EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

08-08-2026

1. Kerala can become India's model AI governance State(THE HINDU PAGE NO 6)

1. **GS II** (Governance) & **GS III** (Science & Tech)
2. **Topics:** Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance; Awareness in the fields of IT, Computers.

   Concepts: AI in public administration, real-time data analytics, decentralized governance, algorithmic transparency.

Kerala can become India's model AI governance State

The evolution of public administration has reached a critical juncture today. The sheer complexity of modern governance has outpaced the legacy tools traditionally used to manage it. Kerala has long enjoyed a distinguished reputation built upon its enduring strengths: a highly educated citizenry, robust public institutions, and an enlightened tradition of public discourse. Yet, these historic achievements risk being undermined if the State's administrative machinery continues to rely on fragmented information flows, delayed reporting, and rigid, department-centric silos.

In an era defined by real-time data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and systems-level coordination, relying on annual reports and retrospective reviews is no longer just an operational inefficiency; it has become a structural hazard. Upgrading these systems is not an exercise in technocratic ambition, but rather a fundamental requirement for institutional credibility, fiscal discipline, and responsible statecraft.

Across Kerala's administrative ecosystem, most departments continue to design, execute, and evaluate their public schemes within narrow, isolated boundaries. Key sectors such as health, power, local self-government, social welfare, finance, agriculture, and education operate with incompatible reporting formats and disconnected review cycles. Crucially, the overwhelming majority of these programmes lack real-time monitoring. Regulatory leakages, cost overruns, beneficiary exclusion, and execution delays are discovered months after the fact, when corrective intervention is both administratively expensive and politically constrained. Fiscal leakages go undetected across departmental lines, policy failures are identified only after public resources are completely exhausted, and administrative accountability shifts to merely explaining errors away. For a State that prides itself on exceptional human development outcomes, this structural vulnerability is inexcusable.

Modern public policy does not operate in isolation; it functions as a highly interconnected web of cause and effect. A rural housing scheme directly alters electricity demand; energy pricing reshapes household economics. These economic shifts subsequently influence nutrition and community health outcomes, which ultimately dictate workforce productivity and long-term fiscal capacity. When administrative departments optimise solely for their individual mandates, the State loses its ability to anticipate or manage these critical second-order effects.

Shashi Tharoor

Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including, most recently, 'The Sage Who Reimagined Hinduism: the Life, Lessons and Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru'

Annual reports are no longer enough and Artificial Intelligence can make the State a model for smarter governance

A real-time digital nervous system

This is precisely where AI-powered governance dashboard becomes a strategic necessity. Such a platform is far from a cosmetic overlay of digital charts and superficial indicators; it functions as a living institutional nervous system. By integrating live data streams from all departments, public utilities, and local bodies, it can track public programmes end-to-end, from the initial budget allocation and fund release to ground-level execution and actual beneficiary outcomes. Machine-learning models can automatically flag anomalies, delays, cost escalations, and implementation gaps as they occur, providing predictive alerts that allow leadership to intervene before an administrative hitch escalates into a public crisis. This approach transitions informed decision-making from a distant aspiration into a daily institutional discipline.

The true value of this integrated digital architecture becomes apparent when it is applied systematically across core administrative sectors. In public health, real-time monitoring of hospital capacity, medicine inventories, ambulance response times, and disease surveillance can actively prevent system overloads rather than just document them after a crisis. AI-driven alerts can detect emerging public health stress at the district and panchayat levels, enabling rapid, localised interventions. Similarly, within the power and energy sector, integrating data on electricity generation, distribution losses, subsidy flows, and rooftop solar adoption onto a single platform, allows energy policy to be managed as a dynamic fiscal and infrastructure system, safeguarding grid stability and mitigating financial drain.

This transparency is equally vital for Kerala's celebrated decentralised governance model. Local self-government institutions can leverage these dashboards to track project execution, fund utilisation, and citizen grievance resolution timelines, ensuring that local autonomy is matched by clear visibility. In the domain of social welfare, where multiple schemes frequently target the same households through different departments, real-time database reconciliation can instantly flag duplication or unwarranted exclusions, ensuring welfare spending remains efficient. Finally, in public finance, moving away from delayed financial reconciliation toward live visibility of treasury cash flows and committed liabilities directly reinforces fiscal discipline and state credibility.

Towards results

This shift fundamentally transforms a political culture where review meetings have historically functioned as retrospective rituals characterised by static presentations and selective indicators. An automated dashboard alters this dynamic by making performance continuous, visible, and cross-institutional. Responsibility moves from episodic justification to real-time ownership. Public officers receive structural protection through objective, unmanipulated data, while senior political leadership gains high-level clarity without resorting to micromanagement. Far from weakening the civil service, this system actively strengthens public institutions.

