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Citizenship under CAA only if claims verified: SC

Act provides rights to persecuted religious minorities, but their claims must clear official review, says court after petitioner flags panic among refugees from neighbouring nations after SIR began

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said conferment of rights associated with Indian citizenship to people claiming to be religious minorities who fled persecution from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh and protected under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, would be wholly dependent on whether their claims turn out to be true.

The court said that though the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, had introduced changes in favour of granting "enforceable rights" to persecuted religious minorities from these countries, every such claim would have to be enquired into and verified by the authorities.



A file picture of Bangladeshi Hindus arriving at a village in West Bengal. REUTERS

The oral observations from a Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi came on a petition filed by an NGO, Aatmadeep.

The NGO submitted that these groups, especially those who had fled Bangladesh and were living in West Bengal, were petri-

Fear of statelessness

Key issues raised in the petition regarding persecuted minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan

■ The delay in issuing citizenship certificates, combined with the non-recognition of acknowledgment receipts during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR), has created a "serious constitutional crisis"

■ The affected persons — recognised by Parliament as deserving protection and integration — are now exposed to the risk of statelessness, social exclusion, and disenfranchisement

■ The acknowledgment receipt generated upon online submission of an application for a certificate of naturalisation must be treated as valid provisional proof of pending citizenship determination, at least for the SIR

fied that the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls would render them stateless.

Chief Justice Kant said the conferment of Indian citizenship was not a given for CAA applicants. They should fulfil certain conditions, and in due course, could apply for inclusion in

the voters' list, the Chief Justice said.

The court, however, issued notice to the Election Commission and the Centre, seeking a response. It posted the case for hearing next week.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

Trump mulls tariffs on Indian rice; move may hit U.S. more

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Days before a team of negotiators from the United States is to visit India to discuss tariffs, U.S. President Donald Trump has hinted at imposing further tariffs on India, this time on rice, to prevent it from "dumping" rice in the U.S.

However, an analysis of trade data between the two countries shows that such tariffs would hurt the U.S. far more than India since only about 3% of India's rice exports go to the U.S., whereas Indian rice makes up more than one-fourth of the quantity imported into the U.S.

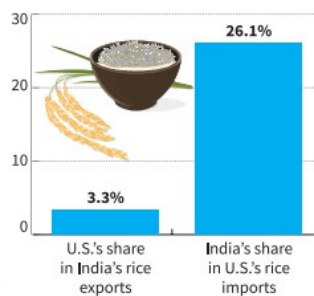
In other words, for rice, the U.S. is not a major export destination for India, but India is a major import source for the U.S.

The Hindu had recently

Differing impacts

The chart compares India's share in the U.S.'s rice imports and the U.S.'s share in India's rice exports in 2024 (in %)

SOURCE: UN COMTRADE



reported that a U.S. team of negotiators led by Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Rick Switzer would be in New Delhi on December 10-12 to discuss tariffs. The U.S. has currently imposed a total of 50% tariffs on imports from India.

Mr. Trump made his rice tariff comments during a White House meeting in which he unveiled a \$12 billion package to support

American farmers.

At a meeting in the White House, when a farmers' representative complained that India, Thailand and other countries were "dumping" rice in the U.S., Mr. Trump asked the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent: "Why is India allowed to do that? They have to pay tariffs. Do they have an exemption on rice?"

Exercising franchise



Voters stand in queue before a polling station in Thripunithura, Kochi, on Tuesday. In the first phase of the Kerala local body polls, seven southern districts recorded 70.9% polling, as per the data released by the State Election Commission. THULASI KAKKAT (REPORT ON PAGE 6)

INDIA bloc MPs move motion to impeach HC judge

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

MPs of the INDIA bloc on Tuesday submitted a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to move an impeachment motion in Parliament against Justice G.R. Swaminathan of the Madras High Court's Madurai Bench.

They accused the judge of deciding cases based on political ideology and sought his removal under Article 217, read with Article 124, of the Constitution.

"The House resolves to pass a motion for the impeachment of Justice G.R. Swaminathan," stated the letter. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) Parliamentary Party leader Kanimozhi said Mr. Birla told



Justice G.R. Swaminathan

the MPs that he would look into the issue.

Other MPs who submitted the letter include the party's Lok Sabha leader T.R. Baalu, Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, CPI(M) member Su. Venkatesan, DMK member A. Raja, VCK MP Thol. Thirumavalavan and MDMK leader Durai Vaiko.

The Opposition's move

The move comes against the backdrop of the judge's order directing authorities in T.N. to ensure that Karthigai Deepam was lit at deepathoon near a dargah

comes against the backdrop of Justice Swaminathan's order directing the authorities of the Subramaniya Swamy Temple at Thirupparankundram, Madurai, to ensure that the Karthigai Deepam was lit at a *deepathoon* (pillar) near a dargah atop the hill.

As many as 107 MPs signed the letter, stating that the judge's conduct raised serious questions

about the judiciary's impartiality, transparency, and secular functioning.

The Opposition leaders accused the judge of showing undue favouritism to senior advocate M. Sricharan Ranganathan in deciding cases, and of favouring advocates from a particular community.

"He is deciding cases on the basis of a particular political ideology and against the secular principles of the Indian Constitution," they alleged.

Copies to President, CJI

The MPs submitted copies of letters written by members of the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha to President Droupadi Murmu and Chief Justice of India (CJI)

Surya Kant.

Last week, the Lok Sabha witnessed a face-off between the DMK, which leads the United Progressive Alliance government in Tamil Nadu, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which leads the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre, over the *deepathoon* issue.

