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GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 1

SC upholds SIR as EC's constitutional duty

Court says EC has constitutional duty to verify citizenship for inclusion or exclusion from rolls

EC asked to refer names of purged Bihar electors to Centre for adjudication under Citizenship Act

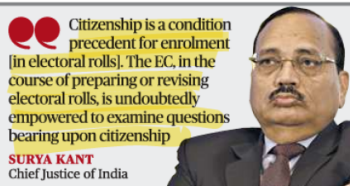
The second phase of the SIR commenced even as a challenge was pending in the Supreme Court

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls as an exercise done by the Election Commission (EC) in furtherance of its constitutional obligation to conduct free and fair elections.

"SIR bears a direct nexus to the constitutional goal of a free and fair election. Free and fair elections do not rest merely upon the mechanics of polling. They equally depend upon the integrity, accuracy, and purity of the electoral roll which forms the foundation of the democratic process," a Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Jyotsna Banerjee said.

The judgment affirming the constitutionality of the Bihar SIR will have an impact on next rounds of SIR.



Citizenship is a condition precedent for enrolment [in electoral rolls]. The EC, in the course of preparing or revising electoral rolls, is undoubtedly empowered to examine questions bearing upon citizenship

SURYA KANT
Chief Justice of India

Respectfully disagree: Cong.

NEW DELHI
The Congress on Wednesday said it "respectfully disagreed" with the Supreme Court order upholding the legality of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. » PAGE 4

Verdict a defeat for Congress: BJP

NEW DELHI
The BJP on Wednesday hailed the Supreme Court verdict on the SIR, describing it as a defeat of the Congress and its allies on "constitutional" grounds. » PAGE 4

life into the constitutional mandate of Article 324 (EC's power to conduct and supervise elections).

Cogent justifications

The court said the EC had "cogent justifications" to conduct the SIR, namely the passage of more than two decades since the last intensive revision, large-scale additions and deletions over that period, rapid urbanisation, migration, and the resulting possibility of repeated or defective entries. The court said the electoral roll was not a static document and must evolve in response to changes in population, residence, and eligibility.

It rejected the petitioners' argument that the SIR did not have an empirical foundation. Chief Justice Kant justified that large-scale migration, non-reporting of deaths, and duplication of entries were

matters of "common administrative experience".

The Bench said the Commission's supervisory authority under Article 324 was a "continuous wellspring of power" encompassing every facet and stage of the electoral machinery to ensure the sanctity of the democratic process.

SIR suffering

The court refused to believe that the SIR caused suffering. It said appropriate safeguards were in place or introduced to mitigate hardship and arbitrary exclusion. These involved the inclusion of Aadhaar as the 12th "indicative" document for citizenship verification; a direction to publish the complete list of approximately 65 lakh excluded electors in Bihar and the active assistance rendered by the booth-level agent of political parties at the grassroots level.

The court dismissed the view of the petitioners that the SIR was a backdoor attempt to conduct citizenship screening in the name of "purifying" the electoral roll of aliens. The EC was well within its authority to verify citizenship to the limited extent of determining inclusion or exclusion from the electoral roll, it said. "Citizenship is a condition precedent for enrolment. The EC, in the course of preparing or revising electoral rolls, is undoubtedly empowered to examine questions bearing

upon citizenship," Chief Justice Kant, who authored the 124-page judgment, observed.

Adjudication of cases

The court directed the poll body to refer, within the next four weeks, the names of electors who were part of the 2003 electoral roll but were purged in the Bihar SIR on the grounds of being non-citizens, to the Centre for adjudication by a competent authority under the Citizenship Act.

The authority must de-

cide their cases before the next Vidhan Sabha or local body elections. Their names should be restored to the rolls if they are found to be citizens.

The second phase of the SIR, covering 51 crore voters in 12 States and Union Territories, including West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, had commenced even as the challenge to the exercise in Bihar was pending in the Supreme Court.

The Bench also directed that persons domiciled in Bihar, whose names may

have been wrongly deleted on the grounds of absence, death, duplication or shifting could challenge the EC's decision before the courts. The final Bihar electoral roll published on September 30 last year contained 7.42 crore electors, compared with 7.89 crore when the SIR was notified by the EC on June 24, 2025.

