

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (HEALTH)

THE HINDU PAGE: 05

Rising child leprosy cases challenge India's 2027 goal

Country records 3,832 child leprosy cases in 2025-26, a figure that is 91.6% above the Centre's target of 2,000; 37 Grade-2 disability cases point to delayed detection and ongoing transmission

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

India recorded 3,832 new leprosy cases among children in 2025-26, including 37 who had Grade-2 disability (G2D) at diagnosis – an indicator of delayed detection. The child caseload was 91.6% higher than the National Leprosy Eradication Programme's (NLEP) target of 2,000 cases for the year.

The figures, from the latest NLEP annual report for 2025-26, come even as India pursues the National Strategic Plan for Leprosy 2023-27, which seeks to interrupt transmission at the district level by 2027.

Under the roadmap, a district is considered to have interrupted transmission after reporting zero new indigenous child cases for five consecutive years.

The NLEP's programme objectives include zero disability among new child cases and a national G2D rate of less than one case per million population. The roadmap projects 1,000 child cases and a G2D rate of 0.5 per million for 2026-27.

Epidemiologic question

The World Health Organisation (WHO) considers new cases among children below 15 years an indicator of recent transmission, while G2D among newly



The Health Ministry has identified high-priority States and districts where the burden remains concentrated. FILE PHOTO

detected patients indicates delayed diagnosis.

The WHO also says disabilities among newly detected child cases signal both delayed detection and ongoing transmission.

India recorded 63 children with G2D in 2019-20, followed by 35 in 2020-21, 41 in 2021-22, 55 in 2022-23 and 45 in 2023-24. The continued detection of children with G2D contrasts with the NLEP's objective of zero disability among new child cases.

The latest numbers therefore raise a fundamental epidemiological question: if India is working to interrupt transmission by 2027, why are children still developing leprosy, and why are some reaching diagnosis only after visible disability has appeared?

India detected 91,783 new leprosy cases in 2025-26, according to the Union Health Ministry. The prevalence rate was 0.56 per 10,000 population, and

1,945 patients had Grade-2 disability at diagnosis, accounting for 2.12% of all newly detected cases. The national G2D rate was 1.34 per million, above the NLEP's target of less than one case per million.

Global hubs

According to the WHO's latest global update, India reported the world's largest number of newly detected leprosy cases in 2025, with 91,783 cases, followed by Brazil with 22,901 and Indonesia with 16,292. Together, the three countries accounted for 78.3% of all new cases reported globally. The WHO notes that, although the update is for 2025, India reported data for April 2025 to March 2026.

India also reported the world's largest number of new child leprosy cases in the WHO's 2025 global update, with 3,832 cases.

The WHO figures and the NLEP figures refer to

the same reporting period for India – April 2025 to March 2026 – although the WHO presents India's data in its 2025 global table. The WHO table records 3,832 child cases and 37 child cases with G2D for India.

Hard-to-reach areas

The Health Ministry identifies high-endemic and hard-to-reach areas as priorities for intensified case detection. The NLEP emphasises active case detection, household contact surveys and focused campaigns, along with special plans for hard-to-reach areas. The programme also identifies stigma and discrimination as continuing concerns.

Leprosy, or Hansen's disease, is a chronic bacterial infection caused mainly by *Mycobacterium leprae*. It primarily affects the skin and peripheral nerves. Transmission occurs mainly through prolonged, close contact with an untreated person. The disease is curable with multidrug therapy.

The Health Ministry has identified high-priority States and districts where the burden remains concentrated. Twenty-three districts in Chhattisgarh, 21 in Jharkhand, 18 each in Maharashtra and Odisha, and 10 in Madhya Pradesh had a prevalence rate above one case per 10,000 population.

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Why did the J&K Statehood resolution cause a row?

What does the resolution passed in the J&K Assembly say? What is the 2000 autonomy resolution that Omar Abdullah spoke of that the BJP objected to? Why did the Chief Minister include the 2000 and 2024 resolution as well? What did two bureaucrats do that he objected to?

