

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

09-10-2026

GS 3: ECONOMY THE HINDU PAGE: 01

GST refunds made easier; arrest powers cut

Rates remain unchanged; decisions on rates only once a year; penalty cut from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000

The council has eased the litigation-related rules of the system, providing relief to small taxpayers

Goods can be inspected or seized only by the officer of supplier or destination State, it said

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council on Thursday took a slew of decisions in its 57th meeting here to enhance simplification, improve certainty in tax treatment, remove hold-ups in the processing of input tax credits, and ease the compliance burden on businesses, especially smaller ones.

The council also recommended removing arrest powers of GST officers and increasing the prosecution threshold from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore. The general penalty will also be reduced from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000.

"I can say that 99% of issues in GST relating to rates and processes have now been addressed," Nirmala Sitharaman, Union Finance Minister and Chairperson of the GST Council, said following the

meeting. "The door is not closed to further reforms, and those will be taken up as needed, but the bulk of them are now done," she added.

Apart from easing processes related to GST registration and availing of refunds and input tax credits, the council has also eased the litigation-related rules of the tax system, providing relief to small taxpayers.

Ms. Sitharaman said all the changes are expected to come into effect from April 1, 2027, and added that no GST rates were changed during this meeting. The rate decisions will now come up before the Council only once a year and will be implemented from the start of the subsequent financial year, the Finance Minister said.

She noted that, beyond the GST Council, the Union government has decided to introduce a faceless assess-

Good and simple

The 57th meeting of the GST council decided to enhance simplification, improve certainty in tax treatment, and ease the compliance burden on small businesses

KEY DECISIONS

- Tax officers' power to arrest scrapped
- Prosecution limit increased to ₹5 crore turnover
- Export of services brought into input tax credit system

The committee has also decided to examine proposal to allow small taxpayers to file returns once a year

- Automated registrations, reduced paperwork, and eased input tax credit processes
- No notices for amounts below ₹10,000, pending notices to be cancelled

New measures likely to come into force from April 1, 2027

I can say that 99% of issues in GST relating to rates and processes have now been addressed... The door is not closed to further reforms, and those will be taken up as needed, but the bulk of them are now done

NIRMALA SITHARAMAN
Union Finance Minister

ment system for the Central GST system, similar to the one currently in place for income tax. A framework for this will be issued for public consultation before Budget 2027, and the system will be implemented during 2027-28.

"The process reforms have been driven by the principle of trust," Ms. Sitharaman said. "The businesses and taxpayers

have to be trusted... and we shouldn't be too intrusive."

Thursday's meet in New Delhi came over a year after its previous meeting in September 2025, during which it had rationalised the rates on most goods and services, and reduced the total number of tax slabs under the GST. The GST Council has approved a system that will provide

greater certainty about the documents required during registration. According to the government, 61% of taxpayers are granted automatic registration within three working days.

The upgraded system approved by the Council is expected to streamline the process for the remaining low-risk taxpayers by avoiding queries and rejections. The new system will

also incorporate a simplified registration mechanism for small taxpayers who provide supplies through e-commerce platforms, and it has also eased the process for amendments to and cancellations of registrations.

This will now allow small e-commerce sellers to register in a single State rather than in each State where they sell goods.

The Centre has also shared a concept note with the GST Council and has received its in-principle approval for an optional scheme for businesses with a turnover of up to ₹5 crore that supply to consumers, allowing them to file returns once a year instead of quarterly.

The final decision on this will come up for approval in the next GST Council meeting.

Refunds are proposed to be acknowledged within 10 days, down from the cur-

rent 15 days. Based on a risk assessment, the government estimates that 90% of the claims will be released within three working days of acknowledgement.

Reducing disputes

The Council has also said that goods moving between States can be inspected, detained or seized only by the officer of the supplier or destination State and not by any officer in between.

Further, goods can now be intercepted only on the basis of "specific intelligence" and only with authorisation of a Joint Commissioner-level officer.

"This prevents arbitrary checks by GST enforcement wings that affect the movement of goods from one State to another," Ms. Sitharaman said.

"This would significantly improve the ease of movement of goods."

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (HEALTH)

THE HINDU PAGE: 07

Nurse-led coordinated care can reduce heart failure mortality, finds study

C. Maya

A large randomised controlled trial among heart failure patients in India led by the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) in Kerala, has found that hospitalisation episodes and all-cause mortality among heart failure patients can be significantly reduced if patients are systematically followed-up by a nurse, with the help of a mobile health application. The two-year Telemonitoring and Integrated Multidisciplinary care for Heart Failure (TIME-HF) trial found that heart failure patients with reduced ejection fraction (HFrEF) who received nurse-led collaborative care had a 22% lower risk of death than those receiving usual care. They were also more likely to remain alive without hospitalisation during the two-year follow-up. The trial results were published in the American Heart Association's Journal, Circulation, on August 30. What makes the trial relevant is

that it addresses critical gaps in heart failure care in Kerala, heart failure registries have reported high mortality post-discharge – 82.7% mortality over 10 years, alongside the fact that only 25.4% of the patients with heart failure receive guideline-based therapies. It also holds lessons for the rest of the country: with nearly 27% of all deaths in India being due to heart disease, and 62% of all deaths due to cardiovascular disease occurring between the ages of 40 and 69 years, there is an urgent need for quality, post-discharge care.

