

# EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

24-10-2026

## GS 3: ECONOMY THE HINDU PAGE: 03

### Govt. to revise labour survey to track gig, household work

Periodic Labour Force Survey to identify households with at least one digital platform worker; it will also have questions to capture engagement in caregiving activities and unpaid trainee work

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Union government has decided to change the design and structure of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) to track digital platform workers and capture engagement in unpaid household, caregiving, volunteer, and trainee work. The PLFS will also include additional questions to measure labour underutilisation.

According to a press release and concept note issued here on Friday, the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), has proposed modifications to the PLFS sampling design starting January 2027. The survey schedule will also change.

The Ministry has invited comments and suggestions from policymakers, researchers, academic insti-



**Hidden labour:** The revised labour survey aims to better capture the economic contribution of women's unpaid work. IMRAN NISSAR

tutions, and the public within 15 days from Friday.

A separate Second Stage Stratum (SSS) will be introduced in the PLFS to identify households with at least one digital platform worker. An additional entry will be added to the questionnaire to determine whether any member of the household has engaged in digital platform work during the specified reference period. "There will be four SSSs in rural areas and five in urban

areas, with 14 households canvassed in each selected First Stage Unit (FSU). This revision in SSS formation is expected to improve the coverage of digital platform workers and facilitate more comprehensive data collection on this emerging segment of the labour market," the press release said.

#### Concept note

According to the concept note, a large proportion of women in India spend considerable time on unpaid

household and caregiving activities, such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, and caring for elderly, sick, or disabled family members.

"While such activities contribute significantly to household well-being and facilitate the participation of other household members in paid employment, they have not been measured separately in PLFS until now," it noted, adding that specific questions will be incorporated to capture engagement in own-use production of goods, and unpaid household and caregiving activities.

Additionally, the criteria for sample allocation and stratification have been updated.

"These revisions are expected to improve the efficiency of sample allocation and ensure better representation of population variations, which in turn will minimise operational difficulties during sample selection," the release said.

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### THE HINDU PAGE: 03

# Jaishankar visits Azerbaijan to ease strain in ties over Operation Sindoor

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Friday met Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Baku and said the visit charted a “pathway” for the future of bilateral ties. The meeting comes more than a year after relations between India and Azerbaijan deteriorated over the latter’s opposition to India’s Operation Sindoor against Pakistan.

Mr. Jaishankar also met his counterpart Jayhun Bayramov, who said the two countries had “different view points on different issues” earlier, but highlighted new areas of cooperation such as energy, and tourism after what he described as a “fruitful discussion”.

“We have common interest in really promoting peace and progress and prosperity. And threats like terrorism, conflict, and instability are our common enemies,” Mr. Jaishankar said in his remarks to the media after the meeting with Mr. Bayramov.

“Delighted to welcome



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar meets Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Baku on Friday. AFP

the External Affairs Minister of India, Dr. S. Jaishankar, to exchange views on the current state and prospects of Azerbaijan-India relations, including political dialogue, trade and investment, energy, tourism and cultural ties,” said Mr. Bayramov, emphasising “continued dialogue and exploration of opportunities for cooperation in areas of mutual interest”.

#### Way forward

“Our talks charted a pathway forward for our relationship. Agreed to deepen political consultations, exchange visits, enhance eco-

nomic activities, build connectivity and foster people-to-people ties,” Mr. Jaishankar said. He also extended India’s support to the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The statement is the first major conciliatory step from the Indian side since Azerbaijan had expressed concern over the India-initiated Operation Sindoor of May 2025.

Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry had, on May 7, 2025, condemned the Indian strikes against Pakistan-based terror targets. “We condemn military attacks against the Islamic Repu-

blic of Pakistan that killed and injured several civilians,” the Azerbaijani Ministry had said.

#### Kashmir issue

Azerbaijan has also been vocal on the Kashmir issue at the international level, often calling for its “resolution”. Mr. Bayramov in his remarks on Friday downplayed the differences between the two sides. “We have touched upon a number of issues. I believe Azerbaijan-India relations are on their way to developing to a higher level,” said Mr. Bayramov.

Mr. Jaishankar’s visit to Baku is the first bilateral visit by an Indian External Affairs Minister in eight years. The late External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj had visited Azerbaijan in April 2018 for a Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Ministerial meeting.

Official sources here described the remarks from both sides on Friday as a sign of “diplomatic reset” as India expects to exert pressure on Türkiye and Pakistan by drawing Azerbaijan close.

