EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

27-10-2026

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

A final surge

Lula is the resistance to U.S. imperial ambitions in South America

At one point, it seemed almost impossible for Brazil's 80-year-old President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, to turn the tide after finishing second to Flávio Bolsonaro in the first round of elections on October 4. In Brazil's history, no candidate who has finished second in the first round has gone on to win the presidential run-off. Most of the candidates who dropped out after the first round were from the right. Flávio's Liberal Party cemented its position in both houses of Congress, while right-wing candidates won several provincial elections. But Lula, a former trade unionist and organiser, who lost a finger in an accident as a teenager, was not ready to give up. Lula and his Workers' Party identified campaign weaknesses, shifted their attention to economic issues, promised growth and welfare, and persuaded more voters to turn out for Sunday's run-off. Lula won 51.7% of the vote against Flávio's 48.2%, a greater lead than his victory against Jair Bolsonaro, Flavio's father, four years ago. Over the weeks, Lula turned the right-wing's gains in the first round against it, highlighting the threats that a Bolsonaro victory could pose to democracy and civil rights. Flávio's campaign pledge to free his father – he is serving a 27-year prison sentence for attempting to overturn Lula's 2022 victory, and impeach Supreme Court judges – only heightened the concerns of voters outside the right wing, who rallied behind a familiar face.

Lula unleashed a social media campaign to mobilise younger voters. A WhatsApp channel called 'Lula's Army' with 11 million followers spread his message of continuity. He also announced plans to expand a cash payout scheme for the poor, a new debt relief package and entrepreneur-friendly measures. In the northeast, the Workers' Party's stronghold, he gained nearly three million votes and made considerable gains in the working-class neighbourhoods of big cities, including São Paulo. A relatively stable economic record, marked by growth and falling unemployment over the past three and a half years, also lent credibility to Lula's appeal. His victory bucks the recent trend in South America, where Washington-aligned right-wing and conservative forces have gained ground. While Lula offers predictable stability and social and economic inclusiveness, he could also be, as the President of South America's largest economy, a voice of resistance to Donald Trump's imperial ambitions. At the same time, Lula will have to work with a right-wing-controlled Congress to advance his agenda. He should seek to build legislative consensus while focusing on addressing the economic challenges of Brazil, which remains one of the most unequal major world economies.

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (HEALTH)
THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Dubious retreat

The National Medical Commission must not be seen as lax on regulation

The National Medical Commission (NMC) has denotified and withdrawn its 2023 Maintenance of Standards of Medical Education Regulations (MSMER), diminishing the framework of penalties *vis-à-vis* educational standards and infrastructure at medical colleges. The move is noteworthy as the MSMER provided for fines of up to ₹5 lakh on faculty members and administrators for submitting false information. Fortunately, the Medical Assessment and Rating Board (MARB) retains the power to fine errant institutions up to ₹1 crore under the 2023 Establishment of Medical Institutions, Assessment and Rating Regulations. MSMER was lauded for its intention to crack down on the deep-seated corruption and malpractice in medical colleges, particularly over 'ghost faculty' and 'ghost patients'. The NMC's justification is that MSMER also introduced a parallel mechanism allowing undergraduate and postgraduate boards to evaluate institutions, stepping on the MARB's toes. However, why the NMC scrapped MSMER wholesale is unclear. The 2023 Postgraduate Medical Education Regulations remain in force and include a provision to fine individual faculty members at postgraduate medical colleges. Non-compliance among medical colleges is not uncommon and seldom nipped in the bud, even as the number of medical seats swells while the transparency of the medical education system has not improved.

Notwithstanding the provision to fine individuals at postgraduate centres, the MARB and the NMC can only penalise institutions, which is harder and risks creating a perverse incentive to accommodate rather than punish, and could mitigate the fear that keeps administrators honest. MSMER also specified timelines to appeal penalties. Although the MARB regulations retain the appeal processes, their 15-day deadline could conflict with the 60-day period under the NMC Act, potentially creating legal disputes that delay penal action. There is also a telling incident. As part of a proceeding under the RTI Act, the Central Information Commission revealed last year that the NMC had stated in 2024 that MARB had neither formally assessed nor rated medical colleges and that its standard forms need not be made public. In a revised reply in October 2025, it said the responding NMC officer's records did not include any of the corresponding reports. However, the 2023 MARB regulations require the Board to publish its latest annual assessment results. If the NMC withdrew MSMER because the powers thereunder also exist elsewhere, the public deserves to know whether the powers are also being exercised and whether the outcomes are as publicly accessible as intended. Unless the NMC has satisfactory answers for all these lacunae, the withdrawal will appear less like simplification and more like regulatory relaxation.

GS 3: INTERNAL SECURITY (CYBER SECURITY)
THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Beyond Kudankulam's fence, a cybersecurity challenge



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The Kudankulam breach highlights vulnerabilities beyond a nuclear plant's physical boundaries

The data breach involving files related to the Kudankulam nuclear power project in Tamil Nadu, reported on July 15, 2026, indicates that India's cybersecurity policy for critical infrastructure is behind the perimeter that now extends well beyond the actual sensitive facility.

The most consequential breach may never touch the facility at all. It could occur in a rented server in a commercial data centre or even within a contractor's network which has documents that the contractor is entitled to possess. That, in essence, is what appears to have happened in the case of Kudankulam. And that is why the incident deserves more attention than the reassurances that followed would suggest.

The perimeter beyond the plant

In mid-July, the group World Leaks began posting sections of an alleged leak of nearly 19,000 files totalling 14.3 GB relating to Kudankulam on its dark web portal. As reported by Reuters, the material spans the years 2016 to about 2025. It includes engineering drawings, supplier information, inspection records, meeting minutes, and insurance documents. The breach was confirmed by Reliance Infrastructure – it won the engineering, procurement, and construction contract for Kudankulam Units 3 and 4 – and added that the data had been stored on a server by its third-party data centre Yotta. It also said that the government had been notified. Yotta confirmed ransomware activity on its site on May 29, and said that the activity has been contained. By June the attackers were claiming the data and demanding a ransom. The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) said that the information was only on documents relating to non-nuclear infrastructure, and unrelated to systems supporting nuclear safety.

In all this, caveats are necessary. A ransomware group's claims are not evidence as such groups routinely inflate what they hold. Nothing in the public domain indicates that the reactors or control and safety systems, isolated from the Internet by design, were accessed. The NPCIL's clarification should be taken seriously.

The pertinent question is not whether the "reactor was hacked" – it was not – but how much operationally relevant information about India's most sensitive facilities exists beyond the facilities themselves. These include what is held by contractors, subcontractors, service providers, and their employees, a few of whom fall within the reach of India's regulatory framework.

This is not the first time that Kudankulam has featured in such a discussion. In 2019, the Dtrack malware, which cybersecurity researchers associate with North Korea's Lazarus Group, was found on a computer connected to the plant's Internet-facing administrative network. The NPCIL initially dismissed the reports but confirmed the infection, while emphasising that the critical internal network had been isolated and unaffected. The two are not technically connected, but there is a link. In both instances, the core held and the exposure was at the periphery. First, it was an administrative network; now, it was a contractor's server in a commercial data centre. Seven years later, the question is whether the lesson of 2019 was ever taken seriously – that security risks extend beyond critical facilities and whether there has been a systematic approach to securing the ecosystem around critical infrastructure. The latest incident suggests that it was not.

