

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 06

Frame policy for release of aged, terminally ill inmates'

The Supreme Court orders States and UTs to draft uniform policy for premature release of such prisoners within three months in coordination with the respective State Legal Services Authorities

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed all States and Union Territories to put in place, within three months, a uniform policy governing the premature release of elderly and terminally ill prisoners, observing that such inmates are entitled to a humane and time-bound mechanism for remission or early release on compassionate grounds.

A Bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta directed that every State policy must clearly lay down the eligibility criteria and procedural framework governing such releases.

"All States and Union Territories shall, within a period of three months from the date of this judgment, formulate and notify a comprehensive policy for early or premature release of prisoners who are of advanced age and/or are terminally ill. Such policy shall be framed in consultation with the respective State Legal Services Authorities so as to ensure institutional coordination and



Joint approach: The policy must ensure institutional coordination to identify eligible prisoners, the court said. ISTOCK

effective identification of eligible prisoners," the Bench said.

NALSA petition

The directions were issued while hearing a petition filed by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), which, based on inspections conducted in prisons across the country, pointed to the lack of a common framework for the premature release of aged and terminally ill prisoners. The petition contended that facilitating the release of such inmates would not only address a humanitarian concern but also help reduce overcrowding in prisons.

The court directed that

every policy must incorporate a clear and uniform definition of "terminal illness". It permitted the authorities to draw upon the definition contained in the *Handbook on Prisoners with Special Needs* published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which describes terminal illness as "a condition where there is no reasonable medical possibility that the patient's condition will not continue to degenerate and result in death".

It also directed the States and Union Territories to constitute independent medical boards to assess and certify cases of terminal illness or ad-

vanced medical vulnerability in accordance with uniform eligibility criteria while considering applications for remission of prison sentences.

To facilitate the implementation of its directions, the Bench directed the Union government, in coordination with the National Informatics Centre (NIC), to provide the States and Union Territories with technical assistance, digital infrastructure, software support and training.

Compliance affidavits

The Bench directed the Centre, States and Union Territories to file compliance affidavits within six months, detailing the number of prisoners identified under the policy, those granted premature release, and those whose cases remain under consideration. The matter has been listed on January 19, 2027.

The petition had pointed out that India's prisons had an occupancy rate of 131% as of December 31, 2022, and that terminally ill and elderly inmates often require specialised care that prison authorities are ill-equipped to provide.

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NITI Aayog suggests ₹50,000-crore fund for biotech growth

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A NITI Aayog road map has proposed creating a ₹50,000-crore BioEconomy Growth Fund, a dedicated production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for biomanufacturing and six national biotechnology missions as part of an ambitious strategy to transform India into one of the world's top three biotechnology powers by 2035.

The report, "Roadmap for building India as a leading bioeconomy powerhouse by 2035", released on Thursday, says India should move beyond the broad framework laid out under the Biotechnology for Economy, Environment and Employment (BioE3) policy and adopt a mission-mode execution strategy backed by new financing, regulatory reforms and cross-ministerial governance. It targets expanding India's bioeconomy from \$195.3 billion in 2025 to \$691 billion by 2035 and \$2.6 trillion by 2047, while creating over 30 million high-value jobs.

"The goal is not to just research but to build globally competitive biotechnology companies," said Debjani Ghosh, Distinguished Fellow, NITI

Aayog, at the launch.

The centrepiece of the recommendation is a proposed ₹50,000-crore fund for 2026-35 to bridge the biotechnology sector's "valley of death" – the gap between proof-of-concept research and commercial-scale manufacturing. The fund would provide blended finance, equity-risk instruments, viability-gap funding and infrastructure support for biomanufacturing, advanced therapeutics, synthetic biology, fermentation technologies and diagnostics.

The roadmap also recommends launching six National BioMissions with clearly identified lead Ministries and measurable outcomes by 2035. These include GeneIndia for affordable gene and cell therapies, AgriBio 2.0 for climate-resilient gene-edited crops and biological farm inputs, BioX Foundry to commercialise synthetic biology innovations, One Health Grid for integrated surveillance of infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance, Marine Biotechnology to expand seaweed cultivation and marine bioproducts, and BioPharmaNext to establish India as a global hub for biologics, biosimilars and AI-enabled drug discovery.

Cyclosporiasis outbreak: what is gastrointestinal illness that has affected over 1,500 in the U.S.