Peerzada Ashiq

The story so far:

In September 25, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Chief Minister Omar Abdullah introduced a resolution before the autumn session of the J&K Assembly, it called upon the Government of India for the "immediate and urgent restoration of full Statehood to J&K". Mr. Abdullah argued that the resolution was necessitated by the Centre's inexplicable delay in granting J&K Statehood status, which was downgraded in 2019 after its autonomous status under Article 370 was diluted by Parliament under the rule of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

On September 28, the resolution was put to vote and was passed after 61 members out of 90 – from the ruling National Conference (NC), Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Peoples Democratic Party, J&K People's Conference, Aam Aadmi Party, and Awami Ittehad Party – extended their support. After the resolution was passed, Mr. Abdullah called upon the Government of India to "fulfil its commitment towards restoration of Statehood".

Why did the BJP decide to stay away from voting?

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took exception to the wording of the resolution. The part that piqued the BJP was that the current resolution was "in addition to the resolutions passed by this House on 26th June 2000 and 6th November 2024", referring to the 2000 autonomy resolution and the special status. BJP legislators raised a hue and cry, stormed into the well of the House, and staged walkouts over the

The 2000 autonomy resolution and the 2024 special status resolution are bids by the ruling NC to bring a solution to Kashmir within the ambit of the Constitution and address all the political constituencies.

resolution. J&K Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma termed references to the 2000 autonomy resolution and the 2024 special status "unnecessary". The BJP asked the ruling NC to bring a resolution confined exclusively to the issue of Statehood. Mr. Sharma said J&K was a sensitive region with neighbours which were always trying to take advantage of internal issues and disturb the peace. He said there was no room for any "Pakistan agenda" in J&K, a region which is an integral part of India. The BJP also targeted NC leader and Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather for allowing the resolution and moved a motion seeking his removal.

What is the 2000 autonomy resolution?

In the 1990s, at the peak of militancy, NC leader and then Chief Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah was forced to step down and leave Kashmir. He returned to power in 1996 and set up a State Autonomy Committee to examine the steady erosion of J&K's regional autonomy since 1953, when his father, then J&K Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, was dismissed from office and arrested by the Central government. The committee was part of the NC's attempt to offer a constitutional alternative to separatist groups that were demanding either complete independence for Kashmir or its merger with Pakistan.

On June 26, 2000, Dr. Abdullah, as Chief Minister, tabled the resolution to restore the pre-1953 autonomy status of J&K; it was passed unanimously by the State Assembly. This envisaged a much more limited Union jurisdiction over J&K, with defence, foreign affairs, and communications among the principal subjects with New Delhi. It called for the Governor to be re-designated as Sadr-e-Riyasat (Head of State) and the Chief Minister as Wazir-e-Azam (Prime Minister). It also proposed replacing the word 'temporary' in Article 370 with 'special'; barring the use of Article 356 of the Constitution to impose President's Rule; having a separate Election Commission and Comptroller and Auditor General; and rescinding all constitutional orders issued after 1954.

After the resolution was sent to Parliament, the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee rejected it. The Union Cabinet described the recommendations as unacceptable and an attempt to "set the clock back".

Why did Omar Abdullah include the previous resolutions?

After J&K was downgraded to a Union Territory in 2019, mainstream political parties in Kashmir have again been offering an alternative within

the Constitution to the alienated sections, to protect land, jobs, and identity. The 2000 autonomy resolution and the 2024 special status resolution are bids by the ruling NC to bring a solution to Kashmir within the ambit of the Constitution and address all the political constituencies.

While Mr. Abdullah clarified in the Assembly that the resolution was confined to the restoration of Statehood, he cautioned the Centre against linking it to the complete cessation of militancy, which, he said, would effectively allow Pakistan to determine when Statehood should be restored. He underlined that the decision on Statehood should be taken in New Delhi and should not be made contingent on any other factor or external consideration.

