EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

06-07-2026

1. Fiscal federalism, efficiency versus equity concerns(THE HINDU PAGE NO 8)

1. **GS II** (Polity & Governance) & **GS III** (Economy)
2. **Topics:** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States; Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Indian Economy (mobilization of resources).
3. **Concepts:** Fiscal federalism, Finance Commission, Tax devolution, Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs), cesses and surcharges.

Fiscal federalism, efficiency versus equity concerns

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The Finance Commission, an institutional innovation embedded in India's constitutional architecture, was never intended to be a routine allocator of funds. It was designed as a central pillar of India's fiscal federal compact and as a corrective institution that would mediate the inherent asymmetry between a fiscally dominant Union and structurally constrained States, while also addressing deep horizontal inequalities arising from history, geography, and institutional capacity. In a country marked by uneven development at Independence, the Commission's central mandate was to safeguard the interests of the States and thereby preserve a strong Union.

Each successive Commission, cognisant of its historical context, has interpreted this mandate in its own way, yet all have contributed to sustaining India's fiscal federal compact. The recently submitted report of the 16th Finance Commission (FC-16), chaired by Arvind Panagariya and covering the period 2026-31, marks a decisive turning point. While it retains the vertical devolution of central taxes to the States at 41%, it fundamentally re-engineers the structure of fiscal transfers, particularly grants-in-aid. In doing so, it prioritises efficiency and performance but raises serious concerns about equity and constitutional intent. At the heart of the issue lies a deeper question: has the Commission moved away from its equalising role toward one that implicitly protects the Union's fiscal primacy?

The constitutional logic of grants-in-aid

Evidently, the provision for grants-in-aid under Article 275 was not an afterthought; it was a foundational design element. In a country more diverse than any other in the world, tax devolution, however sophisticated its formula, cannot account for the diversity of State-specific needs. For instance, Kerala's "export-oriented" human capital development strategy has accounted for nearly 23% of India's total remittances, thereby strengthening the country's external sector. However, this has come at a cost to the State's fiscal health, as it has had to rely on borrowing to finance investments in education.

Similarly, Punjab has played a critical role in ensuring national food security, but at the cost of its revenue base, by focusing on the production of wheat and rice, which are non-taxable apart from paying the price of being a border State. The same is true of the hill States, which face high infrastructure costs; the north-eastern States, which grapple with connectivity constraints; and fiscally stressed States burdened by demographic pressures and social sector commitments.

Grants-in-aid were therefore conceived as instruments of equalisation, enabling targeted support for States with special needs where formula-based tax devolution falls short. The F-14 and the FC-15 recognised this reality by retaining Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs), sector-specific grants, and State-specific grants.

> The Sixteenth Finance Commission risks moving away from its core mandate of acting as an equalising force within the federation

The FC-16 departs sharply from this tradition. It recommends grants-in-aid of ₹9.47 lakh crore, compared with ₹10.1 lakh crore under the FC-15, while their share in total Finance Commission transfers has more than halved, from 19.4% to 8.3%. By restricting grants-in-aid to local bodies and disaster management, it eliminates RDGs, sector-specific grants, and State-specific grants.

While retaining the States' share in the divisible pool at 41%, despite the demand from 18 States to raise it to 50%, the Commission presumes that improved fiscal discipline should enable States to manage their finances without additional gap-filling transfers. However, this reasoning rests on a problematic assumption: that fiscal capacity across States is sufficiently uniform for devolution to be self-equalising.

Empirically and historically, this assumption is untenable. The Commission's justification for doing away with RDGs is rooted in concerns about fiscal prudence. It argues that RDGs create moral hazard by incentivising States to underperform in revenue mobilisation or overspend in the expectation of central support.

It also points to aggregate data suggesting that the States, taken as a whole, are not in severe fiscal distress. Yet, this aggregate view masks deep inter-State disparities, with some States remaining fiscally stressed despite contributing disproportionately to national development and continuing to require fiscal assistance. The very purpose of RDGs was to recognise this heterogeneity, as a fiscal surplus in one State cannot offset a fiscal deficit in another.

More troubling is the contrast between the Commission's stance on RDGs and its treatment of cesses and surcharges. While advocating fiscal discipline for States through the withdrawal of RDGs, it stops short of recommending any binding rollback of these non-shareable union levies ignoring the demand by many States.

Dual shift

Instead, it proposes a "grand bargain", whereby the Centre would gradually merge cesses into the divisible pool in exchange for States accepting a lower devolution share. This asymmetry is difficult to overlook. RDGs are removed in the name of discipline, yet cesses – arguably a more distortionary instrument from a federal perspective – are only gently nudged toward reform. The resulting framework imposes stringency on States while preserving fiscal flexibility for the Union. This dual shift, protecting Union revenues while constraining State support, raises a fundamental concern: is the Commission inadvertently reinforcing vertical imbalance rather than correcting it?

The consequences are particularly severe for States that already face structural disadvantages. As many as eight States, including most of the disadvantaged north-eastern States and fiscally stressed West Bengal, are set to experience a reduced share in both tax devolution and grants-in-aid, while another six States have seen a decline in their share of grants. The problem is further compounded by the reduction in the weight assigned to income distance (from 45% to 42.5%) and the introduction of a 10% weight for contribution to GDP. When combined with the removal of the RDGs, which accounted for about 20% of Finance Commission grants in 2024-25, this creates a double burden: lower tax devolution and the absence of compensatory grants. The Commission's implicit assumption that efficiency should trump equity risks widening regional disparities.

Another defining feature of the FC-16 is its emphasis on tied and performance-based grants, particularly for local governments. While the allocation of nearly ₹7.2 lakh crore to the third tier is commendable, the conditionalities attached to these grants are stringent, linking the release of funds to targets in water and sanitation, revenue mobilisation, and audited accounts. This approach promotes accountability, but it also reduces fiscal autonomy. In effect, the architecture of grants shifts from need-based equalisation to compliance-based incentivisation. Fiscal discipline, while necessary, cannot substitute for fiscal justice.

Efficiency versus equity

The FC-16's report is bold in ambition but uneven in balance. The dismantling of the RDGs and the shift toward performance-based transfers reflect a technocratic confidence in market-like incentives, even though fiscal federalism is a political and constitutional arrangement designed to manage diversity. The contrast between the Commission's strict stance on RDGs and its accommodative approach to cesses and surcharges, along with its hesitation to raise the States' share in the divisible pool to 50% despite demands from several States, reveals a deeper tension.

