

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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GS 3: INTERNAL SECURITY (BORDER AREAS)
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 1

ORGANISED BY MINISTRY OF TOURISM

Tawang chosen as venue for tourism meet, China among countries invited

Divya A

New Delhi, October 1

THE GOVERNMENT is set to hold a mega international event in Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh towards the end of this month.

The International Tourism Mart, being organised by the Ministry of Tourism from October 27 to November 1, will bring together delegates from around 20 countries.

Delegates from China have also been invited to the annual event which is held, by

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

E. EXPLAINED

Tawang not just a tourism hotspot

Tawang is a primary bone of contention between India and China. Beijing refers to Arunachal Pradesh as Zangnan or South Tibet and claims it belongs to China. Delhi rejects China's claim, reiterating that Arunachal Pradesh is an "inalienable and integral part of India".

Tawang chosen as venue for tourism meet, China too invited

rotation, in one of the North-Eastern states. The 2025 edition of the event was held in Sikkim, and was attended by government representatives and industry stakeholders from over 19 countries.

Sources maintained it is a routine rotational event, but the decision to hold the event in Tawang is significant, coming as it does weeks after the government identified 27 places/features in Arunachal Pradesh by standard place and feature names on the official maps of Survey of India for "their accurate recognition and better awareness among the public at large". Tawang in the eastern sector is a primary bone of contention in the boundary dispute between India and China.

Beijing refers to Arunachal Pradesh as Zangnan or South

Tibet and claims that it belongs to China. New Delhi strongly rejects China's territorial claim, reiterating that Arunachal Pradesh is an "inalienable and integral part of India".

While government representatives from China have not attended the tourism event traditionally, there have been instances of private tour operators participating at the event since it offers a lot of scope for B2B tie-ups. At the 2018 edition in Agartala, over 60 tour operator delegates from different countries participated, including those from Bangladesh, Australia, Canada, China and France.

Sources said invitations for the Tawang event have been sent to all participating countries and industry delegations. Participation confirmation will be known closer to the event

date, the sources said.

While a lot of focus is on building travel and tourism ties between the region and its neighbours, particularly the ASEAN and SAARC countries, representatives and stakeholders from other parts of the world also attend the event.

Delegates from Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Germany, Italy, France, Thailand and Israel were among those at the 2025 edition in Sikkim.

For the edition in Tawang, the Ministry of Tourism is collaborating with the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. Union Ministers and state ministers will be attending the event over five days. Delegates will also be taken on a visit to Tawang Monastery, Buddha Park, Panga Teng Tso lake and Shernup village.

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 11

Regulation needs China on board



SUBIMAL BHATTACHARJEE

THE LAST fortnight has exposed fault lines in the global debate on AI. At the UN Security Council, Anthropic's Dario Amodei warned that, if managed poorly, AI could pose a risk to humanity as a whole, while OpenAI's Sam Altman cautioned that humanity could lose control of its future. Rarely does an industry seek its own regulation. Yet in the same chamber, Michael Kratsios, the US President's science and technology advisor, rejected any centralised international control of AI.

Days later, President Donald Trump hosted technology chiefs at the White House and unveiled a voluntary accord. Companies pledged internal model monitoring, a team to verify it, outside auditors and independent board oversight. Trump called the pledges "morally binding". Self-regulation is now American doctrine.

Paradoxically, Washington has simultaneously opened a channel to Beijing. After the Trump-Xi summit, both agreed on an AI incident communication mechanism, with a dedicated dialogue due in November. Middle powers have moved further. Twenty countries and the EU, including Germany, South Africa, Canada, Australia, the UAE and Singapore, called for keeping AI under human control, possibly through a global oversight body. Tellingly, neither the US nor China signed; nor did India.

Four models now compete. The EU offers binding, risk-tiered legislation. America favours market-led voluntarism. China practises state-directed, sector-specific control. A loose international layer of OECD principles, UNESCO recommendations, summit declarations and a UN scientific panel supplies vocabulary without obligation. None suffices alone.

The history of cyber governance is instructive. The UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE), first convened in 2004, spent a decade establishing that international law applies to cyberspace. Its 2015 report produced 11 voluntary norms of responsible state behaviour. States should not knowingly allow their territory to be used for wrongful ICT acts, should not attack critical infrastructure or emergency response teams, should cooperate on requests for assistance, and should responsibly report vulnerabilities. The General Assembly endorsed them.

