

# EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

10-07-2026

## 1. If DNA is the instruction manual, we just opened a big second volume (THE HINDU PAGE NO 7)

1. **GS III** (Science & Tech)
2. **Topics:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications in everyday life; Awareness in the fields of Bio-technology.
3. **Concepts:** Epigenetics, DNA methylation, paramutation, genome-wide association studies (GWAS), non-Mendelian inheritance.

## If DNA is the instruction manual, we just opened a big second volume

A new study found that several inherited traits occur not because genes mutate but because of chemical modifications of the genome that can jump across generations change depending on whether an animal is male or female, and even copy themselves from one copy of a gene to another

**D.P. Kasbekar**

**A** team led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine has found that several inherited traits in the mouse genome break the rules Gregor Mendel laid down in the 19th century about how genes work. This is not because the genes mutate but because of chemical modifications of the genome that can jump across generations, change depending on whether an animal is male or female, and even copy themselves from one copy of a gene to another.

Their findings were reported recently in *Nature Genetics*.

While the study was in mice, the implications go far beyond – as the same mechanisms may also shape human health, and be able to explain conditions that have long resisted genetic analysis.

**'On' and 'off' genes**

Every cell in the body carries two kinds of genetic information. One is the sequence – the order of the four chemical bases, A, T, G, and C, that spells out which proteins a gene produces. This is the genome that geneticists have spent decades mapping. The other is about whether a small chemical compound – called the methyl group (CH<sub>3</sub>) – is attached to the DNA at specific locations.

When cytosines are methylated, the gene is usually silenced. When the group is removed, the gene can be expressed again. This process of switching genes 'on' and 'off' without changing the underlying sequence is called epigenetic modification. Epigenetic modifications are not permanent. They can even differ between tissues – e.g. liver cells and muscle cells methylate differently. Many of them are also reversed when the body makes fresh sperm or eggs.

The new study has found this rule to be violated.

**Vastly underestimated**

The researchers used a technology called nanopore sequencing. A single strand of DNA is threaded through a microscopic hole – the pore. As each base passes through, it produces a distinct blip in the electrical current flowing across the pore. Methylated cytosines produce a different blip from unmethylated ones.

The team sequenced DNA from the liver and muscle tissues of mice belonging to two inbred strains. Their genomes differed at millions of positions.

Of the 7,600 or so locations on the genomes where the methylation patterns differed, around 93% followed Mendel's rules. That is, methylation had passed reliably from parent to offspring. But in the remaining 7% or so, the researchers identified more than 500 instances of non-Mendelian epigenetic inheritance.

To illustrate, in 305 genome regions, all in the liver, the methylation depended on whether the mouse was male or female. Mendel's rules don't allow this. In 304 of these regions, females' genomes were more methylated than males' genomes.

While sex-specific methylation in the liver has been reported before in both mice and humans, the new study found that the scale has been vastly underestimated.

**A new first**

The researchers also identified at least five new genes displaying genomic imprinting – where the level of methylation depends on whether the gene was inherited from the mother or the father.

The most striking finding had to do with a phenomenon called paramutation. Here, the methylation status of one copy of a gene – say, the one inherited from the father – is also transferred to the other copy, inherited from the mother. The 'rewritten' mother's copy then persists through the next generation.

Again, scientists had observed paramutation in plants and engineered mice before. This is the first time it has been reported to be naturally occurring in a mammal's genome.

In the study, the paramutated gene was *Capn1*, which contains the recipe for a protein that is active in the testes during meiosis. When this protein is not available but never to daughters.

According to the study's results, if a father carries a paramutagenic version of the gene that causes this condition and the mother carries a 'normal' version, then in a son the paramutagenic copy would rewrite the maternal copy, leaving the son to have hairy ears. He could then pass the paramutagenic variant of the gene to his own children. But if the paramutagenic variant is demethylated in females – as the new findings suggest can happen – a daughter's own copies of the gene would be unmethylated and her ears would be unaffected.

Even more broadly, the findings imply that genome-wide association studies – an increasingly popular kind of study that looks for the genetic variants linked to diseases – may be missing a significant fraction of heritable variation because that variation is not in the sequence.

Instead, the study's authors have argued the work opens the door to a new kind of analysis: allele-specific epigenome-wide association studies, which trace methylation patterns rather than sequence variants, to find parts of the genome associated with diseases that conventional methods miss.

Human genetics has long assumed that if you sequence the genome, you have read the instruction manual. It may be that the manual has a second volume – and we have barely opened it today.

**D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist. kasbekardp@yahoo.co.in**

**THE GIST**

A team led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine has found that several inherited traits in the mouse genome break the rules Gregor Mendel laid down in the 19th century about how genes work.

The study offers a new framework to explain heritable traits that researchers have struggled to study using genetics.

The study's authors have argued that the work opens the door to a new kind of analysis: allele-specific epigenome-wide association studies.

**Representation of a DNA molecule that is methylated. The two white spheres represent methyl groups. They are bound to two cytosine nucleotide molecules that make up the DNA sequence. (SHUTTERSTOCK/ICC BR SA)**

**The researchers also identified at least five new genes displaying genomic imprinting – where the level of methylation depends on whether the gene was inherited from the mother or the father**

In sufficient amounts, the effects may include infertility and azoospermia (having no sperm in the semen).

The team also identified two likely instances of paramutation related to the gene *Vps37c* and a downstream stretch of the genome. Both these areas are associated with intracisternal A particles – the genetic remains of ancient viruses that became embedded in the mouse genome.

According to the study's authors, these particles may be central to the paramutation process since they have been known to resist the body's mechanisms to remove epigenetic modifications when producing sperm or eggs.

**Genome-wide association studies**

The study also offers a new framework to explain heritable traits that researchers have struggled to study using genetics. For instance, a condition called hypertrichosis pinnae auris leads to the growth of coarse, dark hair on the outer ear and is prevalent among South Asian men. It is transmitted from fathers to sons



## 2. A new security triangle emerges with the Makkah Pact (THE HINDU PAGE NO 8)

1. **GS II** (International Relations)
2. **Topics:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries.
3. **Concepts:** Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA), Middle East geopolitics, collective security alliances, strategic realignment, impact on India's energy security.

