Sanskriti IAS

*7th May 2026*

IMPORTANT

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# GS 2: INDIAN POLITY

# THE HINDU PAGE : 6

# Overall crime rate drops 6%; cybercrime up by 17%: NCRB

**Deaths due to drug overdose saw a 50% increase in 2024 from the previous year's figures; T.N. records the most fatalities; 5,194 cases of offences 'against the state' registered, a rise of over 6%**

**Vijaita Singh**
NEW DELHI

The overall crime rate in India declined in 2024 from the 2023 figure, but there was an increase of over 17% in cybercrime cases, show the Crime in India, 2024 report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) on Wednesday.

A total of 1,01,928 cybercrime cases were registered in 2024 over 86,420 such cases in the previous year.

"During 2024, 72.6% of cybercrime cases registered were for the motive of fraud (73,987 out of 1,01,928 cases) followed by sexual exploitation with 3.1% (3,190 cases) and extortion with 2.5% (2,536 cases)," the report said.

The NCRB recorded 58.86 lakh cognisable crimes across the country in 2024, marking a 6% decline from the previous year's figure. Of these, 35.44 lakh cases were registered under the Indian Penal Code and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and 23.41 lakh cases under special and local laws. There were 5,194 cases of offences "against the state" registered in 2024 as against 4,873 in 2023, showing a rise of 6.6%.

"Out of 5,194 cases, 4,395 (84.6%) cases were registered under The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, followed by 649 (12.5%) cases under The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act," the report said.

## Crime against SC/ST

The report revealed that a total of 55,698 cases were registered for crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs), showing a decrease of 3.6% over the 2023 figure of 57,789 cases. Crimes against Scheduled Tribes showed a sharp decline of 23.1%, dropping to 9,966 cases from 12,960 in 2023.

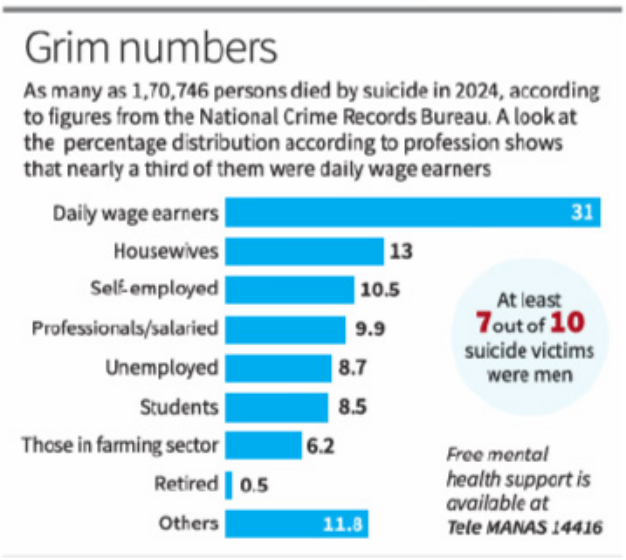
The NCRB released the Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI), 2024 report according to which 1,70,746 suicides were recorded in 2024. Those associated with the agriculture sector, the unemployed, and daily wage workers accounted for a substantial share of suicidal deaths.

A total of 10,546 persons involved in the farming sector (consisting of 4,633 farmers/cultivators and 5,913 agricultural labourers) died by suicide in 2024, accounting for 6.2%.

Out of 4,633 farmer/cultivator suicides, a total of 4,481 were by men and 152 by women, the report said. Around 31% of the total suicides were reported among the daily wagers, the report said. The number of unemployed people who died by suicide was 14,778 while the number of students and homemakers who ended their lives stood at 14,488 and 22,113, respectively.

Deaths due to drug overdose saw a 50% increase in 2024 from the previous year's figure. The report stated that 978 people died due to drug overdose in 2024, up from 650 deaths in 2023.

Tamil Nadu reported 313 deaths, the highest number of drug overdose deaths, followed by Punjab with 106, Madhya Pradesh 90, Rajasthan 69 and Mizoram 65, according to the NCRB data.



# GS 2: INDIAN POLITY
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# Centre mandates local committees to oversee and govern schools

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

In a move to decentralise school governance and align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the Ministry of Education has issued comprehensive new guidelines mandating the formation of school management committees (SMCs), and granting them financial and operational powers to oversee and govern schools.