A cyber blind spot

These ecosystems are large and growing. A modern nuclear plant, electricity grid, defence production facility or telecommunications system cannot be built or operated as a single organisation. Public utilities sit alongside private engineering and construction firms, equipment and software suppliers, cloud and data centre providers, insurers, certification agencies and layers of subcontractors, many of whom are foreign technology partners. Each of them may legitimately hold sensitive data, such as drawings, purchase order forms, reports, personal data, credentials and schedules. But this information is not necessarily protected by the security measures in place at the main facility, such as network segmentation, air-gapped control systems and physical security. This creates a cybersecurity risk across the supply chain. In other words, an organisation's security depends not only on its own safeguards but also on those of every other entity that has access to its data.

A sophisticated attacker can use this information to identify contractors, find potential targets for phishing attacks and determine which subcontractor offers the easiest route into the system. As Nickolas Roth of the Nuclear Threat Initiative has noted, such documents may also reveal how systems can be accessed. The larger concern is that strategic information can pose a security risk even if it does not provide direct access to operational systems. Any serious assessment must therefore examine not just what information was taken but also how it could be misused in the future.

India faces a gap in cybersecurity governance. It is not that institutions or rules are absent. The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, CERT-In, is the national agency responsible for responding to cybersecurity incidents, and its 2022 directions made prompt reporting of such incidents mandatory. The National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC), established under Section 70A of the Information Technology Act, is responsible for protecting critical information infrastructure.

However, India's cybersecurity rules do not necessarily ensure uniform protection for sensitive information shared across contractors, subcontractors and data centres. Although existing regulations cover several categories of service providers, questions remain about the adequacy of security standards, oversight and accountability across the supply chain. In law, a "protected system" belongs to an infrastructure, and the obligations fall on its operator. Once project information is shared with a contractor, and then with a subcontractor or a data centre, its protection depends largely on contractual arrangements. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act does not generally cover engineering drawings and other technical information that do not contain personal data.

This creates a problem of accountability. The operator can truthfully say that its systems were not breached, the contractor can blame its hosting provider, and the host to the malware it had. All these claims may be true, yet sensitive documents may still end up on the dark web. The key question raised by the Kudankulam incident is who is responsible for protecting critical infrastructure information once it leaves the operator's control.

Expansion and risks

India is expanding the Kudankulam plant to a capacity of 6,000 MW, developing smart grids and digital public infrastructure, opening up the defence and space sectors to private companies under Atmanirbhar Bharat, and moving government data and services to commercial cloud platforms. Each of these steps makes strategic sense. But they also mean that more private companies will have access to sensitive information, increasing the risk of cyberattacks and creating more ways for attackers to gain access. A cybersecurity policy designed for a system in which the government builds and controls everything is no longer adequate for one that depends on private contractors, subcontractors and commercial infrastructure.

What are the steps to be taken? First, security obligations must follow the data, not the organisation. Any contractor, subcontractor, or cloud provider handling critical infrastructure data must be bound to defined standards, with liability and audit requirements in the procurement contract. Second, India needs real data classification so that a contractor constructing a conventional facility holds only the data that is needed and only for as long as it is needed. Third, annual compliance certificates should give way to third-party risk assessment, including red-team exercises that test the vendor ecosystem and not merely an operator's perimeter. Fourth, there should be zero-trust. The assumption should be that no network is safe. Every access point should be verified. This should be the policy for projects of national importance. Finally, CERT-In, the NCIIPC, sectoral regulators, and operators should converge on a single national framework for critical-infrastructure supply-chain security – one that assigns responsibility before a breach rather than after. Whether that comes through new legislation or a creative reading of the IT Act can wait.

In the digital era, critical infrastructure is not a building surrounded behind a fence; it is a layered system with many access points, many of them are outside the operator's control. India would be best served by ensuring that every organisation holding the reactor's secrets held to the same standard as those secrets deserve.

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (HEALTH)

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

A ready solution to tackle anaemia



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Despite significant economic progress and sustained public health efforts, anaemia – driven significantly by iron deficiency – continues to be one of India's most pressing public health challenges. Affecting over half of Indian women and almost three-fourths of children, anaemia contributes to maternal mortality, an intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, impaired cognitive development, reduced productivity and substantial economic losses. The Government of India's 7X7X7 Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) strategy, which was launched recently, rightly recognises the multifactorial nature of anaemia through a comprehensive approach spanning prevention, screening, treatment, dietary diversification and behaviour change. Yet, one proven preventive intervention remains significantly underutilised.

The promise of fortification

That intervention is Double Fortified Salt (DFS) – salt fortified with both iodine and iron. Salt offers an unparalleled opportunity to address iron deficiency. Consumed daily by virtually every household across India, in predictable quantities regardless of income or geography, it is uniquely suited to deliver a preventive nutrition intervention at population scale. DFS also addresses one of the fundamental challenges of anaemia control – sustained compliance.

Delivering iron through an everyday food complements interventions such as iron supplementation and dietary diversification, whose effectiveness depends on regular adherence. India already has one of the world's most successful public health platforms in Universal Salt Iodisation, with around 95% of households consuming iodised salt. Building on this existing infrastructure, DFS is already distributed to an estimated 76 million people across four States through government safety-net programmes. Global and Indian evidence strongly support DFS. A global review has shown that DFS can reduce anaemia by up to 21%. Randomised controlled trials in Bengaluru, Darjeeling, and Punjab, along with large-scale implementation in Uttar Pradesh, have shown improvements in iron status and confirmed that, when manufactured to validated specifications, DFS is acceptable to consumers, reduces iron deficiency, and is highly cost-effective. A DFS standard has been issued by the Government of India's Food Safety and Standards Authority (FSSAI), and the Government of India actually mandates DFS' inclusion in the national school feeding programme (PM POSHAN and the national early childhood development programme- Integrated Child Development Scheme, or ICDS).

> Double fortified salt offers a scalable solution to one of India's most pressing public health challenges

At an estimated cost of ₹14-₹20 per person annually, DFS represents one of the most affordable population-level nutrition interventions available, with a benefit-cost ratio of 4.2:1 for national DFS introduction, primarily driven by improved health outcomes and subsequent increases in labour productivity. India also possesses the manufacturing capacity to produce high-quality DFS at scale. Established fortification technologies, centralised salt production and existing laboratory infrastructure make quality assurance and regulatory monitoring simpler than for many other fortified foods.

What the barriers are

What has limited DFS from wider adoption? The barriers are now primarily institutional rather than technical. The next imperative is to accelerate its nationwide adoption and ensure last-mile access, particularly the Public Distribution System apart from social safety-net programmes, across all States through a central flagship scheme. Although DFS is recommended under PM POSHAN and ICDS, its integration into the largest safety net programme i.e., the Public Distribution System (PDS) – which reaches around 800 million beneficiaries – remains uneven because implementation depends largely on State governments. Greater policy commitment, dedicated financing, stronger quality assurance, wider commercial availability and consumer awareness are now needed to accelerate nationwide scale-up. These are implementation challenges – not technological ones – and are well within India's capacity to address.

Like all public health nutrition interventions, DFS should be implemented within a robust regulatory framework. It should complement existing strategies under Anaemia Mukt Bharat, align with India's sodium reduction goals, and continue to be accompanied by screening for haemoglobinopathies such as thalassaemia and sickle cell disease. These safeguards are well recognised through experience of rice fortification programme and can be readily integrated into implementation and monitoring systems.

The launch of the revised AMB strategy provides renewed momentum to strengthen the preventive pillar of India's anaemia response and advance the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Potential to be a global model

India has already shown the world how science, policy, public systems, and public awareness can transform nutrition through Universal Salt Iodisation. By scaling DFS nationally, India can not only accelerate progress towards Anaemia Mukt Bharat but also contribute to global efforts to reduce iron deficiency by demonstrating an affordable, scalable model for other low- and middle-income countries.