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### THE HINDU PAGE: 06

## U.S. midterms — Republicans face growing Blue wave

With about 10 days left for the U.S. midterm elections on November 3, talk of a Democratic wave has shifted from opinion polls to voting reality. Every major forecast now predicts the Democrats will win the House of Representatives. Statistician Nate Silver gives them a 75% chance of winning the Senate, which Republicans held strongly just a month ago. The Grand Old Party faces five main problems: a President who is a liability, weak candidates, money not swaying voters, fissures in their heartland, and a party base turning against its own.

### A President on the defensive

Let us begin with the President. Midterms are often a verdict on the White House. Donald Trump has made this election about himself, telling crowds to “pretend I’m on the ballot”. His approval rating is below 40%. In September, he told Republicans in tight races that he would visit “every one of those 35 places”. But he has campaigned in fewer than a third. Most stops have been in States he won easily, such as Oklahoma, Alabama, Tennessee, and Montana, which he said was his way “to thank them”. When a President rallies supporters in States that he won by huge margins two years earlier instead of margin seats, it conveys a hint of desperation.

The next issue is candidate quality. Texas has not elected a Democrat to the Senate since 1988. This year, the Republican nominee is Ken Paxton, who was impeached by the Texas House in 2023 and later acquitted by the State Senate. He was also observed partying in 2025 in Dubai with two Pakistani-American federal fugitives who were also his donors. His Democratic opponent, James Talarico, a former teacher and State legislator, was leading by two points in a Fox News poll (but the latest Fox News poll listed for October 15-19 showed a 49%-49% tie); and by three points in a University of Texas poll (September 25-October 5).

The third problem is in the heartland. Kansas



Anil Raman

A retired Brigadier and a research fellow in the Geopolitics Program of Takshashila Institution

has sent only Republicans to this Senate seat since 1919, the longest streak for any party in U.S. history. Republican incumbent Roger Marshall is tied in the polls with Adam Hamilton, a Methodist pastor who started one of the country’s largest churches. In Nebraska – a State Mr. Trump won by over 20 points – Democrats have stepped aside for Dan Osborn, a former union leader running as an independent. He is about three points behind Senator Pete Ricketts. When a party spends the last two weeks defending strongholds of Kansas and Nebraska, it is on the back foot.

The fourth issue is money. Elon Musk, who split from Mr. Trump last year, is now the biggest known donor in this election, having given over \$276 million to Republican groups since July. Recent filings show that Mr. Musk gave \$158 million to the Senate Leadership Fund and a separate \$10 million to Lone Star Liberty PAC, which supports Mr. Paxton’s Senate campaign. Even so, Mr. Talarico, the Democratic candidate, is still ahead. Money can buy TV advertisements, but it cannot easily overcome a national mood shaped by high prices, an unpopular war with Iran, and immigration raids.

### The lesson from Ohio

Ohio combines these issues, making it the most revealing race. Vivek Ramaswamy, a former presidential candidate backed by Mr. Trump, seemed confirmed for Governor in a State that the President has won three times. His opponent, Amy Acton, looked like an easy target. As Ohio’s highly unpopular health director during the COVID-19 pandemic, she ordered lockdowns, faced armed protesters at her home, and had Republicans try to strip her powers before she resigned in 2020. Mr. Ramaswamy and his supporters have spent about \$101 million on advertisements, including \$36 million of his own money, about three times what Ms. Acton has spent. Still, he was trailing her recently by about three points on average. Among independent

voters, his net rating is minus 25, the lowest for a Republican candidate for Governor in Ohio this century.

This week, his campaign announced plans to spend \$4 million promoting an advertisement featuring Ms. Acton’s estranged mother calling her a liar, drawing criticism from Republicans, including Governor Mike DeWine and Senator Jon Husted.

Much of this can be explained by the national mood, since the party’s Senate candidate in Ohio is also behind by a similar amount. But some of Mr. Ramaswamy’s problems come from within his own party. His rival in the Republican primary, Casey Putsch, posted a video of himself with a rifle inviting him to play “cowboys versus Indians”. He called Mr. Ramaswamy an “anchor baby” and said that there was “nothing remotely American” about him. Still, nearly one in five Republican primary voters picked Mr. Putsch. Far-right commentator Nick Fuentes told his followers to oppose Mr. Ramaswamy, while students at a conservative youth event questioned whether a Hindu could represent a Christian State. The anger goes back to the H-1B controversy in December 2024, when Mr. Ramaswamy said American culture undervalued excellence, which angered ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) voters. Now, the same party that once questioned who belongs in America is asking the same question about its own candidate.