The guidelines, which supersede all previous instructions under schemes such as the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act, were launched by Union Minister for Education Dharmendra Pradhan on Wednesday.

They require every school across the country – including secondary institutions up to Class 12 – to constitute an SMC within one month of the start of the academic year. "The SMC will replace the existing School Management Development Committees (SMDC) to create a unified, streamlined approach to school leadership," the guidelines said.

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan during the launch of school management committee guidelines in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

The new framework emphasises that education is a "shared responsibility". To ensure grassroots involvement, 75% of an SMC's members must be parents or guardians and 50% must be women. The remaining 25% will include elected local officials, teachers, alumni, and local experts such as Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and academicis.

"Furthermore, proportionate representation must be given to Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups, including SC, ST, OBC, and Children with Special Needs," the guidelines state.

The SMC is not just an advisory body but holds significant financial and operational power. "Committees are authorised to execute all school civil works costing up to ₹30 lakh. For projects exceeding this amount, SMCs will participate in the public tendering process (per CPWD/PWD manuals) to ensure quality and transparency," the guidelines said. The SMC will be responsible for reviewing the school budget, preventing financial irregularities, and maintaining accurate records of receipts and expenditures. They must lead drives to bring out-of-school children back into the mainstream and ensure the distribution of uniforms, textbooks, and scholarships.

# GS 3: ENVIRONMENT

# THE HINDU PAGE: 6

# India to host first Big Cat Summit in June; 95 countries set to participate

**Jacob Koshy**
NEW DELHI

The inaugural International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) Summit, to be held here from June 1 to 3, is expected to adopt the first-ever global declaration on big cat conservation. Titled the 'Delhi Declaration', it will articulate shared priorities, strengthen transboundary cooperation, and promote a landscape-based approach for conserving big cats and their habitats.

Representatives from 95 countries are expected to participate, the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change said on Wednesday.

The IBCA is an association of countries that host, or have itinerant populations of at least one of the seven 'big cats' – lions, tigers, leopards, snow leopards, cheetahs, jaguars, and pumas – and are committed to the conservation of these animals.

**Call for action:** The summit will be guided by the theme 'Save big cats, save humanity, save ecosystem'. K.R. DEEPAK

## Collective action

There are 24 member countries, three observer countries, and several other 'range' countries in the alliance. Member countries are expected to coordinate action through programmes and activities aimed at improving the state of habitats, prey, and big cats, including big cat protection and conservation, innovation, research, development, and capacity building. They also share relevant information about big cat protection and conservation programmes.

Summit participants are likely to include heads of State/Government of member and observer countries, Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said on Wednesday at an event to launch the summit website and unveil its logo. The summit will be guided by the theme 'Save big cats, save humanity, save ecosystem', and will bring together over 400 conservationists, policymakers, scientists, multilateral agencies, financial institutions, corporate leaders, and community representatives from across the globe.

## Launched in 2023

The IBCA, piloted and conceived by India, was officially launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2023. The alliance, Mr. Yadav said, reflects India's belief that conservation challenges must be addressed "collectively" through cooperation, knowledge sharing, and mutual support.

# GS 2: INDIAN POLITY

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## Fixing structural deficits in India's health system

On March 11, 2026, the Minister of State for Health, Anupriya Patel, informed Parliament that 43 new medical colleges have been established and 11,682 MBBS seats along with 8,967 postgraduate seats have been approved for the 2025-26 academic year.

Will this address India's problem of non-availability of doctors in the public health system? Of the 8,967 new postgraduate doctors, how many will actually have the inclination to serve in aspirational districts or underserved areas? Of the 43 newly sanctioned medical colleges, only eight are under State governments, eight are in the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) sector, and 27 are in the private sector. Private medical colleges, after charging high capitation fees, have no obligation to post their trainees in government service, nor can they be compelled to do so. There is also no clearly defined policy or stipulations to ensure that public health institutions benefit maximally by filling existing vacancies in specialist cadre posts.

Merely investing in capital expenditure and infrastructure alone will not yield the desired improvement in health services in hilly, tribal, and other remote underserved areas. Eleven out of 18 All India Institutes of Medical Sciences report around 40% vacancies in their teaching and research faculty positions. Without adequate research and teaching capacity, how can we effectively train specialists?

