVA contracted, but the impact on inflation was different.

Unlike 2009, when food inflation spiked, inflation was rather muted in 2015 due to proactive food management, restrained MSP hikes, and a global commodity price slump, which kept inflation muted despite the monsoon failure, Ms. Deshpande noted.

Can India 'drought-proof' the economy?

Mr. Chouhan's presser raised an important data point: 315 districts are vulnerable to a poor monsoon, of which 111 across 12 States are of primary concern due to poor irrigation facilities.

On July 2, storage levels across the 166 reservoirs monitored by the Central Water Commission stood at 47,725 BCM, against 78,077 BCM in the corresponding period last year, and below the normal storage of 48,402 BCM for this time of year. While the system can provide water to meet requirements, a poor monsoon could strain it.

"A second successive bad weather will be more damaging," Prof. Ramaswami said, adding that irrigation is crucial in adapting to water stress due to climate change.

India needs to 'drought-proof' its economy, said Prof. Ramakumar. He said the country must move from crop insurance to ex-ante risk reduction. "We need to pay attention to policies and interventions that reduce risk itself. That requires public investment, and that's lacking," he said. He added that India needs enough drought-resistant, high-yielding crops, and that farmers must have access to them. "We have not invested adequately in any of these, and hence our disaster preparedness is very poor," he said.

THE GIST

A weak monsoon and a potential super El Niño could reduce kharif output, depress rural incomes, fuel food inflation, slow GDP growth, and hurt exports.

Experts say India must move beyond crop insurance by investing in irrigation, drought-resistant high-yielding crops, and other risk-reduction measures, as prolonged rainfall stress could strain water storage and disaster preparedness.



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GS Paper III – Science & Technology

Diamond jewellery among payloads to be launched by Vikram-1 rocket

Hemanth C.S.
BENGALURU

A diamond jewellery creation mounted on an aluminium base plate and a miniaturised artwork cast in the shape of a rocket using 18K gold are among the payloads which will be launched by India's first privately developed orbital-class rocket, Vikram-1. It is expected to be launched some time between July 12 and August 4.

Skyroot Aerospace on Monday announced that the orbital launch vehicle will carry six payloads.

The rocket will carry technology demonstration payloads from Graaha Space, Dcubed, and Skyroot's own SCOPE. Also aboard will be the Embrace payload, developed by Cosmoserve Space.

During the mission, the robotic arm will remain attached to Vikram-1's payload deck while carrying



Vikram-1, India's first privately developed orbital-class rocket, is expected to be launched soon. PHOTO FOR REPRESENTATION

out its planned demonstration.

Tribute to visionaries

In addition to the technology demonstration payloads, Vikram-1 will carry two payloads celebrating creativity and India's scientific heritage. These include Cosmic Bloom, developed by Cosmos Diamonds, featuring a diamond jewellery creation mounted on an aluminium

base plate, and Microart by Ajay Kumar Mattewada, an 18K gold rocket holding micro-sculptures of Sir C.V. Raman, Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, and Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam – each smaller than a grain of rice.

The artwork pays tribute to three visionaries whose pioneering contributions continue to inspire India's scientific and space journey.

There will be one inter-

national payload developed by Dcubed GmbH, Germany.

"India's space sector is witnessing a remarkable phase of innovation and entrepreneurship. Missions like Vikram-1 are helping expand opportunities for emerging space companies to demonstrate and scale their technologies," said Ramesh Kumar V., co-founder and CEO, Graaha Space, whose nano-satellite, SOLARAS, will be a part of the mission.

"Mission Aagaman gave us a platform to rapidly send our systems to space and test them. Through this mission with Skyroot, we accelerated our soft-robotic capture technology from concept to flight-ready in just four months, advancing the space debris removal capabilities being developed at Cosmoserve Space," said Chiranjeevi Phanindra, founder and CEO of Cosmoserve Space.



Learn Beyond

GS Paper III – Economy

Will record FPI Indian bond flows be sustainable?

NEWS ANALYSIS

Ashokamithran T.
MUMBAI

The overall inflow of foreign investor money into India's bond market crossed a record ₹55,518 crore in June. Experts, however, aired concerns over sustainability of the momentum as the macroeconomic climate had not turned fully conducive.

In early June, the Centre waived Long Term Capital Gains (LTCG) tax on foreign investment in bonds. The RBI and the Centre further expanded the Fully Accessible Route (FAR) to include new long-term Government Securities with 15-year, 30-year, and 40-year tenors, as well as Sovereign Green Bonds.

The steps came in the backdrop of net outflow of foreign funds from Indian capital markets and a constantly depreciating rupee.

