

SANSKRITI IAS EDITORIALS HIGHLIGHTS

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GS 2: GOVERNANCE THE HINDU PAGE: 8

Why is Meta's \$17.1-billion settlement significant?

What was the lawsuit by 29 U.S. States against Meta about? What did the trial reveal about the impact of Instagram and Facebook on children? What changes has Meta agreed to make? Will the settlement lead to meaningful change? Why are critics still raising concerns?

Joan Sony Cherian

The story so far:

In August 26, Meta reached a landmark settlement of up to \$17.1 billion with at least 47 U.S. States, ending a lawsuit which accused the tech giant of hiding harms caused by its platforms to children, violating child privacy laws, and deliberately using tactics to keep teens engaged or 'addicted' to its platforms. The settlement also requires Meta to make changes to the safety features on Instagram and Facebook.

What was the lawsuit about?

The lawsuit, brought by 29 States, alleged that Meta regularly collected data on children under the age of 13 without parental consent, thus breaking various State and federal privacy laws. It also alleged that the company deliberately designed platforms to be addictive in order to keep teens engaged, which led to depression and anxiety. The suit accused Meta of refusing to "abandon its use of known harmful features" and focusing solely on profits and financial gain over the safety of children.

What happened during the trial?

The matter went to trial on August 18, 2026, in Oakland, California. During the trial, internal documents from the tech giant were showcased, pointing towards addictive behaviours among teens using Instagram. There were also witness testimonies from former Meta employees stating that the company had repeatedly ignored warning signs.

According to Meta's own company documents, a Facebook study found that 13.5% of British teenage girls surveyed said their suicidal thoughts had become more frequent

The lawsuit alleged that Meta deliberately designed platforms to be addictive in order to keep teens engaged, which led to depression and anxiety

after joining Instagram. A study by internal researchers of the company on Instagram had found that some of the problems, especially related to social comparison, were issues specific to only Instagram and not social media as a whole. As per a *Wall Street Journal* investigation, the internal researchers had said that while other media mostly focus on the face and 'jokey' filters (SnapChat), Instagram focuses on the body and lifestyle, which lead to comparisons and feelings of inadequacy.

A key witness for the States was Arturo Béjar, a former Meta safety engineer, who stated on record that Meta was aware of the harm its products caused children, which included exposing them to content from sexual predators as well as violent and graphic images. He said that while he had repeatedly raised the issue to various Facebook and Instagram executives, nothing was done to resolve it. He raised concerns about features such as infinite scroll, which keep users engaged while generating revenue for the company through targeted ads.

Meta has denied all these allegations. It said that the statements from documents were cherry-picked and taken out of context. Paul Schmidt, a lawyer for Meta, said that the company had undertaken various measures to address teens' over-use of Instagram, and that it had disabled more than 1 million accounts of young users. During the trial, Adam Mosseri, the CEO of Instagram, denied allegations that his company had hidden negative information from the public. Even after the settlement, Meta has denied any wrong-doing.

Is Meta the only company facing such lawsuits?

Meta and other social media giants such as Alphabet (the parent company of Google and YouTube) and TikTok have been facing a series of lawsuits over youth social media 'addiction' and children's safety.

Earlier this year, a Los Angeles jury found Meta and Alphabet liable for \$6 million in damages due to the 'addictive' design of their platforms. The plaintiff said that she had become 'addicted' to social media, mainly YouTube and Instagram, at a young age, which led to a deterioration in her mental health.

In March, a New Mexico court ordered Meta to pay \$375 million for misleading users about the dangers its platforms pose to children. New Mexico sued Meta in 2023 alleging that the company "steered" children and teens towards sexually explicit, graphic, and violent content which exposed them to offers of solicitation and even trafficking.

TikTok settled three cases brought by teens

who alleged that using the platform had led them to suffer from self-harm, anxiety, depression, addiction, and eating disorders. Earlier this month, it also reached a \$400 million settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice, which alleged that the company violated federal laws on children's privacy.