It suggests a framework that, intentionally or otherwise, protects the fiscal space of the Union while placing a greater adjustment burden on the States. In doing so, the Commission may have moved away from its core mandate of acting as an equalising force within the federation. If the Finance Commission is to continue playing its historic role in holding India together, future Commissions must reward high-performing States while supporting those that continue to face structural disadvantages.

For a country as diverse as India, fiscal federalism cannot be sustained on performance alone; it must be anchored in fairness.

The views expressed are personal

SanskritiIAS

2. A climate resilience pathway between India and China(THE HINDU PAGE NO 8)

1. **GS II** (International Relations) & **GS III** (Environment/Disaster Management)
2. **Topics:** India and its neighborhood-relations; Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Disaster and disaster management.
3. **Concepts:** Climate diplomacy, urban resilience, early warning systems, blended finance, Sister City agreements.

A climate resilience pathway between India and China

This year, El Niño delayed the monsoon in India. When the rains arrived, they were intense, with cities such as Mumbai and Surat receiving a month's rainfall in a matter of days. Regions in Assam and Odisha have experienced severe flooding, resulting in loss of life and damage to infrastructure. Similar conditions have recently affected large swathes of China's provinces, particularly Guangxi, Shaanxi and Gansu. Such extreme weather events are becoming increasingly common, threatening economic growth, food security, and public well-being in the two most populous countries.

In both cases, experts attribute these short, high-intensity bursts to climate change which is causing higher atmospheric temperatures and rapidly warming oceans. Mitigating and recovering from these frequent and large-scale events will become increasingly important for China and India to address. Given the scale of the challenge, could climate resilience become an opening for India-China cooperation?

Similar climate extremes

India and China confront remarkably similar challenges. Rapid urbanisation has replaced wetlands, forests, and permeable surfaces with concrete. Changing weather patterns, combined with outdated drainage systems, poor waste management, rapid urbanisation, and a lack of green spaces, have aggravated waterlogging and flooding. Coastal megacities face the combined risks of extreme precipitation, storm surges, and sea-level rise, while inland cities grapple with heatwaves, droughts, and flash floods occurring in quick succession. These challenges demand scientific collaboration, technological innovation, stronger local governance, and community participation. The costs of inaction include disrupted supply chains, economic losses, declining productivity, and mounting public health risks. This may be the right moment for renewed engagement between India and China. After years of strained ties, bilateral relations are showing tentative and slow signs of improvement.

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Shared climate challenges create opportunities for India-China cooperation

In April 2026, the visit by a Chinese delegation led by China's Special Envoy for Climate Change to New Delhi suggests that climate cooperation remains a priority. Within the area of climate and clean energy, identifying key issues for engagement is important. Collaboration in areas such as green technology and critical minerals remains challenging due to economic competition and geopolitical tensions. Disaster mitigation and urban resilience could offer a relatively low-risk pathway for rebuilding trust.

Past engagement, sister city agreements

A mapping of India and China's climate engagement in a recent paper by the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) shows that there is precedent for such engagement. Beginning from the early 1990s until 2020, there were several summit-level joint statements, agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) calling for practical cooperation on climate change. Topics included climate-induced disasters such as floods, earthquake, droughts and extreme weather events. These MoUs promised facilitation of joint research and development, hydrological, oceanic and seismic data sharing, and exchange of governance practices. During the six Strategic Economic Dialogues, policymakers discussed sustainable urban planning, waste management, sewage treatment, water efficiency and capacity building.

Practical implementation of joint projects in these areas was formally agreed upon in the multiple sister city agreements – Delhi-Beijing, Mumbai-Shanghai, and Chennai-Chongqing. Yet, disruptions in diplomatic engagement resulted in little on-ground action.

China demonstrates the importance of embedding resilience into core urban and rural planning investment decisions. This includes using data-driven approaches to drive policies in transport, housing and drainage systems. India's strength lies in adaptive governance, spearheading community-led strategies for targeted interventions in vulnerable populations.

Successes in India have been seen in early warning systems, heat action plans, cool roofs and nature-based solutions. There has to be engagement between state and non-state actors. Officials from municipal governments can enable knowledge and policy exchanges on urban design such as sponge cities, drainage modernisation and waste management.

Beyond urban issues, rural livelihoods and resilient agricultural practices for food security become salient points for mutual learning. Joint collaboration between planning agencies and academic institutions can improve systems for hydrological modelling and integrating regional and indigenous knowledge into climate adaptation strategies. A critical aspect will be addressing challenges of the melting glacial systems in the shared Himalayan ecosystem. While India and China had agreements on shared water resources, they ceased to function in 2022.

The finance gap

A major barrier to climate adaptation remains financing, with both countries relying heavily on public funds to carry out their policies. Bridging this gap requires greater private sector participation through tools such as blended finance, municipal bonds, and credit enhancement. However, these are nascent ecosystems, constrained by limited local capacity and regulatory gaps. Evidence-based studies and knowledge exchanges between India and China on these models could provide an innovative avenue for engagement. Such cooperation would not only benefit both countries but also enable them to shape climate resilience norms across the Global South through stronger standards, metrics, and fiscal frameworks.

Climate change impacts transcend national borders, from Europe's heatwaves to Asia's heavy monsoon floods. Greater coordination and cooperation could provide India and China with a pathway for a low-risk, win-win engagement.

The views expressed are personal

3. India's cancer focus must shift to early detection(THE HINDU PAGE NO 9)

1. **GS II** (Social Justice/Health) & **GS III** (Science & Tech)
2. **Topics:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health; Science and Technology-developments and their applications.
3. **Concepts:** Multi-Cancer Early Detection (MCED), preventive healthcare, implementation science, digital risk assessment.

India's cancer focus must shift to early detection

Every day, oncology clinics across India confront the same heartbreaking reality. More than 70% of patients present with advanced-stage cancer, when treatment is more complex, more expensive, and far less likely to achieve a cure. Over the past two decades, India has invested substantially in building world-class tertiary cancer centres and has expanded access to sophisticated surgery, radiation therapy, and systemic treatments. Yet these advances cannot deliver their full potential because most patients arrive too late.

The solution to this challenge lies upstream.

Cancer in India is still diagnosed predominantly after symptoms become severe enough to disrupt daily life. By then, opportunities for curative treatment have often been lost. The consequences extend far beyond health. More than three-quarters of cancer-affected households experience catastrophic healthcare expenditure. Late diagnosis is therefore not only a medical problem – it also drives poverty.