### Self-inflicted wounds

Ohio is an apt lesson for the Republicans. A party can get through having an unpopular President, a weak candidate, or a tough electoral map in any given year. But it is much harder when all these problems happen at once and the party’s base starts judging its own candidates by their race, background and religion. If Democrats win Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, or Ohio on November 3, it will be a wave, and the Republicans will have helped make it. Perhaps they deserve that loss.

Multiple Republican vulnerabilities are strengthening Democratic hopes

## GS 3: Science and Technology

### INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 12

# On IT, India had early advantage. It hasn't caught up with AI era

**O**N JUNE 12, Anthropic suspended access to its frontier models, Claude Fable 5 and Claude Mythos 5, to comply with export controls imposed by the US Department of Commerce. In less than three weeks, the controls were lifted, but the episode left a message. Frontier Artificial Intelligence (AI) will now be treated much like nuclear technology: The power to turn access on or off lies with the countries building these models.

The US and China have frontier models of their own. India does not.

As a global hub for IT services and with one of the world's largest pools of software talent, India had an early advantage. Yet it did not prepare adequately for the AI era. India's low R&D spending, around 0.84 per cent of GDP in FY24, has not provided the foundation from which frontier AI could grow. The comparable figures were 2.6 per cent in China and 3.4 per cent in the US.

In the IT services era, this mattered less, as Indian firms prospered by customising and maintaining software built in advanced countries.

In the AI era, this model may no longer be sustainable as AI can now write, test and maintain code on its own. It strikes at the very labour advantage on which India built its services exports.

The IT sector has remained resilient so far, with global capability centres booming. A survey of 651 IT firms across 10 In-

dian cities by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), conducted between November 2025 and January 2026, found that 55 per cent of firms reported a decline in entry-level employment, while 35 per cent reported an increase. Senior-level employment remained largely stable. Nomura's analysis of company announcements tells a similar story: AI-linked hiring in India still exceeds layoffs, but job losses are concentrated in support and entry-level roles.

The IndiaAI Mission was launched in 2024 to develop the country's AI ecosystem. Its five-year budget is around \$1.2 billion and its shared compute infrastructure has expanded to over 45,000 GPUs available at subsidised rates for Indian start-ups and researchers. This is a welcome start, albeit a small one for building home-grown frontier models.

The scale of the challenge becomes apparent when compared with projected annual training and inference costs of \$45.8 billion for OpenAI and \$19 billion for Anthropic in 2026. While these are not directly comparable to a public mission's budget, they illustrate the vastly different resources available to India's AI ecosystem and the firms developing frontier models.

The challenge, however, is not simply to spend more, as China's



MANOJ PANT



M RAHUL

While data centres are essential both for training domestic AI models and for data sovereignty, the net economic benefits may be minimal if the models running on them are foreign-owned

experience suggests, but to develop a research and innovation ecosystem that can support home-grown models.

Yet, the focus now seems to have shifted to attracting data centres. While data centres are essential both for training domestic AI models and for data sovereignty, the net economic benefits may be minimal if the models running on them are foreign-owned. The hardware is imported, and most jobs are during construction. The Centre offers eligible foreign cloud-service providers using India-based data centres for global operations a tax holiday until 2047, while states compete with cheap land, water and electricity.

The government estimates that AI data centres will add around 26.3 GW of demand by FY32, planned to be met mostly by renewables.

Generating enough renewable energy annually is feasible. The real issue is that data centres require round-the-clock electricity, which intermittent renewables cannot reliably provide without costly storage or other sources of firm power. This raises the cost of electricity supplied to data centres from the grid. Until sufficient storage and other sources of firm power are available, the nighttime gap may be partly filled by coal, while the cost of ensuring reliable supply may fall on already stretched grids and,

eventually, other consumers.

Hosting data centres without a presence elsewhere in the AI value chain risks locking India into the lowest-value-added link. The semiconductor push is unlikely to change this soon.

Of the 12 semiconductor facilities approved, nine assemble, test and package pre-fabricated chips. This is a first step and has real strategic value in semiconductor supply chains. However, none of the approved facilities produces leading-edge AI chips. That would require a generational leap in manufacturing capabilities.

One way India could benefit from the "landlord role" it has chosen to follow is by ensuring compute-access guarantees, sovereign cloud capacity and local linkages in hardware and services in exchange for state support, so that investment in infrastructure also builds domestic capabilities. This would ensure an Indian presence at different points in the AI value chain. India must adopt a calibrated approach that secures such commitments from investors while maintaining a favourable investment climate.

A landlord who charges no rent is simply subsidising the tenant.