What the trial did

The TIME-HF trial involved 1,507 adults at 22 government and private hospitals in Kerala and neighbouring States, with 755 patients assigned to the intervention and 752 to usual care. The mean age was 61.9 years; 77.6% were men, 57.3% lived in rural areas and 70% had relatively low educational attainment. Ischaemic heart disease was the predominant cause of heart



The two-year trial found that heart failure patients who received nurse-led collaborative care had a 22% lower risk of death than those receiving usual care. GETTY IMAGES

failure, accounting for 77.4% of cases.

Results indicated that nurse-led intervention substantially improved prescription of the four major components of guideline-directed medical therapy for heart failure –

renin-angiotensin system inhibition/ARNI, beta-blockers, mineralocorticoid receptor antagonists and SGLT2 inhibitors.

"Our heart failure patients receive sub-optimal care, as most of them do not adhere to therapies or follow up

with the doctor on time. There is also the issue of physician inertia. HF Registry evidence indicates that the median survival after diagnosis of heart failure is just 3.7 years. This collaborative care model is proof that survival and quality of life of these patients can be improved if we systematically address the gaps in care so that proven therapies for heart failure become part of routine care," said lead researcher and additional professor at SCTIMST P. Jeemon.

Centring nursing care

The model put a trained nurse at the centre of the care pathway, who would closely monitor heart failure patients after discharge, educate the patient and family about heart-failure self-care, lifestyle modification and encourage medication adherence.

Nurses reviewed the patients' medication regimen at discharge to ensure that there was no deviation from the guideline-mediated therapies. This was again reviewed

at every follow-up visit with the help of a mobile-health app. The m-health app helped the nurses monitor all physical parameters of the patient real time and to identify warning signs of worsening disease, communicate and connect with patients and physicians so that timely hospitalisation was possible.

All participants underwent scheduled follow-up visits every three months for two years. Adherence to all four guideline-directed medical therapies was only 22.1% in the usual-care group, while it was 37.3% in the intervention group at two years.

The TIME-HF trial thus helped address one of the health system's persistent weaknesses: that of proper follow-up care of patients with chronic diseases. The model is suited for strengthening chronic disease management and reducing the burden of hospitalisation and mortality in resource-limited settings across the country, experts said.

(maya.c@thehindu.co.in)

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Flawed by design, exclusionary in impact

For more than 75 years, the defining preoccupation of the Election Commission of India (ECI) has been "inclusion". The first general election of 1951-52 had to enrol an electorate of around 17 crore from scratch, many of whom were illiterate. Successive Commissioners treated universal adult franchise as a promise to be fulfilled rather than just a principle to be stated on paper. India could genuinely be proud of being an electoral democracy where voter turnout among the poor is higher than that among the rich, unlike in many western democracies.

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls launched by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India, Gyanesh Kumar, has reversed this progressive direction. It was termed an exercise to "purify" the electoral rolls, but in practice, it is riddled with methodological flaws and *ad hoc* rule changes, resulting in the deletion of a large number of genuine voters.

The names of 13.37 crore people were struck off during the draft stage across 30 States and Union Territories in the three phases of the SIR. The figure includes 65 lakh in Bihar, 6.57 crore in the 12 States and Union Territories covered in Phase 2, and 6.15 crore in Phase 3, whose final rolls are yet to be published. The deletion rate doubled as SIR progressed – from 8.3% in Bihar to 12.9% in Phase 2 and 17% in Phase 3 (it was 32.8% in Delhi and 21.7% in Telangana). In Phases 1 and 2, even after names were added back, net deletions were about 6.2 crore.

In Delhi, the draft roll has only 97.54 lakh electors, barely above the 94.95 lakh who voted in the February 2025 Assembly election. In 24 of Delhi's 70 constituencies, the draft roll now has fewer electors than the number who voted in the election. The ECI has in effect conceded the point about disenfranchisement. It has now directed officials to run a "special drive" to enrol anyone "whose name has got left out" – an implicit admission that its rolls are missing eligible voters.