Moreover, five-year survival for lung cancer in India is only about 4%, compared with nearly 33% in Japan. Similar gaps exist across several common cancers, reflecting differences not merely in treatment quality but in the stage at which patients enter the healthcare system. A delayed diagnosis is thus a poor outcome on all fronts.

Need for fundamental change

The scale of the challenge continues to grow. India recorded an estimated 1.56 million new cancer cases and over 8,74,000 cancer deaths in 2024. The lifetime risk of developing cancer has now reached approximately 11% nationally and exceeds 20% in some northeastern States. As the population ages and lifestyles change, this burden will continue to rise unless our national strategy changes fundamentally.

Dr. Harit K. Chaturvedi

CEO & Clinical Head, Apollo Oncology Network

Cancer in India is still diagnosed predominantly after symptoms become severe enough to disrupt daily life. By then, opportunities for curative treatment have often been lost

The first step is to redefine prevention as a lifelong public health priority rather than as an occasional awareness campaign. Nearly half of all cancers are preventable. However, efforts to spread awareness among adults give poor results as lifestyle wiring happens at an early age. Once habits are coded, it is extremely difficult to course correct them through awareness campaigns. Health education must therefore begin in schools, where "life skills" should receive the same importance as other mainstream subjects such as mathematics or social sciences. These life skills would not only help in cancer prevention but also other major health issues such as cardiac, neurological, vascular, and bowel diseases. Such education would comprehensively cover all aspects related to physical, mental and social health, addictions, diet, vaccinations, financial literacy, and responsibilities towards the family, society, and nation.

The second step is the need to receive earlier diagnoses. Public awareness about the fact that persistent symptoms lasting more than three weeks deserve medical evaluation can substantially reduce diagnostic delays. However, symptom awareness alone is insufficient. Screening remains our most powerful tool for identifying cancer before symptoms appear. Until recently, organised screening was largely confined to cancers such as cervical, breast, and prostate cancer. Scientific advances are now expanding these possibilities. Blood-based Multi-Cancer Early Detection (MCED) tests have the potential to detect biological signals from multiple malignancies – including colorectal, lung, liver, pancreatic, ovarian, gastric, oesophageal, breast, prostate, and bladder cancers – through a single blood sample.

While these technologies still require careful evaluation for population-wide implementation, they represent one of the most promising frontiers in cancer research and deserve focused Indian validation.

Future plan for India

India must also develop solutions suited to its own healthcare realities. A single centralised screening programme cannot effectively serve a country of 1.4 billion people with enormous geographical and socioeconomic diversity. Instead, we need a layered model combining community health workers, digital risk assessment, AI, mobile diagnostic services, and strong referral pathways linking primary care with cancer centres.

Encouragingly, important foundations are already being laid. NITI Aayog is supporting the development of a large imaging biobank comprising more than 20,000 cancer patient profiles. Such datasets can accelerate the development of AI tools capable of assisting frontline healthcare workers in identifying suspicious lesions and prioritising patients who require specialist evaluation.

The Draft National Health Research Policy 2026 provides an opportunity to accelerate this transformation. By prioritising diseases that contribute the most to India's health burden and encouraging research with measurable impact, the policy signals a welcome shift from publication-driven research towards implementation science. This approach should encourage innovation in affordable screening technologies, risk prediction models, digital health platforms, and implementation research that improves cancer detection across India's diverse healthcare settings.

India should not measure progress in cancer care solely by the sophistication of treatments delivered during advanced stages. The true measure of success is how many cancers never reach an advanced stage. And that success will require coordinated partnerships between government agencies, medical colleges, technology companies, and community healthcare providers.

4. The road ahead for the Asiatic lion(THE HINDU PAGE NO 10)

1. **GS III** (Environment & Biodiversity)
2. **Topics:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.
3. **Concepts:** Landscape-level conservation, IUCN Red List, habitat corridors, anthropogenic mortality, disease outbreak management (CDV).

The road ahead for the Asiatic lion

Six decades of conservation have increased the Asiatic lion population from about 100-150 to over 1,000, with nearly half now living outside the protected area; however, the species remains confined to single forested landscape, while habitat fragmentation, disease threats continue to pose major conservation challenges

FULL CONTEXT

Meena Venkataraman

The only free-ranging population of the Asiatic lion today survives in and around the Gir National Park and Sanctuary. The semi-arid landscape of Gir extends into expansive agricultural fields and traditional grasslands, forming a checkered landscape matrix. Dispersing lions use these habitats as passages, stepping stones, and refuges as they navigate riverbeds and mountainous terrain, eventually establishing territories far from their source population.

Lions today occupy habitats as ecologically distinct as the rugged hills of Girnar, the forests of Mitiyala, the landscapes around Savarkundla-Liliya, and the sandy coastal tracts stretching across Saurashtra to the Bhavnagar coast. What is perhaps most remarkable is that, at their destinations, these lions are accommodated by the local people.

As is evident, the challenge of lion conservation in Gujarat rests not only on protecting Gir, but also on safeguarding the network of habitats and corridors through which lions disperse and establish new territories. Around 50 lions inhabit the coastal habitats of Jafrabad Taluka, linked to the larger lion population through Babarkot. Significantly, the Gujarat Forest Department's 2025 lion population estimation identifies this coastal sector as Satellite IV, one of nine recognised satellite lion populations in the State, while the Gir Management Plan explicitly designates the Babarkot area as a lion movement corridor. Together, these official documents recognise the area as both an important satellite habitat and a crucial landscape linkage for dispersing lions.

An Asiatic Lioness with four cubs at Gir Sanctuary on May 12, 2025. VIJAY SONEJI

A crucial corridor under pressure

It is against this backdrop that a recent proposal to divert approximately 75 hectares of reserved forest for limestone mining has generated concern. The apprehension is that such a move would run counter to the long-standing legal and management framework established to protect lion habitats and movement corridors. If mining were permitted, habitat disruption could functionally disconnect this coastal subpopulation from the larger forest-linked source population and displace lions from portions of their habitat.

The proposed project would reportedly require the felling of nearly 5,000 mature trees and affect a landscape that local communities themselves do not wish to see mined. Human-lion conflict could also intensify. The larger question is whether the prime habitat of a nationally treasured species, a landscape showcasing one of India's greatest conservation recoveries, should be sacrificed for private profit.