### Glaring vacancy rate

According to The Health Dynamics of India 2022-23 report, the vacancy rate in 5,491 rural Community Health Centres (CHC) across 757 districts in India is 79.9%, with only 4,413 specialists available against a requirement of 21,964. Since 2014, the shortfall of specialists in CHCs has remained at around 17,500, despite the creation of additional postgraduate medical seats – 72,627 across 731 medical colleges.

Newly graduated specialists are often unwilling to work in remote and underserved areas due to inadequate facilities, including lack of equipment, decent staff quarters, schools for their children, and adequate peer medical support. If specialists were available at CHCs, patients from rural and tribal areas would not need to travel long distances to district headquarters hospitals or medical colleges.

**Dr. K.R. Antony**

Public health system and policy development adviser

There needs to be greater alignment between medical education and public service

A CHC serves as a first referral unit for a population of about 1.6 lakh to 2 lakh and is expected to have 30 beds with five specialists – physician, surgeon, obstetrician, paediatrician, and anaesthetist. However, the majority of CHCs remain crippled due to a persistent shortage of specialists, a problem that has continued for many years.

Yet, States continue to construct more CHCs to utilise available central government funds, even though many of them function effectively as primary health centres. There are 5,491 CHCs across 785 districts – about seven CHCs per district – which is not a feasible model. With only 4,413 specialists available at present, just 882 CHCs can be fully operationalised, effectively leaving only one functional CHC per district in addition to the district hospital for specialised care.

### Flawed budgetary focus

The central health Budget is largely focused on infrastructure, without matching allocations for drugs, diagnostics, ambulance services, emergency care, or salaries for temporary staff. If the goal is to improve people's health, it must prioritise operational outcomes rather than merely investing capital in building construction, leaving the rest to be managed by State budgets.

How do we manage better with what we have in hand? We need to put the brakes on overly enthusiastic declarations of new CHCs, which often serve populist political mileage rather than functional need.

Classify all PHCs and CHCs into normal, difficult, and most difficult areas based on defined criteria, as was done in Chhattisgarh under the Rural Medical Corps Scheme. The most difficult areas are those with persistently high staff vacancies over long periods. Introduce special incentives such as additional compensatory financial allowances, priority for postgraduate seats, staff quarters, and quality schooling facilities for children, among others.

### Additional steps to take

Hereafter, all government-sponsored postgraduate seat allocations must be linked to existing vacancies in CHCs or district hospitals. Candidates willing to fill a specialist vacancy in a CHC should be allotted a seat in the corresponding speciality, with the assurance that upon completion of training, they will be posted there immediately.

Conversely, aspirant doctors must provide an undertaking to serve in the designated government facility first. Priority may be given to those who commit to a 10-year service bond in difficult-area CHCs, along with additional incentives under the National Health Mission. We must strictly follow an "all or none" principle in posting specialists – either all five specialists are placed in a CHC or none at all –avoiding piecemeal deployment or the dilution of services by spreading specialists too thinly.

Urgent construction of staff quarters and renovation of operation theatres, labour rooms, intensive care units, and 24-hour emergency units must be undertaken in such CHCs, which may number two or three per district. Similar undertakings and post graduate training can be awarded to nurses willing to serve in remote needy areas.

When adequate specialists are posted as a team at the sub-district or town level, the image of government hospitals improves in the public eye. The workload is better distributed, and optimal sharing reduces stress on doctors on duty. Interpersonal communication with patients also improves. This, in turn, enhances patient satisfaction and reduces conflicts between the public and doctors and other health staff.

We can no longer afford to see nearly 70,000 specialists graduating from 731 medical colleges without adequately filling the vacant posts in the public health system, which remains the only source of care for the poor and marginalised.

# GS 3: ENVIRONMENT

# INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 1

• CLASSIFIED AS 'NEAR THREATENED', PROTECTED SPECIES FOUND TO BE ALIVE AND BREEDING IN ARAVALLI SCRUBLANDS

## Rusty-spotted, among tiniest wildcat species, sighted close to Delhi

Sophiya Mathew
*New Delhi, May 6*

THEY WERE sighted for no more than 10-15 seconds — a mother, followed a few steps behind, by her tiny offspring. But it was enough to establish that an elusive species of the cat family was alive and breeding in the Aravalli scrublands at the doorstep of Delhi.