The court said the SIR did not supplant the Representation of the People Act (RP Act) or the Registration of Electors Rules of 1960. Rather, it breathed

GS 2: HEALTH

THE HINDU PAGE: 6

Health expenses dip as govt. spend rises

The out-of-pocket expenditure as a share of the total health expenditure has been calculated as 43.4% in 2022-23, as against 64.2% in 2013-14; the Ministry credits the results to operationalisation of Ayushman wellness centres; the share of private health insurance has also increased, report says

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Concurrent with the increase in government health expenditure, the out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) share in total health expenditure has declined by 21%, from 2013-14 till date, noted the National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates for India 2022-23, released by the Union Health Ministry on Wednesday.

The OOPE as a share of the total health expenditure has been calculated as 43.4% in 2022-23, as against 64.2% in 2013-14.

"This declining trend of OOPE indicates the improved access to health services, leading to reduced financial burden on the households," said a senior Health Ministry official.

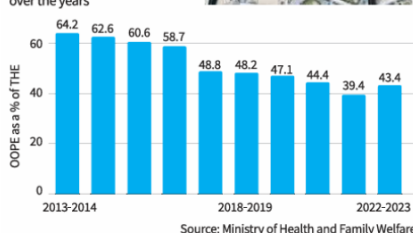
He added that this is also the impact of operationalisation of more than 1.8 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandir wellness centres across the country, providing preventive and curative healthcare services closer to the community.

These centres provide free services across 12 expanded packages, including reproductive and child health, communicable/non-communicable diseases, free drugs/diagnostics services, teleconsultations, and preventive care through wellness sessions.

"These measures have reduced the episodes of sickness. On in-depth analysis, it has been observed that the purchase of pharmaceuticals, including health supplements, vitamins, protein and other supplements [from well-

A medical shift

The chart shows India's year-wise share of out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) in total health expenditure (THE) over the years



ness centres], is the main driver of OOPE in the current estimates," the Ministry said.

The NHA 2022-23 is the 10th report on health expenditure estimates prepared by the National

Health Accounts Technical Secretariat (NHATS), National Health Systems Resource Centre, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, using the System of Health Accounts (2011) framework.

The part reasons of OOPE in current estimates is purchase of pharmaceuticals and supplements from govt. centres

The report indicates an increase in the share of government health expenditure in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It has risen from 1.15% in 2013-14 to 1.43% in 2022-23.

Similarly, health expenditure's share in general government expenditure has increased from 3.78% to 4.89% over the same period.

In per capita terms, government health expenditure has increased nearly 2.7 times, from ₹1,042 to ₹2,786 between 2013-14 and 2022-23.

To address the emergency COVID pandemic situation, the government increased the health expenditure significantly to 1.84% of GDP in 2021-22 towards managing the pandemic situation given these additional spending by the government as a one-time measure. OOPE as a percentage of total health expenditure during this period also declined to 39.4%.

Inter-temporal comparisons also reveal a positive trend in the growth of social security expenditure. Spending here increased substantially from 6% in 2013-14 to 9.9% in 2022-23.

The share of private health insurance has also increased, from 3.4% to 9.2%, clearly indicating improved health-seeking behaviour due to awareness.

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

THE HINDU PAGE: 9

The battle against AI misinformation

India is working towards Viksit Bharat 2047 with the objective of achieving economic growth, and in order to emerge as a technology leader. One of the major areas that India is concentrating on is the Artificial Intelligence (AI) front. However, a question that needs a definite answer is: what will India's policy be with reference to rapidly developing AI tools? While India's aspiration to attain the status of a global AI hub is commendable, Indian policies regarding AI should not only be looked at through the lens of development and economic growth, but also through the lens of growing misinformation and identity manipulation that could be spread through AI platforms.

A new era

ChatGPT recently launched its latest AI multimodal image generation model which has been successful in generating text-heavy images that could rival the work of a professional. Modern generative AI systems are now capable of producing highly sophisticated, text-heavy images akin to a professional newspaper or a scientific research paper. In most cases, these outputs are almost indistinguishable from authentic images taken with the help of a camera, or scanned originals. This model can pull up data from the web portal and provide details of the image with near accurate information.

Thus, through this launch, AI image generation has entered a new era. It is no longer a simple recreational model for a user to dabble with and post on social media platforms to follow a trend; rather, it poses serious concerns in the domain of cyber-crime, theft and digital deceit.

Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and even LinkedIn are flooded with AI-generated content often leaving users wondering about the veracity of the information they consume. The current version of ChatGPT and similar platforms



Sundar Athreya H.