Over the six decades since the declaration of the Gir Sanctuary, the lion population has grown from about 100-150 individuals to a healthy population of over 1,000 today. More admirable, however, is the fact that nearly half of them now reside outside the designated protected area. Lions have, over the years, shown remarkable recovery, expansion and resilience, sustained by a resourceful habitat and a rich prey base.

The unfinished task

This success has been built through a transition from protected-area management to landscape-level conservation, supported by political will, capable administration, sustained funding and the goodwill of local communities. These have been the sturdy pillars of lion conservation.

However, the entire lion population remains confined to a single forested landscape. More puzzling has been the continued resistance to acknowledging the need for a second home for the lions. After years of downplaying the risk of disease in a geographically concentrated population, we received a jolt in 2018 when more than 20 lions succumbed to an outbreak of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV). The forest department responded with a series of immediate measures, but have we effectively applied the lessons learned from previous outbreaks?

Mortality is but a part of a natural demographic cycle. If we are to achieve long-term coexistence in shared spaces, we may even need to accommodate a degree of anthropogenic mortality. Yet the reports of lion deaths associated with babesiosis in May 2026, together with suggestions of possible CDV involvement, are worrying.

If disease exposes the vulnerability of the population, land-use decisions expose the vulnerability of the landscape that sustains it. These controversies raise a broader question: have the once-strong pillars of the State's conservation legacy begun to weaken? Are cracks emerging in the framework that has sustained lion conservation for decades? Historically, there was little room for negotiation where lions and their habitat were concerned. Indeed, Gir remains an important case study of how protected areas were progressively expanded around the original sanctuary. Hopefully, there will be no shift in the vision underpinning the law, its application, or administrative decision-making.

Next chapter of recovery

Given the species' continuing conservation challenges, any ill-advised decision could yet turn the clock back to a far more precarious situation. The International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List tells an encouraging story: the Asiatic lion has moved from Critically Endangered to Endangered. Among the northern lion subpopulations, it is the only stable population exceeding 250 individuals and is therefore of immense global conservation significance. At the same time, the newer Green Status assessments remind us that recovery and restoration are not the same thing.

A species can recover substantially and still remain far from fully restored across its ecological and historical range. Under the Green Status framework, the lion remains largely depleted. While the lion has recovered from the brink, it remains far from fully restored across the landscape it once occupied.

The story of the Asiatic lion is one of sustained recovery achieved through six decades of unwavering conservation effort, and of the responsibility that comes with safeguarding those gains. Our goal is not merely to celebrate this legacy, but to sustain it.

(Meena Venkatraman, PhD, is a wildlife biologist with over two decades of experience in mammalian ecology, with a particular focus on the Asiatic lion)

THE GIST

- Landscape-level conservation, backed by political will, capable administration, sustained funding and local community support, has been the foundation of the Asiatic lion's recovery.
- Protecting habitats and movement corridors, addressing disease risks and securing a second home for the species are critical to sustaining India's lion conservation legacy.

5. Why is the Indian Statistical Institute Bill controversial?(THE HINDU PAGE NO 10)

1. **GS II** (Polity & Governance)
2. **Topics:** Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.
3. **Concepts:** Institutions of National Importance, academic autonomy vs. state control, Societies Registration Act, governance models of higher education.

Why is the Indian Statistical Institute Bill controversial?

What changes does the Bill propose to the governance of the ISI?

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

The government has tabled a new Bill in Parliament, called the Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2026, which will replace its approximately 67-year-old predecessor enacted in 1959. While seemingly innocuous, several provisions of the Bill have become contentious, with many faculty members of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) and MPs protesting against it.

What is the ISI?

In the 1920s, India's greatest statistician P.C. Mahalanobis set up the Statistical Laboratory in the Presidency College in Kolkata. On December 17, 1931, he founded the Indian Statistical Institute as a "learned society" housed in the Statistical Laboratory. The Institute was registered on April 28, 1932, as a non-profit distributing learned society under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 and is now registered under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act of 1961, amended in 1964. The ISI quickly became India's premier statistical organisation. It was declared an Institution of National Importance through the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959.

What does the Bill seek to change?

At the most basic level, the new Bill seeks to bring ISI's governance structure on par with that of other Institutions of National Importance, such as the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) and the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs).

According to the government, in the IITs and IIMs, compact empowered bodies such as the Board of Governors and executives such as Directors take decisions impacting both the day-to-day functioning and long-term policies of the organisations. However, ISI continues to follow the governance model of a society, in which significant control is exercised by a large General Body of members of the society. A key outcome of this structure is that any amendment to the regulations can only be carried out with the approval of the General Body.

The government's contention is that since the regulations are prescriptive, even small reforms require the approval of the General Body.

Therefore, the new Bill is aimed at incorporating ISI into a statutory body corporate, strengthening its legal status and providing a "more robust and contemporary governance framework".

What will the governance model be?

The new Bill provides for the creation of a compact Board of Governors that will serve as the principal policy-making executive body of the ISI and will be accountable to the government. It also provides for the creation of an Academic Council as the principal academic body.

The Board of Governors will consist of 11 members. The Board will be headed by a Chairperson, who is supposed to be an eminent person "in the field of academia, industry, education, public policy, Statistical Sciences and allied sciences, or other fields" and will be nominated by the Visitor (the President of India) on the recommendation of the Centre.

The government will also nominate a government official not below the level of Joint Secretary to the Government of India. The government's representation will further include another joint secretary or additional secretary.

The Board will include four eminent persons in the field of statistical sciences and allied fields, to be nominated by the Chairperson, and four representatives of the Institute who will include two members of the Academic Council to be nominated by the Board.

The Registrar of ISI will serve as the Secretary of the Board.

What is the controversy around the governance structure?

Ever since the draft Bill was made public last year, professors and officials of ISI have been protesting it. One main contention is that the new governance structure would wrest control of ISI from the people working there and place it in the hands of the Union government. The new structure does give the government direct or indirect control of eight out of the 11 members of the Board of Governors.

Were stakeholders consulted?

The critics say that the Bill has been prepared without consultations with the ISI Society, faculty members, students, or other stakeholders.

The government has argued that as per the review framework in the existing ISI Act, four Review Committees (RCs) have examined the functioning and progress of ISI. The second, third and fourth RCs suggested the reduction in size of the ISI Council, the government said. Despite this, the size of the Council of ISI increased over this period and currently numbers 33 members.

The fourth RC also pointed to certain structural and legacy issues.