Photographic evidence for the presence of the rusty-spotted cat (*Prionailurus rubiginosus*), one of the world's smallest species of wildcat, was reported last week in the peer-reviewed journal *Zoo's Print*.

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The female adult and her dependent kitten were photographed in July 2025 in Kot village of Faridabad district during field surveys by researchers affiliated with the Department of Zoology at Indira Gandhi University in Meerpur, Haryana.

The finding, reported by Amit Kumar, Tejveer Mavi, Yatin Verma, Ram Kumar Rawat, and Sohail Madan, indicates the presence of a resident population of the species in the Aravalli landscape in Faridabad and Gurgaon.

The rusty-spotted cat is classified as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN Red List, and is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is an organisation of 160 member countries and hundreds of civil society groups that work together for the protection of biodiversity, and to examine the health of species and their extinction risk.

The rusty-spotted cat measures no more than 35-48 cm in length, about half of which is bushy tail. It has short, reddish grey fur, with rusty spots on the back and sides.

The female cat, her kitten were photographed in July 2025 in Kot village of Faridabad district. YATIN VERMA

The cat is native to India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, where almost 75% of its habitat is believed to be under threat from land-use change, including agriculture and urban expansion. The animal is rarely documented due to its secretive nature and low density.

"The rusty-spotted cat is one of the world's smallest cat species. It is found in virgin forest, where there is no disturbance. But here we have recorded it very close to the city in Aravallis. This is the first time anybody has recorded the breeding. It is proof that Aravallis is still home to very sensitive wildlife," Yatin Verma, one of the researchers, told *The Indian Express*.

Until now, the species had only been recorded sporadically in Delhi-NCR. "In September 2023, from Manger Bani..., before that from Haryana, only three-four instances were recorded in the past few years. It was all through a camera trap and there was no live sighting. But we were able to recently get live sightings as well," he said.

Verma said he had recorded three live sightings of the cat so far, including one made as recently as this week. The first live sighting was reported in Bhondsi in Gurgaon in 2023, followed by the mother-and-kitten sighting in Kot village in 2025, and a third in Tikri just days ago, he said.

The researchers said the presence of the species across

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# INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 4

• STUDY PUBLISHED IN *NATURE* JOURNAL

## Mitigating $SO_2$ from coal power plants could prevent over 1.24 lakh deaths annually in India, says IIT Delhi study

**Sophiya Mathew**
*New Delhi, May 6*

INDIA COULD prevent an estimated 1,24,564 deaths every year by fully mitigating sulphur dioxide ($SO_2$) emissions from coal-fired power plants (CFPP), according to a study conducted by researchers from IIT Delhi, published in the *Nature* journal this week.

The study is among the first comprehensive attempts to quantify how $SO_2$ from CFPPs contributes not only to ambient $SO_2$ levels, but also to the formation of secondary fine particulate matter, or PM2.5.

The researchers found that a decrease in these emissions could reduce annual PM2.5 exposure by 0.3-12 micrograms per cubic metre and ambient $SO_2$ levels by 0.1-13.6 parts per billion across states.

The CFPPs emit $SO_2$, which reacts in the atmosphere to form secondary inorganic aerosols, including sulphate, nitrate and ammonium. These pollutants add to PM2.5, the fine particulate matter linked to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

"Multiple existing source apportionment studies show that the energy sector is the leading contributor to air pollution. Along with the household sector, thermal power plants are also among the leading contributors. So, we wanted to quantify the exact contribution from this sector," Debajit Sarkar from IIT Delhi, one of the co-authors of the study, said.

"The overall goal was to check if we can quantify and provide to different states their specific emissions volume, so that they could make specific policies," he said.

The researchers used air pollution models and satellite data on $SO_2$ emissions from CFPPs. They also used the 'Global Burden of Disease' framework – which measures the impact on health across places, time, age, and sex – to estimate deaths that could be prevented from diseases linked to air pollution, including heart and respiratory illnesses. Further, they matched air quality data with National Family Health Survey-5 data — conducted in 2019-21 — to see how the benefits would differ across gender, caste and income groups.

The study found that complete mitigation of $SO_2$ emissions from CFPPs could prevent 14,777 cardiovascular deaths and 8,476 respiratory deaths annually, apart from the all-cause mortality reduction.