Poll-bound State

On December 5, Mr. Baalu accused the BJP of trying to "ignite communal tensions" in the State, which is due to go to the polls next year, while Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs L. Murugan charged the DMK-led government with "denying devotees their right to worship".

Over 30% students in Odisha schools drop out before higher-secondary level: CAG

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha recorded a sharp decline in the gross enrollment ratio (GER) during the transition of students from the secondary to the higher-secondary level, according to a Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report tabled in the Assembly on Tuesday.

"The transition rate in secondary to higher secondary was only 70.3%, indicating that approximately 30% of the students were not able to make the transition to higher classes, either due to dropping out of school or due to not qualifying for promotion to the next level," the audit report on the State's education sector stated.



Students in a queue outside a school in Bhubaneswar. FILE PHOTO

CAG pointed out that GER in secondary and higher-secondary levels declined in the State during 2022-23 compared to 2018-19, even as the ratio improved nationally over the same period.

Odisha's Education Department did not analyse the reasons for the same, the report added.

It also flagged purported discrepancies in official records. CAG found that the transition rate from the upper primary to the secondary level in 2018-19 for Bhadrak and Nuapada districts was more than 100%, which was not possible.

During 2018-23, 1.50 lakh to 5.47 lakh children enrolled in Classes 1 to 11,

discontinued education before reaching the immediate-higher classes while the dropout rate across classes ranged from 3.12% to 7.26%.

Moreover, 61,487 out-of-school children aged six to 18 years were not brought back into the school education system during 2018-23, as per the report.

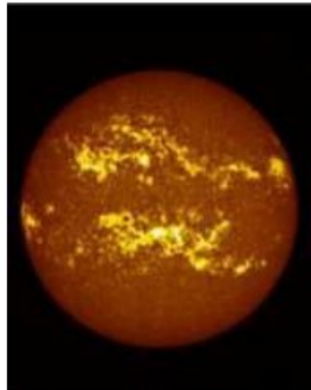
"The reasons for such decline in NER had not been analysed by Odisha State Education Programme Authority. However, ineffective measures to arrest the dropout of students during the transition from upper primary to secondary, as well as inadequate school infrastructure and facilities, were the indicative reasons for the decline in NER," it stated.

Aditya-L1 joins global effort revealing why the 2024 solar storm behaved unusually

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

India's first solar observatory Aditya-L1, along with six U.S. satellites, in a major breakthrough, has revealed why the May 2024 solar storm also known as Gannon's storm behaved so unusually.

The solar storm is composed of a series of giant explosions on the Sun, called coronal mass ejections (CMEs). CMEs are like massive bubbles of hot gas and magnetic energy thrown out from the Sun into space. When these bubbles hit Earth, they can shake our planet's magnetic shield and cause serious trouble for satellites, communication systems, GPS,



The images of the Sun captured by Aditya-L1 during May solar storm, released by the ISRO.

and even power grids.

According to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), during the May 2024 solar storm, the Sun's magnetic fields, which are like twisted ropes inside a solar storm, were breaking

and rejoining within the storm.

"Usually, a CME carries a twisted 'magnetic rope' that interacts with Earth's magnetic shield as it approaches Earth. But this time, two CMEs collided in space and squeezed each other so firmly that the magnetic field lines inside one of them snapped and rejoined in new ways, a process called magnetic reconnection," ISRO said. It added that this sudden reversal of the magnetic field made the storm's impact stronger than expected.

"At the heart of this discovery is India's first solar observatory, Aditya-L1, which joined forces with six U.S. satellites (NASA's Wind, ACE, THEMIS-C,

STEREO-A, MMS, and NASA-NOAA joint mission DISCOVER)," the ISRO said.

"Thanks to precise magnetic field measurements from India's Aditya-L1 mission, scientists were able to map this reconnection region. They found that the area where the CME's magnetic field was tearing and reconnecting was enormous – about 1.3 million km across, i.e., nearly 100 times the size of Earth. It was the first time such a giant magnetic breakup and rejoining had ever been seen inside a CME," it added.

This discovery is expected to enhance the understanding of how solar storms evolve as they travel from the Sun to Earth.

Fadnavis loses cool over repeated mention of Ladki Bahin scheme

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday warned his MLA and others from the Opposition for repeatedly mentioning the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin scheme while raising "unrelated questions" during the Question Hour in the Assembly.

Mr. Fadnavis got triggered when his former personal assistant and Ausa (Latur) BJP legislator, Abhimanyu Dattatray Pawar, said, "We call them Ladki Bahin, but their biggest pain is illegal liquor. We keep mentioning Ladki Bahin when sisters in rural



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. ANI

areas raise their grievances related to illegal liquor."

In response, Mr. Fadnavis warned, "No need to mention Ladki Bahin in everything, otherwise you will have to sit at home. The scheme will go on, and women will continue to re-

ceive a monthly instalment. Do not compare with other schemes."

Ladki Bahin was introduced in July 2024, ahead of the State Assembly election, and has been surrounded by controversies.

Under the scheme, women aged 21 to 65 with an income below ₹2.5 lakh receive a monthly instalment of ₹1,500, which Mahayuti promised to raise to ₹2,500 per month if voted to power.

Mr. Pawar reiterated that the same issue had been raised in the previous session and that, despite directions to the Excise and Food Departments, "nothing substantial has been done".

'Fire count gives a skewed picture of stubble burning'

A research outfit, iForest, studied multiple satellite datasets that said while government claims over a 90% reduction in Punjab and Haryana, burnt-area measurements show only a 30% decline

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The use of 'fire counts' – satellite-derived estimates of active fires – to gauge the extent of stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana may be misleading.