Following this, the government said a brainstorming session had been organised by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on July 2, 2025, in collaboration with the ISI at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research in Bengaluru under the Chairpersonship of Dr. K. Radhakrishnan, the current Chairman of the ISI Governing Council. The aim was to "deliberate on pathways that can transform ISI into a world-class centre of learning and research, as it completes 100 years in 2031".

The government said, as per the pre-legislative consultation policy, comments and suggestions from the public on the draft Bill were invited and the timelines were extended in line with the requests of various stakeholders.

6. Gen Z's parents have to answer for their politics which created this crisis(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 10)

1. **GS I** (Indian Society) & **GS II** (Governance/Polity) & **GS IV** (Ethics)
2. **Topics:** Salient features of Indian Society; Role of civil services in a democracy; Attitude and foundational values for Civil Service.
3. **Concepts:** Social movements, political instrumentalism, institutional accountability, politics of accommodation, ethical compromise in civil services.

Gen Z's parents have to answer for their politics which created this crisis

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE GEN Z protest shattered the government's illusions of invincibility. But the protests, which continue in a different form amongst students in Jharkhand, are not just a protest against a political dispensation or Narendra Modi. They are a protest against society itself, its current architecture and institutions, and all of us who have, in different ways, become complicit in them.

This might seem like a surprising claim. The core demands of the students are hardly radical: Most of them are not here to tear down capitalism. This is not 1968. The demands are ordinary: Institutional accountability, fairness in exams, quality of education, jobs. Under the surface, there are profound issues of unequal access, but these are not going to take the form of radical caste wars. Some students have, rightly, understood that their demands are even less likely to be met under conditions of creeping authoritarianism and communalism. They speak a resolutely constitutional language. The remedies they demand still reflect a faith in institutional process: Better appointments to UPSC, resignations of ministers. Why do these protests then feel like a more radical rebellion against society itself?

These protests are radical in different ways. The first is more psychological: It is a refusal to accept fear as a social norm. Some of that fear has been induced by the exacerbating authoritarianism of the Modi government. But behind it was a deeper social norm internalised in the generation of the students' parents. This was the idea of survival or flourishing required accommodation.

The generation shaped by economic liberalisation developed its own anti-protest sensibility. The memory of student mobilisation and street politics in the Seventies was often one of violence, dogmatism, and political instrumentalism, rather than any deep democratic renewal. A lot of that politics destroyed the very universities which we so yearn for.

Post-liberalisation, politics became privatised in a double sense: Some idealists invested their hope in technical work and policy reform rather than mass mobilisation. A more symbiotic relationship between civil society and the state would make this possible. Others came to regard a refusal of social movement as itself a progressive stance. Genuine change would come about by advancing to positions of power across a range of institutions, not by collective public action.

In cultural terms, the left-right distinction was not so much about the content of ideologies or demands: It was about the modality of political action. The fear of the imagined "Left" was not the actual influence of its ideas, but its perceived encouragement to movement politics. So "activism" always got designated as "Left." Prudent individual advancement would itself add up to social change over the long run. Millions of Indians concentrating on their careers would be a better recipe for India's progress than thousands on the streets. The cumulative effect would be greater.

The Gen Z revolt has shattered this illusion. It is hard to make a prudential argument for concentrating on your career when even the constitutive norms that made fair access to those careers possible have been eroded. The failing exam system is just that. But the underlying promise that there would be enough careers to be made has never been redeemed. The politics of accommodation is becoming unsustainable. Materially, it no longer offers a credible path to security or advancement to most. Morally, the complicity involved in acquiescing to the current system is growing. The acquiescence seems too suffocating. The Gen Z revolt is radical not because of its demands. It is radical because it is stating a blunt truth: The politics of accommodation is not an option, even on its own terms.

But a revolt against the politics of accommodation is the most intimate form of revolt, against the moral world of one's parents. The accommodation of the parents was not just out of cowardice. It has a tragic cast to it. They genuinely believed that avoiding entanglements in movements was a surer path to dignity and opportunity; they had seen enough ideological conflict. And curiously, the parents, in their opting for accommodation, were also victims of a melancholic realism: The only thing we could do was individually navigate the world, not remake it. But what they were supposed to assure us is that the minimum conditions for individual navigation would exist.

> By understandably directing their anger at the Modi government, the protestors are, in a sense, giving their parents a dignified way out

This is where the failure of the parents' generation runs deepest. By understandably directing their anger at the Modi government, the protestors are, in a sense, giving their parents a dignified way out. Politics undoubtedly shapes the architecture of society. But institutions are not hollowed out by governments alone. They decay because thousands of people, across hundreds of professions, cease to uphold the standards that give institutions their integrity.

The post-liberalisation generation believed that social change would come less through movements than through dispersed career choices. We would become professors, civil servants, judges, lawyers, accountants, IPS officers, journalists, entrepreneurs, economists, policy experts, media owners, and business leaders. These careers were imagined not merely as vehicles for private advancement but as bridges between private success and public obligation. The aspiration was not heroism. It was professionalism. If each profession faithfully discharged its ordinary responsibilities, society would gradually improve without the disruptions of collective political action.

This promise now lies in ruins. Politicians are the easiest targets. But the quieter question that echoes through the Gen Z protests is this. What became of the professions? Universities, courts, public service commissions, regulatory bodies, newsrooms, corporations, and the civil services were not hollowed out in a single moment or by a single party. They were weakened through innumerable small accommodations, evasions, compromises, and silences, the very ethic of accommodation that is posed as a counterpoint to revolt. Careerism shaded into complicity too quickly. These were accommodations made by the parents. Politics alone will not fix them. The parents identify with their children. But deep down they know they also have to answer for the politics of accommodation that created this crisis in the first place.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

7. Are India-US trade talks an exercise in futility?(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 10)

1. **GS II** (International Relations) & **GS III** (Economy)
2. **Topics:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian Economy (trade).
3. **Concepts:** Trade protectionism, tariff barriers, comparative advantage, trade diversification.

Are India-US trade talks an exercise in futility?

MANOJ PANT

DEAR EDITOR

I disagree

Fortnightly column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

Far better to concentrate on other trade agreements like with the UK, EU and other countries. Trade policy must now focus on diversifying commodity trade away from the US

AN EDITORIAL ('Ahead of the big deal, strike a careful balance', IE, July 17) in this newspaper has argued that a deal with the US "will go a long way in reducing uncertainty... while expanding trade." But trade negotiations appear to be an exercise in futility. At one stage, Donald Trump insisted that India acknowledge a decisive US role in ending the Indo-Pak conflict, reportedly because such recognition would bolster his Nobel Peace Prize aspirations. A 50 per cent tariff was briefly imposed before being withdrawn, but not before employment-intensive sectors such as textiles and sports goods suffered heavy losses in the US market in 2025-26. More recently, Trump announced tariffs of 100 per cent on India's pharmaceutical exports from 2028, rising to 200 per cent the following year unless production shifts to the US. Such a move is unlikely to succeed because affordable Indian generics underpin healthcare for millions of American consumers.