Flaws by design

First, enumeration. The ECI's Manual on Electoral Rolls (2023) describes an intensive revision as a "denovo process without reference to the earlier existing roll" (paragraph 9.3.1); enumerators visit every house and record the particulars of each eligible resident. If a particular elector's citizenship is in doubt, the Manual requires officials to give "probative value" (paragraph 7.4.2) to their presence on the preceding roll, and places the onus on the objector and not the elector.

The SIR inverts this procedure. It shifts enumeration on to electors and presumes that they are ineligible until they can trace themselves or a parent to the last intensive revision conducted more than two decades ago, or produce documents to establish their eligibility in what resembles a citizenship test.

Electors who could not be found, did not receive or return the form, or were unable to fill it – due to illiteracy, for example – were dropped from the draft roll, even if they had voted in the



Srinivasan Ramani



Pon Vasanth B.A.

The Gyanesh Kumar-led Election Commission of India, emboldened by a deferential Supreme Court judgment, has already disenfranchised lakhs of genuine electors through its Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and risks excluding many more

last election. All this was done at breakneck speed, on the eve of elections in several States.

Second, re-entry. A deleted voter cannot be easily restored, even if he or she has merely shifted address within the constituency. They must apply through Form 6 – the application for new voters – as though they had never been on the rolls. Since newly eligible 18-year-olds also use Form 6, the ECI has made it impossible to distinguish new voters from returning voters in the published figures, preventing a proper audit.

Third, "logical discrepancies". Software matched electors against two-decade-old rolls and flagged mismatches for scrutiny. These included spelling differences, more than six voters linked to one ancestor, and parent-child age gaps outside 15 to 45 years, among other arbitrary criteria.

This was first fully applied in West Bengal, where 60 lakh names were flagged and judicial officers deployed by the Supreme Court of India struck off 27 lakh names. Appellate tribunals appointed since then have restored electors in 93% of the cases, bringing back about one lakh names onto the rolls. But by early September – months after the Assembly election – they had disposed of only 1.22 lakh of more than 38 lakh appeals, or 3.2%. Moreover, 16.1 lakh appeals were filed to remove electors whom judicial officers had found eligible. Who authorised this on the ECI's behalf remains unanswered. Meanwhile, another 19.33 lakh electors on Delhi's draft rolls have been flagged for "logical discrepancies".

Fourth, centralisation. Changes to the rolls increasingly flow through the Electoral Roll Officers' Network (ERONet) database, overriding Electoral Registration Officers, who are the statutory authorities on eligibility. State election officials have complained that they cannot see centrally made changes to the rolls in their own constituencies.

Fifth, lack of a baseline. Without the latest Census – which has been delayed by the Centre – there is no firm population baseline to check the rolls. The ECI also dismisses projected population figures as mere estimates. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the final roll of 5.67 crore is about 33 lakh short of the projected 6.02 crore.

The impact of these flaws was drastic but varied across States. In Bihar, where migration for work is overwhelmingly male, more women than men were struck off the rolls, particularly those aged 18-29 years and recorded as "permanently shifted". The gender ratio in the final SIR rolls fell to 892 from 907 in the 2024 Lok Sabha rolls.

In West Bengal, statistical analyses by the Kolkata-based SABAR Institute, a public policy and research organisation, estimated that 65% of those deleted after adjudication for "logical discrepancies" were Muslims, despite Muslims accounting for roughly 27% of the State's population.

A deferential Court

For months, the Court confined itself to managerial interventions on the SIR. It ruled only

on May 27, after Phase 2 had ended and Phase 3 was notified, upholding the SIR.

Legal scholars have raised three broad substantive objections to the judgment. First, Section 21(3) permits a special revision "for any constituency or part of a constituency" – an exceptional and targeted power. Yet, the Court allowed the ECI to use it for a State-wide exercise, freeing it from the Registration of Electors Rules governing ordinary revisions.

Second, rather than asking whether a less harmful method, such as door-to-door verification and enrolment, could achieve the same objective, the Court asked only whether the SIR was "manifestly excessive".

Third, the Court sidestepped its own three-judge ruling in *Lal Babu Hussein* (1995), which struck down a "sweeping" revision that demanded citizenship documents from nearly 18,000 residents of Delhi's Matia Mahal. The ruling, also incorporated into the ECI's Manual, held that a name on the electoral roll is presumed valid and can be removed only after notice and a hearing.

Essentially, the Court found that disenfranchisement was not "widespread or systemic" enough to warrant intervention, without specifying what would matter instead. The judgment emboldened the ECI to proceed with the flawed SIR in Phase 3, where deletions have risen sharply.

Dissent from within

Reports revealed that Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi recorded at least 14 objections between October 2025 and August 2026. One concerned Form 6 being altered, without amending the rules, requiring applicants to state whether they or their parents or grandparents appeared on the "last SIR" roll. The ECI's response to the revelations was mere window-dressing with some administrative changes. As the two Commissioners constituted a majority, they should have used it to stop these decisions, but did not.