The Environment Ministry has repeatedly claimed that fire counts in Punjab and Haryana fell by 92% and 90% respectively since 2021, citing this as evidence of a sharp decline in stubble burning and proof of the effectiveness of measures in the two states.

However, when data from a different satellite were used to compute another parameter called 'burnt area' – the actual land area affected by fire – the reduction was more gradual, around 30%, falling from about 31,500 sq. km in 2022 to 19,700 sq. km in 2025 (as of November 25), says a study by iForest, a research outfit, that analysed data from multiple satellites used to track stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana.

"The government should stop using fire counts as a proxy for gauging a decline or increase in



A farmer burning stubble in a field at a village. Stubble burning is a significant problem in several States. SANDEEP SAXENA

stubble burning," said iForest CEO Chandra Bhushan, adding, "The smoke that is detected by satellite sensors offers better representation of the land burned. Small fires are often missed by satellites."

Currently, all of India's official estimates rely on data provided by the Consortium for Research on Agroecosystem Monitoring and Modelling from Space (CREAMS) of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) and are built on NASA's Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) on the Terra and Aqua satellites and the Visible Infrared

Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) on the Suomi-NPP satellites.

These satellites orbit earth's poles and observe India only at fixed times of the day, from 10.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. Their sensors are only able to capture active fires and unable to compute the actual number of fires over, say, a 24-hour period.

"These monitoring gaps have far-reaching implications. Fires missed by polar-satellite sensors lead to underestimated emissions, mischaracterised aerosol and particulate-matter loads, and incorrect simulations of air-quality dy-

namics across India," a press statement from iForest noted.

To arrive at their burnt area estimates, iForest used data from the Multi-Spectral Instrument of the Sentinel satellite. Though also a polar-orbiting satellite, passing over India only about once in five days and whose data is available only with a lag of eight to 15 days, it is the only one of its kind able to calculate 'burnt area' at a resolution of 100m by 100m.

Another set of satellite data used in the analysis was the Meteosat 8 and 9, with the sensors Spinning Enhanced Visible and Infrared Imager (SEVIRI). Unlike the other satellites, this one is 'geostationary,' meaning it continuously looks at the same spot and can, thus, provide data every 15 minutes. "While it might not provide accurate information on fire counts, this satellite data clearly showed that since 2022, most of the fires were concentrated in the evenings - outside the detection time of the polar satellites. Which means that the true number of fires in the state has been undercounted," said Mr Bhushan.



Note of harmony

India must uphold social cohesion with a rejuvenated national purpose

Vande Mataram, the salutation of India imagined as mother, inspired generations of nation-builders who brought together diverse sections of society to fight for freedom from British colonialism. Written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and published with his novel *Anandamath* in the early 1880s, this year marks the 150th anniversary of the song. Leaders of the Indian National Congress (INC), which was leading the national movement, decided in 1937 to use the first two stanzas at its gatherings, and the Constitution of the modern Republic of India accorded it the status of the national song. It is only fitting that the country remembers the story of the song, its spirit, and its purpose in nation-building. Unfortunately, the parliamentary discussion to commemorate the anniversary of the song turned into a partisan diatribe in which old wounds were reopened and dominant grievances reframed. The BJP, led by the Prime Minister in the Lok Sabha and Home Minister Amit Shah in the Rajya Sabha, sought to drive home the point that the INC's decision to use only the first two stanzas sowed the seeds of the Partition, as the Muslim League gathered support for a separate state of Pakistan. The Opposition, led by Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in the Lok Sabha and INC party president Mallikarjun Kharge in the Rajya Sabha, explained the historical circumstances of the role of the song and questioned the need for any debate at all on *Vande Mataram*. Ms. Vadra said Parliament should be focusing on issues of the present that concern everyday lives rather than discussing the past.

The past is important for the present of a national community, but it is important to draw the right lessons from history to avoid repeating mistakes. The national movement built unity among various religious and linguistic communities and sects by expanding the political space that they all could share. In fact, the story of *Vande Mataram* holds the path of accommodation and mutual respect that unite faiths and communities. Leaders of the national movement thought it was wise to find common ground rather than impose any faith. Millions of Muslims joined the chant of *Vande Mataram* across the country, as they marched alongside Hindus. While the unification project was successful to a great extent, Partition marked the fragile nature of that unity and flagged a concern for the future, that the promotion of any identity other than a secular, constitutional Indian commonness can be dangerous at any time. Inverting that history of harmony into a cause of fissure serves no purpose. India must uphold unity and harmony with a rejuvenated national purpose. That indeed is the greatest salutation to Mother India.

Wanton negligence

Regulatory failure was a contributory factor in the Goa blaze

A technical report by the Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services in Panaji has laid bare the reasons for the devastating blaze at the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub in Arpora, north Goa that claimed 25 lives. The nightclub had been operating without a valid fire department Non-Objection Certificate (NOC). The local panchayat had issued a demolition notice for the unlicensed structure but this was not enforced. The building itself lacked essential safety infrastructure, and its wooden panels and decor and poorly ventilated basement led to the fire spreading quickly and the victims being claimed by toxic smoke and oxygen deprivation. The unfortunate pattern of the deadly blaze in Goa highlights the fact that such tragedies are not exceptional in India. There is one theme in tragedies such as the firecracker factory explosions in Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, fires in hazardous old buildings in Kolkata, the flames consuming a sleeper bus in Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh, and hospital fires across the country – the inadequacy of regulatory enforcement. Fire safety remains a low priority for regulators and administrators despite recurring catastrophes pointing to the same faults. The issue is not one of a deficit of laws but their lax implementation or even deliberate circumvention without fear of consequences. Building codes, fire safety norms and licensing requirements exist on paper, with corruption, political influence, bureaucratic inertia and, sometimes, even incompetence, creating an ecosystem where violations are routine and enforcement is the exception. With such an enabling environment, establishments such as the one in Arpora prioritise profits over safety. In the case of Goa, a major tourist hub, there is the added problem of proliferation of night clubs, many of them illegal. The operation of these clubs without licenses cannot be possible without political patronage. In Arpora's case, a magisterial inquiry has been ordered by the Chief Minister.