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## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 12

#### UN needs a chief who can restore its moral authority



SYED MUNIR  
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Choosing Guterres's successor is about whether the UN will continue managing the consequences of global disorder or begin confronting its causes

**S**WEDISH ECONOMIST and diplomat Dag Hammarskjöld, who became the youngest UN secretary-general (UNSG) in 1953 at 47, boarded a plane for Ndola, in present-day Zambia, to negotiate an end to the fighting in Congo. His plane crashed on September 17, 1961. Hammarskjöld's death immortalised a vision of the UNSG: Not a ceremonial custodian of an imperfect institution, but an independent diplomat willing to place moral authority, even at the expense of his own life, between nations and war. More than six decades later, as the UN prepares to choose its 10th chief, that vision has rarely been more necessary or more endangered.

The world experienced 65 state-based conflicts across 35 countries in 2025, the highest since 1946. Meanwhile, AI is transforming security and economic power faster than governments can establish safeguards, climate commitments remain dangerously inadequate, and the UN is constrained by institutions designed for 1945. Choosing António Guterres's successor is not another diplomatic rotation; it is a decision about whether the UN will continue managing the consequences of global disorder or begin confronting its causes.

From accelerating scientific discovery to improving public services, AI's benefits could be enormous. The same technology can produce disinformation, automate cyberattacks, intensify surveillance and reduce human control over military decisions. The UN has created a 40-member Independent International Scientific Panel on AI. A scientific body, however, cannot substitute for political rules. The next UNSG should pursue a narrow but enforceable global baseline: Mandatory safety evaluations for high-risk systems, disclosure of serious AI incidents, reliable identification of synthetic media and meaningful human control over decisions involving lethal force.

The next UNSG cannot compel governments to reduce emissions but can expose the distance between rhetoric and action through country-level assessments of emissions, adaptation and financing. High-level climate meetings should become implementation reviews rather than recurring stages for recycled pledges. Developing countries may need between \$310 and 365 billion annually for adaptation by 2035. International public adaptation finance reached only \$26 billion in 2023. Climate finance is partial restitution for a crisis they did not create.

Modern conflicts are increasingly internationalised, technologically enabled and entangled with rival great powers. A permanent UN mediation corps should be established, drawing on diplomats, regional specialists, ceasefire negotiators and experts in humanitarian access. It should deploy when tensions begin rising. The UNSC still reserves permanent membership and veto power for five states reflecting the settlement of World War II. Africa's 54 countries constitute approximately 28 per cent of UN membership, yet the continent has no permanent seat. Such exclusion weakens the legitimacy of the UN's decisions.

Hammarskjöld's final journey embodied the belief that diplomacy must sometimes venture toward danger rather than wait for catastrophe to arrive. The next UNSG need not imitate his sacrifice. But the office must recover his sense of purpose.

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GS 2: POLITY  
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13

## SIR needs reform. But let's go by numbers, not protestors' slogans



SURJIT S BHALLA

**C**ANSOMEBODY please explain what is going on in political India? The agitation Rahul Gandhi has joined is, in Prashant Bhushan's words, a "fight for regime change". Regime change is what Donald Trump wished on Iran's clerics: The end of a political system, not a Congress victory in 2029. The foreign press, once the voice of relative sanity, has joined the chorus. *The Economist* (October 1) says the Election Commission "is barring tens of millions from voting". *The Financial Times* (October 15) headlines an overhaul "that removed 130mn voters", though its own chart says these are names "flagged for possible exclusion". The protestors' slogan is 13 crore votes deleted. And in these pages, Jean Drèze and Yogendra Yadav (DY) ("Let us not be in denial, disenfranchisement is real", October 20) find "well over 10 crore missing voters", about 14 crore for all India.

These are all-India numbers, including states whose final rolls are not yet out. So consider the nine states where the final rolls are known: Bihar and the eight large states of the second phase, home to three in five Indian adults.

Where registration is voluntary, the roll always falls short of the adult population: 4-7 per cent of eligible Canadians are missing from the lists, 11-14 per cent of Britons, and a quarter of American voting-age citizens. Nobody calls that disenfranchisement. Disenfranchisement is the gap between the final roll and the roll one should expect: Everyone who would normally register, and no one who should not be there.