### *A new security triangle emerges with the Makkah Pact*

**T**he Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA), signed on August 7, 2026, by the top leaders of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan, is the first regional realignment since the geostrategic tsunami of the United States-Iran war. While the MJDA text has not been revealed, the joint statement issued specifically states that "any armed attack against any one of the three states shall be regarded as an attack against them all".

This echoes infamous Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – never invoked – leading speculators to claim that the MJDA was a harbinger of a "Muslim NATO". It appears to be part of a jerky Saudi response to specific security challenges, including a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) with Pakistan last year and a 14-country Multinational Maritime Defence Alliance (MMDA) in the last week of July.

#### **Shifting alignments, uncertain stakes**

Any analysis of the MJDA faces multiple uncertainties, including ongoing regional turbulence, partners' previous karma, and their varied expectations. This hazy context creates a push-pull effect: from anticipation of the MJDA having profound cascading implications to it being a seemingly desultory, inconsequential response to their asymmetric defence and security challenges. Some also see it as inducing counter-polarisation and alarming other stakeholders from Iran and its non-state allies, Israel, Kurds, and Greece to the United Arab Emirates and India. To walk back, the Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister has clarified that it is neither an effort to establish a military axis nor a sectarian bloc. He denied any link to nuclear ambitions or an arms race.

This denial is unlikely to pierce the statement's conspicuous silence about the precise threats that the MJDA is geared to confront, the U.S.-Iran war rolling the region, Israeli aggressiveness, threats from the non-state actors, and the impact of choke point constrictions. It also refrains from either inviting like-minded regional powers to join in or an uplink with the existing collective security architectures provided by the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Observers point out that the Arab-Muslim world has remained divided against Israel for close to eight decades. Hence, the prospect of the MJDA being a precursor to a Muslim NATO polarised against Iran and its Arab proxies appears far-fetched at this stage. Moreover, even as all three MJDA signatories are allies of the U.S. (which remains suspiciously silent), it is unclear if it is meant to substitute the regional Pax Americana or to serve as a surrogate for the *ancient régime*. In the same vein, if the proposed Muslim NATO in future decides to confront Israel, the U.S. would have scored its own goal.

Moreover, the MJDA is beset by various snags. The Saudis have bitter memories of the Ottoman



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rule, which brutally suppressed the Al-Saud. For similar reasons, from Türkiye, Ankara's boots on the ground have been shunned by most post-independence Arab regimes.

Till recently, Türkiye promoted the Sunni outfits such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and motley Syrian militias, many of which are anathema to the Gulf regimes. Türkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Neo-Ottoman ambitions to lead the Sunni Islamic world collide with the Kingdom's self-image of being the Custodian of Islam's Two Holiest Shrines. Riyadh does not continue playing second fiddle to Turkey or any other Muslim power. President Erdoğan had a tenuous relationship with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (Mbs) over the 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a U.S.-based Saudi journalist, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Turkish leaks on this episode sullied Mbs's image, making him a western outlier.

On the other hand, Pakistani troop deployments in Saudi Arabia in the past resulted in frictions due to chain of command disputes, Islamabad's refusal to have its troops shorn of Shias and its reluctance to confront Iran or Yemen. Armed forces in Türkiye and Pakistan have a long-standing tradition of Bonapartism. Saudis have kept armed forces and the National Guard, both with an American-styled set up, out of politics since the Ikhwan militia insurrection (the late 1920s) and the Makkah siege of 1979. Both Türkiye and Pakistan have an active border with Iran – offering a potentially lucrative post-war economic bonanza that they would be loath to forego. Pakistan's enthusiasm for the MJDA is circumscribed by its 900 kilometre-long border with Iran, a large Shia minority, internal security challenges and hostility with India and Afghanistan. In a typical doublespeak, last week, Pakistan began formal discussions on a Free Trade Agreement with Iran, notwithstanding the U.S. sanctions, the MJDA and the SMDA.

#### **Riyadh's security needs**

The MJDA is clearly fulcrumed around Saudi security requirements, which Riyadh expects Türkiye and Pakistan to mitigate as part of a "friends with benefits" arrangement. However, the current threats faced by Saudi Arabia are complex and asymmetric, ranging from air attacks on its vital and vulnerable oil and civil infrastructure by Iran and its proxies, the closures of the Strait of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb and the possible insurrection by the restive Shia minority. It is unclear if Türkiye and Pakistan can meet such challenges, where the U.S. Central Command, with its large, long-standing presence and state-of-the-art equipment, failed. The new allies could perhaps upstage the U.S. in having more boots on the ground in Saudi Arabia, but the Kingdom is unlikely to face a ground invasion. Moreover, relying on foreign forces to address internal security challenges would be bad optics for the

Kingdom. The foregoing is not to deride the MJDA as merely a cosmetic exercise. It symbolises the congruence of the three large Sunni powers with considerable complementarity: the Saudi \$83 billion defence budget, Türkiye's booming military industrial complex exporting \$10 billion annually and Pakistan's 6,60,000-strong armed forces. Their defence and security cross-pollination through military exercises, interoperability of weapon systems and co-production and development of hardware would be beneficial to them all. Additionally, Türkiye and Pakistan could gain political influence in the Kingdom and enrich themselves.

At this stage, the MJDA's future appears uncertain. It may flourish if a low-burn attrition war continues to ripple through the region. Ironically, if an all-out shooting war breaks out, Türkiye and Pakistan may be hesitant to commit forces against Iran, their neighbour. At the other end, if peace prevails, the MJDA would become superfluous. A market share scrimmage among the oil exporters would create a glut, affecting the Saudi capacity to bankroll the MJDA partners.

Having suffered Iranian doggedness and Trumpian tantrums, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arabs are currently experimenting with various security alternatives. The Saudis began the SMDA with Pakistan last year and have felt the need for an MMDA and MJDA. They do not appear to be playing a zero-sum game between semi-reliable Pakistan and India. U.S. President Donald Trump's unreliability was on full display to the Saudis recently in his last-minute Abraham Accords rider to the recent nuclear agreement with the Kingdom. The Saudis may not wish to further complicate their dependence on Uncle Sam by deepening their entanglement with Ankara and Islamabad, both ultimately subject to Washington's dictates.