After the 2016-17 GGE deadlocked over self-defence and international humanitarian law, the General Assembly in 2018 created two tracks: A Russian-sponsored

Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) open to all members and a US-backed GGE. Both reaffirmed the 11 norms in 2021. A permanent UN mechanism has since succeeded the OEWG, still non-binding.

Two lessons follow. First, consensus norms are achievable only when the principal adversaries sit at the table. Second, a decade-long, consensus-driven process cannot keep pace with a technology whose capabilities shift every few months.

What would suit AI is a layered architecture rather than a single treaty. Binding national law where frontier laboratories operate; internationally agreed capability thresholds that trigger pre-deployment testing; mandatory cross-border incident reporting; an IPCC-style scientific body to establish shared facts; and, for the most capable systems alone, an IAEA-type verification regime anchored in compute monitoring. The 20-nation proposal approximates this.

However, such a regime cannot succeed without China, the only country besides America with genuine frontier capability. Its open-weight models already power applications across Asia, Africa and Latin America, placing them beyond any regime that governs only Western developers. Beijing's approach is equally consequential. Domestically, it regulates tightly through algorithm registries, generative AI rules and mandatory labelling of synthetic content. Internationally, it presents AI as a development right, champions UN-centred governance and has proposed a world AI cooperation organisation, an offer many developing countries find attractive. A regime excluding Beijing would become a Western club, inviting a parallel Chinese bloc of standards. The nascent US-China incident channel is the minimum foundation; it must eventually extend into multilateral confidence-building. The middle powers must build an architecture both giants can later join.

India's prudent course is to join any open framework, while conditioning oversight on equitable access to compute and models. It should use the credibility of hosting the AI Impact Summit and serving on cyber GGEs to bridge frontier powers and the Global South. It must strengthen its AI Safety Institute so that Indian evaluators shape testing regimes. And it should seek a seat in any incident-reporting framework, since harms originating elsewhere will land in Indian markets.

The cyber precedent shows that norms without enforcement still matter: They build habits of consultation and a common language. AI may not grant the world a decade to learn. Rule-making must be swift and inclusive.

Bhattacharjee is a defence and tech policy adviser and author of *The Digital Decades: On 30 Years of the Internet in India*

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 11

Don't wait for a consensus



SMRITI PARSHEERA

THE CHORUS for AI governance is growing stronger, though not everyone is singing the same tune. Senior executives from companies such as Anthropic, OpenAI, and Google DeepMind have been rallying for "pacing the frontier" — an internationally coordinated effort to recalibrate AI's tempo for better risk management. Meanwhile, civil society organisations would like to see a global moratorium on the development and sale of frontier AI models until binding safeguards are put in place.

On Tuesday, leading US AI companies gathered at the White House to sign a new Accord on Super Intelligence, which takes a considerably softer, voluntary approach. The "morally binding" accord speaks of building robust internal controls, independent external evaluation, and oversight by an independent committee of the company's board. However, the actual standards and enforcement mechanisms are not specified, affording significant discretion to the participating companies.

This comes in response to multiple incidents of unauthorised and deceptive behaviour exhibited by frontier AI agents. AI-related risks were also prominently discussed during the recent UN General Assembly. Finland and Norway initiated an international effort, now endorsed by 28 countries, through "A Call for Control of Frontier AI Models". The signatories are seeking coordinated international action on the governance of frontier AI. Their three-step agenda includes mandatory pre-deployment testing and independent evaluation for AI companies, common incident reporting standards, and an institutional mechanism to enable standard-setting and verification.

These are significant proposals, but their path to implementation remains unclear.

Notably, neither the US nor China, the two nations at the forefront of the geopolitical dynamics of frontier AI, joined the international call. The US continues to emphasise permissionless innovation, with expectations of responsible conduct by AI companies as its preferred approach. It has also been emphatic in rejecting any "globalist scheme of control for superintelligence" at the UN level or otherwise. China, in contrast, has maintained that it respects the UN's role as the

main channel for global AI governance but remains wary of what it labels as Western-centric agendas.

In July this year, Beijing initiated an alternative institutional path for global AI governance through the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO). Twenty-nine countries became founding members of the Shanghai-headquartered organisation. Its functions will include promoting "supply-demand matching" of AI, standard setting, and international convergence on global AI governance.