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (EDUCATION)
THE HINDU PAGE: 09

Why inclusion is key to the RTE Act



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Every morning, 10-year-old Ria walks from her working-class Delhi neighbourhood to a premium private school with quiet pride. As her friends head to a government school, Ria continues her longer walk, feeling lucky to have won a free seat under the Right to Education (RTE) Act quota.

Yet, inside the school gates, a transformation occurs. Her stride becomes subdued, and she quietly slips into a back-row seat. For the rest of the day, she and a fellow quota student operate in survival mode: meticulously copying notes while avoiding the teacher's gaze. After receiving a C-minus on a math assignment and a harsh reprimand from her teacher, she carries the disappointment for days. Her immense effort remains unseen, and her teachers label her as 'struggling to meet grade expectations'.

Across the city, Sahil, admitted to another private school through the same provision, experiences a strikingly different day. His father works as an industrial labourer and his mother takes on local domestic work. Yet his school feels inviting. His engagement has attracted teachers and peers, and his sincerity is reflected in his grades, participation in sports and confidence on the stage.

Ria and Sahil (names changed to protect identities) secured free seats via Section 12(1)(c) of the RTE Act, 2009 to drive social cohesion. The provision provides access to 50 lakh disadvantaged students to private schools nationwide via a mandatory 25% classroom quota. However, mere entry alone does not guarantee social integration. While many face low grades and class-based alienation, success stories such as Sahil's prove that intentional school practices can overcome superficial integration.

An essential tenet of educational development is that what gets measured gets valued. Inclusion remains deeply undervalued because India lacks the metrics to track it

Lacking an institutional blueprint for diverse classrooms, private schools must actively innovate. A study of nine mid-to-high-cost Delhi private schools revealed that inclusion is rarely black-and-white; structural nourishment plays out differently for each child, but success stories consistently emerge where inclusion is a core institutional value.

In typical classrooms, RTE students often drift to the periphery, isolated by organic social segregation and low participation in collaborative tasks. Burdened and undertrained teachers frequently view them through a deficit lens, as demanding 'more effort', while ignoring their emotional distress.

Architecture of access

Conversely, schools with conscious structural intent cultivate an 'invisible inclusion'. In Sahil's school, the day begins with an empathy-driven learning circle where vulnerability is shared safely. Assigned mixed seating and a 'zero period' let peers collaborate on unfinished homework. Lessons rely on collaborative learning with ample scope for student-led discussions with the teacher ensuring that all students participate. While addressing an area problem, the math teacher encouraged an RTE student to share about his family's paddy fields, which validated his lived experience. By noon, teachers co-plan support strategies, preparing for monthly open houses where parents can also exchange insights. Authentic inclusion does not require massive additional material or financial resources. It depends on consistent practices that promote equal participation, recognise diverse lived experiences, and build meaningful connections among students, teachers and families.

Under Section 12(1)(c), the responsibility of fostering an inclusive classroom falls entirely on schools and teachers. Navigating this structural support forces educators to rely solely on personal motivation. In a heavily burdened system, inclusion risks becoming an afterthought. An essential tenet of educational development is that what gets measured gets valued. Inclusion remains deeply undervalued because India lacks the metrics to track it. Unlike academic performance, it never appears on a report card, yet it shapes a student's entire journey. State governments and parent networks must collaborate to monitor benchmarks.

Schools must institutionalise inclusive values through collaborative learning, rotated leadership, dignified and equitable participation of RTE students, and by supporting teachers with specialised resources. For governments, the mandate is to create enabling conditions through financial reimbursements, public recognition of inclusive schools, and cross-state feedback loops.

To ensure that every Ria and Sahil can thrive, inclusion must be pursued with the same deliberate rigour, tracking, and daily practice that we dedicate to academic outcomes.

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE
(VULNERABLE SECTIONS)

Fewer athletes, more medals: India's best Para games yet

India fielded 168 athletes during the Aichi-Nagoya Para Games, barely half of Hangzhou's 309, yet returned with a record 114 medals

DATA POINT

Kapil Gupta

India finished the Asian Para Games in Aichi-Nagoya with a record 114 medals – 30 gold, 35 silver and 49 bronze – securing the fourth place, its best-ever finish. The tally surpassed its revised total of 108 medals at the 2022 Hangzhou Games, down from 111 after three medals were withdrawn over doping violations. The achievement is all the more striking given that India sent a much smaller contingent this time.

India fielded 168 athletes across 11 sports at the 2026 Asian Para Games, compared with 309 athletes across 17 sports in Hangzhou in 2022. With the Asian Paralympic Committee offering limited athlete quotas across sports, the removal of chess and canoeing from the programme, and India's decision not to field teams in taekwondo and rowing, the contingent was definitely smaller than last time. The para athletics contingent, the country's biggest source of medals, also fell from 123 athletes in Hangzhou to 62. With fewer athletes and fewer sporting opportunities, winning even 100 medals appeared uncertain before the Games.

India's medal tally has increased at every edition of the Asian Para Games since its debut in Guangzhou in 2010 **(Chart 1)**. It rose from 14 medals that year to 33 in 2014, 72 in 2018, 108 in Hangzhou in 2022 and 114 in Aichi-Nagoya in 2026, an eightfold increase over 16 years. Gold medals have followed a similar trajectory, rising from one in 2010 to three in 2014, 15 in 2018, 27 in 2022 and 30 in 2026.The medal-table rank for India has climbed from 15th to ninth, fifth and fourth.

More with less

The sharper story is with respect to medals per athlete **(Chart 2)**. From 2014 to 2022, India won 35 to 38 medals for every 100 athletes it sent. In Aichi-Nagoya, the figure nearly doubled to 68. In Hangzhou, it was about three athletes for every medal, while this one needed fewer than one and a half. Gold followed the same path, from 8.7 per 100 athletes to 18.

Part of the gap reflects what was missing. India won 14 medals in Hangzhou in chess, canoeing, rowing and taekwondo. Without them, Hangzhou's comparable tally is 95, so 114 is about a fifth more in the sports India contested at both Games.

Where the medals come from

Para athletics remains the engine **(Table 1)**. It brought 17 of India's 33 medals in 2014, 36 of 72 in 2018 and 53 in Hangzhou. This time, 62 athletes won 65 medals, 22 of them gold: more medals than athletes. Swimming rose from one medal to 11 and table tennis from two to seven. Badminton slipped from 21 to 16, while archery and shooting, with no medals in 2014, won five golds between them.

The presence of women athletes has grown unevenly **(Chart 3)**. They made up 15% of India's squad in 2010, a quarter in 2018 and 37% in Hangzhou, before slipping to a third this time, 56 of 167. In Jakarta, women won 46 medals per 100 athletes, against 35 for men; in Hangzhou, 29 against 35. In Aichi-Nagoya, the gap nearly closed: women won 36 medals, 10 of them gold, or 64 per 100 athletes, against 66 for men.

Medal tables reflect the programme as much as the athletes. Quotas, events and rivals change from one edition to the next, and China remains far ahead of everyone. A smaller squad also means fewer athletes gaining international experience.

Still, the direction is clear. With the Los Angeles Paralympics two years away, the Aichi-Nagoya numbers suggest that Indian para sport is no longer growing by sending more athletes, but by winning more with those it sends.