#### **The implications for India**

Depending on various scenarios panning out, the MJDA can impact India's interests in multiple ways. While India needs to keep a steady eye on Pakistan's attempt to align the MJDA partners with it against India, New Delhi should not overreact. As the world's third-largest crude oil importer, India is slated to drive global demand for the next 15 years. India has been the Kingdom's third-largest market and second largest trading partner. Like Saudi Arabia, India has been both a consistent and moderate pro-status quo power amenable to simpler paradigms of economic complementarity.

Riyadh finds ties with India uncluttered by extraneous considerations. India is a geo-strategically safe bet for the turbulent Gulf. Riyadh, facing a huge paradigm shift, is most unlikely to wade into supporting Pakistan's adventurism against India. So, while the MJDA may give Islamabad an adrenaline high, Pakistan's quest to match India's rise through military fluster in West Asia is unlikely to succeed.

Depending on how different scenarios unfold, the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement (MJDA) could affect India's interests in several ways



### 3. Xi Jinping's doctrine for a self-governing party (THE HINDU PAGE NO 9)

1. **GS II** (International Relations)
2. **Topics:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
3. **Concepts:** Chinese Communist Party (CPC) internal governance, political centralization, anti-corruption campaigns as political tools, ideological entrenchment.

## *Xi Jinping's doctrine for a self-governing party*

**T**he July meeting of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China (CPC) ended with an announcement that the fifth plenary session of the 20th Central Committee will convene in Beijing in October.

The meeting said that the plenum would focus on major issues concerning comprehensive and strict self-governance within the party. This concept has been closely connected with the ruthless anti-corruption and conduct improvement campaign that China's President Xi Jinping has been carrying out ever since he first took charge in 2012.

The plenum's focus on it is indicative of an effort to further deepen Mr. Xi's control over the party ahead of the 21st Party Congress next year, where, in all likelihood, Mr. Xi will seek a fourth term as General Secretary.

The tables appear to have been set for precisely that outcome as there is no serious contender in sight, and much of the machinery that Mr. Xi has built over the past 13 years has been geared, in one way or another, towards ensuring that there is none.

#### **Beyond scale**

It is difficult to overstate the scale of Mr. Xi's anti-corruption campaign.

Between 2012 and 2025, some 7.011 million party members were disciplined or dismissed, among them 930 'tigers', or centrally managed senior cadres. The unprecedented reach of all this is underscored by a striking fact: that three members of the 20th Politburo – a body constituted only in October 2022 – have been sacked.

Additionally, alongside the anti-corruption wave, a sweeping campaign has been targeting the persistent issues of formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance within the party, which are the four ills that undermine party conduct, according to the central Eight-Point Regulation issued in



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2012. By official accounting, roughly 1.5 million people have been caught in this crackdown since 2012. Mr. Xi has left little doubt that neither drive will ease. If anything, the message from Beijing is that the pressure will be sustained, and intensified.

Yet reading the comprehensive and strict party self-governance project through the anti-corruption lens alone misses its ambition.

Mr. Xi's party-building agenda is considerably more broader.

#### **Strengthening the foundation**

Earlier this year, Cai Qi, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and a close confidant of Mr. Xi, formally announced the establishment of 'Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building' – a branch of the wider canon of 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era'.

Chinese media commentary and policy discourse have since stressed the depth of its significance, emphasising that this is not merely a set of instructions on discipline, but rather a systematised body of doctrine that distils the laws governing how a long-term ruling Marxist party should build and govern itself.

In practice, this means an ideological and institutional edifice is being constructed to further entrench Mr. Xi's authority, and bind the CPC ever more tightly to his vision. Ideology supplies the frame, organisational control and incentive structures shape who rises, and discipline enforces loyalty. Together, they are the tools with which Mr. Xi is remaking the party in the image of his own reading of China's trajectory and policy goals, the future he believes the country must pursue, and the kind of cadre he believes must carry it there.

This mindset runs through a recent authoritative essay from the party's discipline inspection and supervision apparatus. There are three key takeaways from it, which

are indicative of what one can expect in the months and years ahead.

First, there is unabashed praise for Mr. Xi. The essay attributes all the achievements of discipline work in the new era to Mr. Xi's "navigation and helmsmanship" and instructs cadres to mould themselves in Mr. Xi's "selfless and fearless" image. The goal of discipline, in other words, exists in no small part to put the chairman at ease.

Second, the essay repeatedly presses for institutional innovation to make compliance permanent, calling to "lock power in an institutional cage," to turn discipline into "a genuinely electrified high-voltage line," and to build a "digital" inspection system that harnesses big data to detect and pre-empt wrongdoing.

And third, the animating purpose of discipline is not just loyalty to Mr. Xi but also to the cause that he has outlined. So inspectors are called to ensure that "what the Party Central Committee advocates is resolutely responded to, what it decides is resolutely carried out, and what it forbids is resolutely not done", and to "clear obstacles and provide escort" for the goals and tasks of the 15th Five-Year Plan.

#### **Moulding a political class**

In essence, the goal of the Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building and comprehensive and strict party self-governance is not simply to punish wrongdoing.

Rather, the aim is to produce a political class that is, by design, composed of believers and adherents. Of course, this is much easier said than done, as evidenced by the fact that the anti-corruption campaign seems to be an endless affair for a leader who has been in power for 13 years.

The solutions he continues to offer are more of the same pursued with greater intensity, and now dressed in the permanence of doctrine and institution.

It is difficult to overstate the scale of Mr. Xi's anti-corruption campaign. Between 2012 and 2025, some 7.011 million party members were disciplined or dismissed



## 4. The stakes in India's delimitation debate (THE HINDU PAGE NO 10)

1. **GS II (Polity & Governance)**
2. **Topics:** Indian Constitution—features, amendments; Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States; Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.
3. **Concepts:** Delimitation Commission, Articles 81 and 82, federalism vs. demographic representation, gerrymandering (packing and cracking), women's reservation implementation.