The Court is now hearing petitions concerning West Bengal and Delhi, as well as pleas seeking the CEC's suspension over the ECI's conduct. It should use these proceedings to revisit its judgment on review or before a Constitution Bench. It should halt the SIR and order an audit of rolls finalised so far before any further deletions. Enumeration should return to door-to-door verification by Booth Level Officers, while States going to the polls soon should use their pre-SIR rolls, updated with fresh enrolments.

Anything less would endorse a process that professes time and again that no eligible elector will be left out while patently doing the opposite. It has removed more than a lakh genuine voters for certain, and possibly crores. The ECI, built to widen India's adult franchise, has instead spent more than a year narrowing it.

srinivasan.vr@thehindu.co.in
ponvasanth.ba@thehindu.co.in

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 11

Understanding Gandhi's re-emergence in India's oppositional politics

Gandhi's return to the centre of opposition politics shows a wider churn in India, with protests, citizen action and new political movements seeking greater accountability and systemic change; despite efforts to diminish his legacy, his emphasis on bottom-up political change remains relevant

Atul Mishra

Mahatma Gandhi is back at the centre of India's oppositional politics and public imagination. On the evening of 8 October, MPs from the INDIA bloc, including Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, started a sit-in protest against India's Chief Election Commissioner at Raj Ghat, the Mahatma's memorial in New Delhi. At protests in Mumbai on the same issue on October 2, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke called Gandhi "the soul of India". Protestors dressed as Gandhi have emerged across the country.

Citizen activists, such as the Uttarakhand resident "Mohammad" Deepak, who have defended members of the minority community against violent communal elements, claim to be inspired by Gandhi. And Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj party, having opened its legislative account in Bihar and expanding to Delhi, uses Gandhi as its central inspiration alongside B.R. Ambedkar.

These are significant examples. The protests the country has seen in recent months are the strongest and potentially the most consequential in years. Mr. Rahul Gandhi and the INDIA bloc MPs appear to be effectively mobilising against the establishment. And Jan Suraj's focus on education and accountability is refreshing in a region where social justice has descended into cynical politics based on caste, religion, and patronage. The world's largest democracy is experiencing a churn – as illustrated by cross-regional protests, mobilisation of Opposition lawmakers, courageous citizen action, and the emergence of a new party with a strategy to break the mould of regional politics in

the Gangetic region. That Gandhi is at the heart of this churn speaks to his utility to those wishing to inject civility and decency into India's public life, mobilise the masses for systemic change, and redefine electoral issues.

Gandhi has come back despite concerted efforts to diminish him. These efforts have come from the political right, and the purveyors of identity politics who dominate the progressive intellectual space in Indian universities, media, and public forums.

On the right, the ruling establishment recast Gandhi as the symbol of cleanliness of physical spaces – streets, offices, transport, and hospitals. The Swachh Bharat campaign put Gandhi on government letterheads. It made Gandhi visible but changed what he came to mean in the public imagination: not modern India's tallest political leader and a source of political renewal, but a symbol for the country's quest to cure itself of being at ease with its own filth. This was an attempt to depoliticise Gandhi, to erase the fact that he possesses ideas for radical political change.

A battle over legacy

The right wanted to replace Gandhi with V.D. Savarkar, the Hindutva ideologue, in the national public imagination. The establishment sought to elevate Savarkar's status by diminishing Gandhi's stature, mainly by projecting him as a weak figure who emasculated Hindu society and appeased Muslims, causing India's partition, the loss of territory, and geopolitical disadvantage. In contrast, Savarkar was positioned as the champion of Hindu strength and uncompromising nationalism. A former Information Commissioner of India, Uday Mahurkar,

has dubbed him the "father of national security", claiming in 2021 that India had entered the "Savarkar era".

Identity politics intellectuals and activists have trained their guns on Gandhi because of his views on race, caste, and women. Early Gandhi bought into the imperial notion of the hierarchy of humanity based on skin colour, placing the Black people below Brown Indians. On caste, while Gandhi opposed untouchability, he was unwilling to disown the varna system, which necessarily produced untouchability. And early Gandhi's views on women, alongside his experiments in sexual restraint in old age, became associated with misogyny. To identity politics intellectuals, Gandhi is the most regressive public figure one can imagine: racist, misogynist, conservative upholder of caste, and hypocritical. His non-violence is held as a cover that sustains the 'structural violence' of racism, casteism, and patriarchy.

While both groups have wanted to diminish Gandhi's global standing, the right in India has not succeeded, given that the establishment finds him useful in projecting India as a state that rejects war and promotes sustainable development internationally. They have also had to accommodate Gandhi's appeal amongst foreign governments.

