

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 04

Telegram challenge once again puts spotlight on Section 69A of IT Act

NEWS ANALYSIS

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CHENNAI

The Centre's move to block Telegram has once again drawn attention to Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, a provision that gives the government the power to direct intermediaries to block access to online information under specified circumstances.

The temporary ban on the platform, which was initially misused for the medical entrance examination paper leak and misinformation campaigns, was aimed at curbing another paper leak during the NEET-UG retest. Telegram has approached the Delhi High Court challenging the ban, which is set to last till June 22, and the judgment has been reserved.

Section 69A of the IT Act



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authorises the Union government to block public access to any information via any computer resource, including applications and websites, if it is satisfied that such blocking is necessary "in the interest of India's sovereignty and integrity, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence".

But the restriction may interfere with Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, which protects freedom of speech and expression. Therefore, the orders under Section 69A must be issued with the procedural safeguards established by the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking Access to Information by the Public) Rules, 2009.

In *Anuradha Bhasin v Union of India*, the Supreme Court examined the validity of the indefinite blanket ban on internet services in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir, and the court held that freedom of speech and expression, as well as freedom to practice any profession or carry on any trade, business, or occupation over the internet, are protected by Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(g). The court also concluded that orders restricting internet access must

meet the proportionality test: they must be required, use the least restrictive measures available, and be open to judicial review.

Article 19(1)(g) provides the right to practice any profession or to engage in any occupation, trade, or business. A ban on a platform that has about 150 million users in India will disrupt many creators, educators, and entrepreneurs running broadcast groups, and prevent them from maintaining communication with their subscribers. It thus limits one's ability to earn a living.

Section 79 of the IT Act also establishes intermediary safe harbour provision, which means platforms are not liable for third-party content if they exercise due diligence, follow the Information Technology Rules, 2021, and act quickly upon receiving knowledge of illegal content.

GS 2: HEALTH
THE HINDU PAGE: 7

Children with vitiligo deserve freedom from stigma and the burden of misinformation

Sabaresh Pandiyan

When a child walks into a classroom, their biggest worry should not be whispers, stares or insensitive jokes about their skin. Yet, for thousands of children living with vitiligo - a chronic condition where patches of skin tend to lose pigment - this is a reality.

Vitiligo is a medically harmless, non-contagious condition. Misunderstandings and stigma about it, however, persist. While children may have completely normal health even with the condition, what is often overlooked, is the impact it has on their mental well-being.

Self-esteem dents

Childhood is a period of development, where self-esteem is developed, confidence is built and a social identity is created.

Children suffering from vitiligo tend to be very conscious of their appearance at an early age.

Unlike adults, children may not fully understand the condition themselves, and therefore are less equipped to navigate the curiosity it invokes, or dispel misconceptions and the social scrutiny that comes with it.



The true burden of vitiligo is rarely found in the skin itself: it is found in the silent stigma that children face. GETTY IMAGES

Many children tend to feel 'different' from their friends and peers. Sometimes this can lead to non-participation in school events and a preference for clothing that covers their entire body, even in the hot weather, to avoid drawing attention and unwanted questions.

Bullying and name-calling is one of the significant concerns faced by children with vitiligo, followed by exclusion from peer groups, and repeated questioning or comments, even they are harmless. This takes a psychological toll and the result

could be that the child withdraws socially.

This heightened awareness about their appearance may lead to chronic stress as well as anxiety, causing the child to experience loneliness, mood changes, and to exhibit symptoms of depression. Adolescents are significantly more vulnerable as during their teenage years, they are more susceptible to concerns of appearances, belonging and acceptance.

What needs to change

Widespread awareness in the

community is what matters most when it comes to vitiligo, since the greatest challenge faced by children with the condition is misinformation.

The condition is often assumed to be caused by poor hygiene or believed to be contagious: neither fact is true.

Simple initiatives inside the classroom can make a difference, as when children understand that vitiligo is an autoimmune disease and poses no health risk to others, the stigma and fear related to it will reduce substantially.