# The stakes in India's delimitation debate

What triggers delimitation? How will the 2027 Census affect seat allocation? Can the exercise be completed before 2029? Which States could gain or lose seats? What happens without a constitutional amendment? How will women's reservation be implemented? How can new boundaries affect electoral outcomes?

### EXPLAINER

Varadhees K. George

The story so far:

The BJP is keen to kick off a fresh delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies. It is trying to garner a two-thirds majority in Parliament to pass a Constitutional amendment for this purpose. In April 2026, it had moved the amendment but could not pass it. The Centre has not revealed its exact proposals. The proposals that the Centre placed before Parliament in the previous Session were the following:

1) Increase the size of the Lok Sabha up to a maximum of 850 seats; 2) distribute these seats among the States based on the 2011 Census through a fresh, countrywide delimitation of constituencies; and 3) reserve one-third of the total seats for women.

According to the existing Constitutional provisions, a fresh delimitation is possible only after the data of the 2027 Census is published, and reservation for women can be rolled out only along with it.

### What happens if there is no Constitutional amendment?

For a fresh delimitation to happen, a Constitutional amendment is not required. A fresh delimitation will be triggered soon after the data of the 2027 census is published. The terms for the next delimitation are already written into the Constitution, principally in Articles 81 and 82. A Constitutional amendment is required only if the existing constitutional provisions relating to delimitation are to be changed.

Articles 81 and 82 mandate that after the data from the first Census conducted after 2006 is published, two things will happen.

The first is a reallocation of the existing strength of the Lok Sabha among the States and Union Territories on the basis of the population recorded in that Census, which would, in this case, be the 2027 Census.

The second is the delimitation of individual constituencies within each State.

Therefore, if there is no Constitutional amendment at all, there will be a delimitation exercise that must begin after the data of the 2027 Census is published.

So, in the absence of any Constitutional amendment, the following sequence is envisaged: first, the reallocation of Lok Sabha seats among States; second, the delimitation of constituencies within States; and third, the implementation of women's reservation—all tied to the Census 2027.

### How is the allocation of seats to each State determined?

Think of India as one large joint family and the States as its constituent family units.

Imagine that each individual across the joint family was entitled to one acre of land (Image 1). A family with five members got five acres, another with seven members got seven acres, and so on. Each family then divided its share among its members. At that point, everyone got roughly the same share. In political terms, every vote had roughly the same value. But then time passed. Some families grew much faster than others. In the larger families, the same land had to be shared among more people. In the smaller families, fewer people shared the same land. As a result, the value of each person's share began to differ.

That is, in a sense, what has happened to votes in India. In 1967, an MP across most major States represented roughly four to five lakh electors. Today, a MP from Kerala represents about 14 lakh electors, while in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the figure is around 19 lakh.

This variation is the result of a deliberate decision by all parties, taken on two occasions, in 1976 and 2001, not to punish States that had stabilised their populations. The Constitution gives that leeway. The size of Lok Sabha constituencies is not necessarily based on a national average, which today would be about 18 lakh voters per constituency. Article 81 requires seats to be allocated among States "so far as practicable", on the basis of a national average. This leeway for variation allows for a balance between two principles that can be in tension: federalism, or representation of States, and democracy, or one vote, one value.

And that is the central tension the debate on delimitation now needs to resolve.

### What is gerrymandering?

When we discuss the democratic principle of One Person, One Vote, One Value, the first requirement is that every Lok Sabha constituency should have roughly the same number of voters. If the way those voters are grouped alone do not guarantee equal value for every vote. Why? Because even when constituencies contain the same number of voters, the way those voters are grouped can dramatically affect electoral outcomes.

Consider a simple example (Image 2). Imagine there are 50 voters. Party A has 20 supporters and Party B has 30 supporters.

There are five constituencies, each with 10 voters and electing one representative.

In the first scenario, voters are distributed fairly across the five constituencies. The result broadly reflects the overall vote share. Party A and Party B win seats broadly in proportion to their

support. In the second scenario, Party A's voters are spread thinly across constituencies. This is called cracking. Although Party A has 40% of all voters, it may not have enough support to win even one constituency. Thus, 40% of voters could end up with no representation at all.

In the third scenario, Party B's voters are heavily concentrated in a few constituencies. This is known as packing. Party B wins those seats with huge margins but ends up wasting votes, allowing Party A to win more seats despite having fewer supporters overall.

The way constituency boundaries are drawn can profoundly shape democratic representation and electoral outcomes.

Extracted from the author's introduction to 'The Delimitation Debate: The Union and its Units', published by The Hindu.

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ratio remains as of today.

The 2027 Census is the first time that data gathering has been completely digitalised. Theoretically, it is possible that the delimitation process could be quicker than before. If the exercise is not completed before the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, it could continue into the term of the next Lok Sabha and the government.

The last Delimitation Commission was appointed during A. B. Vajpayee's tenure as the Prime Minister, and its work was completed during the first term of the Manmohan Singh government, with a Lok Sabha election in 2004 in between. The same can happen with the next Delimitation Commission.

What will be the mandate of the next Delimitation Commission?

If a fresh delimitation is triggered under the existing provisions of Articles 81 and 82, the following will happen.

At present, the distribution of the 543 Lok Sabha seats among the States is based on the population figures of the 1971 Census. When the benchmark changes from the 1971 population to the population recorded in the first Census after 2026, the seat distribution is likely to change (Table 1). Broadly speaking, the southern States are likely to face a reduction in their share of Lok Sabha seats, while the

Handicapped States, particularly Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, are likely to gain seats. The maximum number of Lok Sabha seats allowed by the Constitution is 550. A third of the Lok Sabha seats nationally, and one-third of the seats within each State, will be reserved for women.

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### Image 1

India as a joint family

Think of India as one joint family and the States as its constituent family units.

As its constituent family units, the States are entitled to one acre of land (Image 1). A family with five members got five acres, another with seven members got seven acres, and so on. Each family then divided its share among its members. At that point, everyone got roughly the same share. In political terms, every vote had roughly the same value. But then time passed. Some families grew much faster than others. In the larger families, the same land had to be shared among more people. In the smaller families, fewer people shared the same land. As a result, the value of each person's share began to differ.