However, partisans of identity politics have successfully lessened Gandhi's stature in academic and intellectual circles in India and abroad by placing him within intersectional politics. The claim is that European colonialism has produced a global structure of subjugation called the caste-race nexus, which Gandhi embodies most fully. Just as in the West there have been calls to dislodge statues and monuments of racist figures, like campus

activism around 'Rhodes Must Fall', these critics have welcomed Gandhi's fall. While the right has sought to replace Gandhi with Savarkar, for identity politics intellectuals and activists, that figure is Ambedkar. And yet Gandhi has made a comeback.

The case for relevance

India's citizens need not deify Gandhi; they must assess him for things he said and did in his time, some of which are offensive in our changed context. But Gandhi is more than his problematic views. He had a public career of five decades. He remained relevant for that long not because of his views but because of his basic insight that to change politics, we must work on its foundations: society, community, and the individual. This is what the right in India has done vigorously, capitalising on the fact that Gandhi's successors abandoned that space after independence. Forces that want decency and civility in public life, and accountability in politics, have discovered that they must start by changing what society should expect from politics, and that individuals should think of themselves as citizens with the right to demand accountability rather than subjects who must do as told. It is little surprise that they have found Gandhi useful. He is helping them develop those ideas and, most crucially, giving legitimacy to non-violent protest. It is proof that Gandhi survives in India's collective consciousness. He remains relevant to any social force that seeks bottom-up political change, for which India's neighbours too have shown a keen desire.

(The writer teaches international affairs at Shiv Nadar University, Delhi-NCR)

GS 1: ART AND LITERATURE

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 09

• NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

Anne Carson: A provocateur who blurs boundaries between genres

Paromita Chakrabarti
New Delhi, October 8

IN A 2004 interview with *The Paris Review*, Anne Carson offered a simple explanation for why she writes: "I write to find out what I think about something."

Poet, classicist, essayist and translator for more than four decades, the 76-year-old has used the past to clarify her thoughts about the contemporary. She has drawn on the literature of ancient Greece while refusing to be confined by forms, by the boundaries between poetry, fiction, criticism and memoir. This year's Nobel Prize in Literature acknowledges her "for her bold and inventive oeuvre that, in playful dialogue with the classical tradition, has created new forms for contemporary literature".

Greek on the menu

Born in Toronto in June 1950, the second child of a banker father and homemaker mother, Carson's childhood was spent between small towns, including

Stoney Creek, Port Hope and Timmins. The itinerant childhood meant changing schools repeatedly, but it also brought the Canadian writer to the teacher who would alter the course of her life.

In a 2011 interview to the literary magazine *Brick*, Carson spoke of how she owed her "career and happiness" to her Latin teacher Alice Cowan in Port Hope High School. It was the time she fancied herself as a "reborn" Oscar Wilde: "...I thought, if I learn Greek I could be all the more like Oscar Wilde. It seemed the natural next step." And so, over Greek lessons during lunch hour, a lifelong bond with the ancient classics was formed. Carson went on to study Classics at the University of Toronto. Her doctoral dissertation, completed in 1981, was on Sappho, the ancient Greek poet.

Her first book, *Eros the Bittersweet*, published in 1986, grew out of her academic work, an examination of desire through the classical lens. It established an idea that would remain central to her writing: that desire is created by distance, shaped by

• 'For her bold and inventive oeuvre that... has created new forms for contemporary literature'

"Carson with a light touch explores the possibilities of writing... by which the literary sketch has become of particular value to her."

ON FRIDAY:
NOBEL PRIZE IN PEACE



ANNE CARSON, 76
Canada

SOME NOTABLE WORKS:

- *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986)
- *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse* (1998)
- *Nox* (2010)
- *Float* (2016)
- *Wrong Norms* (2024)

longing and imagination. "The words we read and words we write never say exactly what we mean. The people we love are never just as we desire them. The two symbols never perfectly match. Eros is in between," she wrote.

Books that changed the rules

If *Eros the Bittersweet* introduced Carson as a provocateur, *Autobiography of Red*

(1998), a novel in verse, established her as an unmistakably original literary voice. Carson transformed the ancient Greek myth of Geryon, the red-winged monster killed by Herakles, into the story of a sensitive adolescent who falls in love with Herakles. Myth, adolescence, sexuality and heartbreak come together into a moving coming-of-age tale.

Then came *The Beauty of the Husband*

(2001), "a fictional essay in 29 tangos", which made her the first woman to win the TS Eliot Prize; *Red Doc* (2013), which returned to the characters of *Autobiography of Red*; and *Nox* (2010), perhaps her most formally startling book.

Nox was created after the death of Carson's estranged brother Michael and combines photographs, letters, translation, fragments and handwritten material in an accordion-fold format. Its emotional subject is grief, but it also examines the intellectual difficulty of holding on to another person through language.