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were estimated to see the highest number of avoidable deaths due to high population exposure to pollution. Chhattisgarh and Odisha were expected to see the biggest improvement in air quality because they have several coal power-based pollution hotspots.

Further, the study found that the benefits would not be evenly distributed. People from Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and poorer and middle-income groups are expected to see larger air quality gains than wealthier and general category groups. According to the researchers, this makes $SO_2$ mitigation not only an air pollution issue, but also an environmental equity issue.

"We made sure that meteorology and emissions were both included in the study model. Season-specific contribution of pollutants was also important. During winter, power plants are major contributors to pollution," Sarkar said, adding that location, transported air pollution and population exposure were all significant in assessing the health impact of $SO_2$ emissions.

The study comes amid continuing debate over the installation of flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) systems in CFPPs. The FGD is a technology that removes $SO_2$ from exhaust gases of fossil fuel power plants and industrial boilers, reducing acid rain and air pollution.

A key argument against FGD installation has been that Indian coal has relatively low sulphur content, making the technology expensive. The study, however, argues that health-related monetary gains from reduced emissions are likely to outweigh the cost of installing emission-control technologies.

Manoj Kumar, a researcher at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, said the findings are significant because earlier estimates did not fully quantify $SO_2$-linked health impacts. "The observations are significant, especially that the cost of saving lives will outweigh FGD-related expenses."

Kumar said the findings should be read in the context of the 2015 emission norms for thermal plants and subsequent delays in compliance. "These kinds of assessments were not taken into account during the reversal of the 2015 policy. Most importantly, the study shows the health impacts on vulnerable people and also the distribution among states," he said.

On December 7, 2015, the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change had introduced mandatory emission norms for CFPPs, targeting significantly lower levels of $SO_2$, nitrogen oxides, mercury and particulate matter. On July 11, 2025, the Centre relaxed the 2015 emission norms for CFPPs, exempting roughly 79% of coal-fired units from installing FGD systems to curb $SO_2$ emissions.

According to the IIT Delhi study, while $SO_2$ emissions from CFPPs declined globally between 2005 and 2021, India moved in the opposite direction. Satellite-derived estimates showed India's $SO_2$ emissions rose from 2.36 thousand kilotonnes per year in 2005 to 5.05 thousand kilotonnes per year in 2021, with a further increase of about 30% in 2023.

The study said that stronger implementation of $SO_2$ emission norms, wider adoption of FGDs and related control technologies, and prioritisation of hotspot regions are essential. "India needs to strictly enforce $SO_2$ emission rules, expand the use of FGDs and pollution-control technology in power plants, and prioritise highly-polluted areas. Also, use of cleaner cooking fuels and electric vehicles, as well as decrease in stubble burning incidents are necessary," said Sarkar.

The study also said that implementation of $SO_2$ emission norms remains "slow, localised and uneven" in India, and that fully enforcing current limits could cut coal power plant-linked $SO_2$ and PM2.5 emissions by over 80% by 2030.

### • THE IIT DELHI STUDY, IN A NUTSHELL

**Importance of the study**

- Coal-fired thermal power plants (CFPP) emit atmospheric sulfur dioxide ($SO_2$)
- Major precursor of secondary pollutants, which pose health risks
- Main pollutants produced include sulfate, nitrate, and ammonium aerosols

**Current trend**

- India's emissions have spiked significantly due to rapid socio-economic changes and heavy coal reliance
- Globally, CFPP-$SO_2$ emissions declining

**The findings**

- India could reduce annual PM2.5 levels by 0.3-12 micrograms per cubic metre by cutting down CFPP-$SO_2$

- Can prevent 1,24,564 deaths annually
- States like Chhattisgarh and Odisha would see greatest improvements
- Socio-economically disadvantaged groups would see highest health benefits
- Health-related monetary gains likely to surpass costs of installing emission-control technologies like flue gas desulfurization (FGD)

**The recommendations**

- Proper implementation of SO2 emission norms, which remains slow, localised and uneven in India
- More use of FGDs that are viewed as expensive
- Fully enforcing limits could cut $SO_2$ and PM2.5 emissions by over 80% by 2030
- Developing domestic expertise in pollution-control technologies to support $SO_2$ mitigation efforts
- Policymakers should prioritise hotspot sub-regions

SOURCE: *NATURE*