That is, in a sense, what has happened to votes in India. In 1967, an MP across most major States represented roughly four to five lakh electors. Today, a MP from Kerala represents about 14 lakh electors, while in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the figure is around 19 lakh.

This variation is the result of a deliberate decision by all parties, taken on two occasions, in 1976 and 2001, not to punish States that had stabilised their populations. The Constitution gives that leeway. The size of Lok Sabha constituencies is not necessarily based on a national average, which today would be about 18 lakh voters per constituency. Article 81 requires seats to be allocated among States "so far as practicable", on the basis of a national average. This leeway for variation allows for a balance between two principles that can be in tension: federalism, or representation of States, and democracy, or one vote, one value.

And that is the central tension the debate on delimitation now needs to resolve.

What is gerrymandering?

When we discuss the democratic principle of One Person, One Vote, One Value, the first requirement is that every Lok Sabha constituency should have roughly the same number of voters. If the way those voters are grouped alone do not guarantee equal value for every vote. Why? Because even when constituencies contain the same number of voters, the way those voters are grouped can dramatically affect electoral outcomes.

Consider a simple example (Image 2). Imagine there are 50 voters. Party A has 20 supporters and Party B has 30 supporters.

There are five constituencies, each with 10 voters and electing one representative.

In the first scenario, voters are distributed fairly across the five constituencies. The result broadly reflects the overall vote share. Party A and Party B win seats broadly in proportion to their

support. In the second scenario, Party A's voters are spread thinly across constituencies. This is called cracking. Although Party A has 40% of all voters, it may not have enough support to win even one constituency. Thus, 40% of voters could end up with no representation at all.

In the third scenario, Party B's voters are heavily concentrated in a few constituencies. This is known as packing. Party B wins those seats with huge margins but ends up wasting votes, allowing Party A to win more seats despite having fewer supporters overall.

The way constituency boundaries are drawn can profoundly shape democratic representation and electoral outcomes.

Extracted from the author's introduction to 'The Delimitation Debate: The Union and its Units', published by The Hindu.

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## 5. EC's real test: Winning the confidence of the Opposition (INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 10)

1. **GS II** (Polity & Governance)
2. **Topics:** Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.
3. **Concepts:** Election Commission of India independence, Model Code of Conduct, institutional neutrality and impartiality, constitutional safeguards.

# EC's real test: Winning the confidence of the Opposition

**B**ARELY TWO weeks after the publication of my memoir *India and I*, interviewers and readers have repeatedly asked why I believed the Opposition deserved preferential treatment by the Election Commission (EC).

The answer lies at the heart of what I believe is the constitutional philosophy of election management: The ruling party needs regulation. The Opposition needs reassurance. The EC must provide both.

The framers of our Constitution deliberately placed the EC beyond the reach of the executive. Elections could not command public confidence if the referee was perceived to be close to one of the contestants, especially the ruling party. The Commission was therefore created as an independent constitutional authority, entrusted with protecting the integrity of the electoral process.

That independence is not merely legal; it is institutional.

As a serving civil servant appointed as Election Commissioner, I relinquish my service and assume a constitutional office. In my case, I resigned from the Indian Administrative Service a year before retirement. That separation reflects a profound constitutional principle: Once appointed, an Election Commissioner no longer serves the government of the day. His allegiance belongs exclusively to the Constitution.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly reaffirmed this constitutional vision. In *TN Seshan v. Union of India* and, more recently, in *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India*, it underscored that an independent EC is indispensable to free and fair elections, which form part of the Constitution's basic structure.

But constitutional independence cannot be measured only by legal safeguards. It must also be reflected in institutional behaviour. The EC must consciously maintain an arm's-length relationship with the executive.

Any perception of a cosy relationship between the executive and the EC is antithetical to the constitutional scheme and corrosive of public confidence.

That constitutional distance has an important implication. The party in power commands the administrative machinery, public visibility and official resources. The Opposition has only its voice and its confidence that an impartial constitutional authority will hear it fairly.

Recognising this asymmetry does not compromise neutrality. It fulfils it.

When I became Chief Election Commissioner, I gave my officers a simple instruction. If Opposition parties sought an appointment, they should receive one at the earliest. Sometimes requests came with barely 15 minutes' notice. We did our best to accommodate them. Not because they deserved favours, but because they were entitled to confidence that they would always receive a patient hearing.

An EC trusted only by the ruling party has failed just as surely as one trusted only by the Opposition. It must command the confidence of both. But the confidence of the Opposition is often the more exacting test because those without power are naturally more anxious about the fairness of the referee.

One incident from the Bihar Assembly election of 2010 illustrates why.

Around 11 o'clock on the eve of counting, Lalu Prasad Yadav telephoned me with an unusual request. He wanted only bank employees to supervise counting in his constituency. Although all arrangements had been finished, I asked the Chief Electoral Officer to accommodate the request, come what may.

The following evening, after he had lost, he telephoned again. This time he appeared inclined to



SY QURAISHI

question the Electronic Voting Machines. I told him candidly that people would laugh if he did so. He accepted the advice. A modest accommodation had preserved something far more valuable than administrative convenience. It had preserved confidence in the electoral process.

Throughout my tenure, the Bharatiya Janata Party sat in the Opposition. Its leaders frequently approached the Commission with complaints and representations. They received the same patient hearing. Arun Jaitley initially viewed me with some reservation, but that disappeared as he experienced the Commission's even-handedness. Years later, he generously described me as "one of India's most mature and credible Chief Election Commissioners." I treasured those words because they reflected confidence earned through institutional fairness rather than personal friendship.

The philosophy I followed was not an individual innovation. It is reflected in India's own Model Code of Conduct (MCC). Significantly, one of its most important chapters is devoted to the "Party in Power". It restrains ministers from using official machinery for campaigning, prohibits the misuse of public resources and bans policy announcements that may influence voters. The constitutional instinct is unmistakable: Those who wield power require greater restraint because they already possess overwhelming advantages.

One of India's greatest democratic achievements has been the extraordinary legitimacy of its electoral verdicts. Governments changed. Prime Ministers lost office. Powerful Chief Ministers were voted out. Candidates gracefully accepted the verdict and began preparing for the next election. This confidence in the process made our elections a model for emerging

democracies.