The recurrence of fire accidents must catalyse systemic change in India. Directly related to fire safety, some reforms are key. First, fire safety audits for establishments must be conducted periodically and the findings must be published on an e-governance portal that tracks compliance and fixes accountability. Second, community initiatives about fire safety and hazards should be mandated, and led by local governance institutions. These institutions can also be empowered to incentivise building owners to fit their establishments with fire exits and fire-resistant materials. Third, staff at high-risk establishments must receive safety and crisis management training. In sum, a fundamental shift in governance culture that prioritises citizen safety and holds the regulatory apparatus accountable is a must.

Care as disability justice, dignity in mental health

A 60-year-old recalls eating leftovers as a child, in the absence of his birth family, and, even today, is passively engaged with life. A survivor of childhood abuse says that she now views her problems as 'thoosi' (dust), but only after being homeless and battling insurmountable trauma. Then there is a recollection by someone of stark abuse while under psychiatric care, who was chained and forced to drink water from a washroom because they were deemed 'unmanageable'.

These stories embody suffering in ways that numerical data fail to capture. These are stories that spotlight how different people are impacted and respond differently to distress and care, based on their contexts and beliefs. A lack of commitment to unpack these narratives risks shrinking the immersive exploration that is warranted. It may touch the surface of healing and venture a little beyond but will ultimately relegate the discourse that spotlights barriers, attitudes, social distances, and inadequate care systems to the margins.

Yet, dominant approaches to psychosocial disability continue to view these experiences through a deficits lens, as they are focused on 'integration' into communities that hold stereotypical understandings of productive living, a reductionist imagination of 'the normal', and a social order that goes unquestioned. The gaps in mental health-care access continue to range from 70%-90% globally. While third generation medications promise fewer side-effects and evidence-based therapies proliferate, the fundamental questions remain.

The gaps

We argue that mental health care must be radically reimagined as the primary pursuit of dignity and disability justice that centres equity, inclusion, and diversity, highlighting complexities with all their nuances; as the practice of staying with people and persisting alongside them through suffering, whether that suffering is relational, material, or structural in nature. Care in this lens is a process of individual-level meaning-making, responding to adverse life events, relational disruptions and existential queries, while fulfilling needs for safety, relationships, everyday wins, and problem-solving. It is also a tussle between one's context and one's chosen path, complicating the narrative and the care plan.

To untangle the knots between mental health and the social context we must start with asking what kind of world creates such suffering, and how can one standardise essential protocols while achieving personalisation at scale.

Sustained material and relational deprivation,



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both as a cause and an outcome of mental ill health, often go unaddressed, resulting in a range of losses. An example is found in the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data on suicides, which while reducing causes to monotonous categories as reported by police, shows that a third of suicides in India are due to family problems and another tenth due to relational ruptures. Feelings of shame, rejection, alienation and abandonment that underlie distress are rarely spoken about, limiting both the language and expression of psychic pain. Solutions often attempt to fix patterns (labelled 'maladaptive'), placing the onus for broken relationships, social withdrawal and loss of vitality squarely on the person.

Multiple explanations for distress may persist concurrently, ranging from biological (neurotransmitter alterations, inflammatory markers), psychological (learned patterns, cognitive frameworks), social (isolation, economic precarity, discrimination), cultural (loss of traditional meaning systems), political (oppressive structures, dismantled safety nets), and historical (intergenerational trauma, colonial legacies). These explanations do not exist in isolation. They are overlapping and intersect with caste, class, gender and queer identities in ways that shape both the experience of suffering and access to care. Rather than viewing these as competing frameworks, comprehensive care requires attention to diverse explanations and approaches simultaneously.

On care practice

People experiencing emotional and social crises or intense alienation require the space to grapple with these existential uncertainties. In contrast, dominant notions that locate these within biological or social determinants frameworks obscure these meaning-making dimensions of mental well-being. As much as living in extreme housing precarity may limit opportunities to pursue what is personally meaningful, having a stable house or income alone cannot diminish feelings of disconnection from self and the world.

While privileging tangible interventions such as medication, housing or cash transfers and grit and resilience building (which is not exclusively individual dependent) must assume greater importance, equally, care planning must highlight the need for relational work that engages with questions around vulnerabilities and in/vulnerabilities, purpose and existential incoherence, located in social-ecological contexts. In these ideas lie the foundations of disability justice, that embodies the spirit of liberation and wholeness, and not mere integration into an unequal world.

Mental health care must be radically reimagined as the primary pursuit of dignity and disability justice that gives importance to equity, inclusion and diversity

What if we thought critically, practised with solidarity, and pursued more longitudinal work that is real-world sensitive? Care would then be re-centred as the practice of relational justice and examine concerns that sustain distress and approaches that suffice hope in complex scenarios. This could range from medications and economic security, to finding hope in spiritual practice, one's goals and community connection. The focus shifts from treatment to 'what does this person need to live the life they want?', recognising that there are variegated and yet valid ways of understanding and responding to distress.

A secondary yet important gain might address the one issue that affects all mental health work – engagement with a service and continuity of care. Many people who access a service are disillusioned and lose faith and trust for innumerable reasons. This disengagement could often result in a downward spiral into states of despair, loneliness and homelessness. Building trust involves honest collaborations, dialogic practice and acceptance of non-linear outcomes.

