

EDITORIALS - 25TH AUG 2026

1. Invisible actors (GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial 'Invisible actors' was published in **The Hindu** on 25th Aug 2026, highlights the **misuse of bulk voter-deletion applications** during electoral-roll revision and the need for stronger Election Commission safeguards.

Misuse of Voter-Deletion Process

- The **Special Intensive Revision** has faced allegations of fraudulent bulk applications seeking deletion of eligible voters from draft rolls in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
- Ground reports found **Form 7** applications filed without voters' knowledge, sometimes placing hundreds of objections under one person's name.
- Form 7 permits objections to existing entries or deletion requests based on death, shifting or ineligibility; the **Electoral Registration Officer** must investigate and notify the affected voter.
- **Booth Level Agents** may file ten forms daily and thirty overall, but an ordinary voter faces no total ceiling for objections within the same constituency.
- The **Election Commission of India** mandates review when one person files over five objections, but bulk online submissions in Uttarakhand raised concerns about institutional access.

Democratic and Institutional Concerns

- Opposition parties allege **systematic deletions** could remove eligible voters and provide wrongful electoral advantage, although both ruling and Opposition parties appoint Booth Level Agents.
- Most affected voters reportedly remained unaware until alerted by political workers, making **voting rights** dependent on party-level grassroots capacity rather than institutional protection.
- The third revision phase covering **16 States and three Union Territories** has 3,42,409 party agents for 36,73,87,831 electors, averaging approximately 1,073 voters per agent.

Required Safeguards

- The Commission should investigate abnormal filing patterns and adopt a **uniform Standard Operating Procedure** requiring identity and constituency verification, notice and due process before deletion under Form 7.

Beyond Editorial

Global Best Practices for Electoral-Roll Integrity

- **Verified data integration:** Australia updates electoral rolls using validated records from licensing authorities, utilities and educational institutions, subject to predefined quality checks by electoral officials.
- **First-hand confirmation:** The United States permits deletion for changed residence only after written voter confirmation or statutory verification, preventing unverified third-party challenges from becoming sufficient evidence.
- **Notice protection:** Under the United States National Voter Registration Act, an unresponsive voter remains registered until receiving notice and failing to vote in two consecutive federal general elections.

- **Pre-election restraint:** The United States prohibits systematic voter-removal programmes within 90 days of federal elections, limiting last-minute deletions that affected citizens cannot effectively challenge.
- **Annual verification:** The United Kingdom’s annual electoral canvass requires authorities to contact households and confirm additions, corrections or removals before revising the electoral register.
- **Targeted revision:** Elections Canada sends pairs of revising agents to high-mobility and low-registration areas, including residential complexes and long-term care facilities, to verify eligible voters personally.
- **Quality auditing:** Canada regularly measures electoral-roll coverage, currency and accuracy; its National Register included an estimated 96.1% of qualified electors in November 2025.

2. Labour rights beyond the shadow of BWSSB (GS Paper II Polity)

This editorial ‘**Labour rights beyond the shadow of BWSSB**’ was published in **The Hindu** on 25th Aug 2026, highlights the constitutional importance of **labour protection** amid judicial reconsideration of the **definition of industry**.

Reference and Judicial Reasoning

- The **nine-judge Bench** examined the correctness of *Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board v. A. Rajappa* (1978), which formulated the test for “industry” under **Section 2(j)** of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.
- The reference covered BWSSB’s correctness, the **1982 Amendment**, government welfare activities, sovereign functions and the Industrial Relations Code’s impact; however, the **Industrial Disputes Act** had already been repealed.
- Justices D. Datta and U. Bhuyan declined to answer, while Justices Nagarathna and Narasimha considered the exercise **unnecessary**, as the **Industrial Relations Code, 2020** came into force on November 21, 2025.
- The Chief Justice’s four-judge opinion described its reformulated **Triple Test** as hypothetical and prospective; it neither alters pending disputes governed by BWSSB nor decides future cases under **Section 2(p)** of the new Code.
- Although recognising the Code as an **independent enactment**, the opinion barred BWSSB from guiding its future interpretation, creating an **interpretive contradiction** without construing the Code itself.
- Justice Nagarathna maintained that BWSSB’s relevance to the **Industrial Relations Code** must be determined through textual comparison in an actual Section 2(p) dispute, not through an **abstract ruling**.

Constitutional Significance of Labour Protection

- Judicial anxiety portraying BWSSB as excessively **worker-oriented** overlooks unequal bargaining power; labour law provides minimum protection against employer dominance rather than preferential treatment.
- **Articles 42 and 23** address exploitative labour conditions, while *Kesavananda Bharati* recognised **social justice** as part of the Constitution’s basic structure.
- The **Industrial Disputes Act, 1947** promoted industrial peace through minimum safeguards and adjudicatory remedies; excluding an activity from “industry” consequently denied its workers both **protection and legal recourse**.
- BWSSB’s broad definition extended protection across the Act’s intended coverage, whereas the new **labour codes** adopt narrower inclusion and must still satisfy the constitutional mandate of **Part IV**.