Zubeda Hamid

A widespread outbreak of a gastrointestinal illness has been reported in the United States. The infection, cyclosporiasis, caused by the cyclospora parasite, occurs when people consume food or water that contains the parasite.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in a health advisory issued on July 14, it has received reports of 1,645 confirmed domestic cases of cyclosporiasis since May 1 and is aware of 5,100 cases that require further analysis to confirm the illness, from 34 States, substantially higher than the 249 cases reported in the country by this same time last year. Because cyclosporiasis is often underdiagnosed and underreported, the true number of illnesses is likely higher than what has been reported, it noted. At present, a specific food item has not yet been confirmed as the source.

Cyclosporiasis is a type of food poisoning, caused by the microscopic parasite, *Cyclospora cayetanensis*. It spreads through the faeco-oral route, which means that



Cyclosporiasis is a type of food poisoning, caused by the microscopic parasite, *Cyclospora cayetanensis*. GETTY IMAGES

food or water contaminated by faeces containing the parasite, cause the illness. It does not spread from person to person. While it is usually not life-threatening, symptoms can range from mild to severe and may last from anywhere between a few days to over a month. Symptoms usually begin about a week after exposure. The main symptom is frequent, explosive, watery diarrhoea. Other symptoms include bloating, loss of appetite, stomach

cramps, fatigue and even weight loss. Sometimes vomiting and low-grade fever may be experienced.

Anyone can contract the infection. In children, the elderly and those with weak immune symptoms, the infection may be severe. Untreated, the symptoms can last for a long time and patients can relapse as well. Complications can include severe dehydration, malabsorption (a digestive disorder where your intestine is unable to absorb nutrients), cholecystitis (inflammation of the gall bladder), and reactive arthritis (joint inflammation).

Testing and treatment

Testing for cyclosporiasis is challenging, because the parasite might not shed enough to be detected in one stool sample, and it is not part of routine stool testing. This means that patients may have to more than one sample over several days for an accurate diagnosis. Stool PCR tests to identify the parasite's DNA and stool microscopy that identifies the parasite's eggs can diagnose the condition.

As far as treatment goes, the CDC

recommends treating confirmed cases of cyclosporiasis with 7-10 days of trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX) for adults and children aged over two months. Longer courses may be considered for patients with immunocompromising conditions. Hydration is also recommended.

While the infection may go away on its own without treatment, it can put patients at risk of complications and the CDC recommends visiting a clinician if you have prolonged or watery diarrhea, especially if it lasts more than a few days.

This is not the first cyclosporiasis outbreak in the U.S. Previous outbreaks have been linked to consuming contaminated fresh produce. Fruits and vegetables tied to cyclosporiasis outbreaks include: leafy greens, lettuce, spinach, basil, cilantro and parsley as well as other produce such as raspberries and snow peas.

The CDC recommends reducing risk by thoroughly washing fresh produce under clean running water before eating and by following safe food handling practices.

(zubeda.h@thehindu.co.in)

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• SPORT

Argentina's Falklands banner: Political gestures at World Cups and FIFA's rules

Shuvaditya Bose
New Delhi, July 16

WHILE CELEBRATING their 2-1 triumph over England in the semi-final of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, Argentina's Lautaro Martínez and Giovanni Lo Celso held aloft a banner that read: "Las Malvinas son Argentinas." It translates to: "The Falkland Islands [Malvinas] are Argentine." Argentina fans had been banned from carrying Falklands flags into the World Cup semi-final. But its appearance has sparked controversy.

Why is the banner controversial?

The answer lies almost two centuries in the past. The Falkland Islands — or Islas Malvinas, as they are known in Argentina — have remained at the centre of a sovereignty dispute between Argentina and the UK since Britain reasserted control over the islands in 1833. Argentina argues that it inherited the sovereignty of these islands from Spain upon gaining independence in 1816, and therefore regards Britain's occupation as illegal. In 1982, the two countries fought a 74-day war that resulted in 649 Argentine casualties and 255 British deaths. Officially, Britain continues to administer the islands, with the majority of the residents voting to remain a British overseas territory during a referendum in 2013. But Argentina still considers the British protectorate essential to its national identity.

What are the rules on such gestures?

FIFA's regulations state that any political banner or flags with political messages are strictly prohibited before, after and during a match in the immediate vicinity of the stadium. International Football Association Board (IFAB) regulations also prohibit players from using sporting equipment with political messaging.

FIFA's code of conduct also says fans cannot "curse or chant in a political, offensive and/or discriminatory manner". The world body is currently reviewing the on-field gesture in Atlanta under its rules prohibiting political messaging.



Argentina's Giovanni Lo Celso holds a banner saying 'The Falklands are Argentine'. AP

What have Argentina fans said or done at the World Cup on the dispute?