Can social media be addictive?

The American Society of Addiction Medicine defines an addiction as a "treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences." Social media is sometimes described as a form of behavioural addiction since it makes you engage in an action which you know to be harmful, yet cannot stop.

A review paper published by Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera in *Cureus* in 2024 states that social media "addiction" is shaped by a combination of "psychological factors, such as low self-esteem and mental health issues, technological mechanisms like infinite scrolling and personalised notifications, and social influences, including peer pressure and exposure to idealised content". A potential "treatment" for the same would include cognitive therapy, educational awareness, and parental strategies such as placing limits and boundaries on social media use.

However, social media has not been medically recognised as an addiction. Therefore, there aren't any clear cut guidelines on how to diagnose, measure, and treat such 'behaviours'.

This point was a key argument by Meta's lawyers who claimed that social media addiction was not an established psychiatric condition.

What next?

Under the settlement, Meta has agreed to introduce several safety features for teens, including a default two-hour daily limit which they can turn off only with parental permission; 'school' and 'night' modes that mute notifications; the choice to curate a feed which is not driven by algorithms; blocking of 'likes' on teens' accounts and those they interact with in order to reduce comparison; and blocking of extreme make-up filters. Meta said that the two-hour daily time limit and night mode feature would work only if other social media platforms also follow suit.

The settlement has been called historic as it mandates Meta to make concrete changes regarding safety measures for children and teens. The payouts will also enable the States to address children's mental health concerns.

However, some critics state that since Meta has not changed its revenue model, which still prioritises endless scrolling and targeted ads, such rudimentary safety features will not lead to fundamental change.



Attorneys representing multiple States outside the court after Meta reached a settlement to end the trial, in Oakland, California. AP

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Can an accused be denied a copy of the FIR?

Does the law require the police to give an accused a copy of the FIR? What have courts said about an accused's right to access an FIR? Can the police withhold an FIR from the accused in certain cases? Why does timely access to an FIR matter for an accused?

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

The Supreme Court on August 25 ordered the Ghaziabad Police to provide independent journalist Abhishek Upadhyay with a copy of the FIR and CCTV footage in a road-rage case registered against him. Mr. Upadhyay, who had reported on alleged irregularities in donations to the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, claimed that he was being falsely implicated over his reportage and that the police had failed to provide him with the FIR despite repeated requests.

Why did the court have to intervene?

On August 20, Mr. Upadhyay alleged that a police team arrived at his residence and informed him that a case had been registered at the Indirapuram police station over road rage and abusive behaviour. In a post on X, he claimed that despite repeatedly seeking a copy of the FIR, the police initially sent him a page containing neither the sections invoked nor details of the alleged offence, and later shared an older FIR registered against him in Lucknow.

Mr. Upadhyay then approached the Supreme Court, alleging that the case was based on concocted allegations and intended to harass him for his journalism. He sought a copy of the FIR and quashing of the proceedings or,

The Supreme directed that FIRs be uploaded on police websites within 24 hours of registration or, where no such website exists, on the official website of the State government

alternatively, transfer of the probe to an independent agency.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant directed the Ghaziabad Police Commissioner to provide him with the FIR and CCTV footage and file a compliance report by September 7. It also protected him from arrest and allowed him to approach the jurisdictional High Court for further relief.

What do statutory provisions stipulate?

The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), does not require the police to furnish the accused with an FIR immediately upon registration. Section 173(2) requires a copy to be given "forthwith" and free of cost to the informant or victim, but does not mention the accused. The statute provides for the accused to receive the FIR only at a later stage, after the investigation culminates in the filing of a chargesheet before the magistrate. Section 230 requires the magistrate to furnish the accused with copies of documents relied upon by the prosecution, including the FIR and chargesheet, within 14 days of their appearance or production before the court. The BNSS does not address an accused person's right to access the FIR before this stage, including during the investigation. Judicial precedents have, however, recognised the right of an accused to obtain the FIR soon after its registration.