WAICO's membership is open to any interested country. Some commentators have contrasted this with the liberal-democratic and rule-of-law assumptions associated with other AI initiatives, such as the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence and the G7 Hiroshima Process. As an intergovernmental organisation, WAICO could also serve as a site for formal consensus-building that goes beyond the soft-law-centric approaches in other forums. Yet, its positioning as a China-led initiative could limit the practical expansion of WAICO's footprint outside the Global South.

In a positive development, the US and China recently opened the door for a bilateral dialogue to debate the risks and benefits of advanced AI. But a broader consensus on AI governance remains elusive. That, however, cannot be a reason for inaction by the rest of the world. Neither should it become an excuse to allow the tech industry to play an outsized role in defining what constitutes a suitable mode of governance. However, the latest White House accord places the ball firmly in the industry's court.

Given these realities, where should India locate itself in the global AI governance debate? As a country that is admittedly not at the forefront of frontier AI but is seeing extensive deployment of such models, India has a direct interest in risk-mitigation and accountability safeguards for frontier AI. Its positioning on digital sovereignty also supports a claim to greater representation and agency in defining the rules of the game. This serves as a rational basis for India to lend its support to the Finland-Norway proposal.

Finally, the hype around frontier AI should not drown out the more immediate needs of robust AI governance in the country. Rather than waiting for the catastrophic risks and possibilities of artificial general intelligence that may arise in future, we need impactful legal and institutional safeguards to govern the AI systems that are already embedded in everyday life.

The writer is a lawyer and digital rights researcher

GS 2: POLITY & GOVERNANCE

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 15

• LEGAL

Flawed execution: When lethal injections go wrong



BHASKAR SARMA

AUTHORITIES IN the US failed to execute a 50-year-old woman on Tuesday despite twice administering a lethal drug through injection. Christa Gail Pike had been sentenced to death for killing her classmate at the age of 18 in 1997. Following the execution attempt, Pike was taken to a hospital. Tennessee's Governor has ordered a probe and her legal team has moved the state's Supreme Court seeking a halt on the execution.

Botched executions in the US are nothing new, regardless of the range of methods that are authorised by different states. A study of 8,776 executions in the US between 1890 and 2010 found that 276 (around 3%) of them were botched. The latest case, however, is unprecedented, according to a death penalty expert quoted by the *Associated Press*. This is because no convict has ever survived once drugs are actually administered.

Execution methods in the US

Countries that provide for capital punishment generally operate on the principle of minimising suffering — though the punishment itself is ethically controversial.

In the US, capital punishment is legal in 27 of 50 states. These states authorise different, sometimes multiple, methods of execution — lethal injection, electrocution, nitrogen gas, firing squad and hanging.

The lethal injection method, adopted in 1982, became the primary execution method in the 2000s; it is authorised by all 27 states that retain the death penalty.

The lethal injection method itself follows two broad approaches: a three-drug protocol or a one-drug protocol.

In the first approach, a sequence of drugs is administered to a convict intravenously — first a sedative or an anaesthetic that is meant to render them unconscious, then a paralytic drug that stops muscle movement, and finally potassium chloride, which causes a cardiac arrest.

But as drugmakers grew unwilling to



Emergency vehicles arrive at a prison in Tennessee after the execution of Christa Pike (right) was halted. AP

• 86 minutes of a botched job

AT 7.27 PM, officials raise curtains to execution chamber as witnesses watch.

CHRISTA PIKE, who is strapped to a gurney, is administered a dose of pentobarbital.

BUT SHE remains awake. At one point, she raises her head and asks officials if her arm was supposed to feel that way.

BY 8.26 PM, officials administer a second



dose of pentobarbital, in line with the state's laws, since the first has not resulted in death.

PIKE IS heard snoring behind a closed curtain, until the microphone is cut off at 8.53 pm. She is taken to hospital. — AP

supply drugs, saying they were meant to save lives and not take them, many US states shifted to more accessible single drugs such as pentobarbital and midazolam — Tennessee adopted pentobarbital in 2024.

Pentobarbital is a barbiturate, a type of drug that can slow down activity in the brain and nervous system, and can be fatal in high doses on its own. But critics say pentobarbital and midazolam can cause excruciating pain, which would violate the principle of reducing pain and cruelty.

Lethal injections: The problems

In the case of lethal injections, convicts are secured to a table or gurney and IV lines are attached to them. This is where the problems come in.

The Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), a non-profit organisation that documents capital punishment in the US, lists out example after example of lethal injection executions being botched — either failing to kill a convict, delaying their death or causing them unnecessary agony — primarily because execution teams failed to connect or maintain IV lines.

While there are multiple examples of such failures, one particularly harrowing case from Alabama in 2022 is illustrative of just how wrong things can go when execution teams lack sufficient competence.

In this case, officials tried and failed

India's stance

The Indian government maintains that hanging remains the 'safest and quickest' method of execution.

It has said that no botched execution has ever been recorded in India, while lethal injection in the US carries a long history of failures.

multiple times to place an IV line on the convict, Joe Nathan James Jr., before finally managing to put him to death three-and-a-half hours later — resulting in the longest botched lethal-injection execution in the US.

In fact, the Christa Pike case was the second time this year that Tennessee has been unable to carry out an execution. In May, officials called off an execution after failing to place an IV, AP reported.

This, precisely, is the reason why India's government has never accepted calls to introduce the lethal injection method. It has consistently argued in the Supreme Court that the lack of medical infrastructure and healthcare professionals makes hanging an administratively predictable method.

In the US, several national and state medical organisations prohibit their members from participating in executions owing to ethical considerations. This means correctional officers are often given the task, according to the DPIC.

Apart from placing or maintaining IV lines, many other things can also go wrong with the lethal injection method, such as inadequate dosages. The study mentioned at the outset of this article, which was carried out by an Amherst College professor named Austin Sarat, found that 7.12% of all lethal injection executions went wrong.

This is not to say that other execution methods are without flaws.

Other methods of execution

The search for a relatively "humane" method of execution has led to varied practices. Besides lethal injections, the other authorised methods in the US are the electric chair, nitrogen gas, firing squad and hanging. Each comes with its own ethical and scientific considerations.

ELECTRIC CHAIR: The electric chair passes a high-voltage electrical current through the body, causing cardiac arrest. But the Supreme Courts of Georgia (2001) and Nebraska (2008) ruled that its use violates their state constitutional prohibitions against cruel and unusual punishment. The study also found that 1.92% of electrocutions were botched.

NITROGEN GAS: Alabama and then Louisiana are the only US states that have performed an execution using nitrogen gas, according to the DPIC. The first one in Alabama took place as recently as January 2024. The convict, 58-year-old Kenneth Smith, was fastened to a gurney and forced to breathe in pure nitrogen through a respirator. While the state's attorney general had claimed that it was an effective and humane method, the execution took roughly 22 minutes, and Smith's suffering was visible.

FIRING SQUAD: In recent years, some in the US have backed bringing back the old-fashioned firing squad execution method. Among the backers were US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who called it more humane. In terms of the cold efficiency of ensuring death, they are indeed effective. But prosecutors in a 2019 US federal case said, citing an anesthesiologist, that painless deaths by firing squads are not guaranteed. Inmates could remain conscious for up to 10 "severely painful" seconds depending on where bullets strike.

HANGING: Hangings are extremely rare in the US. Since 1977, only three hangings have taken place in the country, with the most recent one in 2010. Hanging, however, is the primary method in many other countries, such as India, Singapore and Japan. It relies on a "long drop" to snap a person's neck, theoretically resulting in instant death. But a drop that is too short can fail to break the neck and result in prolonged strangulation. Conversely, a drop that is too long can risk decapitating the person. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, carries out executions by beheading with a sword.

GS 2: INDIAN POLITY THE HINDU PAGE : 6

A.P. HC strikes down 34% BC quota in local body elections

Court says the reservation exceeds the 50% threshold laid down by the Supreme Court; it further directs State government and State Election Commission to begin poll process within six weeks

V. Raghavendra
VIJAYAWADA

A Division Bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, comprising Chief Justice Lisa Gill and Justice Challa Gunaranjan, on Thursday set aside Government Orders 105 and 1065 through which the government provided 34% reservation to the Backward Classes (BCs) in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and 33.33% quota in the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

The court said that they exceeded the 50% threshold laid down by the Supreme Court.

While striking down the impugned G.O.s, the court



The High Court gives liberty to the State to revisit the issue and determine the percentage of reservation for BCs. FILE PHOTO

gave liberty to the government to revisit the issue and determine the percentage of reservation for BCs keeping in view the apex court judgment in *Janhit Abhiyan vs Union of India* after completing the exercise of data collection in compliance with the judg-

ment in *Vikas Kishanrao Gawali vs State of Maharashtra*. The judges have expressed the opinion that the empirical data collected by the State through unified family survey cannot form the basis of declaration for reservation for the BCs. In the same vein, the

court directed the State government and the State Election Commission (SEC) to expeditiously commence the process of holding elections to the PRI and ULBs preferably not later than six weeks from October 1.