At the 2026 World Cup, Argentina's unofficial anthem has been 'Muchachos':

*En Argentina nací, (I was born in Argentina)
Tierra de Diego y Lionel, (Land of Diego and Lionel)*

*De los pibes de Malvinas, (Of the boys of the Malvinas)
Que jamás olvidaré (Whom I will never forget)*

The last two lines are widely understood to be a tribute to the Argentine soldiers who died during the 1982 war. After the victory over England, the players also celebrated with the chant "Por las Malvinas, por Diego y por el último de Leo (For the Malvinas, for Diego, and for Leo's last one)".

Have Argentina fans made references to the Falkland Islands earlier?

Something similar took place during Argentina's friendly match against Slovenia in 2014. On that occasion, the players stood behind a banner with the exact wording of the one held up on Wednesday. On that occasion, FIFA had imposed a non-sporting sanction on Argentina. The federation was asked to pay 30,000 Swiss francs.

Have players made political gestures at World Cups before?

Yes. At the 2018 World Cup, for instance, Switzerland's Xherdan Shaqiri and Granit Xhaka celebrated goals against Serbia by making the Albanian double-headed eagle gesture with their hands. Both players have ethnic Albanian roots linked to Kosovo, whose independence Serbia does not recognise. FIFA imposed a fine of 10,000 Swiss francs on both players.

During the 2022 World Cup, meanwhile, Serbia were fined 20,000 Swiss francs for a banner they had hoisted in their dressing room which showed Kosovo as a part of Serbia and read: "No surrender."

At the same World Cup, German players had covered their mouths with their hands ahead of a match, in a symbolic gesture to convey that FIFA were forcibly silencing players. The football body had warned teams against using OneLove armbands, celebrating gender inclusivity, with the tournament being held in Qatar, where same-sex relationship is criminalised. FIFA did not sanction Germany for the protest.

GS 3: SPACE

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Skyroot to launch Vikram-1 orbital rocket tomorrow

Anonna Dutt
New Delhi, July 16

INDIAN SPACE-TECH startup Skyroot Aerospace will attempt the first orbital launch of its indigenously developed rocket, Vikram-1, on Saturday, July 18, at 11.30 am, from the country's premier spaceport at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. The mission, named 'Aagaman', meaning 'arrival', marks a milestone for India's private space sector: the nation's first-ever attempt to place a payload into orbit using a completely privately developed launch vehicle.

All necessary airspace and maritime notices have been issued establishing restricted zones during the launch window, according to the company.

"We have done everything that could be done to test Vik-

ram-1 on the ground. On July 18, we are eager to see how Vikram-1 performs in a real flight environment for the first time," said Pawan Kumar Chandna, co-founder and CEO of the company.

"This is our first test flight, and we will be getting valuable data from it. This will be foundational to Skyroot's aspirations of establishing launch cadence. We are excited to see this through," he added.

Even in its first flight, Vikram-1 will carry several technology demonstrations from the Indian earth-observation nanosatellite maker Grahast Space, Indian space debris removal company CosmoServe, space component developer DCubed, and its own SCOPE satellite, which will collect important flight data. Aside from this, Vikram-1 will also carry a



India's first private orbital rocket, Vikram-1, stands fully stacked at Sriharikota for the upcoming 'Mission Aagaman' test flight.

CREDIT: INSTAGRAM/@SKYROOTAEROSPACE

diamond art piece called Cosmic Bloom from Cosmos Diamonds and a micro-art piece.

"This test flight will show us how every technology we have developed over the years performs in real-world conditions. With the in-flight data gathered from this mission, we will return to the shop floor to learn, improve, and build further. This test flight is the first step towards creating a reliable, on-demand launch company for the world from India," said Naga Bharath Daka, co-founder and COO of the company.

Vikram-1 launcher

Named in honour of Dr Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme, the launcher stands seven storeys tall. It is engineered to deliver small satellites weighing up to

350 kg to Low Earth Orbit (LEO). For this launch, it is targeting a 450 km orbit at a 60-degree inclination.

Alongside Skyroot's Vikram-1, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s own Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) and Agnikul's under-development rockets are set to expand India's capability to launch satellites in this region of space. This is significant given the increasing number of companies developing small satellites intended for low Earth orbit, such as the fleets by internet providers Starlink and OneWeb.

So far, two Indian launch vehicle developers, including Skyroot, have demonstrated sub-orbital flights — vehicles that take a satellite to outer space but lack sufficient velocity to put it into orbit.