What have courts held on access to FIRs?

In *Court on its Own Motion through Mr. Ajay Choudhary v. State* (2010), the Delhi High Court laid down a mechanism for an accused to obtain an FIR during the investigation, before the stage contemplated under Section 230 of the BNSS. The court also directed the Delhi Police to upload FIRs on its website within 24 hours of registration. FIRs involving sensitive offences can, however, be withheld through a reasoned decision by an officer not below the rank of DCP.

In *Rama Nand Rathore v. State of Himachal Pradesh* (2014), the Himachal Pradesh High Court held that a person who suspects that they have been named in an FIR can seek a certified copy from the police, which must supply it within 24 hours. It also directed FIRs to be

uploaded online within the same period, barring sensitive cases.

In *Youth Bar Association of India v. Union of India* (2016), the Supreme Court gave these directives pan-India effect and reiterated that an accused is entitled to access the FIR before the stage prescribed under Section 207 of the CrPC (now Section 230 of the BNSS). The Court directed that FIRs be uploaded on police websites within 24 hours of registration or, where no such website exists, on the official website of the State government. Where unavoidable difficulties delay publication, the 24-hour deadline may be extended to 48, or up to 72 hours for geographical connectivity issues.

The court, however, carved out an exception to the online publication requirement for FIRs involving offences "sensitive in nature".

What is the 'sensitive offence' exemption?

The apex court identified sexual offences, cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, and terror offences as examples of "sensitive" offences, while clarifying that the list was not exhaustive.

The decision cannot be taken by a police officer below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police or its equivalent. A person aggrieved by it can approach the Superintendent of Police or an equivalent officer, who must constitute a three-member committee to decide the grievance within three days.

Even where an FIR is withheld on grounds of sensitivity, the accused or an authorised representative can apply for a certified copy to the magistrate to whom the FIR has been forwarded, who must provide it in three days.

What are the implications?

Delhi-based advocate Nipun Saxena says police officials routinely fail to comply with the Supreme Court's directive to upload FIRs through the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems. "Once an FIR is registered and the criminal law is set in motion, the accused is entitled to seek pre-trial remedies such as quashing of the FIR or anticipatory bail. Without access to the FIR, these remedies cannot be effectively pursued," he says.

Mr. Saxena adds that the Supreme Court's ruling recognised that an accused cannot be made to wait until the framing of charges to know the offences alleged against them, as this would undermine the right to a fair trial and the principles of natural justice.



Abhishek Upadhyay, who had reported on alleged irregularities in donations to the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

GS 3: DISASTER MANAGEMENT THE HINDU PAGE: 9

A Himalayan tragedy

The Bhotekoshi flood

Scientists investigate how a high-altitude rock-and-ice avalanche may have triggered one of Nepal's most devastating floods; while experts have not directly attributed this event to climate change, they note that rising temperatures are warming the Himalayas and accelerating glacier melt

Sanjeev Satgalya

Ramesh Kumar, a journalist based in Kathmandu, on Thursday posted a photograph of a clock tower, its hands stopped at 09:29. "A clock that would never show the time again," he wrote on X, formerly Twitter. "Betrawati."

Mr. Kumar had reached Betrawati in Nuwakot district, a town devastated by the previous day's flood in the Bhotekoshi River in neighbouring Rasuwa district, which borders Tibet. After touring Betrawati, where he was born and raised, he made a grim assessment: "Will Betrawati ever revive as a bazaar again? Almost impossible."

The extraordinary velocity and scale of the flash flood in the Bhotekoshi River at around 8:40 a.m. on Wednesday has left more than 600 dead and close to 2,500 missing, including foreign nationals, mostly from India.

The Nepal government promptly got into action, mobilising personnel from the Nepal Army, Nepal Police and the Armed Police Force, as it mounted a massive search-and-rescue operation.