State ownership matters

To ensure that this transformation is credible, the reform must be anchored in a concrete, State-owned digital architecture. Though there is a strong case for decentralised governance, and those who generate data must continue to "own" it, senior leadership will need a unified oversight to interpret live feeds, highlight deviations from targets, simulate the downstream impact of proposed policy adjustments, and recommend evidence-based course corrections. This architecture would collapse the time lag that routinely paralyses governance, centralising operational visibility while keeping execution authority properly distributed.

To ensure that this advanced technological framework strengthens democracy rather than unsettling it, robust legal and institutional guardrails are mandatory. All data must remain the sovereign property of Kerala, held in trust for its citizens and managed in compliance with Indian data protection laws. Every AI-generated alert or policy recommendation must be fully auditable, preserving clear decision logs for statutory oversight, vigilance reviews, and legislative scrutiny. In democratic governance, algorithmic transparency is a necessity, ensuring that executive efficiency never erodes legislative authority or constitutional balance.

Furthermore, layered over existing infrastructure such as the e-Kerala systems embedded across village offices, this real-time awareness acts as a vital safeguard for State resources. By interfacing lawfully with secure national data verification systems, the State can seamlessly authenticate beneficiary eligibility, track the end-to-end delivery of subsidies, and align property records to close long-standing loopholes in revenue leakage. When identity, entitlement, and transaction data converge under strict legal oversight, fiscal pilferage becomes structurally difficult, protecting the State from systemic financial strain.

The cost of administrative inaction in an increasingly digitised world is exceptionally high. Bureaucratic morale suffers when officers are forced into defensive post-hoc explanations rather than proactive problem-solving.

Transitioning to an AI-driven governance model would signal that public funds are treated as sacred capital, and that democratic administration can be both deeply humane and technologically precise. It bridges the gap between political intent and actual delivery, turning the ideal of collective administrative responsibility into a measurable, 21st-century reality. And once again, Kerala could set a model for the rest of India in how AI can be channelled constructively to improve democratic governance, rather than undermine it.

2. The changing logic of the India-U.S. partnership(THE HINDU PAGE NO 6)

1. **GS II** (International Relations)
2. **Topics:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries.
3. **Concepts:** Strategic convergence, flexible realism, multi-alignment, reciprocal economic benefit, technology partnerships.

The changing logic of the India-U.S. partnership

G. Venkat Raman

Professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Indore, Madhya Pradesh

The Trump administration's latest tariffs on several trading partners, including India, are widely seen as another trade dispute. That interpretation misses the larger picture. Alongside growing demands for greater burden-sharing, tighter technology restrictions and a more reciprocal approach to international partnerships, the tariffs reflect a broader shift in American statecraft. Washington is increasingly judging partners and competitors through the lens of national interest rather than strategic convergence. The immediate impact will be felt in trade negotiations; the more enduring implications are strategic. They signal a changing American approach to alliances and partnerships with important implications for India.

This approach reflects what the Trump administration describes as 'flexible realism'. Unlike the post-Cold War liberal international order, this approach places national interest at the centre of American foreign policy. It treats trade, technology, industrial policy, and security as integrated instruments of statecraft. Partnerships are judged less by shared values or historical goodwill than by the tangible strategic and economic value they deliver. Rather than signalling a retreat from global engagement, it recalibrates how the United States pursues its interests in an increasingly competitive international environment.

The China factor

It is useful to recall the strategic logic that has underpinned the India-United States partnership over the past decade. With China's emergence as Washington's principal strategic competitor, India assumed growing strategic importance in the U.S.'s calculations. Defence cooperation expanded, the Quad gained momentum, technology partnerships deepened, and supply-chain resilience became a shared priority. While democratic values provided a favourable political backdrop, it was the convergence of strategic interests driven by China's rise that gave the partnership its real momentum. For both New Delhi and Washington, managing the geopolitical consequences of a more powerful China became the principal driver of bilateral cooperation. This shift in American statecraft does not diminish India's strategic importance, but it does redefine the basis on which that importance will be judged. Strategic convergence with the U.S. remains important, but it can no longer be assumed to be the principal driver of the relationship. Washington is increasingly likely to assess even close partners through the lens of reciprocal economic benefit, technological capability, and strategic contribution. Consequently, India can no longer assume that intensifying U.S.-China competition will, by itself, continue to enhance its strategic relevance. The partnership must increasingly rest on what India brings to the table than on China's rise alone.

India's challenge is to build capabilities that make it an indispensable U.S. partner

The next phase

The more significant implication of this evolving approach is that it redefines the nature of strategic partnerships. The first phase of the India-U.S. relationship was shaped by strategic convergence driven by China's rise. The next phase will increasingly depend on strategic complementarity, with each country expected to contribute capabilities that reinforce the other. Defence cooperation, critical technologies, resilient supply chains, and advanced manufacturing will matter not merely because they help manage China's rise, but because they strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of both economies. The India-U.S. partnership is therefore evolving from one defined primarily by a shared strategic challenge to one sustained by mutual strategic value. Far from weakening the relationship, this evolution could make it more balanced and resilient.