Teachers and parents play an important role here in identifying signs of emotional distress, declining academic performances or reluctance to attend school. It is very important to provide children with emotional support and to demonstrate that vitiligo must not define a person's ability, future or worth.

The true burden of vitiligo is rarely found in the skin itself: it is found in the silent stigma that children face. Our collective goal must be that no child feels different, or less worthy, due to the skin they live in.

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GS 3: ECONOMY THE HINDU PAGE: 8

The real barriers to trade are no longer tariffs

Recently, the CEO of a large multinational called to ask whether the upcoming visit of the United States Trade Representative to India could result in tariff rates returning to around 18% or settling at a different level.

Such conversations reflect the extent to which trade negotiations are often viewed through the prism of headline tariff numbers. Yet, in practice, tariff rates are only one part of the picture. The more significant determinants of market access and competitiveness frequently lie elsewhere. This presents an opportunity for India to move beyond a narrow focus on tariff bargaining and instead address the broader set of factors that shape trade outcomes.

When India and the U.S. issued a joint statement in February 2026 agreeing on a framework for an interim trade agreement, the headlines highlighted the obvious: the tariff numbers. The U.S. reciprocal rate cut to 18%. India's pledge to move toward zero duties on American goods. The "\$500 billion" purchase commitment. But the White House fact sheet buried the more consequential admission – that both sides needed to negotiate the removal of non-tariff barriers. The U.S. deploys its own formidable non-tariff barriers arsenal while India has its quality regulations. The tariff headline was the press release. The NTBs on both sides are the actual problem.

For decades, trade diplomacy revolved around tariffs. Governments negotiated reductions in import duties, and success in trade talks was measured in percentage points shaved off customs rates. In today's hyper-regulated global economy, tariffs barely matter. The real obstacles are faced in the laboratory and the law offices through NTBs.

NTBs are the regulations, certifications, licensing rules, and product requirements that goods must meet before entering a market. They include technical regulations, environmental rules, health and safety requirements, packaging standards and testing procedures. Unlike tariffs, which are transparent and easy to measure, these regulatory hurdles operate within the system and exert a far-reaching influence on trade.

NTBs, the quiet trade weapon

Since the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, average tariff rates



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Tariffs dominate the headlines, but regulations increasingly determine trade outcomes

among its members have fallen by nearly half, yet governments have not abandoned protectionism. As tariffs declined, NTBs surged. Today, they affect around 90% of global trade – a sixfold increase over the past three decades.

The regulatory landscape has expanded just as rapidly. More than half of the 20,000 global product and safety regulations introduced over the past 70 years have emerged since 2000, creating a dense web of overlapping rules that complicates cross-border commerce and raises compliance costs, particularly for smaller exporters. The WTO itself reflects this shift. In 2025 alone, governments submitted over 7,700 notifications of NTBs and health-related trade measures, 10 times more than in 1995.

Among major economies, the European Union (EU) is the most extensive user of these regulatory tools. According to the World Trade Organization and World Bank data, non-tariff measures cover roughly about 94% of imports entering the EU, compared with about 77% in the U.S. and nearly 45% in India. Each major economy deploys these barriers differently. The EU has built the world's most expansive regulatory architecture for trade, with NTBs concentrated in environmental rules, chemical safety regulations, product standards, packaging requirements and climate-related policies such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and the EU Deforestation Regulation. These rules are justified as protections, often acting as powerful filters on trade.

The American NTBs are driven by strategic competition, security concerns and technological dominance. Export controls, entity lists and restrictions on semiconductors, AI chips and advanced computing hardware increasingly limit rivals' access to critical technology supply chains. India has traditionally relied more on tariffs, but this is changing. As part of its industrial strategy, New Delhi is expanding quality regulations on imports of electronics, machinery and chemicals to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce dependence on external supply chains.

The Indian experience

India's own FTA record makes the point sharply. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India agreement has been in force since 2010, yet preferential tariff utilisation among Indian businesses remains below 50%, largely

because non-tariff barriers (NTBs) make claiming these benefits commercially impractical.

Indonesian registration requirements restrict Indian pharmaceutical exports, while Thai customs procedures force gems and jewellery exporters to reroute shipments through Hong Kong. Tariffs have fallen, but trade barriers remain.