Scientists, meanwhile, struggled to piece together the chain of events and determine the origin of the flood, as they wondered about the enormity of the disaster, with some describing it as the worst since the 2015 earthquake.

On the origin, the Nepalese and Chinese sides have concluded that the source was in the Langtang Lirung area. Identifying the exact point where the initial collapse occurred, and which side of the border it was on, may be difficult.

According to an official at Nepal's Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, satellite imagery shared by the Chinese side pointed to a combination of an ice avalanche, permafrost movement and a rockslide along the Nepal-China border, with the rockslide occurring on the Chinese side and its impact extending into Nepal.

"The avalanche originated on the Nepalese side of the territory, but very close to the boundary, and induced



flooding that crossed the Nepal-China border, causing extensive damage on both sides," said Binod Parajuli, a senior divisional hydrologist at the department's flood forecasting division.

The location scientists are pointing to is in the Lhende Khola, a transboundary high-altitude river that originates in Gyirong County in Tibet and flows south into Nepal, where it is a tributary of the Bhotekoshi and Trishuli river systems.

Flooding in the Bhotekoshi River is not uncommon. Last year, in July, a flood – caused without rainfall – in the Bhotekoshi wreaked damage and destruction. Scientists later concluded that the disaster was associated with a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF).

Different angle

While scientists initially considered whether this year's flood could also have been linked to a GLOF, its velocity and ferocity, which washed away villages downstream in three districts – Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading – prompted experts to examine it from a different angle.

Dr. Ranjan Kumar Dahal, an associate professor at the Himalayan Geodisaster Research Centre at the Central Department of Geology, Tribhuvan University, described the mass movement that triggered the flood as a sturzstrom.

"A sturzstrom is a massive rock avalanche in which a large volume of rock suddenly collapses and moves at extremely high speed over a long distance," Mr. Dahal told *The Hindu* from Trishuli, another area hit hard by Wednesday's flood. "In high-mountain environments, when rock is mixed with ice, snow, firn and frozen soil, it can be understood as a rock-ice avalanche."

Rasuwa is a border checkpoint through which most of Nepal's trade with China takes place. From May to September, hundreds of pilgrims use this border point to cross into Tibet for the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage. Indians make up the largest share of the pilgrims.

It could take weeks, if not months, to assess the full scale of the damage, officials said, adding that the toll could further rise.

The International Federation of Red Cross said the remoteness of the affected areas, combined with damaged infrastructure, was making it harder both to assess the full scale of the disaster and to deliver assistance to people who need it.

Current estimates suggest around 93,000 people may have been affected," it said. "Many homes have been severely damaged, cutting off some of the worst-affected communities."

In the aftermath of the disaster, two more crucial questions have also emerged – whether the early-warning systems were activated and whether climate change had a role in the disaster. Experts say early-warning systems had worked as intended but were rendered ineffective given the staggering speed of the flood.

Kamal Kishore, the head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, said the floods had once again highlighted how fragile mountain ecosystems are and how challenging it is to set up early-warning systems in mountain environments.

Scientists have not ruled out the

impact of climate change, saying the rising temperatures are causing the Himalayas to warm and glaciers to melt faster, but they stopped short of directly linking the disaster to global warming.

"We had not seen such a disaster in Nepal involving a sturzstrom. However, in 2021, there was a similar event in India," said Mr. Dahal, referring to the Chamoli disaster in Uttarakhand, where a bedrock failure beneath a glacier triggered a massive rock-ice avalanche that subsequently transformed into a debris flow and flood.

The 2021 Chamoli event has been scientifically described as a rock-and-ice avalanche and, in some literature, explicitly as a sturzstrom. Research found that more than 25 million cubic metres of rock and ice broke loose high in the Uttarakhand Himalaya before moving rapidly downstream.

Catastrophic sturzstrom

"A sturzstrom begins when an unstable rock-ice slope suddenly collapses. The collapsing mass rapidly accelerates, fragments and mixes with ice and snow," Mr. Dahal explained.