Historic medal run

The data for the charts were sourced from Olympics.com and Wikipedia's "India at the Asian Para Games" pages

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Medal winners: India's para lifters Ashok Kumar Malik, Kasturi Rajamani and others being greeted upon their arrival at IGI Airport following the 2026 Asian Para Games, in New Delhi on Sunday

CHART 1: India's medal tally at each Asian Para Games, with medal-table rank

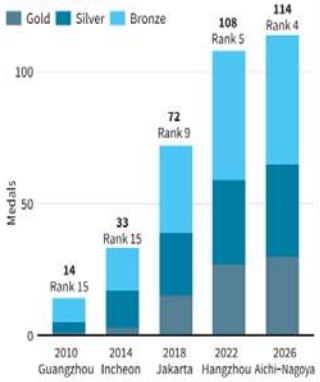
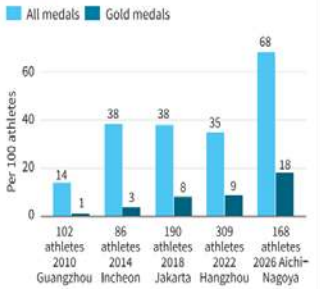


TABLE 1: Sport-wise medals India won in Asian Para Games

Sport	2010	2014	2018	2022	2026
Athletics	7 (1)	17 (2)	36 (7)	53 (16)	65 (22)
Badminton	1 (0)	6 (1)	9 (3)	21 (4)	16 (3)
Swimming	–	7 (0)	8 (1)	1 (0)	11 (0)
Table tennis	–	–	1 (0)	2 (0)	7 (0)
Archery	–	–	1 (1)	7 (2)	6 (3)
Shooting	–	–	3 (1)	6 (2)	5 (2)
Powerlifting	1 (0)	1 (0)	4 (0)	3 (0)	2 (0)
Judo	–	2 (0)	–	2 (0)	2 (0)
Sports not contested in 2026*	5 (0)	–	10 (2)	13 (3)	–
Total	**14 (1)**	**33 (3)**	**72 (15)**	**108 (27)**	**114 (30)**

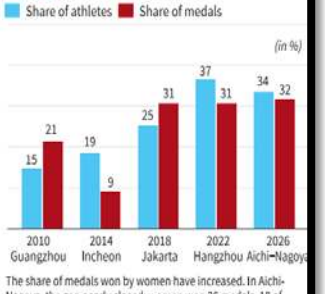
*Note: Medals won, with gold medals in brackets. '–' means no medal. *Wheelchair fencing (2010), cycling (2018), chess (2018, 2022), canoe, rowing and taekwondo (2022)*

CHART 2: Medals won for every 100 athletes sent



Note: Medals per 100 athletes = medals ÷ athletes who competed × 100. Hangzhou 2022 figures are the revised totals (108 medals, 27 gold; 309 athletes)

CHART 3: Women's share of India's squad and medals



The share of medals won by women have increased. In Aichi-Nagoya, the gap nearly closed: women won 36 medals, 10 of them gold, or 64 per 100 athletes, against 66 for men

Note: Mixed-event medals are counted in the total but not as women's medals

GS 3: ENVIRONMENT

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

From climate targets to energy justice

India should reframe the climate issue as a set of national crises arising from unequal energy use, rather than as a global temperature goal driven by emissions; the global policy focus needs to shift from production to consumption patterns, as emerging countries are using much less energy to achieve comparable levels of well-being

EXPLAINER

Mukul Sanwal

The global trend towards electrification has been recognised by the climate process, and the policy challenge is that the shift will involve less commonality and greater differentiation.

This suggests shifting the discussion from the global impact of coal-based emissions to the role of electricity in national well-being. The shift will be away from reliance on global models to a review of national actions. Global emissions of carbon dioxide deal with the symptoms, not the root cause of the problem: national energy use.

The G7 should not be allowed to set the agenda, as the Paris Agreement did 10 years ago. Shifting the global policy focus from production to consumption patterns will require a reframing of the climate process. Real collaboration will only come with a new conceptual framework that treats the global crisis as a collection of national inactions.

The limits of global 'consensus'

Academics in the West, acting as "epistemic communities", set up the framework of climate policy and law. This framework comprises interlinked 'global values' that are universal, 'global goods' that are determined by global science, complex 'global models' based on global projections and 'global rules' arrived at through multilateral conference diplomacy in global organisations.

Official experts described complex issues as the best available knowledge to be universally accepted. They achieved this by using institutions of the United Nations as mechanisms to produce technical reports and frame policies, lending them legitimacy under the banner of international cooperation. International law was then used to enforce within countries the decisions driven by global 'consensus'.

In the case of climate change, the gap between the evolving science of global ecological limits and the growing energy needs of urbanising countries seeking comparable levels of well-being was resolved through arm-twisting in an unequal world. There was no commitment to transfer financial resources as 'means of implementation'.



The floating solar panels at Periyakulam (Ukkadam Big Tank) in Coimbatore. FILE PHOTO

Western diplomats converted a political claim in a vaguely worded treaty into workshops and meetings, where the Global South gained nothing but empty resolutions. Technology transfer has been treated as a 'scientific' issue rather than an 'implementation' issue.

The lesson from 35 years of diplomatic negotiations as well as alternate models of growth to those of the West is the need to reframe climate policy.

First, in a major reversal the United States is echoing reservations of the Global South. The Executive Order "Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements", January 20, 2025, underlines that the U.S. shall "henceforth prioritise economic efficiency, the promotion of American prosperity, consumer choice, and fiscal restraint in all foreign engagements that concern energy policy".

Second, as energy use in the Global South grows to achieve comparable levels of well-being, 'carbonising' will precede 'decarbonising'. This is only partly recognised in the UN's new call for stabilisation, rather than reduction, of emissions. Third, the amount of energy needed for human well-being has never been discussed. China has emerged as the world's second-largest economy and a major global manufacturing power, achieving levels of well-being comparable to those in the West with much lower energy use.

Fourth, China's nationally driven path to achieving stabilisation has been missed in UN Reports even though it provides an alternate to the approach of the West. U.S. emissions increased by 133 megatons in 2025. China's significant steps suggest that the technology aspect of the energy transition should look forward to electrification using renewable sources, rather than focus backwards on eliminating fossil fuels.

Fifth, China's and India's insight lies is limiting consumption as a percentage of GDP, replacing the internal combustion engine, and meeting new energy demand through solar, wind and hydropower. China's more rapid progress shows that because solar and wind power have become "cheaper" than coal and gas, they will not drive the energy transition by themselves. Renewable energy is decentralised, intermittent and has zero-marginal-cost energy, requiring a strategic decision by the state on how to transform the energy system.

China installed more wind turbines and solar panels in 2025 than all other nations combined, adding about ten times as much capacity as the U.S. As this trend is expected to continue, 50% of electricity generation could come from non-fossil-fuel sources by 2030. About 5.62 million new energy vehicles were registered in China during the first half of 2025.

Global trends

Climate policy should now by driven by practice, as a societal problem. First, emerging countries are using much less energy to achieve well-being in cities than the West did earlier, redefining lifestyles and ecological limits. Electrification is making the internal combustion engine redundant. Yet this technological trend in energy use is not captured in global emissions models used by the UN.

Second, in material use, the West's much smaller share of the global population, around one-fifth, is balanced by the sustainable development of the Rest. The demographic trend is now towards ageing. These societal trends are ignored in global models, and taken together with the West's continuing disproportionate use of energy, suggests that there is no global crisis, but rather a few national crises.

Third, given the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme events which affect the Global South, where insurance coverage is limited, continuing with token provision of climate finance by developed countries in negotiations needs to be reviewed. More practical measures include global early warning and regional technical cooperation in disaster relief.

The real question for India is how to build support for a new agenda centred on climate justice.

(Mukul Sanwal is a Former UN Diplomat and Policy Adviser UNFCCC.)

THE GIST

- Global emissions of carbon dioxide deal with the symptoms, not the root cause of the problem: national energy use
- As energy use in the Global South grows to achieve comparable levels of well-being, 'carbonising' will precede 'decarbonising'. This is only partly recognised in the UN's new call for stabilisation

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

What are the powers of Special Executive Magistrates?