"The reforms are poised to attract long-term institutional investors such as pension funds, insurance companies and sovereign wealth funds, leading to more stable and sustained capital inflows. They are also expected to boost foreign exchange inflows and strengthen resilience of India's financial markets," the Ministry of Finance said. The question of whether tax cuts can deliver more inflows is a topic of debate among economists and financial analysts.

"Tax tweaks can serve as a catalyst but rarely override core fundamentals like policy consistency and external conditions. India's progressive liberalisation through the FAR has often mattered more. While taxation was a constraint – especially for debt – it was secondary,"



Inflows stood at ₹55,518 crore in June 2026. AFP

said Lekha Chakraborty, Professor, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP).

The inflows, however, did come and they were across the bond market. FPI investment under general limit debt securities, which contains both corporate bonds and government securities, came in at ₹55,518 crore in June 2026.

Investments under the FAR were the highest since September 2024 when it was introduced. FAR recorded an inflow of ₹21,652 crore in June 2026. Put together, they more than compensated for the significant outflow of ₹49,340 crore from equities.

Many factors at play

"Attributing the recent increase in FPI inflows solely to the removal of capital gains tax or withholding tax would be an oversimplification. A combination of factors has contributed to the improved sentiment in India's debt market," said Venkatakrishnan Srinivasan, managing partner, Rockfort LLP.

"Overall, June has been a positive month for the bond market. The easing of geopolitical concerns surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, expectations of India's possible inclusion in the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Bond Index and improving market senti-

ment on RBI's recent policy steps have all supported investor confidence and foreign investor interest," Mr. Srinivasan continued.

The sustainability of the inflows, which the tax cut was aiming at, cannot be definitely guaranteed as the underlying economic data doesn't suggest that things have changed completely positively for the debt investors.

In all, bond market experts and economists, while certain the inflows cannot be directly attributed to the tax cut, do not discount the benefits of such a move.

Benefits of the tax cut

Benefits of the tax cut include 'diversifying inflows away from equities, deepening debt markets, and supporting external balances,' while fundamentals dominate in determining flows, said Ms. Chakraborty.

However, others in the policy-making space are more careful in evaluating the utility of cutting taxes to bring in capital market investments. Former Finance Secretary S.C. Garg said the move did not have much of a deeper policy thought and was 'more a desperate attempt at bringing in foreign exchange.'

"If you have to try something to get forex and there is no measure available for FDI or FPI in equity, you end up going for FCNR B and government securities," he said.

Now that the tax policy constraint on foreign investment into Indian debt securities has been removed, attention would shift to the macroeconomic climate which would have to be as lucrative for investors to show the same level of interest in bonds as it did in June 2026.



GS Paper III – Science & Technology

Why FDA nod for vepdegestrant is a major shift in cancer therapy

The approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration paves the way for drugs designed to remove harmful proteins from cells, rather than simply block them; this is an advance because these drugs can sidestep the barriers to treating diseases that involve hitherto 'undruggable' proteins

Manjeera Gowravaram

In May 1, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the drug vepdegestrant for patients with ESR1-mutated, ER-positive, and HER2-negative advanced breast cancer. It is the world's first therapy that the FDA – whose lead many drug regulators worldwide follow – has approved that is based on PROTAC technology.

The approval paves the way for drugs designed to remove harmful proteins from cells, rather than simply block them. This is an advance because PROTACs can sidestep the barriers to treating diseases that involve hitherto 'undruggable' proteins. Researchers have been developing this technology for more than two decades.

How PROTACs work

'PROTAC' stands for proteolysis-targeting chimaera, which is a kind of molecule. These molecules are designed to remove specific proteins from a cell. A PROTAC has two ends: one binds to the target protein and the other binds to an E3 ligase, an enzyme involved in the cell's protein degradation process. By bringing these components together, the PROTAC causes the target protein to be degraded by the cell. This is called targeted protein degradation.

Conventional drugs work by binding to a protein in a way that prevents it from performing certain roles in the body. This means the drugs or antibodies often need to be present for long periods in the body. PROTACs, however, act like catalysts: while the proteins they target end up being degraded, they themselves are not degraded. After triggering one degradation process, the PROTAC can detach itself and repeat it with another instance of the same protein.

The mechanism allows a single PROTAC molecule to act multiple times. Because PROTACs remove the entire protein from the cell, they may also disrupt other roles the protein plays, such as controlling the activity of other proteins. Conventional drugs, however, usually block only one specific activity of a protein.