Japan and South Korea tell a similar story. Despite an FTA with Japan since 2011, Indian pharmaceutical exports remain negligible because market approvals can take five to seven years and Japan has resisted recognising international testing standards. With South Korea, bilateral trade reached \$27 billion in 2024-25, but India accounted for only \$6.5 billion. Overall, India's FTA utilisation rate is about 25%, compared with 70%-80% for developed economies. The agreements existed on paper; the barriers remained in practice.

The next frontier of trade

This does not mean abandoning legitimate environmental or consumer protections, but regulatory systems must be transparent and proportionate. Otherwise, they risk fragmenting global markets at precisely the moment when supply chains are being re-organised.

India's newer agreements signal a genuine shift. The United Arab Emirates Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement explicitly mandates automatic recognition of medicines approved by major global regulators, and requires mutual acceptance of laboratory testing that eliminates duplicate compliance costs. The India-European Free Trade Association Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement, in force since October 2025, goes further with mutual recognition of standards, streamlined conformity assessment, and a dedicated sub-committee mandated to address NTBs on an ongoing basis. For the first time, NTB reduction is a legally binding obligation.

The politics of trade still talks about tariffs. The economics of trade has already moved on. In the 21st century, the real barriers are regulatory. If the West wants a serious economic pivot to the east, addressing those barriers will matter far more than cutting tariffs ever did.

The views expressed are personal

Revised pact with U.K. could save \$500 million for Indians

The agreement on social security, effective July 15, will save Indian firms and workers there about \$500 million worth of social security payments they otherwise would have had to pay in the U.K.

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The agreement on social security that India and the U.K. have signed and that will come into force on July 15 will save Indian companies and workers there about \$500 million worth of social security payments that they otherwise would have had to pay in the U.K., according to sources in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The original Agreement on Social Security, also referred to as the Double Contribution Convention (DCC), was signed in July 2025. It exempted companies in the U.K. from paying social security for the temporary Indian workers they employed for a period of three years, as long as they paid social security in India during that period.

On Wednesday, both governments announced that the DCC would come into effect on July 15 along with the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between India and the U.K.

As per the revised agreement, the social security exemption limit has now been increased to five years, which will cover about 90-95% of the Indian workers in the U.K. and stands to significantly reduce costs for Indian companies operating in the U.K. "We have more than 75,000 workers from India



Shot in the arm: There are more than 900 Indian companies at present operational in the U.K., an official said. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

working in the U.K. and there are more than 900 Indian companies that are at present operational in the U.K.," a Commerce Ministry official explained on condition of anonymity since the matter is confidential until July 15.

"On the basis of their minimum salary levels, the savings to Indian companies in the U.K. employing temporary Indian workers will come to more than half a billion dollars," the official added.

Imbalances rectified

The issue that had arisen was that, in the absence of a DCC, companies employing Indian workers had to pay social security for these workers in India as well as in the U.K. Most of these workers were in the U.K. for up to a period of five years. However, the benefits from social security in the U.K. accrue only after 10 consecutive years

of contribution.

"This meant that most of the Indian workers there were paying double social security, and also were not able to get any benefit from the U.K. social security system," the official added. "Now, with the exemption increased from three to five years, this covers about 90-95% of the temporary Indian workers in the U.K."

Companies will need to obtain a certificate from the Indian government confirming that social security was being paid here, which they can submit to the U.K. government in order to avail of the exemption.

The CETA was also signed in July last year and was supposed to be implemented by early May 2026.

However, a fresh U.K. regulation on steel import tariffs temporarily – which had not been part of the CETA negotiations –

brought the trade deal proceedings to a halt as both countries scrambled to find a solution without having to redo the CETA itself.

"If you look at this steel measure in detail, 85% of our steel exports to the U.K. was out of this," a second official explained. "Out of about \$890 million of steel export that we do to the U.K., only \$137 million was getting affected."