If flexible realism encourages Washington to rely on stronger and more capable partners, it also creates greater space for India's strategic agency. A more economically competitive, technologically advanced, and militarily capable India is not only a more valuable partner for the U.S. but also better positioned to pursue its own strategic interests. The relationship can therefore evolve from one shaped primarily by China's rise to one anchored in India's capabilities and strategic contribution.

For India, this evolution reinforces rather than weakens the relevance of strategic autonomy. In the emerging international environment, strategic autonomy is not about maintaining equal distance from competing powers; it is about preserving the ability to make independent choices based on India's own interests. That also means that India's approach to China should increasingly be guided by its own long-term strategic calculations rather than by the trajectory of U.S.-China relations. In practice, this requires a strategy of multi-alignment: strengthening the strategic partnership with the U.S., managing competition and cooperation with China on India's own terms, and deepening strategic, economic, and technological partnerships with the European Union, Japan, and Global South.

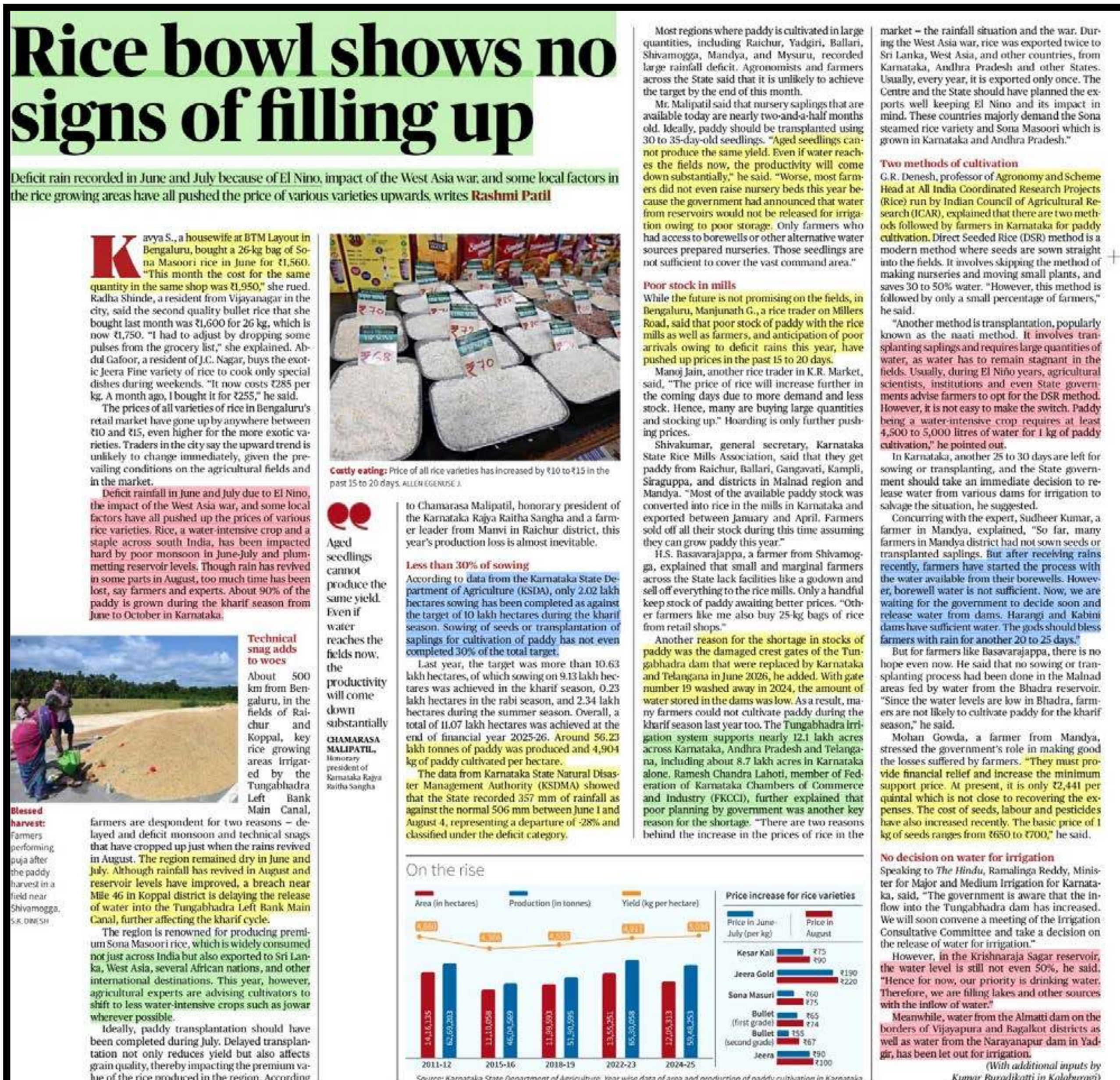
Looking ahead

The India-U.S. partnership is entering a new phase. During the past decade, its momentum was driven by a shared response to China's rise. That strategic convergence will remain important, but it will no longer be sufficient on its own. In this emerging strategic environment, enduring partnerships will increasingly be built on capability, reciprocity, and strategic value. For India, this carries a broader strategic lesson. India's strategic relevance must increasingly flow from its own economic dynamism, technological capabilities, defence preparedness, and diplomatic influence. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to remain relevant in Washington's strategic calculus, but to build the capabilities that make it an indispensable partner. That would not only strengthen the India-U.S. partnership but also reinforce India's strategic autonomy in an increasingly contested world.

The views expressed are personal

3. Rice bowl shows no signs of filling up(THE HINDU PAGE NO 8)

1. **GS III** (Agriculture/Economy) & **GS I** (Geography)
2. **Topics:** Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation; Important Geophysical phenomena.
3. **Concepts:** Impact of El Nino on monsoons, Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) vs. transplantation methods, reservoir levels and crop yields.



Rice bowl shows no signs of filling up

Deficit rain recorded in June and July because of El Nino, impact of the West Asia war, and some local factors in the rice growing areas have all pushed the price of various varieties upwards, writes **Rashmi Patil**

Kavya S., a housewife at BTM Layout in Bengaluru, bought a 26-kg bag of Sona Masoori rice in June for ₹1,560. "This month the cost for the same quantity in the same shop was ₹1,950," she rued. Radha Shinde, a resident from Vijayanagar in the city, said the second quality bullet rice that she bought last month was ₹1,600 for 26 kg, which is now ₹1,750. "I had to adjust by dropping some pulses from the grocery list," she explained. Abdul Gafoor, a resident of J.C. Nagar, buys the exotic Jeera Fine variety of rice to cook only special dishes during weekends. "It now costs ₹285 per kg. A month ago, I bought it for ₹255," he said.