Early research to trials

In 2010, two research groups, at Yale University and Caltech, first demonstrated targeted protein degradation. They showed that a particular molecule was capable of recruiting a target protein to the cell's degradation machinery. This molecule was a precursor to PROTACs. In 2013, a follow-up study by the same groups found that the same molecule could work inside cells to degrade proteins related to breast and prostate cancer.

At this stage, these molecules were mainly research tools and not suitable for use as drugs. Among other properties, they were large, unstable, and had poor pharmacological properties. But researchers made rapid progress in the 2010s: they improved the molecules' designs and stabilised the interaction between the PROTAC, the target protein, and the E3 ligase, among other changes. The advances yielded molecules with better selectivity and other properties suited to a good drug.

In 2019, bivalapretam, a PROTAC developed by the U.S.-based



An artist's concept of an Arvinax PROTAC molecule. PROTACs are designed to remove specific proteins from a cell. www.arvinax.com

biotechnology company Arvinax, became the first drug of its kind to enter human trials. Bivalapretam was designed for patients with metastatic, castration-resistant prostate cancer.

Around the same time, researchers were developing vepdegestrant – developed by Arvinax and Pfizer – as an oestrogen receptor degrader. Vepdegestrant progressed through early-phase trials and began phase 3 trials involving patients with advanced breast cancer. By 2025, the drug had completed late-stage testing as well, with its developers submitting the data to the FDA for regulatory review.

The FDA approval brings the drug's development timeline from initial concept to approval in just over two decades.

Potential and limits

The approval for vepdegestrant was based on results from a phase 3 trial that enrolled 624 patients who had previously been treated with CDK4/6 inhibitors and endocrine therapy – the current standard-of-care.

Among 270 patients with ESR1-mutated tumours, the typical length of time the treatment kept the cancer under control was five months for those treated with vepdegestrant versus 2.1 months for patients receiving fulvestrant, an established standard treatment.

Most side effects reported with vepdegestrant were low grade, including musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, nausea, constipation, and lower appetite, plus changes in liver-related enzymes (that resolve on their own) and heart rhythm (e.g. minor abnormalities in an ECG).

Vepdegestrant works by targeting the oestrogen receptor, an important driver of many breast cancers. In patients with

mutations in the ESR1 gene, the receptor can remain active despite hormone therapy, leading to the cancer resisting the treatment. Vepdegestrant destroys the receptor altogether, giving patients with some advanced forms of breast cancer a new hope. The drug is taken orally once a day, which is more convenient than fulvestrant, which requires intramuscular injections.

Many proteins associated with disease lack suitable points on their surface where a traditional inhibitor can bind, rendering the protein dysfunctional. PROTACs however need to bind to a protein just enough to bring it into contact with an E3 ligase.

Thus, PROTACs may also be able to target proteins previously considered difficult to treat. And because one PROTAC molecule can degrade multiple copies of a protein, these drugs may work effectively at lower doses than conventional inhibitors.

These potential abilities are why the PROTAC development pipeline is so wide today. Thus far, more than 40 PROTAC candidates have entered clinical trials, targeting more than 200 proteins across different disease areas. While the main focus is still cancer, researchers are also paying more attention to neurodegenerative diseases, inflammatory conditions, and muscle disorders, where abnormal or misfolded proteins contribute to disease.

Challenges to overcome

There are still several challenges to overcome. The PROTAC molecules are generally larger and more structurally complex than traditional small-molecule drugs, which are usually designed to be compact enough to pass through the gut

wall and into the bloodstream after a patient swallows a pill. But because PROTACs are bulkier, they can be harder for the body to absorb and distribute efficiently to different tissues.

Their activity can also vary with concentration. At very high levels, PROTACs may begin binding separately to either the target protein or the E3 ligase instead of bringing the two together in the same complex. As a result, fewer productive interactions occur and the drug can paradoxically become less effective.

Most current PROTACs also rely mainly on just two E3 ligases while human cells are known to have more than 600. Scientists are therefore trying to expand the number of ligases that can be recruited, which could improve tissue specificity and reduce side effects.

Resistance mechanisms may also emerge over time. For example, cancer cells could develop mutations that alter the cellular machinery that PROTACs rely on to destroy proteins, or reduce the availability of E3 ligases themselves, making the drugs less effective.

The FDA approval for vepdegestrant augurs targeted protein degradation as a viable clinical approach. At the same time, the field is still developing, and most PROTAC-based drugs are still going through clinical trials. Further study will determine how widely this new therapeutic pathway can be applied and how it will perform relative to existing treatments across different diseases, including long-term safety and real-world effectiveness across various patient populations.

(Manjeera Gowravaram has a PhD in RNA biochemistry and works as a freelance science writer. manjeera@gsiaa.com)