It is precisely because that reputation is so precious that recent developments should concern us all. During the 2024 general election, Opposition parties repeatedly complained that their representations alleging violations of the MCC were not receiving prompt and transparent consideration. Even Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa protested, for which he was hounded out. More recently, 23 Opposition parties took the extraordinary step of writing to the Chief Justice of India expressing serious concerns about the EC's handling of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. Around the same time, the Trinamool Congress publicly alleged discourtesy in its interaction with the Commission, an allegation firmly denied by the Commission.

Whether these grievances are ultimately upheld is not the central issue. The deeper concern is that a significant section of the political spectrum felt compelled to seek relief from another constitutional institution rather than the EC itself. No EC should ever allow such a perception to develop.

In my experience, most defeated candidates can accept defeat. What they find difficult to accept is the feeling that nobody listened to them before they lost.

Every EC is judged twice: First by how efficiently it conducts elections, and then by the confidence it inspires among those who lose them. The first test is statistical. The second is constitutional. Together, they determine the health of our democracy. That conviction shaped my own philosophy as Chief Election Commissioner.

The ruling party needs regulation. The Opposition needs reassurance. The EC must provide both.

*Quraishi is former chief Election Commissioner of India and the author of India and I - A Hundred Memories, Not a Memoir*

Every EC is judged twice: First by how efficiently it conducts elections, and then by the confidence it inspires among those who lose them. The first test is statistical. The second is constitutional

## 6. To lower cost of credit, track information asymmetries(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 10)

1. **GS III** (Indian Economy)
2. **Topics:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development.
3. **Concepts:** Monetary policy tradeoffs, real interest rates, information asymmetry in lending, risk-taking channel of monetary policy, digital public infrastructure (Unified Lending Interface).

### To lower cost of credit, track information asymmetries



**APOORVA  
JAVADEKAR**



**PRASANNA  
TANTRI**

**T**HE RBI kept interest rates on hold at its August 5 monetary policy committee meeting. While the decision may appear passive, it is very much an active one to keep real rates suppressed to boost credit supply and consumption or investment. With the RBI expecting inflation to inch up to 5.9 per cent in Q3-FY27, a pause in the current policy translates into negative real rates of around 65 basis points. This is sharply lower compared to 2 per cent-plus real rates during 2016-2018, and even lower relative to the expected real rates in the US.

Bank and NBFC credit to the small and medium sector and retail segment has recovered strongly since Q4-2025, from when the expected real rates started to fall. For an economy aspiring to sustain growth above 7 per cent, that is welcome news. But monetary policy rarely comes without trade-offs.

A study by Gabriel Jiménez, Steven Ongena, José-Luis Peydró and Jesús Saurina, analysing more than 23 million bank loans in Spain, established the risk-taking channel of monetary policy. It confirmed that extended periods of low real rates after the 2008 financial crisis induced weaker banks to approve riskier borrowers, require less collateral and eventually experience higher defaults. Our own research using the Ministry of Corporate Affairs credit registry establishes similar risk-taking by Indian banks during the first half of the 2010s when real rates were low, which played a role in a full-blown NPA crisis that ensued.

Why does this happen? Lower real lending rates compress banks' profitability from traditional lending, encouraging a search for higher-yielding borrowers, which are naturally riskier. At the same time, as Giovanni Dell'Ariccia and his co-authors argue, when real profitability declines, the bank's incentive to screen/monitor, which are essentially fixed costs, also falls, leading to a rise in risky lending. Finally, lower interest rates also boost the value of banks' bond portfolios and collateral, strengthening balance sheets and encouraging greater risk-taking.

None of this suggests that the RBI's objective of spurring credit-funded growth is misguided. What we are arguing is that the low real rates may not be the most efficient tool in reducing the cost of credit in India.

The real bottleneck is the cost of finding, evaluating and monitoring creditworthy borrowers, and this loads up into lending rates. If the objective is to provide cheaper funding, reducing these information asymmetry costs is a more structural solution, which will allow the central bank to respond to inflationary shocks more flexibly. More importantly, it can make the inflation-growth trade-off less severe.

India has already demonstrated what public digital infrastructure can achieve. The NPCI transformed digital payments, created a financial transactions trail for potential borrowers and merchants, and allowed lenders to lend against these cash flows. Not only did it expand credit access to borrowers who had no credit history, but also lowered the information asymmetry and ultimately the lending costs substantially, without encouraging risk-taking in the system. The RBI's Unified Lending Interface is an important step that will build on this infrastructure.

That distinction is crucial. Lower real interest rates make all borrowing cheaper, including loans that perhaps should never have been made and constrain the RBI's ability to respond to inflationary shocks efficiently, as it has to worry about growth constantly. Better financial intermediation makes good borrowing cheaper by reducing the cost of identifying genuinely credit-worthy borrowers. One works by making money cheaper. The other works by making finance more efficient.

The RBI's current stance may well be appropriate given growth needs and the assessed transitory nature of inflation. But policymakers should also recognise the accompanying risks and enhance risk-monitoring mechanisms.

*Javadekar is chief economist, Muthoot FinCorp Ltd, and Tantri is associate professor and executive director, Centre for Analytical Finance, Indian School of Business*

**The real bottleneck is the cost of finding, evaluating and monitoring creditworthy borrowers, and this loads up into lending rates**

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## 7. Begumpura is a radical vision, not a governance model(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 10)

1. **GS I** (Indian Heritage & Culture) & **GS II** (Social Justice)
2. **Topics:** Salient aspects of Literature from ancient to modern times; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.
3. **Concepts:** Sant Ravidas's philosophy, Begumpura, caste-based discrimination, social equality, counter-cultural resistance.

### Begumpura is a radical vision, not a governance model



RAM SURAT

Begumpura emerged as a prophetic and counter-cultural vision that challenged this oppressive social order in 15th-century. Reading it primarily through the framework of present-day public policy risks obscuring its original historical context and revolutionary intent

**T**HE ARTICLE 'From Ravidas and Begumpura, a philosophy of governance' (*IE*, July 30) by Abhinav Prakash interprets Sant Ravidas's vision of Begumpura in relation to contemporary models of governance and public policy. While it recognises the enduring relevance of Ravidas's philosophy, its analysis is largely shaped by a contemporary political framework. It does not fully engage with the historical, philosophical, and socio-religious depth of Ravidas's thought.