The prices of all varieties of rice in Bengaluru's retail market have gone up by anywhere between ₹10 and ₹15, even higher for the more exotic varieties. Traders in the city say the upward trend is unlikely to change immediately, given the prevailing conditions on the agricultural fields and in the market.

Deficit rainfall in June and July due to El Nino, the impact of the West Asia war, and some local factors have all pushed up the prices of various rice varieties. Rice, a water-intensive crop and a staple across south India, has been impacted hard by poor monsoon in June-July and plummetting reservoir levels. Though rain has revived in some parts in August, too much time has been lost, say farmers and experts. About 90% of the paddy is grown during the kharif season from June to October in Karnataka.

Blessed harvest: Farmers performing puja after the paddy harvest in a field near Shivamogga. S.K. DINESH

Technical snag adds to woes

About 500 km from Bengaluru, in the fields of Raichur and Koppal, key rice growing areas irrigated by the Tungabhadra Left Bank Main Canal, farmers are despondent for two reasons – delayed and deficit monsoon and technical snags that have cropped up just when the rains revived in August. The region remained dry in June and July. Although rainfall has revived in August and reservoir levels have improved, a breach near Mile 46 in Koppal district is delaying the release of water into the Tungabhadra Left Bank Main Canal, further affecting the kharif cycle.

The region is renowned for producing premium Sona Masoori rice, which is widely consumed not just across India but also exported to Sri Lanka, West Asia, several African nations, and other international destinations. This year, however, agricultural experts are advising cultivators to shift to less water-intensive crops such as jowar wherever possible.

Ideally, paddy transplantation should have been completed during July. Delayed transplantation not only reduces yield but also affects grain quality, thereby impacting the premium value of the rice produced in the region. According to Chamarasa Malipatil, honorary president of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha and a farmer leader from Manvi in Raichur district, this year's production loss is almost inevitable.

Costly eating: Price of all rice varieties has increased by ₹10 to ₹15 in the past 15 to 20 days. ALLEN EGENUSE J.

> Aged seedlings cannot produce the same yield. Even if water reaches the fields now, the productivity will come down substantially
>
> **CHAMARASA MALIPATIL,** Honorary president of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha

Less than 30% of sowing

According to data from the Karnataka State Department of Agriculture (KSDA), only 2.02 lakh hectares sowing has been completed as against the target of 10 lakh hectares during the kharif season. Sowing of seeds or transplantation of saplings for cultivation of paddy has not even completed 30% of the total target.