DY measure against all adults instead. Their table sets each state's projected adult population from the government's Technical Group against its final SIR roll. The nine states have 59.9 crore adults and 52.8 crore names on the final rolls: 7.1 crore, or 12 per cent, short. DY call this disenfranchise-

## • Expected and actual SIR rolls, nine states where the rolls are final

| STATE          | ADULTS (CRORE) | UNREGISTERED AGED 18-29, 2024 (% OF ADULTS) | UNREGISTERED AGED 30+ (% OF ADULTS) | EXPECTED EXCLUSIONS (CRORE) | EXPECTED SIR ROLL (CRORE) | PRE-SIR ROLL (CRORE) | FINAL SIR ROLL (CRORE) |
|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Uttar Pradesh  | 16.1           | 14.2                                        | 1.5                                 | 2.5                         | 13.6                      | 15.4                 | 13.4                   |
| Bihar          | 8.2            | 15                                          | 1.5                                 | 1.3                         | 6.8                       | 7.9                  | 7.4                    |
| West Bengal    | 7.7            | 2.5                                         | 1.5                                 | 0.3                         | 7.4                       | 7.7                  | 6.8                    |
| Gujarat        | 5.3            | 6.6                                         | 1.5                                 | 0.4                         | 4.9                       | 5.1                  | 4.4                    |
| Madhya Pradesh | 6              | 6.1                                         | 1.5                                 | 0.5                         | 5.5                       | 5.7                  | 5.4                    |
| Rajasthan      | 5.6            | 6.3                                         | 1.5                                 | 0.4                         | 5.2                       | 5.5                  | 5.2                    |
| Tamil Nadu     | 6              | 3                                           | 1.5                                 | 0.3                         | 5.7                       | 6.4                  | 5.7                    |
| Chhattisgarh   | 2.1            | 5.7                                         | 1.5                                 | 0.2                         | 2                         | 2.1                  | 1.9                    |
| Kerala         | 2.8            | 4.3                                         | 1.5                                 | 0.2                         | 2.6                       | 2.8                  | 2.7                    |
| Nine states    | 59.9           | 8.7                                         | 1.5                                 | 6.1                         | 53.8                      | 58.6                 | 52.8                   |

ADULTS: TECHNICAL GROUP PROJECTIONS AT EACH FINAL ROLL'S QUALIFYING DATE (BIHAR 1 JULY 2025; OTHERS 1 JANUARY 2026). UNREGISTERED AGED 18-29: ECI ATLAS 2024 ELECTORS AGAINST TECHNICAL GROUP POPULATION. EXPECTED EXCLUSIONS - ADULTS X TOTAL UNREGISTERED %. EXPECTED SIR ROLL - ADULTS LESS EXPECTED EXCLUSIONS. PRE-SIR ROLLS: JUNE 2025 (BIHAR) AND OCTOBER 2025 (OTHERS). FINAL ROLLS: ECI NUMBERS ARE ROUNDED OFF.

ment. Their table, drawn from my Substack, leaves out a crucial column: The young who did not register to vote. In 2024, the ECI's own rolls show, four in 10 young adults in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were not registered. In these nine states, that is 5.2 crore young people, 8.7 per cent of all adults. The SIR cannot have deleted people who were never there. Add 1.5 per cent of adults for older people who never registered, or moved and never re-registered, and 6.1 crore adults would normally not be on the roll. Put that column back, and DY's own numbers give the answer: About 1 crore disenfranchised, not 7.1 crore.

The expected roll is 53.8 crore; the final roll is 52.8 crore. West Bengal, where the young register well, expected 7.4 crore and got 6.8: About 60 lakh short. And there the appeals failed: Of the 34 lakh Bengalis who appealed, The Economist reports, fewer than 0.05 per cent had their cases heard before election day, and the tribunals have since found 90 per cent of appellants valid all along. Bihar, where the outcry began, has 7.4 crore on its final roll against 6.8 expected: Largely migrants who work in other

A crore of eligible voters wrongly removed is not nothing. But inflating 1 crore into 7 does not help the 1 crore; it lets the ECI dismiss the real crore along with the imaginary six

## states but stay registered at home.

Nor were the old rolls clean. Before the SIR, these nine states had 58.6 crore names on their rolls. A clean roll, the table shows, would hold 53.8 crore. The difference, nearly 5 crore names, was the dead, the departed and the duplicated, and this on rolls that still missed 5.2 crore young people. Battered rolls are not an excuse invented for the SIR. They are what the SIR removed. Drèze himself now concedes, in another newspaper (October 21), that the old rolls left out "up to 10 per cent perhaps" of adults, and that the "majority" of deletions are legitimate.

Accepting Uttar Pradesh's low youth registration, DY say, is "like saying if you skipped breakfast, you might as well skip lunch". Clever, but nobody skipped lunch. Uttar Pradesh's 2.3 crore unregistered young were counted by the ECI in 2024, before the SIR. Applying the national average to Uttar Pradesh is like measuring Rajasthan's drought with India's rainfall.