A central limitation is its treatment of Begumpura primarily as a model of good governance. In Ravidas's writings, Begumpura is far more than an ideal administrative order; it is a radical vision of social, moral, and spiritual emancipation. It imagines a society liberated from caste hierarchy, social exclusion, economic exploitation, and institutionalised injustice. By emphasising welfare schemes and administrative reforms, the article narrows the transformative scope of Ravidas's vision and gives insufficient attention to his critique of caste-based social structures.

It also overlooks the profound significance of Ravidas's declaration, "*Kahi Ravidas Khalas Chamara*". This statement is not merely autobiographical but a bold affirmation of dignity, self-respect, and liberation from caste-based oppression. It represents an early and powerful articulation of resistance against the social stigma attached to caste identity and therefore deserves deeper theological and sociological analysis.

Although contemporary welfare initiatives may contribute to poverty alleviation and public welfare, they are not equivalent to Ravidas's vision of justice. Begumpura envisages the transformation of the social order itself by dismantling the structures of discrimination and exclusion. The article also underestimates Ravidas's concept of freedom. His verse, "*Maharam mahal na ko atkavai*", envisions a society in which no individual is excluded because of caste, class, religion, privilege, or political power. Similarly, "*Dom na Som ek so aahi*" expresses the ideal of radical equality by rejecting hierarchical distinctions based on caste or *varna*.

Begumpura emerged as a prophetic and counter-cultural vision that challenged the oppressive social order in 15th-century. Reading it primarily through the framework of present-day public policy risks obscuring its original historical context and revolutionary intent. Sant Ravidas's Begumpura represents a profound vision of a city without sorrow — a society founded upon equality, freedom, justice, dignity, fraternity, and the abolition of caste-based discrimination and exclusion. It should be understood not as an endorsement of any political ideology or programme but as Sant Ravidas's enduring and prophetic vision of a just, inclusive, caste-free, and compassionate society.

The writer, a scholar from SHUATS, Prayagraj, is part of the Bahujan Sanskritik Andolan

## 8. Proof of a deep-tech fund is in its outcomes. That's the audit worth doing (INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 11)

1. **GS III** (Economy / Science & Tech) & **GS II** (Governance)
2. **Topics:** Science and Technology- developments; Issues relating to mobilization of resources; Transparency and accountability.
3. **Concepts:** Deep-tech funding, conflict of interest in public finance, sovereign fund management, risk vs. vigilance in innovation investments.

# Proof of a deep-tech fund is in its outcomes. That's the audit worth doing



V ANANTHA NAGESWARAN

**O**N ITS first day, the committee that would decide where India's new deep-tech fund put its money was handed a hard brief: There is very little deep tech in this country. Here is two thousand crore. Go and find it.

So they did. They went to the ventures they knew — the ones they had watched, mentored, argued with, and in some cases carried through the years when no one else would write a cheque. They backed the companies whose science had already been proven. And last week, this paper published also-called investigative report that they had done something troubling: 62 per cent of the first round had gone to firms in which panel members held an interest.

I read the story with sadness, not anger — and let me own my position at once. I serve in this government, so weigh what follows with whatever discount you think that deserves: the argument does not need my office to stand. The sadness, in any case, is not about a single report, a single journalist, or a single newspaper. It is about a habit of mind that keeps us scoring self-goals while the world races ahead.

The question of conflict of interest is a fair one. Public money deserves scrutiny, and it is good that this is being discussed openly. Gopal Srinivasan of the panel said exactly that when the paper reached him. Accountability is the condition of trust.

What is in dispute is the frame. And the frame rests on a fact the investigation never grasped: How the one lakh crore is actually spent.

The money does not go out in a single round through one committee. It is expected to be disbursed over five years through several fund managers, of whom only two have been appointed so far. More are to come. The Technology Development Board's first cohort is a sliver of the whole, and it was appraised on a first-come, first-

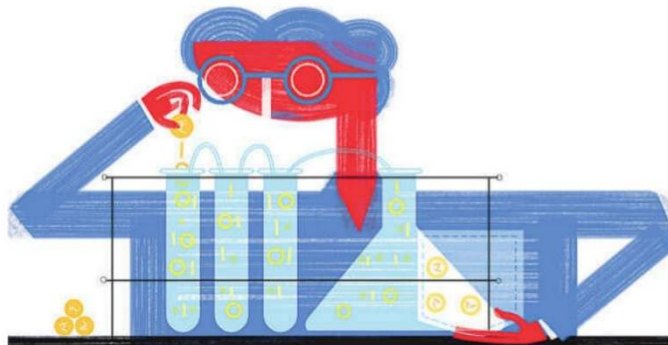


ILLUSTRATION: C R SANKUMAR

served basis. The companies that applied earliest were the ones that heard about the fund earliest — and the ones that heard earliest were, unsurprisingly, close to the ecosystem. That is why the first batch looks the way it does. The Board has already said that in the second cohort, one of 13 firms has a panel link. Not 62 per cent. The number the headline was built on was always going to fall because it was an artefact of sequence, not a pattern of favour.

Now to the harder charge, and the fairer one: A small circle of experts clearing one another's ventures, recusing one at a time, does not pass the smell test. It deserves an answer.

Here is the answer. **If you want to find validated deep-tech ventures quickly, you ask the handful of Indians who actually know the field. Anyone in India who knows this field has touched these companies — mentored them, funded a founder, sat on a board. It is the reason they were chosen. The money is the tip of the iceberg of what this group has given to Indian deep tech.**

So the design does not pretend to eliminate the overlap. It manages it. Firms that a member founded, owns, or runs cannot even apply, however good they are. A stake of more than 10 per cent automatically disqualifies a

firm. Members must disclose not only their own interests but their interests in a rival — a standard stricter than most private boards keep. Selection needs a super-majority, so two or three doubts sink a proposal. The government's exposure is capped at half the project cost. The whole thing passes a second time through a board of secretaries. Recusals are declared in advance and recorded. This is not the absence of guardrails. There are more of them than most of our institutions bother with.