Last year, the target was more than 10.63 lakh hectares, of which sowing on 9.13 lakh hectares was achieved in the kharif season, 0.23 lakh hectares in the rabi season, and 2.34 lakh hectares during the summer season. Overall, a total of 11.07 lakh hectares was achieved at the end of financial year 2025-26. Around 56.23 lakh tonnes of paddy was produced and 4,904 kg of paddy cultivated per hectare.

The data from Karnataka State Natural Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) showed that the State recorded 357 mm of rainfall as against the normal 506 mm between June 1 and August 4, representing a departure of -28% and classified under the deficit category.

Most regions where paddy is cultivated in large quantities, including Raichur, Yadgiri, Ballari, Shivamogga, Mandya, and Mysuru, recorded large rainfall deficit. Agronomists and farmers across the State said that it is unlikely to achieve the target by the end of this month.

Mr. Malipatil said that nursery saplings that are available today are nearly two-and-a-half months old. Ideally, paddy should be transplanted using 30 to 35-day-old seedlings. "Aged seedlings cannot produce the same yield. Even if water reaches the fields now, the productivity will come down substantially," he said. "Worse, most farmers did not even raise nursery beds this year because the government had announced that water from reservoirs would not be released for irrigation owing to poor storage. Only farmers who had access to borewells or other alternative water sources prepared nurseries. Those seedlings are not sufficient to cover the vast command area."

Poor stock in mills

While the future is not promising on the fields, in Bengaluru, Manjunath G., a rice trader on Millers Road, said that poor stock of paddy with the rice mills as well as farmers, and anticipation of poor arrivals owing to deficit rains this year, have pushed up prices in the past 15 to 20 days.

Manoj Jain, another rice trader in K.R. Market, said, "The price of rice will increase further in the coming days due to more demand and less stock. Hence, many are buying large quantities and stocking up." Hoarding is only further pushing prices.

Shivakumar, general secretary, Karnataka State Rice Mills Association, said that they get paddy from Raichur, Ballari, Gangavati, Kampli, Siraguppa, and districts in Malnad region and Mandya. "Most of the available paddy stock was converted into rice in the mills in Karnataka and exported between January and April. Farmers sold off all their stock during this time assuming they can grow paddy this year."

H.S. Basavarajappa, a farmer from Shivamogga, explained that small and marginal farmers across the State lack facilities like a godown and sell off everything to the rice mills. Only a handful keep stock of paddy awaiting better prices. "Other farmers like me also buy 25-kg bags of rice from retail shops."

Another reason for the shortage in stocks of paddy was the damaged crest gates of the Tungabhadra dam that were replaced by Karnataka and Telangana in June 2026, he added. With gate number 19 washed away in 2024, the amount of water stored in the dams was low. As a result, many farmers could not cultivate paddy during the kharif season last year too. The Tungabhadra Irrigation system supports nearly 12.1 lakh acres across Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, including about 8.7 lakh acres in Karnataka alone. Ramesh Chandra Lahoti, member of Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FKCCI), further explained that poor planning by government was another key reason for the shortage. "There are two reasons behind the increase in the prices of rice in the market – the rainfall situation and the war. During the West Asia war, rice was exported twice to Sri Lanka, West Asia, and other countries, from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and other States. Usually, every year, it is exported only once. The Centre and the State should have planned the exports well keeping El Nino and its impact in mind. These countries majorly demand the Sona steamed rice variety and Sona Masoori which is grown in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh."

Two methods of cultivation

G.R. Denesh, professor of Agronomy and Scheme Head at All India Coordinated Research Projects (Rice) run by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), explained that there are two methods followed by farmers in Karnataka for paddy cultivation. Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) method is a modern method where seeds are sown straight into the fields. It involves skipping the method of making nurseries and moving small plants, and saves 30 to 50% water. "However, this method is followed by only a small percentage of farmers," he said.

"Another method is transplantation, popularly known as the naati method. It involves transplanting saplings and requires large quantities of water, as water has to remain stagnant in the fields. Usually, during El Niño years, agricultural scientists, institutions and even State governments advise farmers to opt for the DSR method. However, it is not easy to make the switch. Paddy being a water-intensive crop requires at least 4,500 to 5,000 litres of water for 1 kg of paddy cultivation," he pointed out.

In Karnataka, another 25 to 30 days are left for sowing or transplanting, and the State government should take an immediate decision to release water from various dams for irrigation to salvage the situation, he suggested.

Concurring with the expert, Sudheer Kumar, a farmer in Mandya, explained, "So far, many farmers in Mandya district had not sown seeds or transplanted saplings. But after receiving rains recently, farmers have started the process with the water available from their borewells. However, borewell water is not sufficient. Now, we are waiting for the government to decide soon and release water from dams. Harangi and Kabini dams have sufficient water. The gods should bless farmers with rain for another 20 to 25 days."