Mr. Abdullah also stalled an attempt by eight NC legislators to amend the resolution to include references to Article 370, Article 35A, and the pre-August 5, 2019 position. The Chief Minister argued that these words could provide an excuse to the BJP not to participate in the voting and stall a unanimous resolution on Statehood.

How has this resolution caused a rift with the bureaucracy?

Mr. Abdullah informed the J&K Assembly that a day after he moved the resolution, Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo and Law Secretary Achal Sethi, in two separate communications to the Speaker, advised against allowing the resolution. Mr. Abdullah said the letters cited "matter sub judice" as the reason not to allow the resolution on Statehood. He lamented that this bid by the bureaucracy to scuttle the Statehood resolution only highlighted the need to restore Statehood.

He said, "The Law Secretary and the Chief Secretary had forwarded their opinions to the Speaker, saying that the subject was sub judice and should not be discussed." He was not shown the letters, he said. "I don't know on whose behalf they did this. Which State in the country will witness the Law Secretary and Chief Secretary oppose a resolution moved by the Chief Minister? It's because of the Union Territory status," Mr. Abdullah said.

The episode has sparked a debate over the powers of the legislature in the Union Territory. Congress legislator Nizamuddin Bhat demanded that the letters be made part of the Assembly records and taken up for discussion in the House. He termed the officers' decision to write to the Speaker a "challenge to the prestige, dignity and powers of the Assembly" and questioned whether officers could act as a government. He said the move challenged the authority of both the Speaker and the House. He argued that the Assembly was governed by the same rules as a State legislature, and that neither the Constitution nor the J&K Reorganisation Act provided otherwise. PDP legislator Waheed-ur-Rehman Parra has initiated a breach of privilege motion against the two officials.



J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah looks on amid a protest by Opposition MLAs during the autumn session of the Assembly, in Srinagar. PTI

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE HINDU PAGE: 09

Iraq's militias within the military

Popular Mobilisation Forces

For the Iran-backed Shia armed organisations, which opposed the U.S. occupation of Iraq and frequently clashed with U.S. forces, the September 30 withdrawal of American troops, at a time when Washington wages war on Iran, is a 'historic victory'

Stanly Johny

In June 13, 2014, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Iraq's top Shia cleric, issued a *fatwa* asking Iraqis to join the fight against terrorism. "The nature of the situation and the dangers facing Iraq and its people at the present time require defending the country, its people and the honour of its citizens," said the cleric in his edict, which was read out by his representative Sheikh Abdul-Mahdi al-Karbalai, during Friday prayers in Karbala.

Mr. Sistani's call came amid the rapid territorial advances made by the Islamic State (IS), a Sunni-jihadist group, in Iraq. On June 10, IS militants captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city. After consolidating in the north, they started moving south towards Baghdad, while also threatening Shia holy places such as Najaf and Karbala. In the north, the Iraqi military collapsed in the face of IS advance. There was panic in Baghdad, where Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was scrambling to arrest the jihadist surge. "This defence is considered a *wajib kifai* [collective obligation] upon a sufficient number of citizens as is needed to fulfil the task," Mr. Sistani said in his *fatwa*. "Hence, the citizens who are able to bear arms and fight the terrorists in defence of their country, their people and their sanctities must volunteer to join the army and the security forces to achieve this sacred objective."

The edict triggered the mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi youth to fight the Islamic State. But the mobilisation did not remain confined to the army and police. Shia militias expanded and new armed groups emerged, eventually forming the core of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMFs, or Hashd al-Shaabi).

The Iraqi state, shaken by the loss of Mosul, encouraged the militias to expand their footprint, while Iran, equally invested in defeating the IS, provided money, weapons and training to the militias. Seven groups were already operating in Iraq - Badr Organisation; Asaib Ahi al-Haq; Kataib Hezbollah; Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada;



Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba; Kataib Jund al-Imam; and Kataib al-Imam Ali. Several new groups also sprang up. All these forces were brought under the PMF umbrella for better coordination in the fight against the Islamic State.

The PMF factions, which fought alongside the Iraqi military under U.S. air cover, played a key role in defeating the IS. But the battle against the jihadist group also led to the institutionalisation of the militias, which refused to disarm even after the IS was defeated and its militants were driven out of most Iraqi cities including Mosul. Calling themselves resistance forces, the prominent factions in the PMF demanded complete American withdrawal from Iraq. The killing of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy chairman of the PMF and leader of Kataib Hezbollah, in January 2020, along with Iran's Qassem Soleimani, in Baghdad by a U.S. air strike opened a new phase of attritional conflict between the PMF and U.S. forces in Iraq. This conflict escalated further after the U.S. launched its war on Iran this year. On September 30, when U.S. troops

completed their withdrawal from Iraq, 23 years after the invasion started, the PMF, unsurprisingly, called it a "historic victory".

Three currents

The PMF now comprises more than three dozen militias, with an estimated total strength of 240,000 fighters and an annual budget of \$3.4 billion. Historically, the PMF contained three broad currents: Iran-aligned factions, Sistani-aligned shrine units and the Sadrist Saraya al-Salam. The Sistani-aligned shrine units (Abbas Combat Division, Ibra Ali al-Akbar and Imam Ali Combat Division) subsequently broke away from the PMF structure in 2020 and came under the direct authority of the commander-in-chief.

Badr Organisation, originally the armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq; Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba are the prominent Iran-backed factions within the PMF fold. They are also the most powerful among the militias. The most prominent Sadrist militia is Saraya

al-Salam (Peace Brigades), which is aligned with the PMF but maintains a tense relationship with its command. Muqtada al-Sadr, a Shia cleric, is one of the most influential religious-political figures in post-war Iraq. He had commanded the now-dissolved Mahdi Army that resisted U.S. troops in the early days of the invasion. The Mahdi Army had received support from Iran, but Mr. Sadr later distanced himself from Iranian influence and projected Saraya al-Salam as an Iraqi nationalist militia.

The U.S. had repeatedly demanded that the Iraqi state demobilise the militias, some of which, such as Kataib Hezbollah, have been designated as terrorist groups. But both mainstream Iraqi politicians and militia commanders have resisted such calls. In 2016, the Iraqi Parliament passed the PMF commission law, which institutionalised the PMF as an independent organisation within the Iraqi armed forces.

But they continued to maintain their independent command structures. The prominent members of the PMF also formed political parties

and started contesting elections. In 2018, Badr Organisation, Asaib Ahi al-Haq, Kataib Hezbollah and Kataib al-Imam Ali all came together to form the Fatah Alliance, a political coalition to represent the militias in the general elections (the alliance was later disbanded). Besides, the Sadrist movement has a separate political organisation, the National Shia Movement. In the current Iraqi parliament, Badr Organisation has 18 seats, while Sadriqoun Movement, another PMF-linked political bloc, has 27 seats.

The war on Iran

After the U.S. and Israel started bombing Iran on February 28, 2020, the Iran-aligned militias in the PMF started attacking American military and diplomatic facilities in Iraq.

According to U.S. officials, they carried out some 600 attacks since the war broke out and the U.S. launched air strikes targeting these groups. But the U.S. found it increasingly difficult to deter PMF factions whose decentralised operational tactics and geographical spread worked in their favour. Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi had said earlier that the militias would be demobilised by September 30, the deadline for U.S. troops withdrawal. After the U.S. troops completed their pullback, Mr. Zaidi said the process of demobilisation had begun, and pushed the deadline to June 2027. Some militias such as Kataib Imam Ali and Saraya al-Salam have reached an understanding with the government to hand over weapons and regularise their status. But the more powerful ones such as Kataib Hezbollah and Nujaba have resisted the calls for disarmament, saying the Islamic resistance would continue as long as American military presence in the region continues.

Both the U.S. and the militias have agreed to refrain from attacking each other for 90 days following the withdrawal of U.S. troops, according to Iraqi officials. But with the war on Iran unresolved and some PMF factions deeply entangled with Iran, any escalation between Tehran and Washington could have a direct impact on Iraq.

THE GIST

The PMF factions, which fought alongside the Iraqi military under U.S. air cover, played a key role in defeating the IS

But the battle against the jihadist group also led to the institutionalisation of the militias, which refused to disarm even after the IS was defeated

Now, pro-Iran factions in the PMF say the Islamic Resistance would continue as long as U.S. military presence continues in the region

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

THE HINDU PAGE: 09

The latest leap

Astra

OpenAI's latest model launch and the cancellation of an updated version over safety concerns have intensified debate over whether AI capabilities could outpace human control

Maneesh T.

“Welcome to the AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) era,” were the words of OpenAI president Greg Brockman following the launch of GPT-6 Astra, the U.S. AI company's latest model, on September 3. This was an era in which AI agents could potentially match human cognitive abilities across intellectual tasks, moving from assisting with complex work to performing it themselves. The company touted Astra as its most intelligent and aligned model yet.

A launch video showed how Astra set a new frontier in computer use, and achieved advanced capabilities in mathematics, coding, software engineering, cybersecurity, science, and professional work. It demonstrated the ability to develop 3D designs and games using Blender or route a manufacturable printed circuit board (PCB) layout in KiCad - all from a prompt.

OpenAI described Astra as its model most aligned with human intent, thanks to its ability to exercise care, respect task boundaries, and communicate transparently. The company presented data on how Astra showed a significantly lower rate of misaligned outcomes compared with



REUTERS

Fable 5.1 and Opus 5, frontier models from its competitor Anthropic.

However, on September 28, *The Wall Street Journal* broke the news of OpenAI scrapping the launch of GPT-6.1 Astra - an update to GPT-6 - that was slated for an October launch, citing “safety concerns”.

OpenAI made the announcement of the cancellation a day before its annual DevDay conference in San Francisco, saying internal testing revealed that the model did not meet its safety standards. According to Saachi Jain, head of safety systems at OpenAI, GPT-6.1 “didn’t quite meet the bar”. Ms. Jain particularly mentioned how the system fell short of staying within its scope and authorisation, and in communicating to the user what work it had performed.

Unsanctioned activities

The same day, a report by the U.K.’s AI Security Institute (AIS), based on simulations using GPT-6 Astra,

flagged several instances of the model’s unsanctioned cyber activities, including autonomous behaviour that exceeded its scope and the creation of fake identities. Astra used these identities to deceive developers and posted comments from fake accounts, arguing against the results of accurate security reviews.

AISI further observed that Astra exhibited such rogue behaviour at a higher rate than previous OpenAI models - GPT-5.6 Sol and GPT-5.5. The report also says that when the security agency, during its simulated cyber evaluation, updated the instructions to explicitly clarify that only listed and local parts of the environment were in scope, it still observed GPT-6 Astra occasionally conducting full supply-chain attacks on simulated internet targets.

The withdrawal of GPT-6.1 also coincided with OpenAI apologising for unauthorised access to

Australian government websites during a research and training exercise involving an unreleased, internal-only model in June.

After the Hugging Face incident from May to July, during which OpenAI’s AI agents intruded into the infrastructure of the company, these latest revelations have raised concerns about what is yet to come.

As AISI’s evaluations of GPT-6 Astra suggest that the unsanctioned actions it took in simulations could cause harm in real-world environments, the agency proposes that the models have defences that complement alignment - such as sandboxing (isolating a model inside a secure, restricted digital environment) and monitoring - to prevent such damage.

A broader question, however, is whether OpenAI will take its cue from these recent incidents to slow down the development of frontier AI to ensure that safety standards keep pace with such advances. Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, along with Google DeepMind chief Demis Hassabis and xAI owner Elon Musk, had expressed support for Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei’s call for a deceleration.

Amid a global race for AI supremacy, whether that commitment will translate into practice remains to be seen.

GS 3: ECONOMY

THE HINDU PAGE: 11

RBI chief lays down five key priorities for financial stability

Financial instability anywhere can become a threat to financial stability everywhere, says Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra emphasised on the importance of maintaining financial stability amid multiple shocks. Financial instability anywhere can become a threat to financial stability everywhere, he added.

The challenge before financial sector regulators is to build a financial system that can withstand the shocks they anticipate and those they cannot yet foresee, said Mr. Malhotra laying down five key priorities policymakers must factor in when safeguarding financial stability.

"This requires resilient institutions, better data, deeper markets, credible safety nets, effective resolution mechanisms and regulation and supervision that is proactive and forward-looking while being proportionate," he said at an event here.

First, financial stability was about strengthening systemic resilience to face and contain amplification.

"Shocks may be endogenous or exogenous. Our aim must be to foster a financial system that can provide financial services in all States of the world, even under severe shocks," he said. **Second**, as a new generation of systemic



New context Sanjay Malhotra with ex-ECB President Jean-Claude Trichet, others at the 5th Kautilya Economic Conclave. PTI

risks were taking shape, assessing them and complex interactions was vital.

"The next financial crisis may begin with a geopolitical event, a cyberattack, or a technological failure and affect the financial system through multiple channels," he said.

Dependencies network

To boost systemic resilience, those responsible must aim to better understand the network of dependencies and contagion channels and make scenario analysis a cornerstone of risk management.

Third, monitoring and assessment frameworks must improve. "For that, we need better and more granular data. The financial system is turning increasingly complex but data on NBFIs, interconnected exposures,

technology dependencies and cross-border positions remain fragmented."

Fourth, he said, resilience must be system-wide. "A strong banking system is not sufficient. We need resilience across sectors and institutions: NBFIs, financial markets, payment systems, technology infrastructure, critical third parties and cross-border financial networks."

Fifth, he said, innovation must boost fragment, the foundations of trust.

"AI, tokenisation and new forms of financial intermediation can dramatically boost efficiency. But innovation will be sustainable only if financial system preserves the fundamental properties on which trust rests: sound institutions, settlement finality, singleness of money and financial integrity."

GS 2 AND 3: GOVERNANCE AND SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 1 & 2

BID TO ADDRESS CONCERNS ON OVERREACH BY TAX AUTHORITIES

Arrest powers under GST regime likely to be removed

GST Council to discuss issue on Oct 7, Govt may bring amendment in Winter Session

Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, October 3

MORE THAN nine years after its rollout in July 2017, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime is set to see a major overhaul — removal of arrest powers.

In a bid to boost investor sentiment and allay concerns about overreach by tax authorities, the upcoming GST Council meeting, on October 7, will take up the proposal to decriminalise offences under the indirect tax regime, two persons

aware of the development told *The Indian Express*.

The Centre and the states are learnt to have held several meetings over the last eight-nine months, including involvement at the top levels of the Union government, to reach a broad consensus on removal of the arrest provisions under GST, which were being seen as a major impediment

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

E. EXPLAINED

Throwback to VAT
If the power to arrest is removed, the GST regime, in a way, will be similar to the Value Added Tax regime that existed before the rollout of the indirect tax regime in July 2017 and did not have any provisions for arrest.

Arrest powers under GST likely to be removed

for traders and businesses. The move is viewed as an attempt to address concerns of high-ranking functionaries were made in recent times under the GST provisions that were termed by industry leaders as an overreach.

For intentional frauds and deceit under GST, the authorities will proceed with prosecution and arrests will be through the country's criminal code, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, a source said.

"The consultations had been going on since the last eight-nine months. The feedback from businesses about the arrests has been taken into account to move ahead with this discussion. The GST Council will take up the matter and the final decision will be taken after that, following which there will be legislative changes to allow removal of arrest provisions under GST laws," said a source.

After the rollout of GST in July 2017, authorities have grappled with multiple instances of frauds, involving broadly similar modus operandi. Typically, such cases involve fake identities or mule accounts to undertake fraudulent GST transactions in a bid to avail input tax credit, or fake bills without actual supply of goods. Many suppliers also undervalue their final goods and show purchase of raw materials at lower rates. Or, they supply taxable goods and services without due payment of GST to the central and state governments.

In 72,393 cases of GST offences from 2021-22 to 2024-25, 887 arrests were made by central GST formations. The arrests by state authorities will be in addition to this number.

Under the Central GST Act, non-compliance can result in penalty under Section 122, in-

• GST evasion including input tax credit frauds

Period	Cases	Detection (In Rs crore)	Recovery (In Rs crore)	Arrests
2021-22	12,574	73,238	25,157	342
2022-23	15,562	1,31,613	33,226	190
2023-24	20,582	2,30,332	31,758	223
2024-25 (up to Dec 24)	23,675	1,88,415	20,128	132
Total	72,393	6,23,598	1,10,269	887

*FRAUD DETECTED BY CENTRAL GST FORMATIONS *EVASION FIGURES INCLUDE FIGURES OF ITC FRAUD CASES; SOURCE: LOK SABHA

terest under Section 50, and recovery of tax. However, violations involving deliberate intent to evade tax attract arrest and prosecution under the criminal provisions of the CGST Act.

Section 69 of the CGST Act provides for the power to arrest after approval by the Commissioner. Sub-section (1) provides that where the Commissioner has "reasons to believe" that a person has committed any offence related to fake invoices, fraudulent availing of input tax credit, he may, by order, authorise any officer of central tax to arrest such person. The "reasons to believe" have to be backed by credible material and evidence, and mere suspicion is not sufficient, with all the reasons required to be recorded in writing.

According to sources, after the GST Council discusses the issue at its upcoming 57th meeting slated on Wednesday, the Centre is expected to bring in an amendment in the Winter Session of Parliament to enable the removal of arrest powers.

Industry experts said arrests had become a harassment tool, especially in the services sector, including banking and insurance, and would often be deployed as a bargaining tool for

businesses to pay penalty in order to avoid prolonged legal battles. An official said the removal of arrest powers would be a taxpayer-friendly measure and remove any perceptions of fear and harassment.

The concern about arrest powers under GST laws is not new. It was flagged by several states in the early meetings of the GST Council, even before the 2017 rollout of the indirect tax regime.

In the fifth GST Council meeting held in December 2016, the Maharashtra Additional Chief Secretary had observed that the power of arrest and confiscation was not in tune with the concept of ease of doing business, according to the minutes of the meeting. A minister from West Bengal had said that under VAT law, there was no power of arrest and that First Information Report (FIR) could be lodged only with the police, and it may not be prudent to give such powers to the tax authority.

The Commissioner, GST Council, had said that under GST, the provision of arrest was highly restricted and the power could be exercised only where combined evasion of duty was Rs 2 crore or more and where offence was very severe, where supplies were made

without any invoice; invoice was made without any supply; tax collected but not paid to the government; tax collected in contravention of provisions of the GST Act but not paid to the government; and taking input tax credit without receiving goods and services.

An official document from the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) stated that in the administration of taxation, the provisions for arrests are created to tackle the situations created by some unscrupulous tax evaders.

"To some, these may appear very harsh, but these are necessary for efficient tax administration and also act as a deterrent and instill a sense of discipline. The provisions for arrests under GST law have sufficient inbuilt safeguards to ensure that these are used only under authorisation from the Commissioner. Besides this, the GST law also stipulates that arrests can be made only in those cases where the person is involved in offences specified for the purposes of arrest and the tax amount involved in such offence is more than the specified limit," it said.