"Pressure and friction can generate meltwater, which may increase lubrication within the moving mass and along its base, reducing resistance and contributing to exceptionally long runout," he added.

According to him, this process can unfold within just a few minutes.

"As it moves downslope, it may incorporate more ice, snow, rock, soil and water, potentially transforming into a massive debris flow before finally depositing its material," he said.

Meanwhile, rescue operations have continued on the fourth day, with Prime Minister Balendra Shah saying more than 15,000 personnel have been deployed.

For communities along the Bhotekoshi-Trishuli corridor, the immediate priorities are finding the missing, restoring access and assessing whether some of the places destroyed by the flood can be rebuilt at all. It's a race against time.

THE GIST

▼ The flood devastated riverside towns across Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading districts, burying places like Betrawati and Trishuli under metres of mud, boulders and silt.

▼ Nepal mobilised a massive search-and-rescue operation involving personnel from the Army, police and armed police force.

▼ The remoteness of affected areas and damaged access routes have severely hampered both damage assessment and delivery of aid.

GS 3: ENVIRONMENT THE HINDU PAGE: 10

Dung beetles prefer dog poop, but their children pay the price

D.P. Kasbekar

Dung beetles are humble insects. They feed on the faeces of other mammals. In many species, a male dung beetle flies to a fresh pile of dung, shapes a piece of it into a ball, and quickly rolls it away from the pile so others don't grab it.

Reputedly, male dung beetles have rolled dung balls a thousand times heavier than their own body weight.

A female will inspect the ball and decide if it is good enough to lay her egg in. If it is, the couple mate, the female lays her egg, and the ball is then buried in a tunnel in the soil. The ball will provide food for the offspring.

Dung beetles quickly clear dung piles and recycle soil nutrients. Plants benefit, too: the seeds that pass through a mammal's gut get planted deep underground, in dung-fertilised spots. Dung beetles

have been known to increase plant growth by 17%. On August 12, a team from Clark University in Massachusetts, U.S., reported in *Ecology and Evolution* that these dung beetles are vulnerable to a previously unforeseen risk: dogs. The researchers found that, given a choice, the dung beetle *Onthophagus orpheus* preferred dog poop. This was in line with other studies that have shown dung beetles prefer the faeces of omnivorous

mammals to that of herbivores, like cows.

In the laboratory, the dung beetle made larger brood balls on dog poop than on cow dung. Male offspring developed in larger brood balls than female offspring, suggesting more resources are provisioned to the sons. This sex difference was more pronounced with cow dung than with dog dung.

O. orpheus eggs also developed faster in dog poop and the progeny that

emerged were larger. However, egg mortality was also higher in dog poop. The researchers inferred that "the dung type most strongly preferred by adults was also associated with the lowest offspring survival", creating a mismatch between preference and performance.

They added that this "suggests that accumulation of domestic dog waste ... may pose a widespread but underappreciated risk to urban dung beetles".

Why the mortality was higher with dog poop remains unclear. One possibility is that pets are routinely administered antiparasitic medications which accumulate in faeces, and could have increased the mortality of the larvae and the pupae of dung dwelling insects.

The insect cannot be faulted for its unfortunate mismatch. It is our lack of foresight.

D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist.

GS 3: DISASTER MANAGEMENT THE HINDU PAGE: 11

Blaming climate change for extreme weather has limits

Short-duration, sub-daily extreme events are harder to link to climate change than heatwaves; attribution of localised events is hampered by limited weather records, insufficient computing power, and what 'extreme' weather really entails

Harsh Kabra
PUNE

After an intense heatwave struck South Asia earlier this year, World Weather Attribution (WWA) said climate change had made the event about three-times likelier and up to 1° C warmer than it would have been in a world without climate change.

WWA is an international research group that assesses the impact of climate change on extreme weather. At the heart of these assessments is the science of extreme event attribution, whose goal is to trace the human fingerprint in extreme weather. However, many experts have raised questions about how well extreme weather can be pinned on climate change.