If tariffs are so unilateral, what remains to be negotiated?

Look at Canada. Under Section 338 of the US Tariff Act of 1930, Trump has announced 50 per cent tariffs on some Canadian imports. While this may impact only about $20 billion of imports, there's no knowing what he will announce next. In a recent press conference, he felt tariffs were a cost Canada should pay for the smoke from the recent wildfire in Central Canada, which sent the AQI soaring in some central US cities for a few days. This is in addition to the 12.5 per cent tariffs for "unfair trade practices" like use of forced labour and the already existing 25 per cent tariff under Section 232. Then what is the relevance of the USMCA that Trump himself re-negotiated? Under the three laws and their sections (301, 232 and 338), all US imports are now covered. The Trump strategy on tariffs has changed, but the main message is the same: Tariffs will be a revenue-raising device with the long-term objective of encouraging manufacturing to shift to the US. Irrespective of what Congress feels, these three allow Trump to arbitrarily impose duties irrespective of any trade negotiation signed. Canada and the USMCA are a case in point. Only domestic inflation affects Trump's trade policy, not any agreement.

There is not much for India to do but go ahead with the pretence that the negotiation is based on each country's "comparative advantage". For Trump, this has no meaning. Recently the US said that India's UPI system, backed by the government, constitutes an " unfair advantage" to other payment systems. Who knows when this brings a 25 per cent tariff (like the Pix payment system did for Brazil). A negotiated agreement will mean nothing. Like Canada, India will have to bring in legislation (like in the case of forced labour) to show "sincerity of purpose". But there is no knowing when this stops, as other red flags like imports of Russian oil will spring up. Indian negotiators should proceed in good faith but expect little from a long-term point of view. Far better to concentrate on other trade agreements like with the UK, EU and other countries. Trade policy must focus on diversifying commodity trade away from the US. China has done so. India remains in the saddle as far as trade in services is concerned. Fortunately, this is not yet affected by Trump's "trade policy".

The writer is visiting professor, Shiv Nadar University

8. New FCRA bill is about control, not transparency. It must be opposed(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 11)

1. **GS II** (Polity & Governance)
2. **Topics:** Development processes and the development industry - the role of NGOs; Fundamental Rights; Government policies and interventions.
3. **Concepts:** Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, civil society autonomy, selective enforcement, Article 14, Article 25.

New FCRA bill is about control, not transparency. It must be opposed

THAROORTHINK

BY SHASHI THAROOR

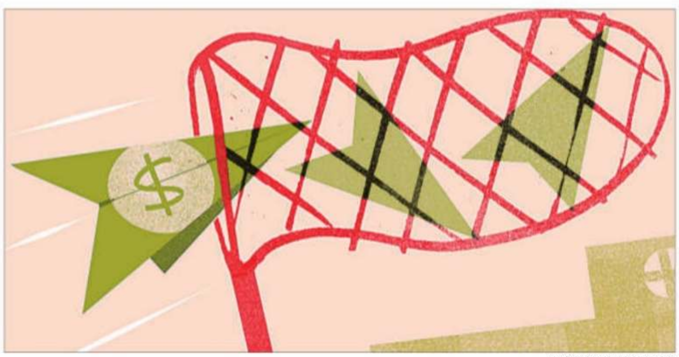

ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

THE FOREIGN Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, reintroduced in the Lok Sabha for adoption during the Monsoon Session following its sudden withdrawal in April, marks a dangerous escalation in the centralisation of executive power in India. In the name of enhanced transparency and regulatory oversight, the proposed legislation fundamentally rewrites the relationship between the Indian state and civil society. Driven by its majoritarian ideology and allergy to independent voices, the current government has increasingly reframed non-profit charities, think tanks and human rights groups not as development partners, but as sources of subversion and foreign manipulation. To neutralise these voices, the state has targeted their primary vulnerability: Dependence on international philanthropy.

Through aggressive enforcement and sweeping amendments to the FCRA, the government has already imposed complex compliance burdens, such as banning sub-granting to grassroots organisations, slashing allowable administrative outlays, and mandating a single bank branch in New Delhi for all foreign inflows. The resulting regulatory squeeze has triggered an 87 per cent drop in foreign funding, forcing thousands of secular and community-based organisations to shut down, while an impending legislative push to allow the state seizure of cancelled NGO assets threatens to permanently cripple the sector. For the nation's welfare network, and particularly for the long-standing Christian institutions that form the backbone of healthcare, higher education, and social care across states like Kerala, the provisions of this Bill do not merely represent administrative hurdles; they present an existential threat to institutional autonomy, property rights, and constitutional freedoms.

The Amendment introduces an unprecedented mechanism of control that bypasses traditional legal protections. The Bill establishes a central, bureaucratically appointed Designated Authority, empowered to take control of an organisation's foreign funds and physical properties. If an entity's FCRA license is suspended, cancelled, or denied renewal, its assets provisionally vest in this authority, granting the government the statutory right to seize, manage, and ultimately sell these properties while crediting the proceeds directly into the Consolidated Fund of India, even if an asset was only partly funded through foreign contributions. Furthermore, under newly proposed mechanics of "deemed cessation", if an organisation fails to submit its renewal application on time or if its renewal is rejected by the Home Ministry, its registration automatically ceases, immediately terminating its right to operate, utilise tied assets, or access remaining foreign funds. At the same time, the executive reserves the authority to dictate rigid timelines for the receipt and disbursement of funds, stripping charities of the financial flexibility required to manage long-term infrastructure projects, disaster reserves, or endowments.

To understand the human toll of these provisions, just examine their impact on regions with deeply-rooted institutional networks. As a Kerala MP, I have seen Christian-run charitable trusts, schools, hospitals and diagnostic centres, medical colleges, and welfare NGOs serving marginalised populations, regardless of caste or creed, for well over a century. These facilities rely on a mix of local contributions, domestic fees, and foreign grants to maintain world-class medical equipment, sponsor affordable care, and fund educational scholarships. By linking an administrative decision on an FCRA license directly to the physical confiscation of land and buildings, the Bill creates an environment of extreme instability. A single administrative delay or an adverse ruling by the Ministry of Home Affairs could instantaneously convert a functioning 500-bed charitable hospital into state property, disrupting essential public services and placing community assets under government control. The victims are the ordinary Indians who are the beneficiaries of these facilities.