Who appoints SEMs? Can they conduct criminal trials or convict people? Can they grant judicial custody?

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

A Special Executive Magistrate (SEM) court in Delhi accepted the sureties and granted bail to Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) activists Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka last Wednesday.

Despite the Delhi Police seeking a three-day extension of custody, Assistant Commissioner of Police Ritu Raj, who presided over the proceedings, ordered their release. CJP activists had challenged the legality of their continued detention. The case has brought into focus the roles and powers of SEMs and their differences from Judicial Magistrates.

Who is Special Executive Magistrate?

State governments appoint SEMs for specific areas or purposes and give them the powers exercised by the Executive Magistrates under Section 15 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.

While Executive Magistrates perform continued administrative and preventive functions, SEMs are appointed for a specified period, area or function, such as particular situations that require preventive action or maintenance of public order. Their powers also depend on the authority conferred upon them by the State government.

What is the function of SEMs?

The powers of SEMs are intended to allow authorities to intervene when there is a likelihood of disturbance, rather than responding after the offence has occurred. They maintain public order and prevent breaches of peace by performing preventive and administrative functions.

The Executive Magistrate can require a person who is likely to cause a breach of peace or disturb public tranquility, to show cause as to why they should not execute a bond to keep the peace. So, depending on the circumstances, they may be required to furnish a bond for a specified period. It is subject to the procedure established by law. This is dealt with under Section 126 of the BNSS.

Executive Magistrates can also issue urgent orders in case of nuisance or apprehended danger. It is likely to prevent, or tends to prevent, obstruction, or injury to any person lawfully employed, or danger to human life or safety or a disturbance of the public tranquillity, or a riot, or an affray.

Preventive arrest can be made by police officers when necessary to prevent the commission of a cognisable offence that cannot otherwise be prevented, according to Section 170 of the BNSS. This is a police power, not exclusively that of SEMs.

The police initiated a preventive proceeding against the CJP activists, alleging that they had breached peace bonds they had signed. The SEM extended their custody on October 19, citing concerns about public peace. Later on Wednesday, their sureties were accepted, and they were released on an undertaking that they would not call for any protest at Jantar Mantar while it remained a denotified protest site.

The proceedings before the SEM primarily concerned only the alleged violation of a signed peace bond and not the criminal cases registered over the October 13 Jantar Mantar incident.

What is a peace bond?

Section 126 of the BNSS allows an Executive Magistrate to require a person to execute a peace bond for up to one year to prevent breach of peace.

According to Section 135, the Magistrate conducts an inquiry into the information received. In certain circumstances, they can also order a person to provide security while the inquiry is pending and record the reasons in writing. In case of a breach of a peace bond, the Magistrate may order that the person be arrested or detained for the remaining period of the bond. This is dealt with under section 141(1)b.

In the present case, the SEM proceedings concern allegations that Mr. Das and Mr. Ranka breached their earlier peace bond through actions at the Jantar Mantar.

How are SEMs different from Judicial Magistrates?

Section 9 of the BNSS provides for the establishment of courts of Judicial magistrates of the first and second classes. For that, the State government determines the number and location of these courts. Presiding officers are also appointed by the High Court.

Judicial Magistrates form part of the judicial system and deal with criminal cases, including remand proceedings, bail applications and trials. They are independent and impose sentences permitted by law.

SEMs are limited to administrative functions and cannot conduct criminal trials or convict people through these proceedings. They are also authorised to release or grant police or judicial remand.

Can the actions of SEMs be reviewed by courts?

Yes, SEMs' actions are subject to judicial review and administrative oversight to ensure legality and the protection of the rights of citizens.

Their order can also be challenged before the appropriate court or authority depending on the nature of the order and remedy available.

GS 3: ENVIRONMENT
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 10

Climate justice needs quicker compensation

NEARLY TWO months after Nepal suffered devastating floods, the UN climate convention's Fund for Loss and Damage (FLD) has allocated $21.6 million to the Himalayan nation. This is the first time that the Fund has earmarked a grant for a disaster-affected nation. Kathmandu had invoked the principle of climate justice in its application: Nepal accounts for barely 0.1 per cent of global emissions, yet it is on the frontline of climate change in the Himalaya. The ice-and-rock avalanche that triggered flash floods in the Bhotekoshi and Trishuli river systems claimed more than 1,400 lives, several villages were swept away, and the country lost at least 10 per cent of its hydropower facilities. Conservative estimates put Nepal's recovery and reconstruction requirements at $5 billion. The grant, far short of what Nepal needs, marks an important first step in turning the commitment of climate reparation into action.

Established at the UNFCCC's COP27 in 2022 and operationalised a year later, the FLD is a product of a nearly three-decade-long campaign by nations most vulnerable to global warming. It rests on the principle of climate compensation, not charity. This distinction is not academic. The Global North is often willing to provide humanitarian assistance, but a fund explicitly meant to address "loss and damage" remains fraught because it raises questions related to responsibility for climate change. Nepal's application ran into predictable bureaucratic hurdles. The FLD's application window had closed in June, and when Nepal sought emergency funding, claims from 119 countries were awaiting approval. Developed countries initially argued that granting Kathmandu's request would mean allowing it to jump the queue. They eventually relented, but only after insisting that the allocation be treated as an exception and not set a precedent for a permanent rapid-response mechanism.

Nepal's experience with the FLD should serve as a case study for reforming the Fund. Delays in releasing grants can aggravate the hardships of affected communities, slow down the restoration of essential services and increase rebuilding costs. A swift response is particularly important for poorer countries, whose budgets have less room to absorb sudden losses. Fund shortages have also limited the FLD's ability to fulfil its mandate. It has received pledges worth $822 million — about a third of the claims pending before it. Compensation for countries hardest hit by global warming will be on the agenda at COP31, which begins on November 9 in Antalya, Turkey. As extreme weather events become more frequent and intense, delays in addressing the FLD's shortcomings will undermine the central principle of climate negotiations under the UN's aegis: Climate justice.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 10

Lula's return is dramatic, his challenges formidable

BRAZIL'S PRESIDENTIAL election was watched closely around the world as it unfolded in a fraught setting. It came amid a populist right-wing surge across Latin America, the long shadow cast by US President Donald Trump and his "Donroe Doctrine", and larger questions about the Global South, in which Brazil's voice is key. Incumbent Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party was seen as more than a president seeking re-election; he is one of the most prominent figures of the global left. In a dramatic turnaround, Lula, who finished second in the first round to the far-right Flávio Bolsonaro — son of former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is under house arrest for allegedly plotting a coup after losing the 2022 election — won the runoff by a razor-thin margin. His victory with about 52 per cent of the vote, which has secured a historic fourth term, interrupts the right-wing tide in the region. But it is hardly a sign that the right is weakening within Brazil. Rather, the result shines the light on a society split down the middle and the resilience of a movement that may have outgrown its leader.

Going ahead, Lula faces formidable challenges. Although unemployment is near historic lows, the economy is slowing, compounded by affordability concerns, high interest rates and mounting household debt. Lula will likely struggle to push reforms through a conservative majority in Congress and more than a dozen right-wing state governors. He must govern a deeply divided electorate, nearly half of which voted against him. Bolsonarism's appeal reflects not only in ideological conservatism but also in anxieties about the role of the state and religion. Addressing them will require Lula to reach out beyond his traditional base.

Lula's win denies Trump an ally in the region's largest economy, of the kind he has in Javier Milei in Buenos Aires and once had in Jair Bolsonaro. Lula has deepened ties with China and resisted US tariffs. His re-election keeps Brasília on a Global South-oriented course, which is heartening for India. It is likely to sustain the momentum of groupings such as BRICS and IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa), both seen by the two countries as vehicles for a more multipolar world order. Brazil's continued engagement in these forums matters at a time when developing countries are demanding a greater say in the governance of global institutions.