But for farmers like Basavarajappa, there is no hope even now. He said that no sowing or transplanting process had been done in the Malnad areas fed by water from the Bhadra reservoir. "Since the water levels are low in Bhadra, farmers are not likely to cultivate paddy for the kharif season," he said.

Mohan Gowda, a farmer from Mandya, stressed the government's role in making good the losses suffered by farmers. "They must provide financial relief and increase the minimum support price. At present, it is only ₹2,441 per quintal which is not close to recovering the expenses. The cost of seeds, labour and pesticides have also increased recently. The basic price of 1 kg of seeds ranges from ₹650 to ₹700," he said.

No decision on water for irrigation

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Ramalinga Reddy, Minister for Major and Medium Irrigation for Karnataka, said, "The government is aware that the inflow into the Tungabhadra dam has increased. We will soon convene a meeting of the Irrigation Consultative Committee and take a decision on the release of water for irrigation."

However, in the Krishnaraja Sagar reservoir, the water level is still not even 50%, he said. "Hence for now, our priority is drinking water. Therefore, we are filling lakes and other sources with the inflow of water."

Meanwhile, water from the Almatti dam on the borders of Vijayapura and Bagalkot districts as well as water from the Narayanapur dam in Yadgir, has been let out for irrigation.

(With additional inputs by Kumar Buradikatti in Kalaburagi)

On the rise

Year	Area (in hectares)	Production (in tonnes)
2011-12	14,16,135	62,69,203
2015-16	11,10,058	46,04,569
2018-19	11,99,593	51,90,595
2022-23	13,55,251	65,30,058
2024-25	12,05,313	59,48,253

Yield (kg per hectare)

Price increase for rice varieties

Variety	Price in June-July (per kg)	Price in August
Kesar Kali	₹75	₹90
Jeera Gold	₹190	₹220
Sona Masuri	₹60	₹75
Bullet (first grade)	₹65	₹74
Bullet (second grade)	₹55	₹67
Jeera	₹90	₹100

Source: Karnataka State Department of Agriculture, Year wise data of area and production of paddy cultivation in Karnataka

4. India's forex kitty swelled by $10.5 billion to $692.87 billion(THE HINDU PAGE NO 11)

1. **GS III** (Indian Economy)
2. **Topics:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development.
3. **Concepts:** Foreign exchange reserves, Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) account - FCNR(B), RBI interventions in the forex market.

5. U.S. accounts for 67% of India's LPG imports, says Hardeep Puri(THE HINDU PAGE NO 11)

1. **GS III** (Economy/Energy) & **GS II** (International Relations)
2. **Topics:** Infrastructure: Energy; Bilateral agreements involving India.
3. **Concepts:** Energy security, diversification of energy supplies, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) imports.

India's forex kitty swelled by $10.5 billion to $692.87 billion

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India's forex reserves jumped by $10.512 billion to $692.866 billion during the week ended July 31, the RBI said on Friday. The overall kitty had jumped by $6.118 billion to $682.354 billion in the previous reporting week.

Reserves had expanded to an all-time high of $728.494 billion during the week ended February 27 this year before the onset of the West Asia conflict, which led to several weeks of drop as the rupee came under pressure and the RBI had to intervene in the forex market through dollar sales.

For the week ended July 31, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by $8.75 billion to $ 564.68 billion, the central bank's data showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves.

It may be recalled that the central bank and the government had launched a series of measures to attract more forex flows into the country last month, including FCNR(B).

U.S. accounts for 67% of India's LPG imports, says Hardeep Puri

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

The U.S. has "today" become India's largest supplier of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), accounting for 67% of its LPG imports, said Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri.

Hardeep Singh Puri

Addressing the CII International Energy Conference, he said the shift follows an earlier decision to source roughly 10% of India's LPG requirements from the U.S. as part of a broader effort to diversify energy supplies. "Some of us wondered would we need the 10% [from U.S.] when we have suppliers nearby [in the Gulf]. Today, I am happy to inform that U.S. accounts for about 67% of our LPG imports," he said. Separately, he refuted reports that the government proposed to impose an additional charge on LPG and natural gas to fund a strategic fuel reserve.

6. Food Security Act amendments will hurt the poorest(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 12)

1. **GS II** (Social Justice) & **GS III** (Economy)
2. **Topics:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; Issues of buffer stocks and food security.
3. **Concepts:** National Food Security Act (NFSA), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), per-capita entitlements vs. household approach, Household Consumer Expenditure Survey.

Food Security Act amendments will hurt the poorest

JEAN DRÈZE

MOHAMMAD ZAMEER

MAHATMA GANDHI invited us to judge our actions in terms of what they do to the last person. From this standpoint, the proposed amendment of the National Food Security Act leaves much to be desired. Indeed, it is a direct attack on the food entitlements of the poorest of the poor.