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While the country seeks to establish itself as a global AI leader, it must develop a robust legal framework that would effectively address the issues of misinformation, identity misuse and manipulation

allow such content to be released disproportionately on social media platforms. Since such platforms are primarily accessed by users through their mobile phones, which have limited screen sizes, the ability to verify such content becomes difficult and users may readily accept AI-generated images posted on these platforms as real.

For instance, a post on LinkedIn about publishing a new research paper, along with the image of the first page of the paper which might contain all necessary details such as the name of the journal and author credentials, might just be fake and non-existent. However, this can be verified by other users only if they check the database; most users are unlikely to fact-check such information.

Educational institutions and genuine academic publishers who strive to maintain originality face challenges as AI systems can fabricate mark sheets, degree certificates and research papers. The persuasive effect of AI-generated content significantly amplifies the possibility of misinformation and manipulation, to the extent where genuine photographs, videos and documents themselves may be dismissed as fabricated thus bearing a large impact on academics, journalism, and institutional credibility.

Various implications

Cybercrimes related to identity thefts have also multiplied in the recent past.

Additionally, celebrities have filed petitions before various High Courts of India seeking protection of their personality rights, and protection against the unauthorised usage of their likeness in image, voice and name using AI. Although various individuals have filed such cases, India has yet to formulate a sound legislative response to this emerging challenge. The implications of AI-generated content also pose risks in terms of

evidence or pleadings that are submitted before courts using AI platforms. The Supreme Court and other High Courts, such as the Bombay High Court, have disparaged such usage and have also imposed costs on lawyers who adopt AI-generated arguments without verifying the submissions and cases cited therein.

Need for regulation

India therefore stands at a critical crossroads at present. While the country seeks to establish itself as a global AI leader, it must develop a robust legal framework that would effectively address the issues of misinformation, identity misuse and manipulation. The challenge at hand is to craft a balanced regulatory framework – one that encourages innovations and technological advancements while simultaneously ensuring accountability from platforms and safeguarding the authenticity of the digital ecosystem.

India's recently amended Information Technology Rules, 2026 mandate the disclosure of AI-generated/altered content throughout the video. They have also attempted to revamp the age-old intermediary liability framework with the stipulated timeline of three hours to remove synthetically generated content upon receiving a court order or government notification. They also mandate that personal complaints filed by users must be solved within 36 hours of its filing. This is a step in the right direction.

Further, there is a need to develop a code of ethics for AI platforms to prevent them from generating images/videos that would undermine trust in digital news. Beyond the quintessential legal and regulatory frameworks, there is a need for developing digital and AI literacy amongst the public at large. Unless users themselves develop the capacity to critically evaluate a particular digital content and verify the same before dissemination, these issues will continue to linger.

GS3: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 12

When night falls, and temperature doesn't



RAJIB
DASGUPTA

A recent study has established strong evidence of an increased mortality risk associated with hot-night indices in most regions across the world. This was found to be independent of any association with daytime temperature

DELHI HAS recorded the hottest May in 14 years, with the minimum temperature 5°C above normal. The occurrence of daytime-only heatwaves is increasingly shifting to nighttime-only and day-night compound heatwaves, and the conventional "hot day and cool night" is no longer the case.

A recent analysis reveals that warm nights in northeast, northwest and peninsular India increased by two-eight days/decade and are projected to increase by 10-13 days/decade from 2015 to 2100. The forecast for the far-future (2080-2100) scenario: Warm nights (and days) are expected to rise sevenfold.

High night temperatures have a bearing on both sleep quantity and quality, and the nocturnal recovery of the body from diurnal heat stress. Body temperature falls after sleep onset, and the set point for thermoregulation is adjusted to a lower level. Humid heat exposure (during sleep time) suppresses the sleep-evoked core body temperature, raises the thermal load, and increases wakefulness.

Accounting for two thermal indices — hot night excess and hot night duration — a recent study has established strong evidence of an increased mortality risk associated with hot-night indices in most regions across the world. This was found to be independent of any association with daytime temperature. The "hot night excess" has been associated with increased hospital admission and mortality risks from conditions like stroke, cardiovascular conditions and dementia.