GS 3: ECONOMY (ENERGY)
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 10

To ease energy transition, ramp up storage, strengthen transmission



SOMIT DASGUPTA

THE FACE of the Indian power sector is changing. From perpetual deficit, we have moved to a situation of glut at least for certain hours of the day, specifically the solar hours. Both scenarios are painful, though as far as the consumers go, the first was far worse. The situation of glut and the way we are dealing with it is a national waste, but an individual consumer does not really feel the pinch. It is the sector that is suffering.

People will not have forgotten how difficult each summer was in the past with frequent power cuts. The problem also included the quality of supply. Voltage used to drop dramatically in the dusk hours, and it was inadvisable to run a television or a fridge without a voltage stabiliser. If this was the position in urban areas, one can imagine the situation in rural areas, where the number of hours for which supply was available was frequently in the single digits. One can, however, add a caveat. Only people connected to the grid faced the problem of erratic supply. A large part of the population lived in the dark because they were unelectrified. Thirty years ago, according to the World Bank, 40 per cent of India's population did not have access to electricity.

During the decade 1990-2000, the installed capacity was growing at the rate of about 5 per cent, whereas demand was growing at about 7 per cent to 8 per cent. Deficits in peak demand were of the order of 15 per cent, whereas energy shortage was about 10 per cent. Inadequate installed capacity was not the only problem. Perhaps a bigger problem was a poor and dilapidated distribution infrastructure that just did not have the capacity to cater to the growing load since there was virtually no upgrading. Upgradation required additional funds either through enhanced retail tariffs or through government grants, both of which were difficult to come by. The vertically integrated state electricity boards, with generation, state transmission, and distribution under one roof, were overstaffed, corrupt, and inefficient.

Then came the Electricity Act, 2003, which allowed for the dismantling of the State Electricity Boards (SEBs) and the setting up of separate companies for generation, transmission, and distribution. This segregation took years to happen in some states, as the issue became politicised. The Act also mandated the setting up of electricity regulatory commissions so that tariff determination could be an independent exercise, free from government clutches. However, this did not have the desired effect, as the government was loath to give up its control over tariffs and continued to breathe down the regulators' necks. The regulators, incidentally, gave the impression that they were willing to bend over backwards to stay on the government's right side. Consequently, the distribution sector remained where it was, financially unsustainable, waiting for a fresh injection of funds at regular intervals.

The good news, however, was that growth in installed capacity got a boost after the setting up of the electricity exchanges in Delhi and Mumbai around 2008. The spot prices of power shot up manifold, and developers saw this as an opportunity and started investing heavily in new power projects, mainly coal-based. A little more than 1,00,000 MW of coal-based capacity was added between 2010 and 2020. Interestingly, about the same capacity was added between 1947 and 2010. It wasn't just the developers; banks started giving out loans blindly without ensuring that the developers had signed power purchase agreements (PPAs) and had fuel linkages. As a consequence, thousands of megawatts became stranded, the developers started defaulting on loans, and the non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks went up. Moreover around 2015, the solar sector received a push. Prior to this, India had primarily wind and biogas generation. Today, renewable capacity, including large hydro, is a little less than 292 GW, which is about 53 per cent of total capacity. Solar alone is about 162 GW. This massive growth in installed capacity reduced our peak and energy deficits to about 1 per cent to 2 per cent.

> The answer is to build storage so that excess generation in the daytime can charge our batteries, which may also ensure less frequent ramping up and down of our coal-based generation

As they say, all good things must come to an end. With this massive growth in installed capacity, deficits may have gone down, but other problems have cropped up. This energy transition has made us surplus in solar hours, but we are facing deficits at night on account of unplanned outages in our coal plants, excessive air conditioning load, poor reservoir levels affecting hydro generation, etc. The surplus in solar hours is forcing us to back down our solar generation, even after ramping down our coal generation sometimes to the minimum technical load in order to balance the grid. Two things are happening here. First, we are wasting our solar power by backing down. Second, we are decreasing the longevity of our machines by this frequent ramping up and down.

So where lies the solution? The answer is to build storage so that excess generation in the daytime can charge our batteries, which may also ensure less frequent ramping up and down of our coal-based generation. Along with storage, we also need to strengthen our transmission system, improve demand-side management and create a market mechanism that properly rewards flexibility. However, building storage, especially pump storage, is time-consuming, and moreover, the price of storage, as determined through competitive bids, is said to be non-remunerative. This may mean that many of the storage projects will not see the light of day, which will only prolong our agony of losing valuable solar power.

The writer is visiting professor, ICRIER and former member (economic and commercial), CEA. Views are personal

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 11



In Israel, what election can change, what it can't

RAJAN KUMAR

ISRAEL'S PARLIAMENTARY election on October 27 will decide the fate of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It is significant because this is the first election since Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. The central question is whether a change in leadership will occur, and if so, whether it will usher in a new political trajectory. Many fear that a Netanyahu victory will embolden him to escalate the war against Iran and continue his coercive policies towards Gaza.

Given the fractious nature of Israel's politics and shifting coalitions, it is difficult to predict the outcome. Opinion polls suggest that neither the present coalition nor the opposition parties will attain a majority. Netanyahu is locked in a close contest with Gadi Eisenkot, the leader of the newly formed Yashar party. Eisenkot draws his popularity from his military service, family sacrifices, and anti-Netanyahu sentiment. He lost his son, Gal Eisenkot, during a military operation in Gaza in 2023. Seen as a hawk, he served in Netanyahu's emergency war cabinet in 2024 and later resigned over disagreements with respect to Gaza. If he wins, expecting a moderation of Israel's policy would be premature. Much will depend on the coalition that emerges, in which the support of right-wing parties will be fundamental.

The election is widely regarded as a referendum on Netanyahu's uncompromising governance approach. He is being blamed for pushing Israel into a perpetual war with Iran and its proxies and for exposing the country to widespread international opprobrium and diplomatic isolation over its conduct in Gaza. He could neither topple the theocratic regime in Tehran nor destroy its nuclear enrichment programme.

Further, his military operations in Gaza have created the worst humanitarian crisis in recent years, leading to about 74,000 deaths. The disproportionate Israeli military response in Gaza shifted the narrative from attributing responsibility to Hamas to holding Netanyahu responsible for its escalation.

> The far-right nature of Israeli politics prevents any policy moderation. All the major parties object to the two-state solution and the creation of Palestine as an independent state

Netanyahu's biggest success was convincing the Trump administration to launch a joint attack on Iran. US President Donald Trump has endorsed him in the current election, praising him as an ally, "great warrior prime minister", and peace partner. Trump's support for Netanyahu, however, has come at a high political cost. His popularity in the US is at an all-time low. The price of diesel has skyrocketed, and the Republican Party is facing trouble in the midterm elections.

Netanyahu enjoys the support of other far-right parties, but this coalition might shift based on the electoral outcomes. Security is the central issue, and Eisenkot has centred his campaign on Netanyahu's failure to prevent Hamas's attacks and his policies on Gaza. The exemption of ultra-Orthodox Jewish men from conscription and Netanyahu's attempts to control the judiciary remain divisive issues in Israel.

Even if there is a change in leadership, there will be no major shift in Israel's policy towards Palestine or Iran. The far-right nature of Israeli politics prevents any policy moderation. All the major parties object to the two-state solution and the creation of Palestine as an independent state. On Iran, however, Eisenkot appears cautious and calibrated. He is firmly opposed to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, but is sceptical of achieving political objectives through military means. But if Netanyahu forms the government, the US and Israel are likely to initiate the next phase of coercive measures.