More precisely, the amendment adversely affects the entitlements of households in the Antyodaya category, a little over two crore households. The Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) was launched in late 2000, under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, to provide special protection to the poorest of the poor. Antyodaya households were supposed to be identified by local communities. They were entitled to monthly foodgrain rations of 25 kg at symbolic prices, soon raised to 35 kg. Today, AAY rations are free under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana.

Originally, no specific criteria were laid out for the identification of destitute households. The Supreme Court, however, helpfully defined some vulnerable groups. For instance, the Court rightly acknowledged the extreme insecurity of particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs), and directed that all of them should be covered under AAY. This did happen to a large extent, and AAY cards have been a critical resource for PVTG households ever since.

Similarly, the Court observed that a large number of households in India are at risk of destitution because they have no earning member. Examples include elderly couples, widows with small children, disabled persons without support, and so on. In a significant order dated May 2, 2003, the Court prescribed the inclusion of all these households under AAY. The extent of compliance with this order varies widely across states, but the order did provide a useful framework for special food assistance to destitute households.

The National Food Security Act ushered a transition from household entitlements to per-capita entitlements for "priority" households – the bulk of ration-card holders. For Antyodaya households, however, the household approach was retained. The reason lies in AAY's special focus on households with no earning member, such as widows living alone and elderly couples. These tend to be small households, and they were at risk of losing a major source of economic security in the switch to per-capita entitlements. Many of them had come to rely heavily on their AAY rations for survival. It seemed best not to rock the boat.

To view it another way, the switch to a per-capita approach under the NFSA was a serious threat for small households with little staying power. The retention of the Antyodaya programme and its household approach made it possible to protect them.

Under the proposed NFSA amendment, however, monthly rations of 35 kg for Antyodaya households are to be replaced with per-capita rations of 7 kg per person, with a cap of 35 kg per household. For households with five members or more, this makes no difference. Smaller households, however, will lose 20 to 80 per cent of their current entitlements. And a majority of AAY households (53 per cent to be precise) have fewer than five members, according to the nationwide Household Consumer Expenditure Survey 2023-24. There are no gainers in this bargain, only losers.

Women living alone will be the worst affected. There are nearly one million of them in the Antyodaya category. According to HCES data, 85 per cent are widows and 74 per cent are illiterate. As recent work by Esther Duflo and others brings out, many of them have to cope with mental stress and social stigma in addition to economic destitution. Their monthly foodgrain rations will crash from 35 kg to 7 kg under the proposed amendment – a reduction of 80 per cent.

Of course, 35 kg per month exceeds the foodgrain requirements of many small households. The surplus, however, can generally be cashed or exchanged for other commodities. AAY's monthly rations are best thought of as an economic resource, not just food to eat.

> The argument is that it will reduce the variation in per-capita entitlements within the Antyodaya category. This is like reducing the salaries of peons on the ground that it will reduce wage disparities between peons and chowkidars

Oddly, this reduction of entitlements for the country's poorest households is being justified in the name of equity. The argument is that it will reduce the variation in per-capita entitlements within the Antyodaya category. This is like reducing the salaries of peons on the ground that it will reduce wage disparities between peons and chowkidars.

The real motive for this amendment is likely to be to save money. The potential savings, however, are small. In 2023-24, the foodgrain allocation for AAY was 10 million tonnes, and offtake was 8.8 million tonnes. Using HCES data on household size, we can easily infer AAY's foodgrain requirements under the proposed approach: 7.6 million tonnes. At best, the proposed amendment will save around 2 million tonnes of foodgrain per year. This is of little value when the government is already struggling with massive excess stocks. It is for the poor that every grain counts.

Instead of chasing minor savings at the expense of the poor, the government should revamp the AAY programme. The AAY lists are very old, and they must be rife with inclusion and exclusion errors. Without cancelling any ration cards, better-off households could be moved to the priority category to make space for those who are unfairly left out of AAY. Expanding the AAY quota would also be useful to ensure full coverage of all destitute households. Even more useful would be to add dal and edible oil to the PDS entitlements of Antyodaya households, as some states have already done off and on. As for the proposed NFSA amendment, it is best thrown in the dustbin.

Drèze is visiting professor, Department of Economics, Ranchi University and Zameer is independent researcher based in Ranch

7. Maharashtra shortcut to rural healthcare is risky(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 12)

1. **GS II** (Governance/Social Justice)
2. **Topics:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Human Resources.

   Concepts: Rural healthcare shortages, bridge courses for homeopathic practitioners, integration of medical systems, public health policy.

Maharashtra shortcut to rural healthcare is risky

THE MAHARASHTRA government has framed its decision to allow homeopathic doctors to prescribe allopathic medicines, after undergoing a bridge course, as a pragmatic response to a vexing problem. Although the state has roughly one physician for every 700 people — better than the WHO's benchmark of one doctor per 1,000 people — its rural areas have faced a persistent shortage of allopathic practitioners. Improving access to medical care in these areas is an urgent public health priority. But addressing that shortage by combining therapeutic systems is problematic. Different, often conflicting, principles underpin allopathy and homeopathy. Mixing the two systems can undermine professional standards, compromise patient safety, and ultimately erode public trust in both modern medicine and homeopathy.