Carson has also translated Sappho, Euripides and other classical writers, most notably in *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* and *An Oresteia*. *Wrong Norms* (2024), a collection of 25 poetic-prose pieces, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry in 2025.

What makes her stand out

Carson's distinction lies in her easy ability to transcend genres. She's always been

reluctant to call herself a poet, even though, as she told *The Paris Review* in the 2004 interview, she had been writing "some heretic form of poetry" for much of her life.

She is impatient with formal categories, with the distinction between the intellectual and the emotional. A poem can suddenly become an essay; an essay morphs into a translation; a translation can become autobiography; an ancient myth turns into a modern love story.

Through it all Carson maintains an emotional detachment, writing about desire, abandonment or bereavement without the confessional warmth usually associated with such themes.

Instead, they show up through a fragment of Sappho, in the form of a mythological figure, a photograph, or an abrupt change of form, demonstrating that the classics remain radically contemporary, that there is no one way to arrive at or dwell in poetry. Or, as she put it in *Autobiography of Red*: "Reality is a sound, you have to tune in to it not just keep yelling."

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (HEALTH)

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 09

• HEALTH

Angioplasty: When is stenting necessary, when is it not?

Rinku Ghosh

New Delhi, October 8

KERALAM CHIEF Minister V D Sathes-
san's call for a campaign against "unneces-
sary" angioplasty — a procedure to open
blocked heart arteries — has sparked a de-
bate among doctors. Sathesasan said some
hospitals were carrying out angioplasty de-
spite there being no medical need for it,
putting the focus on a procedure that can
be life-saving in some situations but may
not be necessary in others.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA)
has agreed that unnecessary investigations
and treatment should be avoided, but has
cautioned against broad claims about un-
necessary angioplasty. Such statements, it
said, could undermine patients' trust in doc-
tors and even prompt some to delay or refuse
procedures that are genuinely life-saving.

Keralam is among the country's largest
users of coronary stents, ranking third in
reported stent use after Maharashtra and
Karnataka, according to National Inter-
ventional Council data.

Cardiologists say angioplasty is not
required for every patient with chest pain,
but it should not be delayed when a patient
is having an acute heart attack, when blood
flow to a part of the heart is suddenly
blocked because of blood clotting over
broken plaque, depriving the heart muscle
of oxygen. The decision, they stress, has to

be made on the basis of a patient's clinical
condition, investigation and risk factors.

When do we need angioplasty?

"Angioplasty can be life-saving when
performed promptly during a heart attack.
However, in non-acute situations or stable
coronary artery disease, (when the heart's
arteries are narrowed, predictable and do
not pose an immediate emergency) its role
is more limited. Several large studies have
shown that, for most patients with stable dis-
ease, routine angioplasty and stenting do
not provide additional protection against
death or heart attack compared to treatment
with medicines only," says Dr Ambuj Roy,
professor of cardiology, All-India Institute
of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi.

According to him, stent or bypass sur-
gery is particularly considered when there
are high-risk coronary blockages "that
place a large amount of heart muscle in
jeopardy, or when troublesome angina
(chest pain) persists despite an adequate
trial of medical therapy."

What percentage of plaque is required for the procedure?

According to protocol, a coronary artery
blockage generally requires at least 70%
narrowing (or 50% in critical areas like the
left main artery) before a stent is con-
sidered necessary. Mild blockages under
50% are typically managed non-invasively

What is an angioplasty?

● During a heart
attack, a blood clot
can suddenly block a
coronary artery, cut-
ting off blood flow to
part of the heart.

● Angioplasty can
restore blood flow
and save lives in such
situations.

● It is a procedure to
open a narrowed or
blocked heart artery
with a small balloon,
often followed by
placement of a stent
or a mesh bridge to
widen it for oxygen-
ated blood to flow.

● Modern stents are
drug-coated and,
with anti-clotting
medicines, are built
to last a lifetime.

● But finding a
blockage on an
angiogram does not
automatically mean
a stent is needed.

through diet, lifestyle changes, and me-
dications like statins. "For moderate, border-
line blockages between 50% and 70%, we
need to test functional blood flow to deter-
mine if the heart muscle is actually de-
prived of blood before deciding whether to
place a stent," says Dr Balbir Singh, chair-
man, Cardiac Sciences, Max Healthcare.

Who should get an angiogram (the heart imaging test)?

In patients with chest pain but not hav-
ing a heart attack, doctors first estimate the
pretest probability or how likely the patient
is to have significant coronary artery dis-
ease. "This estimate is based on factors
such as age, sex, symptoms and other risk
factors, including smoking, family history
and existing medical conditions. If the es-
timated pre-test probability is very high —
above 85% — guidelines may support an-
giography. If it is very low — below 15% —
further testing may not be necessary," says
Dr Akshay Ashok Bafna, HOD Cardiology
at Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj
Government Medical College, Kolhapur.