"We have arrived at a deal on this steel measure, which has taken care of our concerns," they added. "It was finalised only yesterday afternoon [hours before the deal was announced]. India will not lose any market access, and will have a decent market access in the affected portions. We are satisfied with the overall deal. We are happy that our concerns on steel have been addressed."

The two officials would not reveal details of what concessions India has obtained regarding the steel tariffs as the matter was still extremely sensitive for the U.K., which was still negotiating with other countries on the matter.

However, they said that the leeway granted to India would be in the form of a mix of country-specific quotas, residual quotas and access under authorised-use schemes.

The details will be available on July 1, when the U.K.'s tariffs come into effect.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
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Washington-Tehran MoU is a relief, but flashpoints remain

THE 14-point Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), digitally signed last Sunday on US President Donald Trump's 80th birthday, was again signed by him early Thursday morning our time at a Versailles dinner hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron. Though Iran was not represented in Versailles, it also released the text around the same time. This official release came after global media outlets leaked the full text yesterday morning.

According to the MoU, a final agreement is to be negotiated within 60 days, extendable by mutual consent. The MoU includes a commitment by Iran that it will never produce nuclear weapons. It also says the US will lift its naval blockade of Iran fully within 30 days (which it has already done), that the movement of ships through the Strait of Hormuz will be restored to full capacity within 30 days, and that the US will issue waivers for exports of Iranian crude oil and other products and services.

In addition, Iran and the US, together with their allies (read Israel, though it is not a party to the deal), will permanently and immediately end the war on all fronts, including Lebanon, and cease all hostile action or threats of force against each other. The MoU also specifies that both sides will address the fate of enriched material, including Iran's nuclear needs. The final agreement will be approved through a binding resolution of the UN Security Council.

Notably, the MoU does not include specific provisions to discuss the curtailment of Iran's ballistic missile capabilities or its support for regional proxies. However, these is-

suess could still be raised during the negotiations due to pressure from Republicans, Israel, and the Gulf countries.

The MoU primarily restores the status quo ante. Before the commencement of Operation Epic Fury on February 28, the Strait of Hormuz was open for free passage with no US blockade. The US and Iran had just completed the third round of their discussions on nuclear and other issues on February 26, with a tentative fourth round being considered for March 2. The outcome of the war is that nuclear negotiations have essentially returned to the starting point, with one key difference: The US is now waiving sanctions on the export of Iranian oil and allied products, while offering assurances of relief on frozen Iranian assets.

Further, during the discussions preceding the war, the US insisted on zero uranium enrichment, while Iran maintained that it had an inherent right to enrich. However, Iran showed a willingness to compromise by offering to transfer its 60 per cent enriched uranium to a third country and suspend enrichment for several years. In the forthcoming 60-day negotiations, Iran is likely to agree to its pre-war concessions, with a significant condition of its own: It will now reject transferring the enriched material abroad, opting instead to down-blend it below 5 per cent while eventually agreeing to a 10-to-15-year enrichment suspension.

The key new element is Iran's explicit declaration that it will never produce nuclear weapons. While this commitment is already implicit in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty



R SWAMINATHAN

Notably, the MoU does not include specific provisions to discuss the curtailment of Iran's ballistic missile capabilities or its support for regional proxies

(NPT), to which Iran has been a party since 1970, and has been repeatedly reaffirmed by Tehran — including through an oral fatwa attributed to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in 2003 — the difference now is that Iran is effectively waiving the NPT's standard withdrawal clause. Tehran has never given notice to withdraw from the treaty despite major conflicts in June 2025 and this year.

A major concession that Iran has secured upfront is a ceasefire in Lebanon, where it suffered immense strategic damage following Israel's killing of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah in 2024 and the near-decimation of the group's military capabilities.

While the MoU could be seen as "Advantage Iran", its conclusion has already brought significant domestic and economic benefits for Trump. Oil prices, which skyrocketed to \$126 per barrel during the conflict, have plunged below \$80, triggering a major stock-market rally. Further, the US secured a binding commitment from Iran never to produce nuclear weapons. This comes after a military campaign in which the US inflicted massive damage on Iran's military infrastructure, eliminated key leadership figures, and enforced a sustained blockade that caused severe hardship in Iran.