Allopathy is an integrated discipline built upon several interconnected fields. Its therapeutic practices are grounded in evidence generated through clinical research, pharmacological studies and epidemiological investigation. Clinical judgement develops through years of classroom instruction, laboratory work, clinical postings and supervised practice, followed by an internship. This training enables a doctor to understand why diseases develop, how different organ systems interact, how to arrive at a diagnosis, how medicines act on the body, interactions between drugs and the reasons for complications and adverse reactions. The MBBS curriculum also trains doctors to assess the quality of medical evidence, and interpret diagnostic investigations. A bridge course, however well designed, cannot recreate this intellectual and clinical architecture. At best, it can familiarise homeopathic practitioners with selected allopathic medicines, common conditions and standard treatment protocols. But knowing which drug is commonly prescribed for a particular symptom is not the same as diagnostic reasoning.

This is not to deny homeopathy a place in India's healthcare system. The Centre's decision, in 2014, to create a separate ministry for alternative medicine, including homeopathy, AYUSH, was, in fact, guided by this imperative. The country's public health deficits can be addressed by expanding medical education, investing in institutions and strengthening incentives for doctors to serve in areas where they are urgently needed. These objectives are best achieved by respecting the integrity of each system rather than through ill-advised moves to blur disciplinary boundaries.

8. What you eat was once medicine. Now, it is addiction(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 12)

1. **GS II** (Health)
2. **Topics:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.
3. **Concepts:** Ultra-processed foods (UPFs), metabolic diseases, advertising regulations on High in Fat, Sugar or Salt (HFSS) foods, Front-of-Pack Warning Labels.

What you eat was once medicine. Now, it is addiction

SHASHANK JOSHI

ANNAM BRAHMA. In the Vedic vision, food is not mere sustenance. It is Brahman itself — the living substance that becomes body, mind and prana. What we place on the tongue shapes the quality of our thoughts, the strength of our dharma, and the destiny of the nation. Today, that sacred understanding has been inverted. Food is no longer worshipped as medicine. It is engineered as addiction and sold as aspiration.

We are living through a silent metabolic emergency. Ultra-processed foods — loaded with fat, sugar and salt — are being marketed to India's children with cartoon characters, celebrity endorsements, cricket sponsorships and aggressive "buy-one-get-one" tactics. School canteens and digital feeds have become delivery systems for hyper-palatable products designed in laboratories to override satiety and create lifelong craving. The human cost is already visible. Nearly one in three Indian women and one in four men are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity and type-2 diabetes are rising at a pace unseen in our history. Cardiovascular and metabolic diseases have almost tripled in seven years. This is not a failure of willpower, but of the food environment we have allowed to form around the next generation.

Global science is unambiguous. It has linked ultra-processed foods to obesity, diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers and premature death. The WHO and UNICEF have repeatedly warned that repeated exposure to junk-food advertising shapes children's preferences long before they can exercise informed choice. Every time a child reaches for a sugary drink or packaged snack instead of dal, roti and seasonal fruit, an ancient dietary wisdom that sustained this civilisation is being displaced. India's own Economic Survey 2025-26 has sounded the alarm. It calls for clear front-of-pack warning labels, watershed restrictions on advertising, and a precise legal definition of ultra-processed foods. There is a need for stringent regulation of HFSS (High in Fat, Sugar or Salt) marketing and a ban on junk food in schools.

Śarīramādyam khalu dharmasādhanam. The body is the primary instrument of dharma. A generation whose metabolism is compromised cannot fully discharge its duties to family, society or nation. When we allow commercial forces to undermine the health of children for short-term profit, we are not merely creating patients; we are eroding the foundation of future capability. The time for half-measures is over. We need to impose a complete ban on advertising of HFSS and ultra-processed foods between 6 am and 11 pm across television, digital platforms and social media. It's time to prohibit celebrity endorsements, school-based promotions, cartoon mascots and any form of child-targeted marketing of junk food. Finally, we need to make every school a protected nutritional zone: Remove sugary drinks and HFSS products, and ensure only wholesome, sattvik, culturally rooted meals are served.

India once taught the world that food is medicine. We can do so again — not by exporting the diseases of modern lifestyles, but by reclaiming the wisdom that viewed ahara as the first and most intimate form of medicine. From food as medicine to food as marketing was a costly detour. It is time to reverse the journey. Let food be medicine again.

This is not a failure of individual willpower. It is a failure of the food environment we have allowed to form around the next generation

The writer is a Mumbai-based endocrinologist