Even a night's lack of sleep has negative implications for cognitive ability, immune system, mood changes, quality of life and social activity. Indoor overheating is critical in bedrooms and is a key determinant of restorative sleep. The intersection of urban heat exposure and housing vulnerability is gaining attention. Recent observations in Chennai revealed that indoor temperatures remained in the 32°-35.5°C range, and even exceeded 35°C. Prevailing relative humidity adds another layer of heat stress. Reports indicate the IMD is considering revising the criteria for declaring heatwave conditions

in coastal regions.

Several factors contribute to high indoor temperatures. External shades, a traditional consideration for residential housing sites, are increasingly less so. Awnings, solar screens and blinds can help with indoor cooling. Cross-ventilation helps, but modern apartment buildings are often deficient on this count: opening windows during high-heat diurnal hours is not advisable. Rooms in low-income settlements typically have low ceilings without enough space for "stratification" (warmer air near the ceiling and cooler air closer to the floor). Indoor electrical gadgets radiate heat, and switching to low-energy/thermally efficient equipment reduces it to some extent.

Permanent indoor alterations are costly, difficult to make and not suitable for tenants. Measures to improve shading include installing moveable/removable shading above, around, or on windows and doors, and shades for open spaces like verandas. Installing blinds and placing leafy green indoor plants by windows improve internal shading in rooms exposed to direct sunlight. Ceiling fans certainly improve ventilation, but tend to spread the heat around if the temperature is above 35°C.

It is generally difficult and expensive to cool the entire home. One or two rooms are best kept cool, and as little time as possible is spent in rooms that receive direct sunlight or kitchens. A shower before bed reduces body temperature slowly and avoids the risk of overheating. A glass of cold water before bed and loose clothing also help.

While heat-related mortality risk and advisories focus on peak daytime temperatures or exposure across the entire day, it is difficult to adapt to the consequences of nighttime exposure and high indoor heat. India needs to respond to this challenge, taking into account both climatic and socioeconomic contexts.

The writer is chairperson, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, JNU, and a collaborator in the Wellcome Trust-supported 'Economic and Health Impact Assessment of Heat Adaptation Action: Case studies from India'. Views are personal

GS2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13

On India-US, symptoms are being managed, not underlying MAGA unpredictability



THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

WHEN PRIME Minister Narendra Modi met President Donald Trump at the White House in February 2025, the air was thick with the celebratory rhetoric of a geopolitical romance destined to define the 21st century. For 25 years — a golden quarter-century bookended by Bill Clinton's transformative visit to New Delhi in 2000 and that February encounter — the India-US relationship operated on a seemingly unassailable, ascendant trajectory.

This historic warming rested on several foundational assumptions throughout the first quarter of the century. There was a widespread conviction that no fundamental strategic or systemic incompatibilities existed between the two nations and their geopolitical interests, broadly defined. As vibrant democracies, it was believed that Washington and New Delhi had far more in common than their evident, mostly material and cultural, differences. The principal threat to both countries was unmistakably the same — a rising, increasingly assertive, and revisionist China. Furthermore, the United States appeared to have outgrown its Cold War-era hyphenation of India with Pakistan, clearly seeing the former's rise as invaluable to world order and the latter as an unreliable, terrorist-enabling disruptor. Finally, emerging global trends in technology, supply chains, world trade, and investment all found India and the US on the same side as countries whose intrinsic strengths were mutually compatible. Driven by these certainties, New Delhi gradually shed its non-aligned reticence to warmly embrace a comprehensive global strategic partnership with Washington.

Then, abruptly, came the Trump wrecking ball. Over the past year, the Trump administration has systematically trashed these long-held assumptions, leaving Indian policymakers deeply shaken and confused about the basic premises of their foreign policy. Rather than treating India as an indis-

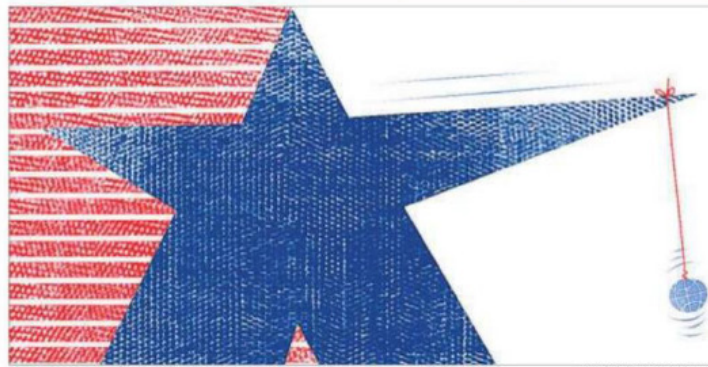


ILLUSTRATION: C.R. SASKUMAH

pensable strategic counterweight in the Indo-Pacific, Washington's transactional "America First" doctrine has treated New Delhi as an economic adversary and a geopolitical afterthought.