K B S Sidhu, a former civil servant, put it simply on X: The 130 million in the headlines "was never a count of the disenfranchised". Article 326, he reminds us, sets only three condi-

tions for the roll: "a citizen of India, eighteen years of age, ordinarily resident. A person who meets them shall be entitled to be registered. Everything else is fluff."

By Sidhu's test, the SIR was loaded with fluff, and the blame lies with the ECI and the government. In these pages on September 24 ("I have voted for three decades. Why is my SIR incomplete?"), I set out, from my own experience, what went wrong: The haste, the paperwork demanded of poor and migrant voters, and "logical discrepancy" notices for a misspelt name. Those criticisms stand. The government changed the law in 2023 so that it effectively chooses the Election Commissioners, and now wonders why the Commission's impartiality is doubted; its ministers talk of "infiltrators" without producing even an approximate number for us mere mortals to assess. The Commission ran a hurried exercise, often just before state elections, let its discrepancy rules fall hardest on Muslims in Murshidabad and Malda and on Matua Hindus, added a declaration to Form 6 without changing the rules, and has still not published a national post-SIR roll, or removals by reason, state and booth. An umpire who will not explain his decisions invites the charge of bias. A crore of eligible voters wrongly removed is not nothing. But inflating 1 crore into 7 does not help the 1 crore; it lets the ECI dismiss the real crore along with the imaginary six.

So start from first principles, from Article 326. The citizen is entitled to be registered; it is for the state to show that he is not. Take the passport. India issues one only to its citizens, after police verification. Yet in June an External Affairs ministry official declared the passport a travel document, "not a document of citizenship", and the ECI had to clarify the next day that it still accepts one. A passport is the state's own certificate of citizenship; if the state now doubts it, the state must prove its case before a tribunal, not ask the citizen to prove it again. That is a reform worth marching for. Regime change is not.

The writer is chairperson of the Technical Expert Group for the first official Household Income Survey of India. Views are personal

## GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE

### INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13



RAJIB DASGUPTA

ON OCTOBER 7, the WHO issued the first-ever guidelines for integrated management of obesity in children aged 29 days to under 10 years. The evidence-informed recommendations include guidance on dietary interventions, physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep, behaviour-changing interventions, digital health interventions, pharmacotherapy, and bariatric surgery. Childhood obesity is on the rise globally as a result of a shift towards the intake of foods that are high in fat and sugar (deficient in diversity as well as vitamins, minerals and micronutrients) and less energy-intensive recreational activities and transportation.

## Childhood obesity deepens the nutrition challenge

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease, which are diseases of adulthood, are increasingly being diagnosed in children and adolescents with obesity. The net for screening of these conditions therefore has to be cast increasingly at younger ages. Further, complications of NCDs such as chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease or certain obesity-driven malignancies will be manifest in younger productive ages.

UNICEF's *Child Nutrition Global Report 2025* marked a watershed moment — with obesity among school-aged children and adolescents, for the first time, surpassing underweight globally as the most common form of malnutrition. With childhood obesity no longer a marker of affluent societies, it put the number of children living with obesity

at about 188 million — one in 10. In 2000, South Asian countries had the lowest prevalence of overweight children and adolescents; by 2022, the prevalence was up nearly fivefold across all three age bands (5-9, 10-14, 15-19). The projections suggest that by 2030, India will have over 27 million children and adolescents (5-19 years) living with obesity, about 11 per cent of the global burden.

It would be naïve to assume that undernutrition is no longer a concern. In fact, low- and middle-income countries such as India

The food environment is the toughest challenge, due to weak interventions in marketing through TV and other media, and lack of front-of-package labelling

are battling a double burden — the unfinished agenda of communicable diseases and undernutrition on the one hand and the rising prevalence of risk factors of NCDs including obesity and overweight at younger ages. The explanations lie in inadequate prenatal, infant and child nutrition, followed by growing children experiencing exposure to high-fat, energy-dense, and micronutrient-poor foods, and not enough physical activity.

The policy approach is to address the obesogenic environment, that is, "an environment that promotes gaining weight and one that is not conducive to weight loss" within the home or school. The government's role is critical — the Union and state governments for agenda and policy framing, and local and municipal governments for adaptation and implementation in local settings. The major pillars include addressing

the food environment and lifestyles, including promoting physical activity, establishing meal and obesity guidelines, and implementing health education and early intervention programmes such as limiting sweetened beverages at schools.

The food environment is the toughest challenge, due to weak interventions in marketing through television and other media, and lack of front-of-package labelling. A key implementation imperative is tailoring these to sub-national and regional variations, ethnicities, and cultures. These also entail increased capital investment; to a certain extent, sin taxes can generate revenue for specific public health interventions.