> It is a profound injustice to subject institutions that have devoted generations to India's development, education, and healthcare to such punitive statutory mechanisms

If an institution's FCRA license is suspended or withdrawn under this proposed framework, its legal recourse is severely restricted, forcing non-profits into protracted and costly litigation through writ petitions under Article 226 in high courts or Article 32 in the Supreme Court. Constitutional challenges could rest on Article 300A regarding the right to property, as taking over legacy assets (created partly through foreign and partly through domestic funds) without fair compensation or stringent judicial safeguards constitutes arbitrary deprivation of property. Challenges may also arise under Article 14, given that the Bill mandates that law enforcement agencies must seek central government clearance prior to initiating investigations, risking selective enforcement that shields favoured entities while applying draconian measures against minority-run organisations. Furthermore, by choking the financial lifelines of these institutions, the administration circumvents core constitutional protections, specifically the rights to freely practice and propagate religion (Article 25) and acquire and manage denominational property (Article 26), without formally repealing them.

In practical terms, if a hospital's license is suspended, the trust must immediately seek an emergency stay order from the high court against physical eviction by the Designated Authority while simultaneously defending its registration before the Ministry of Home Affairs, a process that drains charitable resources away from patient care and education. It is a profound injustice to subject institutions that have devoted generations to India's development, education, and healthcare, to such punitive statutory mechanisms. The contributions of the Church and affiliated charitable organisations in India are documented in millions of lives uplifted, educated, and healed. To treat these developmental partners with institutional suspicion, and subject their physical assets to executive expropriation, undermines the principles of a constitutional democracy. This selective enforcement fundamentally violates the foundational liberal tenet that a democratic state must remain a neutral arbiter rather than an instrument of political engineering. The ruling party uses the cover of regulatory legality to assault liberal policies, transforming our humane, constitutional democracy into a rigid state structure of majoritarian control.

This Bill must therefore be resisted through every legal and democratic channel available, beginning on the floor of Parliament. When it comes up for discussion in the Lok Sabha, the Opposition must stand united in its resistance, demanding at an absolute minimum that the Bill be referred to a Select Committee for rigorous, clause-by-clause consideration, public consultation, and input from civil society stakeholders. India's democratic integrity and the survival of its independent social sector depend on ensuring that state regulation does not turn into executive overreach.

The writer is a fourth-term Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram

9. Look closely at source and purpose of foreign funding(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 11)

1. **GS II** (Polity & Governance) & **GS III** (Internal Security)
2. **Topics:** Role of NGOs; Challenges to internal security (non-state actors).
3. **Concepts:** Sovereign regulation of foreign funding, neo-liberal priorities vs. grassroots autonomy, national security, accountability of voluntary sector.

VINAY SAHASRABUDDHE

Look closely at source and purpose of foreign funding

THOMAS FRIEDMAN once said that "the world is flat". Globalisation has indeed created a level playing field for trade and industry. However, when forces try to make the world socially and culturally flat, it amounts to making it less beautiful. The globalisation of philanthropy illustrates this danger.

As Parliament prepares to debate amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), many civil society groups have criticised the proposed changes and levelled serious allegations against the government. But India's experience with foreign-funded activism, along with examples from other countries, offers enough reason to revisit the regulatory framework.

Over time, genuine voluntarism has given way to professionalised activism. Organisations once known for commitment, sacrifice and grassroots engagement increasingly adopted the NGO model, with access to large donor funding reshaping priorities. Some evolved into influential actors that sought to shape public policy, at times reflecting donor agendas more than local needs. The rapid expansion of foreign funding encouraged this shift.

The experience of other countries is instructive. In 1997, scholar James Petras, writing on Latin America, argued that foreign-funded NGOs had become adept at designing donor-driven projects while promoting the rhetoric of identity and globalism. He said that this fostered dependence on external funding, aligned organisations with neo-liberal priorities, and weakened genuinely autonomous grassroots movements.

Researchers in Africa have also pointed out that aid flows have created a vicious cycle of dependency that is proving hard to dismantle. There is also research in India showing that foreign aid does not have a significant impact on poverty alleviation. This is not to point fingers at every funder. There is no need to ban foreign funding. Tighter scrutiny is essential in the interest of the community, donors as well as recipients. Seen this way, the FCRA amendments are aimed at increasing the framework's transparency and making it risk-ready. They seek to bring administrative clarity, improve monitoring of the use of foreign contribution, enable the identification of inactive associations, fix accountability and ensure that foreign contribution is used only for the purpose it was provided.

> India's experience with foreign-funded activism, along with examples from other countries, offers enough reason to revisit the regulatory framework

These amendments will ensure that foreign money does not shape domestic political, social or ideological outcomes in ways that compromise national security and sovereignty. A Supreme Court judgment, in fact, upholds the State's invocation of sovereignty and national security to regulate foreign contribution. The relevant question is not the cost of compliance to an individual organisation but the source and purpose of foreign funding of activity within India. Besides, the regulatory framework proposed is as per international norms — sovereign states maintain comparable, and frequently stricter, controls over foreign funding of domestic non-governmental activity.

The proposed FCRA amendments are both faith-neutral and sector-neutral. They make no distinction between religious and secular organisations or among different faiths. While some groups have opposed the changes, most voluntary organisations — including hospitals, universities, research institutions and service bodies — have not objected. For organisations that use foreign funds transparently and for declared purposes, greater accountability poses no threat. Had the amendments genuinely endangered the voluntary sector, resistance would have been far broader. Beyond FCRA, the government should also address the excessive professionalisation of the sector. It needs to revive India's tradition of autonomous, community-driven voluntarism rooted in civilisational values.

The writer is president, The Asiatic Society of Mumbai and NEC member of the BJP

10. Cut, copy: Why books are being destroyed to feed AI(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 12)

1. **GS III** (Science & Tech / Intellectual Property) & **GS II** (Governance)
2. **Topics:** Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers; Issues relating to intellectual property rights.
3. **Concepts:** Large Language Models (LLMs) training data, Destructive vs. Non-destructive scanning, Copyright Act 1957 (Fair Dealing exception).