Beyond Editorial

Implications for India's Informal Workforce

- **Massive coverage:** Over 31.82 crore unorganised workers were registered on e-Shram by August 2026, demonstrating the scale of workers potentially affected by narrow labour-law definitions.
- **Expanding gig economy:** India's gig workforce is projected to rise from 77 lakh in 2020–21 to 2.35 crore by 2029–30, increasing the importance of legal clarity.
- **Platform vulnerability:** Workers associated with Zomato, Uber, Swiggy and Ola remain subject to algorithmic ratings and account deactivation, while their employment status and collective rights remain uncertain.
- **Social-security recognition:** The **Code on Social Security, 2020** recognises gig and platform workers and enables schemes covering health, maternity, accidents, disability and old-age protection.
- **Portable welfare:** e-Shram integrates 15 welfare schemes, including One Nation One Ration Card and Ayushman Bharat, helping mobile workers access benefits beyond their home States.
- **Migrant precarity:** A 2026 National Human Rights Commission consultation highlighted delayed wages, weak interstate coordination and inadequate portable protection as continuing problems for migrant workers.
- **Collective empowerment:** The Self-Employed Women's Association organised around 3 lakh women into 106 cooperatives, showing how worker-led institutions can extend livelihoods, insurance and bargaining support.

3. Smart glasses highlight gaps in privacy laws (GS Paper II Governance, GS Paper III Science and Technology)

This editorial 'Smart glasses highlight gaps in privacy laws' was published in **The Hindu** on 25th Aug 2026, highlights the **surveillance risks** created by **AI-powered smart glasses** and inadequacies in India's privacy framework.

Technology and Privacy Risks

- **Smart glasses** combine voice-controlled communication, speakers and discreet cameras within normal-looking eyewear, enabling inconspicuous photography, video recording and continuous **surveillance**.
- Recording indicators can be concealed using widely available stickers or workarounds, while shutter sounds provide weak notice and **privacy controls** remain exclusively with the **wearer**.
- Meta's contractors sometimes review shared recordings for user-experience tracking, including sensitive footage, exposing weaknesses in **data processing** and third-party **accountability**.
- The **National Crime Records Bureau** recorded 3,678 women-centred cybercrimes in 2023, including 2,767 involving sexually explicit material, indicating heightened risks from **non-consensual recording**.
- The 698 cases involving child sexual abuse material in 2023 underline children's **privacy vulnerability**, as they may not recognise when **smart glasses** are recording.
- A four-to-nine-hour battery enables extensive **data collection**, including films, lectures, documents, patient information and private activities unintentionally captured within the camera's frame.

Legal Gaps and Regulatory Needs

- The **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** is technology-agnostic but emphasises collection purpose, while individuals in public spaces cannot meaningfully grant **consent** or monitor data use.
- *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017) protected reasonable **expectation of privacy** under **Article 21**, including freedom from detailed capture in public spaces.

- The Act excludes **publicly available information** and does not regulate public recording, while smart glasses provide fewer visible indicators than smartphones, creating a significant **regulatory gap**.
- Rapid innovation, weak regulation and low awareness may normalise invisible surveillance; outright **bans** are impractical as multiple firms enter the market, requiring adaptive laws and regular **risk assessments**.

Beyond Editorial

Global Regulatory Models for Wearable Surveillance

- **Risk-based regulation:** The European Union's **Artificial Intelligence Act** classifies artificial-intelligence applications by risk, imposing stronger obligations where systems threaten privacy, safety or fundamental rights.
- **Biometric restrictions:** The European Union generally prohibits real-time remote biometric identification in public spaces for law enforcement, allowing only narrowly defined and authorised exceptions.
- **Privacy by design:** The **General Data Protection Regulation** requires purpose limitation, data minimisation and storage limitation, making companies responsible for embedding privacy safeguards into wearable devices.
- **Mandatory assessment:** The United Kingdom's Information Commissioner requires Data Protection Impact Assessments for high-risk surveillance, including facial recognition and large-scale monitoring of public spaces.
- **Biometric consent:** Illinois' **Biometric Information Privacy Act** requires informed written consent and publicly available retention and destruction policies before private entities process biometric identifiers.
- **Meaningful consent:** Canada's privacy regulator has warned that wearable devices make informed consent difficult because surrounding individuals may be recorded, tracked or profiled without noticing the device.
- **Proactive oversight:** Australia's privacy regulator specifically warned in 2026 about surveillance wearables, emphasising early risk assessment as Meta, Google and Apple expand into smart devices.