The most visceral shock has been economic, shattering the illusion of seamless trade convergence. Trump's aggressive re-litigation of trade balances resulted in the sudden imposition of sweeping universal tariffs on Indian steel, aluminium, and textiles, accompanied by a public branding of India as the "tariff king". For an Indian economy banking on "friend-shoring" (the intentional redirection of global supply chains away from China), this blunt protectionism has been a rude awakening, proving that Washington is less interested in building resilient economic partnerships than in closing its borders to most imports, friendly or otherwise.

Simultaneously, the assumption of strategic compatibility crumbled under the weight of Washington's transactional approach to global conflicts. As India maintained its pragmatic oil imports from Russia and sustained its historical defence ties with Moscow, the White House aggressively brandished the threat of CAATSA sanctions, erasing the diplomatic space New Delhi previously enjoyed to navigate its complex Eurasian dependencies and replacing it with a rigid demand for compliance. In parallel, the talk of a "G2" raised questions about the US's basic pos-

Widely viewed as a much-needed damage-control exercise, Rubio's visit sought to inject a dose of traditional geopolitics back into a relationship on the verge of transactional derailment

ture towards China. The pattern of disruption extended to the human sphere, where the administration's drastic tightening of H-1B visa caps and increased scrutiny of tech-worker renewals targeted the human bridge connecting Silicon Valley with Bengaluru, severely disrupting the high-tech trust underlying their joint technology initiatives. Perhaps most alarmingly, the post-Cold War de-hyphenation of the Subcontinent began to blur as Washington, in its haste to pressure Iran and secure transactional regional exits, re-engaged with Islamabad on mediation and intelligence-sharing, forging investment partnerships in crypto and minerals, hailing Asim Munir as the US President's "favourite field marshal", and sending shivers through our security establishment.

It was against this backdrop of structural fraying and mounting mistrust that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio arrived. Widely viewed as a much-needed damage-control exercise, Rubio's visit sought to inject a dose of traditional geopolitics back into a relationship on the verge of transactional derailment. As an institutional hawk on China, Rubio represents the faction within Washington that still views the Indo-Pacific through a structural lens rather than a balance-of-payments ledger. To some extent, he succeeded in limiting the immediate bleeding. Rubio was effective at separating the noisy trade rhetoric of the Oval Office from the quiet, institutional mechanics of bi-

lateral security cooperation. By utilising his time in New Delhi to reaffirm American commitment to the Quad, fast-track pending defence transfers like the co-production of jet engines, sign an agreement on strategic minerals cooperation and frame India's security as an absolute requirement for American dominance in the Indian Ocean, Rubio offered India a comforting echo of the pre-2025 consensus. By returning to the familiar language of anti-hegemonic balancing against China, he temporarily restored a sense of shared purpose.

However, a single successful diplomatic visit cannot completely undo a year of systemic whiplash. While Rubio effectively managed the acute symptoms of the crumbling partnership, the underlying disease — the radical unpredictability of Washington's transactional MAGA foreign policy — remains uncured. To genuinely rebuild the trust that has been destroyed over the past 12 months, both capitals must move beyond high-level rhetoric and commit to concrete structural assurances.

Washington must codify its much-awaited "strategic partner" status for India, ensuring that if New Delhi is expected to take risks to support US interests in Asia, it cannot be simultaneously penalised with the same tariff bluntness applied to economic adversaries. Furthermore, the US must accept that India will always maintain an independent relationship with Russia and a distinct posture on Central Asia, acknowledging that trust can only be restored if Washington stops treating strategic divergence as a sign of betrayal. To dispel doubts about China, Trump must attend a Quad summit in India soon. Finally, critical technology pipelines require the free movement of both data and brains, meaning both countries need to insulate high-tech immigration pathways from the broader, highly politicised domestic debates over American border crossings.

The past year has delivered a sobering, necessary lesson to New Delhi: The strategic partnership with the US is not a self-sustaining enterprise, but a fragile construct susceptible to shifting executive whims, requiring constant protection from the vagaries of transactional politics. As they say in Washington, it's time to wake up and smell the coffee.

The writer is a fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram and chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs