

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

05-10-2026

GS 1: ART AND CULTURE THE HINDU PAGE: 03

Activists worry coal mine near Ramappa Temple may harm heritage site and lake

P. Laxma Reddy
HYDERABAD

Heritage activists, including the Kakatiya Heritage Trust (KHT), are demanding the withdrawal of the proposed PVNR opencast coal mine at Venkatapur in Mulugu district of Telangana, contending that the project could pose a long-term threat to the UNESCO-inscribed Kakatiya Rudreshwara Temple, popularly known as Ramappa Temple, and the adjacent Ramappa Lake.

To mount pressure on the State government, they are planning to mobilise people from 15 villages and organise mass protests after the Dasara festival, against the proposed mine.



Old glory: UNESCO-inscribed Rudreshwara Temple, aka Ramappa Temple, was built by the Kakatiyas in the 13th century. NAGARA GOPAL

As part of the campaign, a delegation met Union Coal and Mines Minister G. Kishan Reddy in Hyderabad on Saturday and urged him to intervene and stop the proposed project. They said the Singareni Collieries Company Ltd. (SCCL)

was reportedly gearing up to take up the project despite concerns raised by conservationists.

Quoting technical observations, former Professor of NIT-Warangal M. Pandu Ranga Rao said the proposed mine would be lo-

cated about 5 km downstream of the lake and temple and involve excavation to a depth of about 300 metres. He said that a Geological Survey of India report contended that the water level in the lake could influence groundwater movement through geological lineaments and faults towards the proposed mine.

Mr. Rao further pointed to the sand-box foundation of the nearly 800-year-old Ramappa Temple and said interconnected lineaments passing through the lake and temple area could potentially affect the foundation through piping. "The temple is already showing signs of distress," the KHT representative added.

GS 3: ECONOMY

THE HINDU PAGE: 05

Next-Gen GST and India's next phase of growth

India's ambition to become a Viksit Bharat requires an economy in which enterprises of every size can grow, wherever they begin.

Over the past 12 years, our government has worked to create those conditions. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 established a common national framework for indirect taxation.

Next-Gen GST carries that effort forward, drawing on nine years of implementation and the experience of taxpayers and States.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, Next-Gen GST was conceived with two connected purposes: to reduce and rationalise rates, and to make compliance easier. The rate changes took effect on September 22, 2025. The next phase of process reforms will come before the GST Council shortly.

Together, these efforts seek to give households relief, businesses greater certainty and taxpayers a system in which they can fulfil their obligations without avoidable difficulty.

The States have been partners throughout. They brought their priorities and experience to the Council, helped shape the decisions and undertook their implementation. I thank them for that commitment. GST's progress rests on this willingness to pursue a shared national purpose while



Nirmala Sitharaman
Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs

respecting each government's responsibilities.

The results provide grounds for confidence. Between October 2025 and July 2026, the value of reported taxable supplies grew by 25.8% over the corresponding period a year earlier.

A lighter rate structure has been accompanied by a substantial expansion in reported economic activity. This is an encouraging foundation for a reform intended to support both enterprise and public finances.

That resilience is visible in the latest revenue figures. Gross GST collections reached ₹12.46 lakh crore during the April-September 2026 period, up 11.6% over the corresponding period last year. Every month from June through September recorded double-digit annual growth; together, collections for these four months accelerated by nearly 15%. Net collections, after refunds, also grew by 10.4% over the half-year.

Taxpayer relief has coexisted with growth in the resources available for development.

The breadth of the expansion matters as much as its scale. Reported taxable supplies grew across all 11 sector groups and all major States.

In an economy as diverse as India's, this spread is significant. Growth across sectors and regions creates opportunities for more businesses to participate in expanding markets, and for more communities to benefit from

the demand, investment and employment that follow.

Reported sales to consumers (B2C) also rose by 26.7% in the post-reform comparison. When tax relief is reflected in prices, families have more room to meet other needs or save. Consumer relief and enterprise growth are closely connected: the purchasing power of households sustains demand for the goods and services that businesses provide. The benefits can extend from the household to the retailer, the supplier and the producer.

For small and medium enterprises, a national market is valuable when it opens a practical route to customers beyond their immediate surroundings. Businesses in Tier-2 and Tier-3 towns should be able to build those relationships while continuing to invest and employ people locally. Enterprises expanding into these towns, in turn, can create opportunities for local suppliers and distributors. GST's common framework supports these connections; simpler administration must make them easier to sustain.

Participation in that framework is substantial. GST registrations across Central and State jurisdictions stood at approximately 1.71 crore at the end of August, up nearly 15% from a year ago. For the April-July 2026 tax periods, GSTR-3B returns filed by their due dates were 12.6% higher than for the same periods last year. These improvements

place a corresponding responsibility on the administration: regular compliance must be supported by reliable service, clear guidance and timely resolution of difficulties.

The functioning of input tax credit is another important part of this experience. The post-reform figures show that the share of tax liability discharged through credits rose, while accumulated credit declined relative to taxable supplies. This is encouraging for businesses that depend on the effective use of eligible credit. For a smaller firm, working capital determines how readily it can purchase inputs, fulfil an order and take on the next one.

Refunds are equally relevant. Approximately ₹1.80 lakh crore was refunded during April-September. Returning amounts due to businesses is part of a well-functioning tax system. Greater predictability in this process would help enterprises plan purchases and production with more confidence. The taxpayer's experience of receiving an eligible refund is an important measure of administrative performance.

The States also have a stronger revenue position. Their aggregate SGST receipts, including their share of IGST settlements, grew by about 16% during April-September this year. These resources support investment in infrastructure and public services, which improve the conditions in which families and enterprises pursue their

aspirations. The gains can therefore reinforce one another: household relief supports demand, enterprise strengthens economic activity, and public revenues help sustain development.

The experience also points to the work ahead. A growing system must remain attentive to the costs it imposes on smaller participants. Their time and resources are limited. Each improvement in filing, credit or refunds should allow more of those resources to be devoted to running and expanding a business.

The proposals before the Council on October 7 have been developed through sustained work with the States. They address registration, returns, refunds, disputes and improved flow of input tax credit, with the aim of reducing the time and cost of compliance. Taxpayer experience must continue to guide implementation.

GST's growing maturity gives us a stronger foundation for the next stage of reform. The same commitment to clarity, certainty and respect for the taxpayer guides our work on direct taxes. A dependable tax system enables enterprises to plan beyond their immediate obligations and invest in opportunities that take time to mature. Giving them that confidence, wherever they operate, helps build the economic strength of a Viksit Bharat as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The taxpayer's experience of receiving an eligible refund is an important measure of administrative performance

GS 2: HEALTH

THE HINDU PAGE: 06

Mismatch in data on rabies deaths poses major challenge

Health Ministry's surveillance programme reported 50 deaths in 2023, while Registrar-General recorded 271 fatalities the same year; however, ICMR study says 5,726 people die of rabies annually

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

In 2025, India recorded 55 deaths by malaria, 131 deaths by dengue, and 27 deaths by kala-azar (black fever), according to data from the Union Health Ministry.

However, there is no single comparable and comprehensive national measure of its annual human rabies mortality, even as the country looks to eliminate dog-mediated human rabies by the year 2030.

A community-based study led by researchers from the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Epidemiology (ICMR-NIE) and published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* recently estimated that 5,726 people die of rabies in India every year.

The Health Ministry's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme-Integrated Health Information Platform (IDSP-IHIP) system reported 21 deaths by rabies in 2022, 50 in 2023, and 54 in 2024.

The Registrar-General of India's Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD) system recorded



On a mission: India plans to eliminate dog-mediated human rabies by the year 2030. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

66 medically certified rabies deaths in 2022, and 271 in 2023. The MCCD system, however, covers only medically certified deaths and does not capture all registered deaths.

These figures are not directly comparable – the IDSP-IHIP is a disease surveillance system, while the MCCD captures medically certified causes through civil registration.

At the national level, the MCCD covered 22.3% of registered deaths in 2022, and 22.0% in 2023. Neither system provides a complete national count.

For its study, the ICMR surveyed 337,808 people in 78,807 households

across 60 districts in 15 States and estimated that India sees about 9.1 million animal bites every year, including about 5.6 million dog bites.

The researchers used the community survey, laboratory data, and a probability decision-tree model to estimate the number of people who progress from an animal bite to rabies and die. The 5,726 figure is therefore a modelled estimate of annual deaths, and not a count of deaths recorded in hospitals or by government surveillance.

The difference between the two datasets is substantial. The 54 deaths report-

ed through government surveillance in 2024 is less than 1% of the study's estimated annual toll of 5,726.

"The two figures, however, are generated through different methods and should not be treated as directly equivalent," a senior Health Ministry official said.

Hurdle in eradication

"Lack of consolidated data is a challenge in rabies eradication. Very often cases and deaths occur in areas of the country where they are not measurable," Nirimal Kumar Ganguly, medical scientist, and former ICMR chief, told *The Hindu*.

The Health Ministry has also acknowledged the challenges in surveillance and data collection, especially when deaths occur outside the formal health system.

Globally, rabies causes an estimated 59,000 human deaths every year. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that India accounts for 35% of rabies deaths globally, underlining the country's significant contribution to the global burden.

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

The ECI's constitutional mandate is under strain

Never before has the Election Commission of India (ECI) been subjected to such public opprobrium as it is witnessing today. This constitutional body has always enjoyed the admiration of people both within and outside the country. Indeed, the reputation of India's ECI has been global, because of its competence, impartiality and unwavering commitment to democratic norms. But today, its reputation is in the mud because of its actions in recent times, which smack of illegality, partisanship and worse. The manner in which it has carried out the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in various States shows an utter disregard for the law and a disdain for procedural correctness and constitutional propriety.

Electoral fears

The debate in the Constituent Assembly on the Election Commission (Draft Article 289) throws light on the thinking of its members about the functioning of this constitutional body. There was, in fact, unanimity among the members, including the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, that the ECI should be outside the control of the executive. Dr. Ambedkar was quite emphatic on this point. He said, "So far as the fundamental question is concerned that the election machinery should be outside the control of the executive government there has been no dispute."

The members were conscious of the danger of an election commission being under the control of the government, which would undermine the integrity of the election. In fact, the proposal in the Draft Constitution was for a decentralised election machinery under which each province would have a chief election commissioner who would oversee the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to the State legislatures. Elections to Parliament, as well as to the offices of the President and the Vice-President of India, would be conducted by a chief election commissioner at the Centre.

This proposal was rejected by Dr. Ambedkar himself, who moved an entirely different Article proposing to centralise the election machinery. The reason for rejecting the proposal and deciding to centralise the election machinery was that there had been instances in the provinces of large-scale deletion of voters regarded as opponents of the ruling party by the Chief Election Commissioners (CEC) of the States. These Commissioners were mostly political nominees of the Chief Ministers.

A new Article was therefore introduced, providing for a central Election Commission consisting of the CEC and other Election Commissioners (EC), with the responsibility of preparing electoral rolls and conducting elections to Parliament, State legislatures and the offices of the President and the Vice-President. It is an irony that, almost 80 years later, the same



P.D.T. Achary
Former Secretary
General, Lok Sabha

complaints against the CEC – of large-scale deletion of voters from electoral rolls without strict adherence to the law – have come up. The greater irony is that the ECs themselves have voiced complaints about the "illegal and unconstitutional" acts of the CEC.

It is interesting to note that senior members of the Constituent Assembly, such as Shibban Lal Saxena, had expressed the fear that a party in power in the future might appoint a staunch party loyalist as the CEC, who could manipulate the election machinery in favour of the ruling party. To avoid this, his suggestion was that any person appointed by the President should have to be approved by Parliament by a two-thirds majority, along the lines of the United States Senate's confirmation of senior-level appointments.

The point is that the Constitution-makers could foresee the danger of a CEC acting in the interests of the ruling party and thereby subverting the entire constitutional scheme governing elections. It now appears that their fears were not unfounded.

An uncertain legal foundation

The SIR that has stirred up the present controversy is, in fact, not backed by any clear legal provision. Section 21 of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950, provides for the preparation and revision of electoral rolls. It states: "The electoral roll for each constituency shall be prepared in the prescribed manner by reference to the qualifying date and shall come into force immediately upon its final publication in accordance with the rules made under this Act" [Section 21(1)].

"The said electoral roll shall ... be revised in the prescribed manner by reference to the qualifying date – (a) before each general election to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly of a State; (b) before each by election; and (c) shall be revised in any year in the prescribed manner by reference to the qualifying date if such revision has been directed by the Election Commission" [Section 21(2)]. Under Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, a revision under Section 21(2) may be either intensive or summary, or partly intensive and partly summary.

There is yet another category of revision in Section 21(3), which says: "Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (2), the Election Commission may at any time, for reasons to be recorded, direct a special revision of the electoral roll for any constituency or part of a constituency in such manner as it may think fit." The words "any constituency or a part of a constituency" make it abundantly clear that this special revision is meant to be done only in a limited number of constituencies where special circumstances exist. Thus, intensive revision and special revision are two different types of revision under different circumstances. The above

provisions make it clear that there is no mention in the law of a special intensive revision. How, then, could the ECI conduct a revision that is not provided for in law? Article 324 does not empower the ECI to do things against the law.

Under this Article, the ECI can exercise powers in respect of matters that are not covered by statute. Otherwise it is bound to act in accordance with the law.

The cost of unilateralism

According to media reports, 13 crore Indian voters have already been removed from the electoral rolls across the country as a result of the SIR operations. Perhaps this is the biggest disenfranchisement exercise ever undertaken in any democratic country in the world. This exercise, needless to say, violates Article 326, which provides for universal adult suffrage and the right of eligible citizens to be registered as voters, subject to disqualification under law. The scheme of Article 326 is to include eligible voters, not to exclude them. But the objective of the SIR seems to be to exclude the maximum possible number of voters from the electoral rolls.

This huge mess has been created by the now obvious unilateralism that prevails in decision-making within the ECI. The appalling state of affairs in the domain of decision-making has been brought to light by the two ECs; according to them, they were not kept in the loop when crucial decisions were taken by the CEC.

The ECI is a constitutional body, and the procedure for decision-making is well laid in the law. A decision taken unilaterally by the CEC is not a valid decision, and all actions that follow from it have no legal validity. This creates a real constitutional crisis.

Opposition parties are preparing to move an impeachment motion against the CEC for serious misconduct. The CEC can be impeached in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court of India. For the CEC to be removed, however, misbehaviour must be proved. The law also empowers the presiding officers of the two Houses of Parliament to disallow an impeachment motion at the threshold.

This provision could frustrate any attempt by Opposition Members of Parliament to initiate proceedings against either a judge or the CEC.

Further, Section 16 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, further fortifies the CEC and other ECs by providing lifelong immunity from any civil or criminal liability. It may be noted that even the President of India does not enjoy such lifelong immunity. Such is the level of protection provided to the CEC and the other ECs. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Constitution, the law and citizens appear to have become helpless before an omnipotent ECI.

The Election Commission of India's conduct raises serious questions about legality, accountability and constitutional propriety

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

Does a visa guarantee entry into India?

Why was Turkmenistan citizen denied entry? What grounds did she cite in challenging the denial? What did the Centre argue about a foreigner's right to enter? Why did the court reject her Article 14 argument? What does the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 say? What have the Supreme Court's earlier rulings said?

EXPLAINER

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

The Delhi High Court has held that possession of a valid visa does not give a foreign national an inherent or legally enforceable right to enter India.

Justice Amit Mahajan was hearing a petition filed by a Turkmenistan citizen who was stopped at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi despite holding a valid business visa. She had arrived in India on March 25 on the same flight as her husband, who was permitted to enter the country. But she had to return to Turkmenistan the same day.

The petitioner sought a written order explaining why she had been denied entry and also sought permission to enter India with her business visa. The court dismissed the petition on September 30, holding that there is no inherent or legally enforceable right of a foreign national to enter India.

What was the case about?

The petitioner argued that she had a valid passport and business visa issued by the Indian Embassy in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

She contended that she was denied entry without being given reasons, while her husband, who had travelled with her and held a visa of the same category, was allowed into India.

She therefore challenged the action on two grounds: first, that the authorities had not provided reasons for refusing her entry; and second, that allowing her husband to enter while denying her entry amounted to discriminatory treatment in violation of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.

The Centre, however, argued that a foreign national does not acquire an indefeasible right to enter India merely because a valid visa has been issued. According to the government, grant of a



GETTY IMAGES

visa and permission to enter India are two distinct matters and entry remains subject to the immigration law and the powers of the competent authorities.

The authorities also told the court that "adverse inputs" had been received concerning the petitioner and that the decision was taken in the interest of national security and public order. The court examined material placed by the government in a sealed cover.

The material referred to discrepancies in the petitioner's personal details, the absence of a business card or invitation letter, and the lack of details about the business or company with which she was associated. The court also noted her travel history on medical and business visas.

What did the court rule?

The court held that "there is no inherent or legally enforceable right of a foreign national to seek entry into India".

It noted that issuance of a visa, refusal of entry and immigration clearance are sovereign functions of the State, involving considerations such as national security, foreign policy and administrative discretion. The court drew a distinction between satisfying the requirements for

obtaining a visa and actually being admitted into the country. The court noted that "the statutory framework, therefore, does not treat the possession of a visa as creating an absolute and unconditional right of admission into India".

As for the Article 14 argument, the court said that the mere fact that the petitioner's husband was allowed to enter did not establish that the two were similarly situated in all respects. The authorities had stated that "adverse inputs" specifically concerned the petitioner.

Thus, the court held that since the petitioner could not establish infringement of a legally enforceable right, there was no basis for issuing a writ under Article 226. The petition was dismissed.

What is the law behind this?

The key legislation in the judgment is the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, which now governs the legal framework concerning foreigners in India.

Section 3 of the 2025 Act requires a foreigner seeking to enter India to possess a valid passport or travel document and a valid visa.

However, no foreigner shall be allowed to enter into or stay in India if he is found inadmissible to do so on account of a threat to national security, sovereignty and integrity of India, relations with a foreign State or public health or on such other grounds.

Section 3 of the Foreigners Act, 1946 (now repealed) as well as Section 7 of the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 authorises the Central government to make provisions, either generally or with respect to all foreigners, for prohibiting, regulating or restricting the entry of foreigners into India or their departure therefrom. The respondent authorities can therefore, or rather are entitled to, take into consideration all the relevant factors that may warrant scrutiny.

An examination by the Immigration Officer of the passport, travel document and visa of a foreigner at the stage of entry empowers the Immigration Officer to require such information as may be necessary and appropriate. The statutory framework, therefore, does not treat the possession of a visa as creating an absolute and unconditional right of admission into India.

The judgment majorly relied on two Supreme Court decisions. In *Hans Muller of Nuremberg v Superintendent, Presidency Jail* (1955) the Supreme Court held that the Foreigners Act, 1946, gave the Central government broad discretion in relation to foreigners, including the power to expel them.

Later, in *Louis De Raedt v Union of India* (1991), the Supreme Court held that a foreigner's fundamental rights are confined to Article 21's protection of life and personal liberty. The right to reside and settle in India under Article 19(1)(e) is available only to citizens.

The court held that where the petitioner could not establish infringement of a legally enforceable right to enter India, there was no basis for issuing a writ directing the authorities to admit her.

THE GIST

The Delhi High Court holds that a valid visa does not give a foreign national an inherent or legally enforceable right to enter India, and that entry remains subject to immigration laws and the powers of competent authorities.

The court upholds the denial of entry to a Turkmenistan citizen despite her valid business visa, citing 'adverse inputs' concerning her and rejecting her claim that the decision was discriminatory because her husband was allowed to enter.

The judgment relies on the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, and earlier Supreme Court rulings to hold that the State has broad powers over the entry and presence of foreigners in India.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

Why are students across France blockading schools?

When did the protest begin? How has the government responded to the protest?

Nivedita S.

The story so far:

Across France, teenagers have been using trash cans and furniture to stage blockades (*blocus* in French) at the entrances of lycées or high schools in protest over poor conditions in schools. Over 5,000 people, mostly students, have been detained so far, including 1,949 people on October 1 alone.

When did the protest begin?

In mid-September, small protests began in lycées in the suburbs of Paris and spread rapidly across the country after word spread on social media. Lycées are upper secondary schools attended by students from the ages of 15 to 18. Out of the 3,700 lycées in the country, 1,027 have been affected, according to a release by the Interior Ministry. University students have also joined the protests, with blockades staged across 30 campuses.

The protests gained momentum and coincided with the larger public workers' protests over the planned budget cuts by the Emmanuel Macron government before the next year's presidential election. AFP reported that in the draft 2027 budget Bill, the government has planned to cut expenditure by €43 billion to reduce the deficit to 5%. Teachers, particularly from primary schools, and school staff have also joined the protest demanding better pay.

What are students protesting for?

Students are protesting over the poor condition of schools, dilapidated buildings, long hours, lack of teachers, overpacked classrooms, and schedules. Students complained of broken toilets and rodents on school premises. They have also been demanding equity funding, as schools in lower-income areas have been receiving considerably less funding compared to the higher-income areas.

Their main demands include more funds to be allocated for improving school infrastructure, reduced hours, and hiring more teachers.

France experienced one of the hottest summers this year, with heatwaves pushing temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius in several regions. This has been particularly grueling for students who are in classrooms with over 30 people, poor insulation, and no air conditioning for over nine hours a day. This has also been a major grievance that the students want to be addressed through the protest.

Student unions are calling for a national day of demonstrations on Tuesday.

How has the government responded to the protest?

Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu convened a crisis meeting on October 1 and cancelled Ministers' trips to manage the protests. The Prime Minister's Office warned of "urban violence" by

demonstrators and shifted online classes for many schools.

On September 30, around 85 police officers and gendarmes were injured in the clashes. Trash cans were set on fire, and projectiles were also thrown at schools by protesters. Two schools in Nantes and Le Havre were set on fire by the protesters, and a teacher was reportedly doused in petrol. Municipal tram lines were halted by the authorities. The riot police used less lethal crowd control measures like tear gas and rubber bullets, causing injuries to dozens of protesters, which have drawn criticism from the opposition.

Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez noted the escalation of the movement and said "troublemakers" were going to different schools to incite violence. He has asked the public to limit travel and deployed more security forces to maintain law and order.

The government, citing intelligence sources, has accused the far-left party La France Insoumise (LFI) of encouraging the protests and causing public disorder. LFI's presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon said that the party backs the "non-violent methods of struggle by the students" and accused the government of turning the issues raised by the students into a political battle.

Similar protests have also started in neighbouring Belgium, with authorities ordering schools to be closed in Liège on October 2, according to local media.

THE GIST

Students across France are blockading schools over poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, long hours, teacher shortages and inadequate funding, with the protests spreading from lycées to universities amid wider opposition to planned government spending cuts

The protests have escalated into clashes and violence, with thousands detained. The government has deployed additional security forces and warned of further unrest, while opposition parties have criticised the police response

GS 2 : HEALTH

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 13

Why India doesn't screen for its deadliest cancer



ANONNA DUTT

LUNG CANCER is the leading cause of cancer deaths in India. In 2024, it accounted for 10.9% of all cancer deaths, or 98,687 deaths — up from 75,031 in 2022, when it ranked fourth.

While lung cancer is one of the more difficult-to-treat types of the disease, another reason why it kills so many in India is that most patients reach hospitals in the late stages of the disease; by that time, the survival rate drops significantly. Yet, the government's screening programme at primary health centres looks only for the other common types: breast, oral and cervical.

Why is screening necessary?

Between 2022 and 2024, new lung cancer cases increased from 81,748, or 5.8% of all cancer cases, to 1.12 lakh, or 7.2%, taking it from fourth to third place in terms of incidence. Mortality, meanwhile, increased from 8.2% of all cancer deaths to 10.9%, shows the latest data from Global Cancer Observatory, a cancer statistics platform maintained by the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

This means there is a need to detect cases and provide treatment early, which is possible only if there is a screening programme for lung cancer.

But lung cancer is a disease that is not usually screened for — and has no easy way to screen for — it is usually diagnosed when it has already spread. "We have seen that 93% of all the lung cancer cases are diagnosed in advanced stages," Dr Abhishek Shankar, one of the authors of a "perspective" on lung cancer screening published by the IARC in September, told *The Indian Express*.

When diagnosed in late stages, the likelihood of surviving five years with lung

Low-dose CT scans: Highest cost, highest gain

LDCT (low-dose computed tomography)-based lung cancer screening can reduce the mortality from lung cancer by treating the disease at an early stage.

The likelihood of surviving five years with lung cancer can rise to 80% if the disease is detected in the first stage.

An Indian Council of Medical Research study comparing the outcomes of LDCT, chest X-rays, and no screening in a hypothetical high-risk population found that although LDCT incurred the highest cost, it also provided the highest net monetary benefit.

The study concluded that LDCT is a "cost-effective strategy" for lung cancer screening in India, and policymakers should "consider integrating LDCT into national cancer screening programs".



CT scan machines are not available at primary health centres.

Outside the net

Guidelines cover people with a history of smoking cigarettes, but there is no equivalent for India's large population of beedi-smokers.

A 2024 statement by researchers said these smokers should be added to the high-risk category.

The LDCT test, however, is not an inexpensive one — and is likely to add to the government's budget if introduced as a screening tool. But an Indian Council of Medical Research study comparing the outcomes of LDCT, chest X-rays, and no screening in a hypothetical high-risk population found that although LDCT incurred the highest cost, it also provided the highest net monetary benefit.

AVAILABILITY OF LDCT: The test would require patients to travel to a higher centre for a screening test without experiencing any symptom. Even at centres that do currently have CT machines, LDCT is usually offered only when the doctor suspects something.

POPULATION AT RISK: Unlike the West, a significant proportion of lung cancer in India occurs among non-smokers. Current global screening guidelines recommend that LDCT be performed only for people between the ages of 50 and 80 who have been smoking a pack of cigarettes a day for at least 20 years, but leave a large proportion of at-risk people in India out of the net. India also has a large population of beedi-

The increasing burden of lung cancer makes early detection crucial. But there are several challenges with introducing a screening programme

smokers and there is no equivalent screening criteria for them.

HIGH INCIDENCE OF TB: A concern often raised is whether the high prevalence of tuberculosis (TB) in India could lead to more false positives and excessive testing. But a pilot study from Mumbai published in 2021 said: "...even in a tuberculosis endemic country, LDCT picks up malignant lung nodules early and saves lives." Another 2025 study by AIIMS doctors also found that prevalence of TB posed no problem in lung cancer screening.

Who should be screened?

An expert opinion statement written by Indian researchers in 2024 said that people with a history of beedi smoking, exposure to second-hand smoke, biomass fuel, fumes, and domestic smoke should also be added to the high-risk category. Ambient air pollution may be an emerging threat.

"Screening cannot not rely only on smoking history when millions are exposed to air pollution and occupational risks. Through the Indian Lung Screening Trial, we are generating Indian evidence on low-dose CT screening, while AIRCARE (Air Pollution and Cancer Research Ecosystem) is studying the contribution of air pollution and other environmental exposures to lung-cancer risk," said Shankar.

What is the role of measures to curb smoking?

While a significant proportion of lung cancers in India may not be linked to smoking, smoking cessation is still a very effective way to reduce risk of lung cancer. "In lung cancer patients, smoking cessation can significantly improve treatment outcomes," said Shankar.

According to Shankar, changing the way we warn people about the risks associated with smoking may also help in ensuring more people receive timely care. "Instead of simply saying that smoking kills, if the cigarette packets, for example, say that if you are over the age of 60 years and have been smoking for 20, you should get screened for cancer. This way, the people have actionable knowledge about what they need to do."