What drives patient anxiety?

Unfortunately, information asymmetry
can limit a patient's ability to make a truly
informed choice. "Faced with an angio-
gram showing a 70% or 90% blockage, pa-
tients depend heavily on their treating car-
diologist to explain whether a stent is likely

to prolong life, prevent a heart attack, re-
lieve symptoms or add little to good medi-
cal therapy," explains Dr Roy.

It is the overuse of stents in these situ-
ations that has, at times, brought an other-
wise life-saving treatment into disrepute.
"This has in recent times been amplified due
to wide availability of insurance schemes.
Unfortunately, there has been a potentially
dangerous consequence: patients refuse
stents even during an acute heart attack,
when timely angioplasty can save lives and
preserve heart muscle," he says.

Dr S Ganapathy, surgeon and public
health activist from Keralam, points to
another source of anxiety for patients: the
difficulty of interpreting cardiac tests with-
out the right clinical context. Even normal
variations in an ECG can differ with age, he
says. "An ECG of a 30-year-old is different
from that of a 50-year-old," he explains, not-
ing that variations in ECG waves can some-
times add to a patient's anxiety when they
are not properly explained. Such anxiety, he
says, can make patients vulnerable to inap-
propriate medical advice. "Some people can
prey upon these anxieties," he cautions,
making it important for patients to under-
stand that an abnormal-looking test does
not, by itself, mean that an invasive proce-
dure such as angioplasty is necessary.

INPUTS FROM ANURADHA MASCARENHAS

FULL VERSION ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

GS 3: ENVIRONMENT

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 10

To combat pollution, we need to cast a wider net, go beyond the city

THE COUNTRY has been witnessing rapidly evolving dynamics on multiple fronts in recent weeks. While much of the public discourse has been dominated by Election Commission-related developments, it was particularly gratifying to hear a minister in Delhi make a scientifically important observation: "PM10 does not travel as far as PM2.5, so the construction contributes far less to pollution than vehicular emissions." This is the kind of scientific understanding I have long wished to hear from policymakers and authorities. Nearly a decade ago, while presenting the SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research, India's first air-quality forecasting framework) findings under the MoES, I reported that the transport sector was a major contributor to Delhi's toxic pollution, accounting for around 40 per cent of PM2.5 emissions. At the time, the finding was uncomfortable. It provoked strong resistance, even a backlash. Although it was clear that PM2.5 was the most harmful to our health, we continued to devote disproportionate attention and resources to the second- or third-tier contributors, especially dust, because the National Clean Air Programme's (NCAP) metric gauges funding, assessing performance and mitigation progress by percentage reduction in PM10, where dust is a major contributor. This inevitably shaped pollution-control priorities. It is encouraging to see scientific understanding of Delhi's pollution sources gradually finding greater acceptance in policy discourse, though the road ahead remains long.

While Delhi begins work on its Winter Action Plan — narrow road-sweeping machines, doubling parking charges, work-from-home provisions under GRAP — nature may have a plan of its own. One of the biggest factors shaping Delhi's winter air quality will be "Super El Niño", an exceptionally strong event of the century. It has already influenced India's monsoon, which ended with a 13 per cent rainfall deficit, the highest in a decade. Delhi defied the national trend, recording a 17 per cent surplus. This raises a question: If ENSO's larger dynamics originate from the Pacific Ocean, why should it matter for Delhi's winter air quality, a regional phenomenon? While a Super El Niño does not generate an air pollution source, it can act as a villain by "weather trapping" in several ways. First, it can drastically reduce wind speed over north India, as a recent study by this author at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) found. This prevents dispersion of fine particulates — PM2.5 emitted from stubble burning, vehicular transport, biofuel, and open waste burning — thereby compounding emissions for a prolonged period and leading to repeated extreme pollution episodes. Two, in all probability, westerly disturbances (WD) will be almost absent as El Niño becomes severe. The WDs bring rain in Delhi to wash away pollutants intermittently. The dry spell means prolonged accumulation of pollution without a break. Third, under the influence of this super event, winter is likely



GUFRAN BEIG

to be milder in northern India. A combination of milder daytime temperatures and nighttime cooling under stagnant conditions may lower the surface inversion layer. This can restrict vertical mixing and prevent pollutants from dispersing, causing them to accumulate in a shallow layer near the ground. As a result, pollutant concentrations can rise sharply.