Justice beyond fair distribution of resources or services, as espoused by Sandel, becomes central; as a process of recognising what we owe to one another and the moral threads holding our relationships and society. In mental health care, this means asking whether our systems centre dignity and account for the injustices that precipitated suffering, and, importantly, whether care can even be conceived without addressing the contexts that created harm in the first place.

Transforming care, education and research

Mental health education may need to prepare people to sit with discomfort and uncertainty, navigate the complexity of a person's social world, celebrate small wins, and remain open to diverse approaches. Research priorities require reorientation toward capturing the granular aspects of care rather than only large-scale, generalisable findings. These actions require examining micro-level processes through implementation science and transdisciplinary methods that link practice and theory, enabling continuous learning about what works, for whom, and how.

Most critically, those currently designated as non-specialists and those who bring lived experience need to be recognised and compensated as practitioners who bring community wisdom and contextual understanding that formal training cannot replicate, and receiving preparation and resources that enable them to engage with the same systemic support afforded to those with professional credentials.

Charting an agenda on the right to health

Timed between Human Rights Day (December 10) and Universal Health Coverage Day (December 12), a significant national gathering on public health is being convened in New Delhi. The National Convention on Health Rights (December 11-12, 2025), will offer a unique platform for around 400 health professionals, community leaders and health activists to address some of the major health challenges, while charting an agenda on the right to health. Organised by Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (People's Health Movement – India) which comprises diverse networks and civil society organisations from over 20 States, the convention will draw lessons from the COVID-19 crisis, while strengthening right to health initiatives and presenting alternatives to the commercialisation of health care.

Challenging privatisation

A major issue is the push for privatisation of public health services. Expansion of public-private partnerships is leading to medical colleges and health facilities being handed over to private players across India. This threatens to dismantle already weakened public services, while making health care unaffordable for crores of Indians who rely on public health-care provisioning. Leaders from movements against privatisation in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Mumbai, Madhya Pradesh and tribal districts of Gujarat will share insights and strategies, while critiquing the impacts of privatisation on health systems.

Commercial private health care in India has rapidly expanded, fuelled by domestic and foreign investments and pro-corporate policies. But this boom has not been matched by necessary regulation. Much after the Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act was enacted in 2010, its implementation remains nominal. The consequences for patients include frequent overcharging and unnecessary medical procedures such as caesarean sections, opaque



Dr. Abhay Shukla

is a public health physician and national co-convenor of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan

The National Convention on Health Rights will offer a platform to address India's major health challenges

pricing and violations of patient rights. The convention will advocate for effective implementation of regulatory frameworks including rate standardisation, transparent pricing, mandatory observance of the Charter of Patient's Rights, and accessible grievance redress systems.

India has among the lowest financial allocations for public health globally, with just 2% of the Union Budget allocated for health services, and annual per capita public spending at only \$25. Out-of-pocket expenses remain high, despite disproportionate attention to government-supported health insurance schemes. At the convention, participants will examine the gap between claims and ground realities of these schemes and explore alternative financing frameworks centred on enhanced government spending, reduced out-of-pocket costs, and equitable access.

Justice for health workers

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the indispensable roles of frontline doctors, nurses, paramedics and support staff. Yet, many still face low wages, insecure employment, and inadequate social security and working conditions. During this convention, health worker associations will highlight the need for justice to health workers and resilient health systems.

Medicines constitute up to half of a household's medical spending, yet more than 80% of medicines in India remain outside price control. Irrational drug combinations, unethical marketing and high retail markups persist. The convention's session on access to medicines will examine regulatory gaps, pricing barriers, proposed removal of GST on medicines, and expanding public sector production of essential medicines.

The convention is to advocate for public health systems that are capable of delivering universal, quality services. With over 80 crore people in

India dependent on public provisioning, strong public health services remain essential. Participants will highlight community-led models and successful state-level initiatives for revitalising public systems, with decentralised planning and community engagement. The vision is to affirm health care as a fundamental right anchored in robust, responsive public systems.

Eliminating discrimination

Entrenched social hierarchies continue to influence access to health care. A special session on gender and social justice will foreground the experiences of Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, LGBTQ+ persons, and persons with disabilities and others towards embedding inclusion and non-discrimination in health systems. The convention also links health to broader determinants, with a session covering food security, environmental pollution and climate change, which would explore intersectional strategies for health.

The convention has been timed during the winter session of Parliament, and dialogue will be held between delegates and Members of Parliament to highlight pressing health policy issues.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA). During this time, the JSA has worked across over 20 States with women's organisations, science groups, rural movements, patient groups and civil society networks to advance diverse health rights and pro-people policies. The convention will celebrate this legacy, renewing long-standing alliances, and strategising for the future. The National Convention on Health Rights is a call to action for everyone in India who believes that health must be a basic human right. Lessons from past campaigns will meet the energies of the present, shaping a popular narrative and demands for policies to ensure the right to health for all in the decade ahead. The overarching message remains clear: health care for people, not for profits.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Debate in Parliament

No one has the least doubt about the presence of *Vande Mataram* as the national song. But creating unwanted controversy in its 150th year is out of line (Front page, December 9). We are missing the music by tuning to unwanted noise.

It is disconcerting that the government of the day is focusing on optics while ignoring fundamental issues

that are crying for attention. The ruling dispensation seems to have the sole intent of amassing dividends in elections and is doing a disservice to the pride of place that the national song has in the country's psyche.