Cut, copy: Why books are being destroyed to feed AI

AI companies have long relied on online content. Now, to avoid copyright and get high-quality training data, they may be turning to books — and tearing them up

ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR

IN RECENT weeks, booksellers in Australia and Europe have raised concerns about unusual, bulk purchases of books amid reports that artificial intelligence (AI) companies are acquiring physical copies to train their datasets.

It is the manner of such training, however, that has caused alarm: unsealed documents in a copyright lawsuit against Anthropic revealed that the company was resorting to "destructive scanning", a process in which books are destroyed after their contents are scanned.

The Guardian reported recently that Australian booksellers had received requests for books ranging from rare and obscure titles to cheap paperbacks through intermediaries. *Fortune* reported a similar incident involving a Dutch bookseller.

In many cases, intermediaries source books in bulk from sellers before sending them for digitisation, making it difficult for sellers to know who the eventual buyer is.

The reports build on earlier findings about Anthropic's Project Panama. In January, *The Washington Post* reported that the company had bought millions of physical books, removed their bindings and scanned them to build a massive collection of high-quality training data for its models.

The new reports suggest that a practice once visible mainly through court filings and investigative reporting is now becoming visible further up the supply chain, with booksellers noticing unusual demand.

Why books?

The terms AI and generative AI usually refer to a subset of artificial intelligence called large language models (LLMs). LLMs learn statistical patterns from enormous volumes of content and generate output based on the quality of data fed into them.

While the AI competition in recent times has largely centred on the race for computing power through chips, the push for physical books reflects a growing demand for another critical resource: high-quality training data.

For years, frontier AI companies have relied heavily on text scraped from the public internet. But as AI-generated content has proliferated online and copyright disputes have made large-scale web scraping increasingly contentious, companies have begun looking elsewhere for reliable, human-written material. Books offer long-form, edited text across a wide range of subjects, much of which is either unavailable or difficult to obtain in digital form.

ISBNdb, which markets book-sourcing services to AI companies, has argued that books published before the AI boom are particularly valuable because they are free of AI-generated content. As AI-generated text proliferates online, older books are increasingly seen as a source of cleaner training data.

Jannis Lennartz, Visiting Professor at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, argues in an essay titled *AI Is Eating the Book World* that the current debate over book digitisation began with Google Books, Google's effort to digitise millions of library books in the 2000s. The project sparked years of litigation over copyright and mass digitisation.

Lennartz argues that the current digitisation efforts by AI companies resemble Google Books in technique but differ in purpose. Instead of making books searchable or accessible online, the goal is to convert them into machine-readable training data for AI systems.

Destructive scanning

Many books are unavailable as clean digital files, while publishers often control access to commercial ebooks. Physical copies therefore remain one of the simplest ways to obtain large volumes of text for digitisation.

The present controversy extends beyond the acquisition of books to what happens to them during digitisation. Once acquired, the books must be converted into machine-readable text before they can be used for training. Many AI companies have turned to destructive book scanning, a process that permanently disassembles physical books for their high-speed digitisation. In the process, they cut the spines of books and feed the loose sheets to the automated document scanners, choosing to recycle or shred the remaining pages. The scanned images are then converted into text using optical character recognition, allowing AI models to ingest them during training.

Destructive scanning has long been used in some mass-digitisation projects because it is faster and produces flat, high-quality images for optical character recognition. However, preservation projects often favour non-destructive scanning to avoid damaging physical books.

The Internet Archive, a digital library best known for preserving web pages and digitising books, has long maintained that it uses non-destructive digitisation, photographing books without dismantling them to preserve the original copy.

In an email reply to *The Indian Express*, Chris Freeland, Director of Library Services at Internet Archive, said the organisation's 2021 explanation of its scanning process "continues to be the best description of its digitisation process today".

In that post, the Internet Archive said its testing of commercial book scanners, which feature a vacuum-powered page-turning arm, threatened the integrity of brittle books, rare volumes and other special collections that its library partners wanted digitised.

The legal questions

The acquisition and digitisation of physical books for AI training also raises a fresh set of copyright questions, even if the books themselves were lawfully purchased.

Arul George Scaria, professor at the National Law School of India University, argues that buying physical books and digitising them for AI training represents a middle ground between negotiating licences with publishers and relying on shadow libraries. "Buying physical copies and getting them digitised for training appears to be the middle path taken by many AI developers now, as many presume that this is fairer to the authors and publishers," he told *The Indian Express*.

The legal position under Indian copyright law remains unsettled. "Whether this is permissible under copyright law may depend on different factors including the question of whether digitisation is done solely for the purpose of AI training or whether the firms had stored it for other purposes also," Scaria said. "If it is done solely for the purpose of training, it should fall under the fair dealing exception under the copyright law," he added, citing the recent *OpenAI vs ANI* decision.

The fair dealing exception, outlined in Section 52 of the Copyright Act of 1957, is a copyright provision allowing the limited use of protected material without the owner's permission for specific purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review, and news reporting.

Scaria made the case for training uses, saying that as non-expressive uses, which are not prohibited under copyright law, they could help advance research and innovation. "Any copyright-related anxieties that copyright owners have could be addressed by making AI developers liable when there is substantial similarities in outputs. This may force AI developers to opt for licence agreements with copyright holders," he said.

Scaria, however, argued that copyright law alone may not resolve the concerns of authors and publishers. "Many copyright holders have anxieties and concerns about the use of their works," he said, adding that "we should also explore solutions outside copyright law", including mandatory labelling of AI-generated content and funds to support authors and artists affected by large-scale AI adoption.

• UNDER THE SCANNER: THE TWO WAYS TO DIGITISE BOOKS

Non-destructive scanning

- Digitises a book without physically altering it, using a V-cradle (see pic) to protect spine.
- An overhead scanner photographs each page while the book remains fully intact.
- Ideal for rare or valuable books that must be preserved.

Destructive scanning

- Digitises a book by cutting off the spine and separating the pages.
- Loose sheets are scanned rapidly using automated scanners, producing high-quality images.
- The process is irreversible, making it suitable only for replaceable books that do not need physical preservation.

INTERNET ARCHIVE DIGITIZATION SERVICES

The 'Scribe' scanner used by Internet Archive. The non-profit digital library says it uses non-destructive digitisation.

What Indian copyright law says

The legal position under Indian copyright law remains unsettled.

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Section 52 of the Copyright Act, 1957, outlines the fair dealing exception, which allows the limited use of protected material without the owner's permission for specific purposes.