Places in Punjab and Haryana experienced severe recent rainfall deficits, reaching as high as 23-40 per cent. Some early monsoon rains, however, enabled early paddy sowing — meaning harvesting could begin as early as the first week of October. Recent research, reinforced by conversations with farmers during a recent visit to Amritsar, suggests that stubble burning has indeed shifted from morning to evening. MODIS-based fire detection, which authorities rely on heavily, may miss a significant share of these fires. We should not repeat last year's blind spot — when undercounting fires risked undermining the very purpose of mitigation. However, how the rainfall deficit affected the rice crop and, consequently, stubble burning, remains to be seen.

The festive season when fire-crackers are used arrives in the first week of November this year, when winter conditions are already firmly established, and stubble burning is expected to be at its peak. Without suitable alternatives, farmers may resort to the fastest matchbox methodology. Historically, November 5-10 has been

Delhi's most challenging pollution period in the last decade. The pattern is likely to return with greater intensity this year, as El Niño-driven weaker-than-usual winds may create a perfect atmospheric trap, allowing emissions from multiple sources to accumulate rapidly over the region. But there is an opportunity: Curbing additional emission sources at least during this critical window could spare Delhi the worst of the pollution.

India's air-quality challenge, particularly across the Indo-Gangetic Region and Delhi, is becoming increasingly complex as climate change amplifies natural drivers of pollution. It is a double whammy: Worsening emissions compounded by extreme weather events and a changing climate. This calls for science-based simultaneous action across the short, medium and long term, not just the short term. The first and most difficult step is to move decisively from a city-centric to an airshed-based approach. The pathway is outlined in a monograph, NARFI (National Air Quality Resource Framework of India), a project developed by NIAS under the auspices of the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India. Where the full airshed is too vast for practical implementation, a satellite airshed could provide an operational alternative. What is needed now is not another incremental measure, but a firm commitment to airshed-based, science-driven air-quality management.

The writer is chair professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, IISc-campus, and founder project director, SAFAR

This calls for science-based simultaneous action across the short, medium and long term. The first and most difficult step is to move decisively from a city-centric to an airshed-based approach

GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (HEALTH)

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 11



URVASHI PRASAD

WORLD MENTAL Health Day falls on October 10. There will be helpline numbers, awareness posts, wellness webinars. Set that against what we did, a few weeks earlier, to a 22-year-old, Sahil Wakode, a second-year BTech student at IIT-Bombay, died by suicide on September 18, hours after an examination. Within days of his death — long before any inquiry could conclude — exam-hall CCTV was circulating online and on various television channels as proof he had been caught with a phone; his last calls became content for strangers to pick over. His father alleges caste discrimination and named a faculty member in an FIR; the institute denies any of it drove him to his death.

Notice what the argument is always about. Not whether a young person should

Hunting for villains, not searching for truth

be dead but which single story owns the death. The institute thrives on academic stress; the activists need caste, the pattern they have watched kill before. The hunt for a single, assignable cause is not a search for the truth but a way of not having one. A death reduced to one villain — a professor, a phone, a father's ambition — is a death no one has to think too hard about.

We are told each time that India has no rules for reporting a death like this. We do. The Press Council's 2019 guidelines, issued under the Mental Healthcare Act, bar what happened after the Mumbai incident. Every line was crossed. The Supreme Court has laid down pan-India guidelines on student suicide and appointed a national task force on student mental health. In January, it was still flagging the "tokenistic compliance" and "institutional apathy" that met its orders. The language usually used to speak of such deaths gives the game away, too. "Committed suicide" — the phrase almost every-

one still reaches for — is the vocabulary of crime. Parliament removed suicide from that category in 2017, when the Mental Healthcare Act decriminalised the attempt. A person does not commit suicide. A person dies by suicide.

NCRB's Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India recorded 14,488 student suicides in 2024 — the highest it has ever logged, close to double the figure of a decade earlier, and roughly 1.24 lakh students lost across 2014 to 2024. The deaths cluster where the pressure is highest: The coaching towns, the entrance-exam hubs, institutions. These are not private misfortunes. They are a structural output, arriving in larger numbers every year.

Which forces the question the ritual of blame avoids: Why does a single entrance result still stand in for the whole of a young life? When the resulting pressure produces cheating, we consider it a defect of character rather than the predictable behaviour of people

held underwater. And the responsibility does not stop at the institution's gate. It reaches the families who stake a child's entire worth on a rank. It reaches a media that converts grief into traffic. Whether a professor discriminated is a fair question; so is whether the institute reached too quickly — as it has before — for "academic pressure" the moment caste was named. But those sit inside a larger question no FIR will cover: What kind of system produces the death, and then the spectacle around it?

Which brings us back to World Mental Health Day that insists on one idea: These deaths are not fated. They happen because of choices we make, and we can choose differently. Prevention that begins only after the student is dead is not prevention. It is absolution, too late to be of use to the person it names.

The writer, a public health and policy professional, is a former director at NITI Aayog