Ayyasari Raveendranath,
Araramulla, Kerala

The parliamentary debate so far reflects a selective reading of history, as

records show that our leaders of the time consciously balanced national unity with cultural sensitivity. Recasting those decisions as "appeasement" ignores the realities of the time and risks polarising society today. Historical symbols should unite, not divide. Respecting history requires honesty, not selective narratives that are shaped by contemporary

political agendas.
Chris Grace Thomson,
Bengaluru

Yes, *Vande Mataram* is 150 years old and it is fine that we are celebrating its 150th anniversary on a grand scale. There ends the matter.

The Bharatiya Janata Party/National Democratic Alliance should not forget the fact that it has crossed over a decade in power. As

rightly pointed out by the Opposition, there is a number of bread and butter issues that should be discussed in Parliament. One concurs with the Opposition that the NDA/BJP is indulging in diversionary politics. Religion alone cannot solve or resolve problems faced by the common people who outnumber the rich in India.

Govardhana Myrnedu,
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

The debate served neither the national interest nor could it evoke a feeling of patriotism. Such unproductive and divisive talk is only a distraction. Let us not harp on issues which do not have any bearing on present-day India.

V. Subramanian,
Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

UN grants relief after Cyclone Ditwah batters Sri Lanka

4.5 million dollars. The United Nations has released \$4.5 million from its Central Emergency Response Fund to support Sri Lanka's recovery from Cyclone Ditwah. Sri Lanka's foreign minister thanked the UN, noting the disaster's severe impact on livelihoods and infrastructure. **P11**

Projected population of the elderly in India by 2036

22.74 crore. India's elderly population is projected to surge to 22.74 crore by 2036, the Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai told the Lok Sabha. The share of citizens aged 60 and above is expected to rise from 8.4% in 2011 to 14.9% in 2036. **AN**

Returnable plots which are yet to be registered in Amaravati

7,000 Andhra Pradesh Municipal Minister P. Narayana said 7,000 of the 66,000 returnable plots allotted to farmers in Amaravati are yet to be registered. Farmers are completing 30 to 60 registrations daily. **P11**

Worth of possible cyber frauds blocked via I4C's registry

8,031 In crore. The government told Parliament that the I4C's suspect registry, launched in 2024, helped block ₹8,031.56 crore in suspected cyber fraud transactions. The database has identified over 18 lakh suspicious individuals. **P11**

Sudanese militia leader gets sentenced by the ICC

20 years. The International Criminal Court has sentenced Sudanese Janjaweed leader Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman to 20 years in prison for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the 2003-04 Darfur conflict. **P11**

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Lessons from recent transport crises

In October, trains to Bihar experienced immense rush. In December, the mass cancellation of Indigo flights led to stranded passengers and inflated prices. Low prices of government services do not increase welfare unless accompanied by government investment, while deregulated prices only reduce welfare in the presence of monopolies

ECONOMIC NOTES

Rahul Menon

In the past couple of months, India has witnessed its transport infrastructure come under massive strain. In October and November, trains to Bihar experienced immense rush, owing to migrants travelling home for Chhath Puja and the Bihar elections. Travellers were forced to travel in cramped and inhospitable conditions in unreserved compartments due to the paucity of trains. In December, the mass cancellation of Indigo flights owing to regulatory non-compliance led to stranded passengers and inflated prices.

Both events can be used to explain the reaction of prices and the responses of government and private players to demand and supply shocks. But the divergent behaviour of prices – and its effects – in these cases indicate the constraints imposed on welfare in a neo-liberal economy. Low prices of government services do not increase welfare unless accompanied by significant government investment, while deregulated prices only reduce welfare in the presence of monopolies.

Demand shock and Indian Railways

The sudden increase in demand for Bihar-bound trains in October is a classic indication of a demand shock. In the face of a given supply, such an increase in demand would lead to higher prices. If prices remain fixed due to government intervention, it would lead to an increase in the number of travellers far beyond the capacity of the trains. This led to overcrowded trains and hazardous travelling conditions. Standard economic theory would state that prices need to rise such that demand and supply are in equilibrium. While this would lead to the inability to travel for many, economic efficiency would be achieved.

Critics point to this as the fundamental issue with government services, where



Out of options: Passengers crowd at the platform as they arrive to board a train to their home town a day after the Chhath Puja festival at a railway station in Patna on October 29. **AFP**

keeping prices low due to social compulsions leads to excess demand of services and rampant inefficiency. But this criticism misses a fundamental problem. It is true that low prices lead to overcrowding, but the answer lies not in raising prices, but ensuring an increase in supply. Prices for certain services like health, education and train travel must be kept affordable for welfare, but at the same time, there must be significant investment by the state to expand access.

This is difficult to do in a neo-liberal economy, which places strict constraints on government intervention in the economy. Limits are placed on the size of the fiscal deficit, limiting government investment. A route that increases government spending while maintaining the deficit is through raising resources by wealth and income taxation of the top 1%. As shown by Thomas Piketty and his

team, modest taxation of the top 1% would be enough to raise a considerable amount to strengthen the Indian welfare state. This, however, would not be acceptable to domestic and global capital.

Monopolies and grounded flights

The solution, as advanced by many, is deregulation, and the entry of private capital into the provision of services. The logic goes that focusing on the profit motive ensures an efficient match of demand and supply, and investment in search of profit will ensure the expansion of services to all. However, the recent crisis surrounding Indigo has shown the shortcomings of this model.

The Indigo crisis is an example of a supply shock. The withdrawal of flights in the face of normal demand leads to price increases, amplified by the near-monopoly enjoyed by Indigo in

Indian markets. The reduction in such a large amount of supply meant huge price increases for other flights and significant consumer loss. Supply restrictions for one firm in a market would not lead to such massive market-wide disruptions if the market was genuinely competitive.