Trump's announcement last Sunday that the MoU had been concluded sparked widely varying reactions across the US. While the MAGA base backed the deal as a triumphant validation of Trump's "maximum pressure" strategy, traditional Republicans remained conflicted — mirroring warnings from the CIA director that Tehran might use the 60-day pause as

a strategic stalling tactic.

Concurrently, Democrats blasted the framework as flimsy and dangerously vague. Meanwhile, the broader American public responded with a mix of relief over the end of the conflict and scepticism regarding Iran's willingness to comply with its nuclear concessions.

However, the official release of the MoU's terms has already sharpened domestic reactions within the US, where critics have termed it a "jaw-dropping humiliation" and a "surrender". This severe criticism, combined with fierce opposition from an Israel that feels it stands to lose the most, has significant potential to derail the upcoming 60-day negotiations.

A major flashpoint will be Lebanon, as Iran is expected to insist on a complete Israeli withdrawal during the talks. While Trump took a position in the recent past that Israel would have the right to retaliate in the event of attacks by Hezbollah, he is now proposing to look to Syria to handle the militant group — a strategy that seeks to exploit the deep animosity between the current Syrian leadership and Hezbollah. Another issue of friction will be Iran's assertion that the Strait of Hormuz will operate under joint Iranian-Omani sovereignty — a geopolitical stance completely unacceptable to Washington.

Thus, while much of the world is cheering the MoU in hopes of a lasting peace, significant hurdles remain in achieving it.

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GS 3: ECONOMY
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 12

**A decade of empowerment,
from reform to rozgar**



MANSUKH
MANDAVIYA

OVER THE past 12 years, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has undergone a remarkable transformation driven by empowerment, good governance, and inclusive development. From being counted among the Fragile Five economies in 2013, it has emerged as the fastest-growing major economy, built one of the largest start-up ecosystems, become a leader in digital public infrastructure, and strengthened its standing on the global stage.

At the heart of this transformation is India's *yuva shakti*. Recognising the potential of the demographic dividend, the government has launched transformative initiatives like Make in India, Digital India, Startup India, Skill India, PM Mudra Yojana, and the National Career Service portal. Combined with investments in infrastructure, innovation, and technology, these have expanded opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and skill development.

India's growth story is also a story of rising employment. Research shows that between 2017-18 and 2023-24, India's employment elasticity stood at 1.11, meaning that every 1 per cent increase in Gross Value Added was accompanied by a 1.11 percent rise in employment. This marks a sharp improvement over the employment elasticity of 0.008 between 2011-12 and 2017-18.

According to RBI KLEMS data, more than 17 crore jobs were created between 2014 and 2024, compared to 2.9 crore during 2004-14. The employment rate increased from 46.8 percent in 2017-18 to 57.4 percent in 2025, while unemployment declined to around 3.1 percent, below the global average of 4.8 percent. EPFO payroll data further indicate that more than 8 crore formal-sector jobs were added between 2017 and 2025.

The story of New India is equally about ensuring people are protected through a robust social-security system. Social-security coverage increased from 25 crore people (19 per cent of the population) in 2015 to more than 94 crore (64.3 per cent) in 2025. In recognition of this achievement, India received the International Social Security Association's Award

for Outstanding Achievement in Social Security in 2025.

The Modi government, in the first budget of its third term, introduced the most ambitious employment initiative in independent India's history: The Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PMVBRY). With an outlay of nearly Rs 1 lakh crore, PMVBRY aims to support the creation of more than 3.5 crore employment opportunities over two years. Under Part A of the scheme, first-time employees receive financial assistance of up to Rs 15,000 in two instalments. Under Part B, employers receive incentives of up to Rs 3,000 per employee per month for every additional worker employed. It provides incentives for up to four years to eligible manufacturing employers and for up to two years in other sectors. By putting money directly into workers' pockets, PMVBRY rewards work, makes jobs more attractive, and helps families remain financially secure. Financial incentives for employers can generate positive cyclical impacts on industrial growth.