"Using a combination of computer modelling, long-term weather data, and physical understanding of climate systems, climate model simulations are run first for a counterfactual world with pre-industrial conditions, when carbon dioxide levels [in the atmosphere] were 280 ppm, and then for present-day conditions when they are over 420 ppm," J. Srinivasan, professor emeritus at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, said.

"The difference in the magnitude or likelihood of the extreme weather event can then be attributed to human influence, including higher carbon dioxide. To ensure this has not occurred by chance, many simulations and rigorous

Uncertain bridges

Analysing localised events is hampered by limited long-term weather records, computing power

- Extreme event attribution science assesses the human fingerprint by comparing current weather with historical climate simulations
- Researchers use detection to identify abnormal patterns and attribution to measure the specific influence of climate change
- Scientific confidence

varies because heatwaves are easier to model than shorter, more localised weather events like thunderstorms

■ Significant gaps in historical records and modelling limitations hinder efforts to separate natural variability from human influence

■ Attribution findings could establish legal liability for

polluters, but experts have questioned the underlying scientific methods

Some researchers argue that improving early warning systems and infrastructure is more beneficial than assigning climate responsibility



Confidence in extreme event attribution is generally lower for thunderstorms. MARCUS WOODBRIDGE

statistical tests are required." Attribution science draws on detection and attribution. "Detection involves determining whether an event falls outside the range of its normal occurrence due to natural variations in the climate system," Vimal Mishra, the Bikram Sarabhai Chair Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at IIT-Gandhinagar and a specialist in climate science, hydrology, and climate extremes, said.

During one extreme event attribution committee hearing at the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) in 2025, Stanford University climate scientist Noah Diffenbaugh questioned "whether single event attribution is even possible at all, from a scientific point of view".

Mark Keenan, a former UN and U.K. government scientist, wrote recently in *American Thinker*, "How do we know [a climate model] accurately represents a climate that no one has ever observed?"

NASEM experts have previously noted that it is challenging to ascertain the influence of climate change on extreme weather. Dr. Srinivasan also said, "extreme weather events can occur even without anthropogenic climate change".

In the Sixth Assessment Report, IPCC experts also noted that some local phenomena such as land-sea breezes and mountain wind systems can only be realistically represented by simulations at a resolution of around 10 km or less, which current models do not support. Similarly,

short-duration, sub-daily extreme events, e.g. intense bursts of rain lasting only an hour or so, are harder to model and link to climate change than longer events like day-long heatwaves or several days of heavy rain. This is because most global climate models cannot capture fast-changing processes.

According to Dr. Mishra, analysis of localised events is also hampered by limited long-term weather records and computing power. "For example, without long-term hourly or sub-hourly rainfall observations for a particular place, we cannot confidently mark out the range of natural variability for a heavy rainfall event there," he explained. "Uncertainties arising from observations and models can lead to unscientific claims and

sweeping generalisations."

In fact, scientists are also not agreed on what amounts to 'extreme'. "For instance, when our group reconstructed droughts over roughly 1,200 years, we found that some kinds of droughts seen in the past no longer occur," Dr. Mishra said. "An event that appears extreme over a 10-20-year timeline may not look exceptional when analysed with a dataset spanning ... 500 years."

"Extreme event attribution is about assigning legal liability for emissions, either at the country level or the corporation level," Raghu Murtugudde, a professor emeritus at the University of Maryland, said. "Studies claim that carbon majors [businesses with particularly high emissions] can be defined and certain climate changes can be attributed to certain organisations. The real question is whether these findings can hold up in court." He also said climate models will never be perfect enough for counterfactual worlds – the worlds that might have existed if not for some fact today, like climate change – to be accepted without question. Instead, Subimal Ghosh, convener of the Interdisciplinary Programme in Climate Studies at IIT-Bombay, said preparedness is more important: "Our priority should be to develop more effective early warning systems and adaptation infrastructure in order to save more people."

Harsh Kabra is an independent journalist