Non-competitive pricing power was highlighted as a key factor leading to the rapid increase in inflation during former U.S. President Joe Biden's term, which played a role in bringing Donald Trump to power. The massive supply disruptions brought about by lockdowns increased costs, but were translated into a cost-of-living crisis due to the presence of significant monopolies. The argument for flexible prices implicitly assumes a competitive economy, which requires government intervention to prevent the rise of monopolies.

On the liberal economy

The two outcomes are not distinct but are the consequences of a neo-liberal economy that places restrictions on the actions of the state but pushes for deregulation of private activities. The inability of the state to raise taxes and increase spending leaves them with no option but to keep prices low for essential services and struggle with the increased demand and the fallout from overcrowding. The withdrawal of regulation leads to the concentration of capital and the rise of monopolies, a feature of Indian markets today. Far from ensuring consumer welfare, unregulated private markets can lead to rising monopolies which lower welfare and lead to high prices, as seen in the case of Indigo and the U.S. The two travel disruptions may seem dissimilar, yet they are both logical outcomes of an economic model that prizes the private, and downplays the importance of the public. These massive disruptions will emerge once more, if the underlying tendencies towards monopolies and the degradation of public services are not arrested.

Rahul Menon is associate professor at O.P. Jindal Global University.

THE GIST

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Does Google's Quantum Echoes bring Q-day closer?

What was the Willow experiment? How does an RSA encryption work? Is Q-day on the horizon?

Priti Kumari

The story so far:

Using a 65-qubit Willow superconducting processor, Google researchers have measured how quantum information spreads and refocuses within an entangled system. This technological leap in quantum computing has been called Quantum Echoes.

What was the experiment?

Unlike the 2019 Sycamore experiment, which claimed "quantum supremacy" for completing a random-number task faster than any supercomputer, Quantum Echoes was not a speed race but a test of understanding. Scientists measured out-of-time-order correlators (OTOC) – tiny echoes that reveal how disturbances travel through a network of qubits. The method resembles giving a material a microscopic "poke," reversing time

evolution, and listening for the returning echo. The echo's strength reveals how quickly information disperses, offering insight for chemistry, materials science, and superconductivity. Despite its scientific importance, the experiment does not bring the world closer to breaking encryption or to Q-day.

'Harvest now, decrypt later'

Q-day refers to the day a cryptographically relevant quantum computer becomes powerful enough to break public-key encryption. It would not instantly expose all secrets, but any encrypted data stored today could be decoded later if intercepted now – a risk known as "harvest now, decrypt later."

Governments and researchers are already preparing. The U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has standardised new post-quantum cryptography (PQC) algorithms – CRYSTALS-Kyber for

encryption and Dilithium for digital signatures. These rely on mathematical problems that are believed to resist both classical and quantum attacks.

Experts expect that machines capable of breaking RSA-2048 will need millions of logical qubits, which could take 5 to 8 years to build (RSA-2048 is a commonly used standard for public-key cryptography). Until then, Q-day remains a theoretical horizon. RSA encryption works by multiplying two large prime numbers to create an enormous product. Multiplication is easy, but reversing it and finding the original primes is so difficult that even the fastest classical computers would need billions of years to solve it.

Machines that test multiple possibilities

Quantum computers operate under the laws of quantum mechanics. Their building blocks, called qubits, exploit superposition, the ability to exist as both 0 and 1 simultaneously, and

entanglement, where qubits influence each other instantly, even when far apart. These features let quantum machines test many possibilities at once rather than sequentially. This aspect of existing in multiple places at the same time powers Shor's algorithm, which converts the hard task of factoring numbers into one of finding repeating patterns, or periods, in modular arithmetic. To expose those patterns, the algorithm uses the Quantum Fourier Transform (QFT), a tool that acts like a detector of hidden rhythms within a signal. Scaling this method to large RSA numbers would let a quantum computer find their prime factors exponentially faster than classical machines.

Craig Gidney and Martin Ekerä of Google Research estimated in 2019 that factoring a 2,048-bit RSA key would need about 20 million physical qubits and eight hours of computation. Current processors, such as Google's Willow and IBM's Condor, have only a few hundred noisy qubits. A true fault-tolerant quantum computer would require millions of logical qubits, which are stable, error-corrected versions capable of long calculations. That scale remains far beyond present technology.

Shor's algorithm and encryption systems

In theory, Shor's algorithm is a computational tool designed to factor large numbers efficiently. Its purpose is mathematical and, eventually,

cryptographic: it challenges the foundations of today's encryption systems. Quantum Echoes is an experiment in physics. Instead of solving equations, it studies how quantum information spreads and re-emerges within entangled particles. While both use quantum hardware, they serve very different goals. Shor's algorithm seeks computational advantage; Quantum Echoes seeks physical understanding. So, the Willow experiment differs as its results can be verified through repeated measurements and signal-to-noise analysis. It represents progress in scientific reproducibility rather than in cryptographic power. But experts caution that some entities may already be storing encrypted information today to decrypt in the future. Regulators, including India's central bank, are urging organisations to transition to quantum-safe systems before the end of the decade.

How far is Q-Day?

Google's Quantum Echoes does not bring Q-day any closer. But it does mark a scientific milestone in understanding quantum behaviour. The experiment shows that quantum processors can now verify complex physical interactions within entangled systems – a sign of maturity in quantum science rather than a cybersecurity threat.

Dr. Priti Kumari is a research analyst at an international asset management company.