Which brings me to the test that matters, and that the story never applied. The proof of a fund is in its outcomes. Were undeserving ventures funded? Were deserving ones turned away? **That is the audit worth doing. Judge the decision on what was knowable then, not on what hindsight reveals now. We rightly tell our bureaucracy to pursue outcomes rather than hide behind process. It is a strange day when the press asks it to do the opposite.** Here is the bitter part: We who count the "conflict of interest"

today are the same who will, a decade from now, write a harsh critique lampooning the government for letting India fall behind in the very technologies this fund was built to seed.

The likely effect of a "62 per cent" headline is not cleaner governance. It is a chill. The founders

who were, for the first time, animated by the sense that the system had faith in them will read it and grow wary. Technologists of global standing who might have joined the next committee will think twice about lending their names to a body that is treated as a cartel. A watchdog is meant to prevent harm. Here it risks producing the very harm it exists to guard against.

None of this asks the press to fall silent. It asks the opposite. There was a genuinely important story, and the paper is well placed to tell it. Where does follow-on capital come from once these ventures outgrow their first lean? How do we build funds large enough to carry them? Should we monetise idle public assets to seed a sovereign fund for this? Those questions decide whether India's deep-tech ambition survives its infancy. They are harder to write than a conflict-of-interest headline. They are also worth incomparably more.

There was an easy path here and a hard one. The easy path was a tidy number, a whiff of impropriety, a takedown that writes itself. The hard path was slower — to sit with the committee, understand how it works, weigh the trade-off it was asked to make, and then decide whether the deviation, if any, was gross, reasonable, or none at all. Too often, we take the easy path and call it diligence.

This is the price of a democracy. Authoritarian systems are spared these noises; they are also spared the correction that noise can bring. But a democracy has to learn the difference between holding power to account and reaching reflexively for suspicion. Get that wrong often enough, and the result is not vigilance. It is paralysis dressed as virtue.

I keep returning to a plain fear. **The world is about to change in ways we can scarcely picture. We, in India, have a choice. The political class, the bureaucracy, the watchdogs and the media, all of us can spend the decade pulling the rug from under one another's feet and keep India where it is while everyone else moves. Or, we understand the strategic imperatives, re-examine our trade-offs, our red lines and ways of working. The choice is ours to make and the consequences ours to bear.**

*The writer is the 18th Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India. Views are personal*

**Were undeserving ventures funded? Were deserving ones turned away? Judge the decision on what was knowable then, not on what hindsight reveals now**



## 9. A strategic partnership faces an ethical question (INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 11)

1. **GS II** (International Relations) & **GS IV** (Ethics)
2. **Topics:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India; Ethical issues in international relations.
3. **Concepts:** India-Israel defense ties, arms exports and human rights, strategic autonomy vs. ethical foreign policy, diplomatic balancing in the Middle East.



NICOLAS BLAREL AND  
SUMIT GANGULY

# A strategic partnership faces an ethical question

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S recent report alleging that India sent at least 2,596 shipments of military equipment and components to Israel since the outbreak of the Gaza war has generated understandable attention. Yet, the revelations do not mark a dramatic shift in India's defence relationship with Israel so much as underscore the depth and maturity of a strategic partnership that has been built over the past quarter century.

The foundations of India's defence relationship with Israel were laid during the 1999 Kargil War, when Israel emerged as one of the few countries willing to rapidly provide critical equipment, including ammunition, drones and precision-guided munitions. That experience established Israel as a reliable defence partner and accelerated a relationship that has expanded ever since. Unlike many Western suppliers, Israel has also demonstrated a willingness to transfersophisticated military technologies to India.

Over the last decade, however, the partnership has evolved beyond a conventional buyer-seller arrangement. Under PM Narendra Modi's "Make in India" initiative, Israeli defence companies have increasingly established joint ventures and local manufacturing partnerships within India. The production of drones, electronics, missile systems and components has become embedded within India's expanding defence industrial base. This localisation means that India's role is no

longer confined to importing Israeli systems but increasingly extends to manufacturing equipment and supplying components.

It is precisely this evolution that gives the Amnesty report its significance. If the findings are accurate, they suggest that India has become more than just a customer; it has also emerged as a contributor to Israel's defence supply chain during one of its most controversial military campaigns. At a time when Israel has faced mounting international criticism, legal scrutiny and growing pressure on defence exports from several traditional suppliers, India's manufacturing capacity appears to have helped mitigate some of those supply-chain constraints, particularly in such areas as drones and ammunition.

For years, India has sought to balance an increasingly close strategic partnership with Israel while maintaining its longstanding support for the Palestinian cause and its expanding economic and energy relationships with the Gulf states. That has become more difficult as the Gaza conflict intensified. Reports of sustained military shipments will inevitably invite greater scrutiny from partners across the Middle East and beyond.

Given the complexity and depth of the India-Israel relationship, which runs the gamut from agricultural technology to weapons production, it is unlikely that New Delhi will abruptly terminate its defence ties regardless of the revelations in the Amnesty International report. However, the disclosure is likely to

have two important consequences.

At a domestic level, elements within the Congress who have been sceptical of the steady embrace of the Netanyahu government under Modi are likely to highlight these disclosures and try to embarrass the ruling party. Such an attempt, however, is unlikely to gain a great deal of traction when most of India's public is focused on the student agitation in the wake of the exam paper leaks.

Externally, in the Arab world, it may draw some attention and lead to a few expressions of public displeasure. Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that India's key Arab partners were wholly unaware of India's expanding defence and security links with Israel. More to the point, unlike decades ago during the Cold War, there is no unified Arab opinion toward Israel despite their periodic (and mostly cosmetic) denunciations of Israel's handling of the Palestinian issue. A few Muslim nations, outside the Arab world, ranging from Turkey to Malaysia, may express diplomatic outrage but, once again, New Delhi is unlikely to change its policies because of it.

These political considerations aside, the larger question of the ethics of participating in the joint production of weaponry with the current government in Israel — whose conduct of the war in Gaza has drawn widespread global disapprobation — may be deserving of debate.

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**Reports of sustained military shipments will inevitably invite greater scrutiny from partners across the Middle East and beyond**