The government has been moving towards decriminalisation of offences on the direct tax side as well. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) had, in September, removed arrest and detention provisions from the tax recovery rules with retrospective effect from April 1, 2026, barring tax officials from undertaking arrest in case of tax default. In a notification dated September 17, the CBDT had brought in Income-Tax (Fourth Amendment) Rules, 2026, which also removes "arrest and detention" from the tax recovery rules in case of death of the defaulter.

GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 12

THE GOVERNMENT, SEEKING TO DIRECT HOW PEOPLE USE THE TECHNOLOGY, HAS RESPONDED BY IMPOSING NEW REGULATIONS AND JUDICIAL GUIDELINES ON ITS USE — AND MISUSE

China wants its citizens to embrace AI, but fears they depend on it too much

Yan Zhuang
October 3

AS CHINA'S government pushes its citizens to embrace artificial intelligence, it is confronting a problem partly of its own making: overreliance on the technology.

State media reports have featured stories that serve as cautionary tales: a farmer who lost 25 acres of seedlings after asking an AI for advice, children who have become so attached to chatbots that they want their parents to speak like them and AI-generated microdramas with characters that look like carbon copies of one another.

These cases and others have

raised concerns in China that as it rushes to catch up with the United States in AI, it is running into adverse side effects created by the new technology, which is accused of undermining human relationships and depriving people of their better judgment.

The government, seeking to direct how people use technology, has responded by imposing regulations and judicial guidelines on its use — and misuse.

The response reflects how the ruling Communist Party is trying to balance its ambitions to promote the widespread use of AI with a desire to avoid anything that might undermine social order, say analysts.

The party is "recognizing

that the more they develop the technology, the more there's going to be social challenges that they have to deal with," said Scott Singer, a fellow and co-director of the China AI Initiative at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Where the party is sensitive is any area where they feel like the technology is getting better in a way that fundamentally could disrupt social stability."

Singer said the party is particularly sensitive to disruptions caused not only to human relationships but also to the job market as AI threatens to replace workers.

Concerns about overuse are shared among China's citizens,



People at World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai. Reuters

who say they see the spread of the technology as inevitable even as they question its benefits and tire of its ubiquity.

Xie Tong, a graphic designer in Beijing, uses AI in her own work at a consulting agency and can no longer imagine her life

without it. But she despairs at countering AI all around her — in the subway ads that she sees on her commute and in the work of contractors at her job who obviously relied on AI.

"It's like a marriage where you curse your partner but you can't leave them," she said.

For a time, China's AI push created a boom in virtual companion apps, including ones offering romantic partners, personal tutors and AI avatars of family members.

In a country already struggling with a shrinking population and a historically low birthrate, the proliferation has led to concerns from Beijing about AI replacing human rela-

tionships. State media quoted experts saying people could soon find it hard to navigate real interactions. Reports cited a 2025 survey by the China Youth and Children Research Center of more than 8,500 minors that showed more than 20 percent "only wanted to chat with AI and did not want to talk with real people."

That mirrored the concerns of some parents like Vivian Lyu, a stay-at-home mother in Hangzhou who two years ago introduced her 5-year-old daughter, Polly, to Doubao, an AI assistant created by ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok.

Soon, the child was chatting with the A.I. and a personalized

companion on the app nearly every day. At first, Ms. Lyu thought the AI was good at keeping Polly entertained when the mother had to take care of household tasks. "When you feel like you don't have a choice, you use Doubao," she said.

In July, the government imposed limits on A.I. companions that require platforms to step in if users exhibited unhealthy dependencies. Under the new rules, platforms must intervene if users show signs of self-harm.

The rules also banned virtual relationships between chatbots and minors, which forced ByteDance to shut down the feature on Doubao that allowed users to create companions.

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