The writer is professor, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13

SCIENCE

A new 'cocktail' could help treat cobra bites

Arnav Chandrasekhar
Bengaluru, October 26

SCIENTISTS FROM IISc Bengaluru's Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES) and the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) have created an antivenom that could potentially be used to treat snakebites from the diverse cobra species of India. The discoveries were published in the journal Science Translational Medicine.

Challenges in treatment

Cobras generally kill their prey using "neurotoxins" in their venom that paralyse their prey and stop them from breathing. Cardiac issues and other side effects have been observed in some cases of attacks on humans.

Government data from 2024 had estimated the annual snakebite fatalities at 50,000. The spectacled cobra (Naja naja), one of India's "Big Four" venomous snake species, accounts for at least 12.5% of these snakebite deaths — this number could be higher, as the snake is not always identified by the victim.

India has several cobra species, and different species have different kinds of venom. Venom from the same species might vary in composition for cobras from different locations.

This poses a challenge when using antivenom. For example, while the Polyvalent antivenom is used in India to counter the venom of the Big Four snakes including the spectacled cobra, this would not work against king cobra venom.



Spectacled cobra. RICKY MADAPPA

'BIG FOUR'

- India's "Big Four" venomous snake species are the spectacled cobra, the common krait, the Russell's viper, and the saw-scaled viper.

Treatment is also complicated by the fact that rural victims often don't reach healthcare centres in time, or end up at centres which may not have the required antivenom. Kartik Sunagar, an associate professor at CES, said antivenom treatment has essentially remained the same for the past century.

The new antivenom

Previously, Danish scientist Andreas Laustsen and his colleagues at DTU had tested a new method on certain African snakes. They took the blood of animals such as alpacas and llamas, which had been exposed to the venom of these snakes. Then, they extracted the antibodies that were formed.

A similar process was applied to create an "antibody cocktail" from India's different cobra species. This was then tested on mice, which had been injected with venom from spectacled cobras, monocled cobras, and two species of king cobras. Even 30 minutes after venom injection, the antibody cocktail was able to save the test mice from death.

Future applications

Previously, such use of antibodies to counter venom in mice tests required a large amount of antibodies, which might mean that a huge dose would be needed for humans. But the current research, Sunagar said, "showed that it is possible to neutralise venom using very small amounts of carefully selected and engineered antibodies". This could potentially help address some of the cost and safety concerns associated with administering large quantities of antibodies, he added.

Further, such a method could be used to create cures for snakebite venom of species across the world.

POLITY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13

• POLICY

Census duty: govt's powers and private citizens' rights

'Any person' the government considers suitable can be asked to perform the duties of an enumerator. But the rules are not as absolute as this sounds



DEEPTIMAN TIWARY



Census enumerators at work in New Delhi. FILE

THE CENTRE earlier this month amended the Census Rules, 1990 to expressly state that teachers of government, local authority, aided as well as unaided private educational institutions may be appointed as Census enumerators. It similarly included officials of establishments such as banks, companies, institutions, societies and trusts.

But the amendment also retains a much wider category: "any person" whom a state government or Union Territory administration considers suitable to perform the duties of an enumerator.

This is not very different from what the rules said before the amendment. The earlier rules already said an enumerator could be chosen from among "Teachers, Clerks or any official or any person". If "any person" literally meant anybody, private-school teachers and private-sector employees were already covered.

What is the significance of the amendment then?

Officials in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) say it has been done to remove any ambiguity from the rules and make sure that the Census operation, which requires lakhs of enumerators, is conducted smoothly. However, there is a backdrop.

On May 22, the Bombay High Court gave interim protection to associations representing more than 500 private unaided and minority schools in Maharashtra. It said Section 4A of the Census Act imposed an obligation on local authorities, while Sections 6 and 7 did not, in its preliminary view, confer authority to compulsorily requisition teaching and non-teaching staff of private unaided schools.

It then considered the old Rule 3, which permitted "Teachers, Clerks or any official or any person" to be enumerators. The government had argued that this was broad enough to include private teachers.

The court rejected that interpretation at the interim stage. It observed that if "any person" were given an unrestricted meaning, it could extend to private professionals such as doctors, advocates and chartered accountants. It held, prima facie, that subordinate legislation could not travel beyond its parent statute.

The operative order restrained authorities from issuing further orders "compelling or requiring teachers and/or employees" of the petitioner schools to perform Census duties. Then on October 8, the Punjab and Haryana High Court stayed Haryana government communications seeking details of private unaided school teachers for Census duty.

Eight days later came the amendment.

What does the Census Act actually say?

Section 4(2) of the Census Act, 1948 gives the state government power to "appoint persons as census-officers" to take, aid in or supervise the Census within a specified area. Importantly, it adds that such persons, "when so appointed, shall be bound to serve accordingly".

This is potentially the strongest basis for the government's case. Unlike provisions dealing specifically with government employees, Section 4 uses the broad word "persons".

But other provisions of the Act are much more specific about whose services can be compulsorily called upon.

Section 4A requires a local authority, when directed by the Centre, to make available such staff as are necessary for Census work. Sections 6 and 7 also permit assistance to be sought from private establishments and their personnel — but in defined circumstances relating primarily to counting people under their charge or present in those establishments.

For example, Section 7 allows the District Magistrate to call upon staff of a factory or establishment to assist with the Census of persons present in its premises. It does not expressly say that such employees can be taken out of that establishment and deployed generally as door-to-door enumerators.

So, can private individuals be compelled to serve as enumerators?

In 2010, LIC challenged an order requiring its Jalandhar office to provide at least 150 employees as Enumerators and Supervisors.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court quashed the orders. It held that Section 7(c) only allowed assistance in taking the Census of persons within an establishment and found the directions "beyond the scope and powers conferred by the Census Act, 1948". But it expressly left the state free to invoke Section 4(2) "wherever and whenever so required".

In a separate LIC case, the Gujarat High Court similarly ruled against requisition of LIC employees, with a Division Bench holding in 2019 that Section 7 did not confer such a power. That judgment is under challenge before the Supreme Court.

Private-school teachers had raised similar objections during Census 2011, though the litigation did not produce an unqualified prohibition on their deployment.

In May 2010, Manisha Jain, a teacher at an unaided school in Chandigarh, approached the Punjab and Haryana High Court after being appointed an enumerator. In an interim order, Justice K Kannan was reported to have observed that it would be "incorrect" to force a private teacher to undertake Census work after her normal working hours.

Private unaided schools also approached the Bombay High Court. On January 24, 2011, a Division Bench gave interim protection against coercive action against private unaided-school teachers refusing Census duty. The Centre sought modification of this order, arguing, among other things, that Section 4(2) of the Census Act permitted "any person" to be appointed for Census duty.

The court subsequently modified the arrangement. On February 3, it allowed teachers of private aided and unaided schools to be deployed for Census 2011, while directing that their services normally be used before or after school hours, exempting teachers of Classes 10 and 12, and allowing school managements to decide which teachers could be spared so that academic work was not disrupted.

Does the Constitution allow citizens to be compulsorily drafted for public work?

Yes — but this does not by itself give Census authorities the power to do so.

Article 23(1) prohibits *begaar* and other forms of forced labour. But Article 23(2) expressly permits the State to impose "compulsory service for public purposes", provided it does not discriminate on specified grounds.

Under the Police Act, 1861, residents of a neighbourhood may in specified public-order circumstances be appointed special police officers. The Calcutta High Court in Dulal Samanta v District Magistrate, Howrah (1958) characterised this as compulsory public service protected by Article 23(2).

An even clearer example is the National Service Act, 1972, under which specified qualified doctors and engineers can be called up for national service. However, Parliament created an elaborate statutory regime for this: it identified who was liable, provided for registration and notice, permitted postponement on hardship grounds, prescribed remuneration and required private employers to release — and later reinstate — employees called up for service.