PMVBRY's success is now being marked through a nationwide event. Today, Prime Minister Modi will disburse incentives worth Rs 2,400 crore to 15 lakh beneficiaries through direct benefit transfer. Simultaneously, events across 200 major industrial clusters will see appointment letters distributed to beneficiaries, and employers felicitated for creating opportunities.

As India moves towards the centenary of Independence, it is sending a clear message to the world: Its greatest strength is its young population. Twelve years of reforms have been driven by a strong partnership between employees and employers. The Modi government has recognised both as equal partners in nation-building, ensuring workers are protected, enterprises are empowered, and the benefits of growth are widely shared.

As India advances towards Viksit Bharat, employees and employers will continue to serve as the twin engines of growth, prosperity, and opportunity. "Rozgar ho ya karobaar, saath hai Bharat sarkar."

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By putting money directly into workers' pockets, PMVBRY makes jobs more attractive. Financial incentives for employers can generate positive cyclical impacts on industrial growth

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13

Court may have set a figure, but what's the value of unpaid domestic work?

SC verdict first step but has class blinkers



NEETHA N

THE RECENT Supreme Court ruling acknowledging the contribution of women "homemakers" is definitely a significant step in recognising the invisible and unpaid work of women in the country. Valuation of women's contribution to unpaid housework and care work is riddled with issues, as it is always entangled with familial relations. The compensation of Rs 30,000, as the ruling mentions, is a notional figure and thus can be seen as an acknowledgement of the priceless value of the labour of women that is otherwise largely underestimated. This large-scale underestimation of women's contribution to housework is evident in the cash transfer schemes that various political parties and state governments have offered or are offering to women in multiple states, which mostly range between Rs 1,000 and Rs 2,500 per month. The poor honoraria paid to community workers, be they Anganwadi workers, ASHAs or others, is another example. It is critical to flag this ongoing undervaluation of women's work while they are actively contributing to nation-building, whether as homemakers or as care workers.

While the judgment has surely opened up the way for a discussion on women's unpaid and undervalued work and their contribution to the economy, it raises multiple concerns. The first is the anxiety that many scholars of women's studies have raised, ever since the campaign on Wages for Housework in the 1970s, of a possible reiteration of gendered roles. The discussions around cash transfer schemes recognising women's housework in various states also highlighted the possible adverse effect of such schemes on women's economic status, given the poor participation of women in employment. At a time when women's share in higher education has surpassed male shares, equipping women to break gendered norms, the terminology of "homemakers" may end up in deceleration or reversal of such positive changes.

The judgment acknowledging women's unequal housework and care-work burden highlights it as a reason for the low female labour force participation. However, it does not delve much into this aspect, but goes on reiterating women's contribution in building, nurturing and maintaining human capital and thus being

nation-builders. The lack of choice for women, whether to shoulder gendered roles or not, does not find any mention amidst this glorification of their contribution to families and the economy. Women's labour force participation in urban areas is very low, lower than that of their counterparts in rural areas, and much below male rates. In 2024-25, as per the PLFS data, the urban workforce participation rate of women (ages 15 plus) was only about 26 per cent, as against 45 per cent for rural women. Notably, the male-female difference was about 47 percentage points, with male participation rates at 73 per cent.

In rural areas, agriculture, the most important sector of women's employment, allows for intermittent paid and unpaid housework and care work, while in urban areas, such possibilities are few and conditional. The poor presence of married women and women with young children in jobs that are better paid is an issue that also needs attention. Studies in the context of flexible employment have also shown how women's choices are determined by gendered social and familial expectations around housework and care work. Without adequate policies that could help in the reduction and redistribution of housework and care work, women's employment outcomes will continue to be compromised.

The judgment is significant when read with the dismissal of the public interest petition *Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam Versus Union of India*, filed by 10 trade unions of domestic workers on the issue of minimum wages. This petition was disposed of by the Supreme Court this year, directing the unions to appeal to the state government. What seems contradictory to the current progressive position of the Court is the view that it held on the matter of minimum wages for domestic workers. The observation that minimum-wage regulation for domestic work can trigger an increase in litigation with unintended consequences, including the possibility of domestic workers losing their jobs, seems to contradict the current valuation argument. Or, is it that housework and care work performed by women in their own homes are worthier than the work carried out by poor women who are hired for such services? By entertaining the domestic workers' petition, the Court, alongside this landmark judgment, could have set the floor towards the valuation of housework and care work for different segments of women, whether part of the family or otherwise.