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## GS 2: POLITY

### INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13

#### • POLITY

## The debates around Legislative Councils, their functions today

Rishika Singh

New Delhi, October 23

**ELECTIONS TO 28 seats across the Legislative Councils of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Karnataka were held on Friday, with results to be declared next week.**

Unlike state polls, not every adult citizen can vote for Members of Legislative Councils (MLCs). Not all states have Legislative Councils, either.

#### What are Legislative Councils?

Just as the Indian Union has a bicameral legislature, comprising the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, some states have a Legislative Assembly and a Legislative Council. Six states — the four mentioned earlier plus Telangana and Andhra Pradesh — have them.

Chakshu Roy, head of outreach at PRS Legislative Research, earlier wrote for *The Indian Express* that the colonial history traces back to the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, which led to the formation of the

Council of State at the national level in 1919. "Then the Government of India Act of 1935 set up bicameral legislatures in Indian provinces... a Legislative Council first started functioning in Bengal in 1937," he wrote.

Similar to Rajya Sabha, the Legislative Council serves as a second layer of the law-making process. The two share similarities — Bills need their approval to become law; only those aged above 30 can contest for a seat, and members are chosen for six-year terms through indirect elections. One-third of the members retire every two years.

During the Constituent Assembly debates, members disagreed about its need. Congress leader Brajeshwar Prasad argued that, "With the inauguration of the new Constitution on the basis of adult franchise, it is risky to vest all powers in the hands of the Lower House... I believe that power must be vested in the hands of those... not only literate but wise too... who have got a sense of justice... People in India are not only illiterate, but narrow-minded."

#### Political barometer

● Legislative Council elections are seen as a political barometer by parties, indicating support among educated groups and professionals, or their position before key elections, as in the case of UP now.

● They are not fought on party symbols, but parties still back candidates.

Others criticised the elevated position enjoyed by the Legislative Assembly. For instance, the Legislative Council cannot reject the Assembly's suggestions on a Money Bill. Roy wrote that today, whether states are to have a Council is a political issue: "For example, in Tamil Nadu, creating a Council has been a contentious issue." The AIADMK-led government in 1986 abolished the state's second chamber. Since then, DMK has made attempts to re-establish the Council.

Legislative Council elections are seen as a political barometer, indicating support among educated groups and professionals, or their position before key elections, as in the case of UP now. They are not fought on party symbols, but parties still back candidates.

#### How are MLCs elected?

Article 169 of the Constitution says that Parliament can pass a law to create or abolish a Legislative Council, "if the Legislative Assembly of the State passes a resolution to that effect by a majority of the total mem-

bership of the Assembly and by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the Assembly present and voting."

Article 171 says the total number of MLCs cannot be more than one-third of the total MLAs in a state, and not less than 40.

The polls are held through proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote. In general, one-third of all MLCs shall be elected by "electorates consisting of members of municipalities, district boards and such other local authorities..." Then, "One-twelfth shall be elected by electorates consisting of persons residing in the State who have been for at least three years graduates of any university" or equivalent qualifications. Those who want to vote in these seats must fill forms that require proof of qualifications. One-twelfth of the seats is to be elected by those teaching in at least a secondary school for three years in the state. The Governor also nominates some people having "special knowledge" in fields such as literature and science.

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# How India's bullet train project took a long detour



DHEERA MISHRA & ANIL SASI

IN SEPTEMBER 2017, work began on one of India's most ambitious and technologically advanced transportation projects — a 508-km high-speed railway line between Mumbai and Ahmedabad, popularly known as the bullet train project.

A joint-venture with Japan, known for its iconic 300 kmph Shinkansen trains, the project was initially estimated to be completed by 2022. Now, the first section of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail is expected to open by December 2027.

Over the years, the project has run into rough waters several times — delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a change in the Maharashtra government that resulted in land acquisition issues, and, most importantly, what appeared to be a degree of misalignment between the two sides.

A senior industry source, who has interacted with both the Indian and Japanese delegations, said that the two sides had "a grossly insufficient understanding of each other's objectives, business environment and way of working", having announced the project including timelines and costs "without sufficiently detailed homework and without taking into account risks".

Did each side clearly understand what the other side thought had been actually agreed? That seems unlikely. Did they understand or anticipate, but choose to remain silent, hoping for the best? Likely. Was there chicanery on the Indian side, as was alleged by former Japanese minister Hi-deki Makihara in July? "I think not," said the source. India's Ministry of External Affairs has dismissed Makihara's accusations of "sheer recklessness" by the Indian side.