India-Nepal Army exercise concludes in Uttarakhand

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The India-Nepal joint military exercise, SURYAKIRAN-XIX, concluded at Pithoragarh in Uttarakhand on Tuesday.

Marking the end of the intensive combined training cycle, the Directors-General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of the Indian and Nepal Armies jointly witnessed and validated a two-day battalion-level validation exercise at the Foreign Training Node in Pithoragarh.

The Indian Army said the validation phase showcased joint tactics, techniques and procedures for counter-terrorism operations mandated under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The drills featured a suite of cutting-edge technologies, including ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) and precision-targeting drones, advanced day/night weapon sights, AI-enabled surveillance feeds, unmanned operational and logistics



DGMO Lieutenant General Manish Luthra along with DGMO of Nepal Army, Major General Anup Jung Thapa. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

platforms, and secure battlefield communication systems.

The exercise underscored seamless interoperability, synchronised mission planning and coordinated execution of combined tactical operations in a counter-terrorism environment across battalion, company and small-team levels. Troops carried out intelligence-based surgical missions in complex terrain, employing aerial insertion methods to strengthen rapid-response capability.

Acknowledging the importance of shared security and humanitarian preparedness in the

Himalayan region, both DGMOs lauded the exercise for enhancing operational synergy, deepening mutual trust and reinforcing the long-standing military brotherhood between the two armies, the Army added.

As a mark of this enduring partnership, the DGMOs jointly planted a Tree of Friendship, reaffirming the timeless bonds and strategic cooperation between India and Nepal.

SURYAKIRAN - XIX stands as a robust demonstration of unity, preparedness and partnership for regional peace and stability, the Army said in a release.

Ensure free content access for LLMs, says working paper

It says data crawlers for training artificial intelligence models should not be restricted; instead a copyright society should be set up to collect royalties for members and non-members of body

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

A government working paper released on Monday suggested that AI large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT should, by default, have access to content freely available online, and that publishers should not have an opt-out mechanism for such content.

Instead, a copyright society-like non-profit should be set up to collect royalties for both members and non-members of that body.

The working paper, authored by a committee formed by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), is not final, and is accepting public comments for 30 days. The document is one of the main indicators of how the Indian government is thinking of balancing copyright holders' fears that AI systems will regurgitate content they invested in without remuneration, and the interests of LLM developers who have routinely consumed massive amounts of data online to train their models.

Nasscom, which was represented in the DPIIT's

LLMs and copyright

A committee formed by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is accepting public comments on a working paper for 30 days

■ The core proposal suggests that LLMs should be allowed to freely access all publicly available online content

■ A royalty system has been recommended instead of restrictions

■ However, publishers are

already concerned about AI regurgitating content. Some are already suing AI firms (e.g., DNP vs OpenAI)

■ There may be pushback from AI firms over the cost burden, while publishers may resist flat royalty distribution

committee, dissented, arguing that forced royalties would amount to a "tax on innovation", and said that "mining" or scraping the Web for data must be allowed for freely available content without paywalls, and that both "crawlable" and access-restricted content providers should have options to "reserve" their content from being mined for LLM development.

Opt-out not feasible

The committee rejected Nasscom's dissent, arguing that small content creators may not have the means to actually enforce such opt-outs.

The Digital News Publishers Association, which represents traditional news media outlets with

a digital presence, including *The Hindu*, has sued ChatGPT maker OpenAI in the Delhi High Court for copyright infringement. OpenAI denies the allegations. The working paper argues that it may not be prudent to await the outcome of this and other similar litigation.

The recommendations, if put in place through a law, will eliminate any allegations of improper access to data, by blessing all access, provided a fee is paid. This model is similar to the "compulsory licensing" framework in place for radio stations in India, which are empowered to play music without negotiating rights for them, as long as a statutorily prescribed fee is paid to the rights holders.

This balancing may face pushback from AI developers and content creators; the former may argue against anything that increases development costs as few AI firms are even profitable at the moment, leaving little appetite to share revenues. Content creators may resist a flat fee if they feel their inputs are more valuable in training a model than those of other royalty recipients.

A payout to the copyright society set up for distributing AI riches to content creators, will be distributed by considering factors such as Web traffic and social indicators, like how respectable a publisher is. Any decision can be taken to the court, the working group says.

SC asks Centre to give nationwide data on missing children

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed the Union government to furnish six years of nationwide data on missing children and to appoint a dedicated officer in the Union Home Ministry to ensure effective coordination with the States and Union Territories in compiling such information.

A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and R. Mahadevan was hearing a public interest litigation petition filed by the non-profit organisation Guria Swayam Sevi Sansthan, which highlighted the rising number of children who remain untraced across several States. The court had earlier directed all States and Union Territories to depute dedicated officers to oversee cases of missing children and to ensure that such details are promptly uploaded on the Mission Vatsalya portal administered by the Women and Child Development Ministry.

Appearing for the Centre, Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhat informed the Bench that all States and Union Territories had appointed such officers and uploaded

It directs Home Ministry to appoint officer to coordinate with States and Union Territories

their particulars on the portal. She noted, however, that the effective dissemination of information and coordinated use of the platform remained essential to securing meaningful outcomes.

The Bench observed that the Home Ministry itself had not nominated a dedicated officer to oversee cases of missing children, despite being the central coordinating agency. It accordingly directed the Ministry to appoint such an officer within two weeks and to upload the officer's details on the Mission Vatsalya portal.

"We find that the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Union of India has not appointed a dedicated nodal officer for cases of missing children for the purpose of Mission Vatsalya, and hence an officer may be nominated as a dedicated nodal officer, whose details may also be uploaded on the Mission Vatsalya portal," the court ordered.

It will hear the matter next on February 10.