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Give her rights in her lifetime



PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI

THEY SAY it is love. We say it is unwaged work." Thus begins Silvia Federici's foundational 1975 essay, "Wages Against Housework". Federici's Marxist-feminist argument was made in the context of Western industrial capitalism. Half a century later, and half a world away, the demand has shifted from wages to worth, from recognition to right.

The move from housewife (interchangeable for large periods of the 20th century, in thought if not in words, with house help/house elf) to homemaker has had a long, arduous journey. The marginal elevation has not altered much for the woman at the centre, still counted as the primary caregiver, still responsible, notionally at least, for the task of "housekeeping", still with very little to show for herself in terms of actual economic heft.

Last week, while hearing the case of a woman killed in a road accident in 2001, the Supreme Court took a decisive step towards addressing this anomaly. It held that the loss of domestic care provided by a homemaker constitutes a distinct category of compensation in motor-accident claims. The Court also arrived at a minimum figure of Rs 30,000 per month, a floor to be revised upward by 10 per cent every three years. The bench observed that care-giving work — mostly by women — is estimated to contribute about 15 to 17 per cent of the country's GDP, that in nurturing homes, values, and generations, homemakers perform the enduring work of nation-building. It is a landmark ruling that deserves to be celebrated. It also demands introspection.

For the purpose of the latter, let us turn to some basic accounting: Tally your monthly expenses for a cook, a part-time cleaner, a care provider for the elderly, and if you have young children, a nanny — more or less all the things a homemaker is, all at once, all day, every day. The figure, at least in Delhi, is likely to far exceed Rs 30,000. Now consider what the Court did not address, given that it falls outside the remit of the case. A woman who spends her lifetime managing a household, raising children, and enabling her spouse's career is worth Rs 30,000 a month only after she has been killed by a negligent driver. In her lifetime, she is worth nothing in terms of asset entitlement or wealth accumulation, at least

not in any enforceable, quantifiable way.

This is an injustice with compounding consequences. When a woman steps out of the workforce — to follow a spouse to a new city, to raise children, to care for ageing parents — she exits a system that measures contribution in salaries and provident-fund deposits. Every year outside the formal economy widens the gap and reduces them to what economist Devaki Jain called "virtual non-entities in economic transactions". The apex court's ruling compensates for the absence of a homemaker's labour after death. It does nothing for the woman who is still alive, still holding up the home, still accruing none of the financial security that formal employment provides.

None of this is to suggest that the home be recast as a workplace or the spouse as a quasi-employer. It is an argument for rights and recognition, of the kind the Court itself offered: "It is ironic to describe a homemaker as dependent on earning members, when, in reality the household's functioning depends substantially on the homemaker." The homemaker, in other words, is the co-author of everything the household builds and everything it becomes.

To be fair, the judiciary has been pulling in the right direction. In February, the Delhi High Court observed that a wife's non-employment cannot be equated with indolence or deliberate dependence, that the assumption reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of marriage as a partnership: "Where one spouse earns income in the marketplace, and the other sustains the domestic sphere, the economic stability of the household is the result of combined, though differently manifested, contributions." In September 2025, a Delhi woman approached the High Court seeking a 50 per cent share in the matrimonial flat that her care had sustained for years. The division bench was candid about the bind it found itself in: It acknowledged that a homemaker's contributions "remain hidden and downplayed", called on the legislature to act, and then — because existing maintenance provisions lack the reach to cover asset-sharing — ruled against her.

Homemakers need more than a better payout at the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal that they themselves cannot enjoy. They need social infrastructure that eases the burden of care work, shares it more equitably, and values it more fully. They need community property laws that give them a share in liquid or income-generating marital assets; maintenance laws with teeth. And they need all of these in their lifetime.

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