Months down the line, the two sides seem to have largely reconciled their differences and agreed upon a pragmatic way forward. What started as a Japanese high-speed rail project is now heading towards a hybrid solution of sorts — Japanese track and civil infrastructure design, European signalling systems, India-made trains.

For the Indian Railways, the challenge going forward is to ensure that the different systems work with each other.



It started as a Japanese high-speed rail project. After friction, it has evolved into a hybrid model: Japanese tracks, European signal systems, Indian trains

a European-Indian joint venture in June 2023. The project will use Indian-built high speed trains (not as fast as the Shinkansen but much faster than the trains currently in service in India). And the two countries are likely to negotiate the supply of the Japanese E10 trainset when it becomes available in a few years' time. The Japanese financing package will remain in place.

This is quite a different scheme from the one that was originally intended. Under the circumstances, however, it is a pragmatic solution that benefits both countries.

According to Indian Railways officials, the government decided in 2024 to get its own bullet train and deploy an international signalling system after it became clear that Japan would not be able to provide the E10 Shinkansen trainset before 2034, as it had stopped the production of E5 trains. Officials said both sides agreed to the decisions on rolling stock and signalling, drawing on experiences from countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, China and European nations, where a similar system is being used with variations.

Railway officials said that all approvals of drawings, designs, construction schemes and quality control are carried out by Japanese experts. The Indian bullet train (B28), which can achieve a maximum operational speed of 250 kmph, is being developed by BEML in Bengaluru.

Japanese experts support India's ambition for its own bullet train, but with caveats. Masafumi Shukuri, Chairman of the Japan Transport and Tourism Research Institute and International High-Speed Rail Association, told The Indian Express that India will have to prove that it is safe to use two different types of bullet trains (B28 and E10) and their respective signalling systems in the same corridor. He emphasised the "total systems approach", a unique aspect of the Shinkansen where civil work, tracks, signalling, and rolling stock are built as one single system. "Eventually, I think, one of those systems will need to be adopted; you can't have both the systems running," said Shukuri.

There are lessons for future collaboration. "Japanese organisations need to be willing to flexibly adapt their offerings to suit the requirements of other markets," the industry source cited above said. "In case of India... the reputation of Indian counterparts for detailed planning and adherence to agreed terms is lacking... long-term reputation for trust matters a great deal too."

#### How we got here

Talks with Japan over the idea of a bullet train started well before 2013. But it was a feasibility study by Japanese consultants in December 2013, and a report by them in July 2015, that gave the idea concrete shape. The Union Cabinet approved the project in December 2015 and work started in September 2017. It was seen as a high-profile manifestation of India and Japan's strategic partnership under prime ministers Shinzo Abe and Narendra Modi.

But execution plans — the nitty gritty of procurement, cost estimates, statutory approval processes, construction schedules and so forth — seem to have been worked out afterwards. This was also the first time the two countries had attempted to execute a complex project together. So, it was not surprising that reality turned out to be quite different from initial assumptions.

This brings us to one of the key divergences between Indian and Japanese sides. The Japanese thought they were set to export the entire system — track, rolling stock, signalling — since they were financing the entire project on highly concessional terms.

"But India did not wish to be tied to a single, high-cost, imported solution," said the source. "The cost effectiveness, flexibility of choice and indigenisation of technology are important to the Indians, especially for the further expansion of the high-speed

At Vikhroli in Mumbai, one of the tunnels through which the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed line will pass.

#### Execution issues

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But execution plans — procurement, cost estimates, approvals, construction schedules, etc. — seem to have been worked out afterwards.

rail network beyond the initial project. Indians rarely buy anything without taking the proposal apart and aggressively negotiating things in line with their requirements."

"The Shinkansen, though a marvel of technology, was designed for domestic use as a comprehensive system, not for piecemeal export," this person added.

There were also drifts and delays on both sides. Japan has had four changes of administration since prime minister Abe; in India, acquisition of land and legal right of way for much of the route was thrown into uncertainty when there was a change of government in Maharashtra after elections in 2019, and this was resolved only after the next election in 2024. By then, the Japanese had decided to phase out the E5 trainset originally intended to be deployed in India.

Delays are not uncommon in such projects anywhere — Japan's Shinkansen to Hokkaido, and the UK's High Speed 2 rail are examples of similar projects that have seen substantive delays and cost overruns. The overall cost of the Indian project has nearly doubled to about Rs 2 lakh crore, compared to the initial estimated cost of Rs 1.08 lakh crore. The government is now likely to allocate a special budget to meet the cost surge.

#### Current situation

It seems both sides have come to an agreement on the way ahead for the project.

India awarded the signalling contract to