The same elaborate arrangement is not available in the Census Act.

Large workforce

Census remains overwhelmingly manpower-intensive despite digitisation. Recent operational figures put the number of enumerators and supervisors being trained at around 31 lakh.

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Census authorities say enumerators are mainly drawn from school teachers and government and local-body officials.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13

• GLOBAL

How Lula scripted turnaround in Brazil and what lies ahead

Anagha Jayakumar
New Delhi, October 26

IN A STUNNING upset, Brazil's leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was re-elected for a historic fourth term on Sunday, securing 51.79% of the vote against his rival Flávio Bolsonaro.

In the first round of voting earlier this month, he finished behind Flávio, the son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, whom Lula defeated in 2022. Flávio has called for annulling the results.

The verdict was historic for another reason: since Brazil returned to direct presidential elections in 1989, no candidate who finished second in the first round had gone on to win the runoff.

Lula's victory also bucks a recent regional trend, with right-wing candidates winning the last seven consecutive presidential elections across Latin America. It deals a setback to US President Donald Trump's ambitions to expand Washington's influence. "Brazil is no one's backyard," Lula said.

How did Lula emerge victorious?

Two factors were key:

1. HIGHER TURNOUT AND VOTER MOBILISATION: Lula's narrow loss to Bolsonaro in the first round initially dismayed his supporters but prompted renewed mobilisation.



Lula holds a copy of Brazil's Constitution during a rally. AP

Young Brazilians organised nationwide demonstrations, while Lula held rallies in key battlegrounds. The 80-year-old president, who does not own a mobile phone, also stepped up his digital campaign.

He also announced welfare measures, including increased and early payments under a cash-transfer programme, and secured congressional approval for a shorter working week, reducing the maximum from 44 to 40 hours without cutting pay.

Brazil's Superior Electoral Court reported that nearly three million more Brazilians voted in the runoff. Although it is unclear how they voted, their number exceeded the gap of just over 2.2 million votes between Lula and Bolsonaro in the first round.

2. STRONGHOLDS RETAINED, GAINS ELSEWHERE: Lula won all nine states in the country's northeast, his traditional voter base. But his victory depended on gains in areas that earlier favoured Bolsonaro.

What is the broader significance?

Flávio's challenge to the election result has revived tensions over the democratic transfer of power. During the last elections in 2022, Jair Bolsonaro refused to accept the result, leading to his supporters attempting to storm government buildings in Brasilia.

It has further raised questions about Brazil's judiciary. Flávio's challenge to the election result centres on a decision by Supreme Federal Court Justice Cristiano Zanin to extend voting by two hours on Sunday, which caused some confusion. Brazil's courts have also faced criticism for interventions in elections and online speech, which they state is necessary to safeguard democracy.

For the region, a Bolsonaro victory would have given Trump a crucial ally in Latin America's largest economy and country, particularly as Washington seeks closer security cooperation with right-wing governments across the region.

Lula has resisted joining the coalition over concerns about Brazilian sovereignty. Trump has also repeatedly clashed with Lula, imposing tariffs of up to 50% on Brazilian goods over the prosecution of former Bolsonaro Senior, among other things.

Lula used these interventions to frame the election partly around Brazil's resistance to foreign pressure. Lula's re-election leaves Washington dealing with a Brazilian government that has resisted its expanding military and security role in Latin America.

Managing that relationship could be a challenge down the road for Lula, as could the fact that Brazil currently has its most conservative Congress since its return to democracy in the 1980s. He must also address Brazil's public debt, which has risen to over 82% of its GDP. Interest rates are also high, at around 13.75% in September. The debt crisis has fuelled public dissatisfaction despite record-low unemployment and wage growth outpacing inflation.

GS 1: GEOGRAPHY (CLIMATE)
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13



CLIMATE

'Godzilla' El Niño effects to be felt next year too: Decoding WMO warning for India

Anjali Marar
Bengaluru, October 26

THE PREVAILING El Niño conditions are set to peak towards the end of the year, with forecasts suggesting off-the-charts warming. On October 21, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said the effects of the phenomenon would be felt even in 2027.

El Niño refers to the abnormal warming of surface waters in the Pacific Ocean. It suppresses monsoon rainfall, spikes temperatures and causes heatwaves.

How is El Niño affecting India this year?

El Niño emerged in the Pacific Ocean in June this year. As it developed, its climatic effects over the oceans surrounding India began to be felt after 40-45 days.

As El Niño intensified to "strong" levels, India's southwest monsoon — which brings about 70% of the country's annual rainfall — weakened in late August. It ended at 87% of the long period average (LPA), making it the fourth driest since 2001.

The ongoing northeast monsoon, however, is expected to be normal over India's southern peninsula.

El Niño could also result in a warmer-than-usual winter, with above-normal temperatures forecast for October, November and December.

What is different about the 2026 El Niño?

El Niño is one of the three distinct phases of a large ocean-atmosphere interaction over the Pacific region that influences weather patterns worldwide.

This interaction is known as the El Niño Southern Oscillation, or ENSO. Its three phases are: warm (El Niño), neutral, and cool (La Niña).

Scientists measure the sea surface temperatures over specific regions of the equatorial Pacific Ocean. Temperature anomalies in one of these regions, called the Nino 3.4 region, is usually the deciding factor in declaring the onset and strength of ENSO phases.

Scientists calculate what is known as Relative Ocean Nino Index (RONI) from this region, essentially a temperature deviation from the normal. If the average RONI over a three-month period exceeds a value of 0.5 degrees Celsius, an El Niño is declared. An average RONI value of less than -0.5 degrees Celsius leads to declaration of La Niña.

The ongoing El Niño, experts say, has shown a rapid intensification. Since its emergence in June, the July-September RONI index recorded warming of 2 to 2.8 degrees Celsius.

These temperature values look set to break all records since ocean temperature monitoring began four decades ago. The previously recorded highest anomaly in the ocean temperatures was 3 degrees Celsius. The 2014-2015 El Niño peaked at 2.3 degrees Celsius, according to data maintained by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"The temperature values at the epicentre of the El Niño in the Pacific Ocean are expected to remain 3.8 degrees Celsius above normal — a value that has never been recorded since the start of ocean temperature monitoring four decades ago. This El Nino will have far reaching consequences for several months ahead," said WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo.

Which regions will be affected?

In the northern hemisphere, above-normal temperatures are likely over parts of southern Europe and Africa, the Arabian peninsula, the Indian subcontinent and eastern Asia. Above-normal rainfall will likely affect the Arabian peninsula, central and east Asia, coastal Southeast Asia and North America.

In the southern hemisphere, higher-than-normal temperatures are likely to sweep Africa, particularly the equatorial regions and the Greater Horn of Africa, along with South America and Australia. Unlike the northern hemisphere, many parts of the southern hemisphere are expected to see weak rainfall — over southern Africa, southern regions of Central America and the Caribbean.

Overall forecasts suggest that floods, droughts, extreme temperatures and cyclones could affect tens of thousands of people across the globe, particularly those living in Central and South America, southern Africa and Southeast Asia.

El Niño could also threaten food and water security, and push up fertiliser and fuel prices. These effects are likely to be felt well into 2027.

This will come as an additional burden on global resources, which are already under considerable strain owing to continuing conflicts, including the Strait of Hormuz crisis.

Overall, the UN body handling humanitarian affairs has said that the Central and South American population needed to be provided with alternative livelihood options, and the crops grown by the African communities and their seeds need to be moved and stored to safer places before they are cut off. Southeast Asian countries, meanwhile, need to brace for floods, droughts and cyclones in the coming months.

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