Continued operation of electoral rolls in existence on the qualifying date cannot be affected by the special intensive revision (SIR) and it cannot be the reason for postponement of the elections, the judges said.

On delimitation of Municipalities and Municipal Corporations, they said the Census Act of 1948 or Census Rules, 1990 do not prohibit the State from undertaking the process.

GS 2: INDIAN POLITY THE HINDU PAGE : 15

HC says draft roll can't be basis for deleting names without hearing

The object of Representation of the People Act and EC is to ensure that votes are cast by citizens, the court says, adding poll body's endeavour is to have as many eligible voters on the roll as possible; expresses concern over automated deletions

Press Trust of India
PANAJI

The Bombay High Court on Thursday said that the primary mandate of the Election Commission (EC) is to ensure that citizens cast their votes, and asserted that while the poll body questions voter conduct, citizens are equally within their rights to ask why exercises such as the special intensive revision (SIR) are ordered after decades.

Hearing a petition filed by six family members whose names were deleted from the voter list, the High Court's Goa Bench, comprising Justices Valmiki Menezes and Amit S. Jamsandekar, said the EC's action was not in consonance with its mandate.

As per the plea filed by Paresh Salgaonkar and his family, they had moved to a new house in the same Santa Cruz Assembly constituency and were instructed by the booth-level officer (BLO) to submit Form 8 for a change of address.

At the time of processing these forms, they said,

Show us from the Act... what empowers you to delete without a hearing? Your officers were helpless and just decided to throw it on the system. We are very perturbed by this... we are just wondering how many more who have not come to court
GOA BENCH OF BOMBAY HC



errors showed up since no record of their elector photo identity cards (EPIC) was found, and as such, the only option available in the ERONET software was "reject". Their Form 8 was rejected, following which they approached the High Court.

The EC's advocate Gaurish Agni questioned why the petitioners had not notified authorities of their relocation earlier, to which the Bench remarked "the petitioner will also ask why this SIR after 24 years because he is a citizen of India, why not in between, because the number could have been controllable".

The court added that such discrepancies would never arise if updating electoral rolls was a continuous process.

"It is not about the blame game," the judges noted, pointing out that authorities have access to birth and death records and should automatically update rolls, enrolling people as soon as they turn 18.

The object of the Representation of the People Act and the EC is to ensure that votes are cast by citizens, the court said, adding the election body's endeavour is to have as many eligible voters on the roll as possible. "For that purpose, they can adopt any measures. Whatever measures that you adopt, the object has to be achieved. In that object, here and there, there may be aberrations. But the object cannot be overridden," the Bench asserted.

It noted that instead of

rejecting the Form 8, the authorities could have kept it in abeyance and taken it up after the SIR was completed.

"Because what happens is that if you don't keep it pending, the person escapes from the roll... You finish your roll and deal with all the Form 8s. Because that is the best information for you to understand that people have shifted," the court observed.

'Automated deletions'

Expressing deep concern over the automated deletions, the Bench questioned the EC's authority to drop names without giving electors a hearing.

"Show us from the Act... what empowers you to delete without a hearing? Your officers were helpless and just decided to throw it on the system. We are very perturbed by this... we are just wondering how many more who have not come to court," it said and pointed out that such rejections risk taking lakhs of legitimate voters off the rolls.

The Bench had, during the earlier hearing on Wed-

nesday, said the draft roll under the SIR cannot be the basis for deletion of names from the voter list and held that administrative software cannot supersede statutory laws to disenfranchise voters.

The court ruled that the draft roll cannot be the basis for deletion of voters' names. "Otherwise, Form 6, 7 or 8 have no meaning. Form 6, 7 and 8 are specifically for either a person who is a new voter, a person who has lost the right to vote, or a person who is shifting," the court said on Wednesday.

The court told the EC that the "software system did not allow" it to accept Form 8. "He was never a new voter. He was an existing voter. He became new for your system," it said.

The Bench questioned the EC on the provisions empowering it to delete names without a hearing.

The Bench said that once a Form 8 is received, the authority must "apply its mind and see whether this person has really moved (to a new address)".

The court will hear the plea further on October 5.