

Caste bias, segregation in prisons violate dignity: SC

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court declared that caste-based discrimination of prisoners, segregation of their work according to caste hierarchy, and the treatment of inmates from the de-notified tribes as “habitual offenders” within prison walls across India are oppressive to fundamental human dignity and personality. The Supreme Court directed

Removing bias

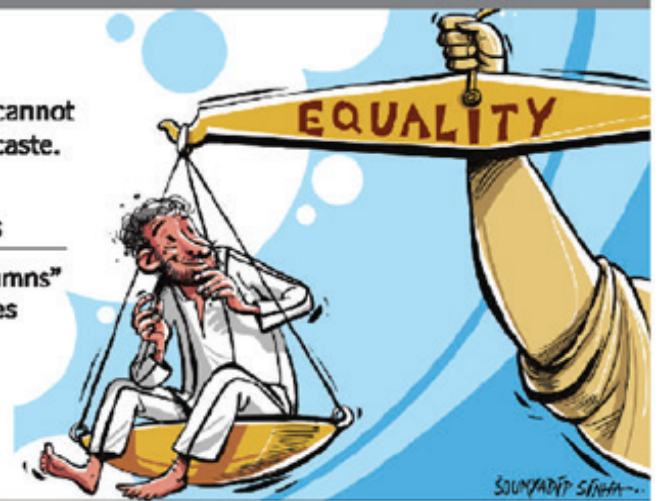
The Bench says “everyone is born equal” and cannot suffer lifelong due to stigma attached to their caste.

The directions include:

- States and UTs should revise their Prison Manuals/Rules in three months
- Centre should address caste-based discrimination in the Model Prison Manual 2016 and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act 2023 in

three months

- “Caste columns” and references to caste in prisoners’ registers should be removed



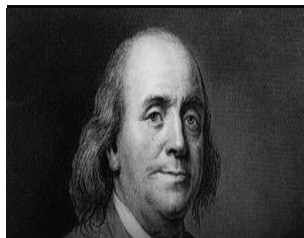
the revision of prison manuals within three months ordering the deletion of the ‘caste column’ and any references to caste from registers of under trials and convicts maintained in prisons. The court underscored that members of denotified tribes must not be subjected to arbitrary arrest.

‘Violates Constitution’

The CJI, who authored the judgment, referred to Article 15(1) of the Constitution which enshrines the fundamental right against discrimination. He held that discrimination among prisoners and distribution of work on the basis of caste amounted to untouchability, which is forbidden under Article 17 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court emphasised that “no prison authority enjoys amnesty for unconstitutionality”. Degrading labour and oppressive practices violate the right against forced labour under Article 23 of the Constitution.

Prison manuals, by treating members of the denotified and wandering tribes as “born criminals” and habitual offenders, re-affirm colonial caste-based discrimination. The court declared all loose references, not statutorily backed, to ‘habitual offenders’ in prison manuals as unconstitutional. Segregation of prisoners on the basis of caste would only work to reinforce caste animosity.

The judgment declared that compelling marginalised caste inmates to perform tasks like cleaning latrines or sweeping based purely on their caste, constituted a form of coercion. Prison manuals and rules which relegate tasks like manual scavenging to the lowest castes or refer them to as ‘scavenger class’ practise untouchability. The court held that the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which prohibit manual scavenging, has a binding effect in prisons as well. The court directed the Union government to make the necessary changes to address caste-based discrimination in the 2016 Manual and the 2023 Act within three months.



“If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it.”

–Benjamin Franklin

Marital relations must be exempt from rape provisions, Centre tells apex court

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Centre on Thursday told the Supreme Court that punishing non-consensual sexual acts by a man with his own wife as 'rape' will impact conjugal relationship and lead to "serious disturbances" in the institution of marriage.

"The demographics of a marriage are sui generis. There are plenty of examples of male-female relationships. However, the relationship between a husband and wife, which emerges as a result of the tying of the matrimonial knot, is distinct from all of these relationships. To ignore or even to seek to undermine this is to ignore plain reality.

In an institution of marriage, there exists a continuing expectation, by either of the spouses, to have reasonable sexual access from the other. Though these expectations do not entitle the husband to coerce or force his wife into sex, against her will, they constitute a sufficient basis for the legislature to distinguish qualitatively between an incident of non-consensual sex within the marital sphere and without it."

- Union Ministry of Home Affairs Affidavit

The Union government was responding to a bunch of public interest litigation petitions seeking to strike down Exception 2 of Section 375 of Indian Penal Code (IPC). The provision excludes non-consensual sexual intercourse by a husband with his wife, if the latter is over 15 years of age, from the definition of 'rape'.

'Excessively harsh'

The Centre reasoned that a husband certainly does not have any fundamental right to violate the consent of his wife. However, attracting the crime in the nature 'rape' as recognised in India to the institution of marriage can be arguably considered to be excessively harsh and therefore, disproportionate. It reasoned that marriage did not "obliterate" a woman's consent. It agreed that any violation of a woman's consent should indeed result in penal consequences. But there were provisions, other than rape, to protect her consent within marriage.

The Union government also argued that even if a law was framed in the future, it would have to balance between protecting the cherished concept of consent by a woman within the confines of marriage with the competing position of the "potential accused husband".

Internships to bridge job market-skills gap; pilot project takes off

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Centre launched a portal for India's top 500 companies to participate in the one-year internship scheme, Prime Minister's Internship Scheme announced during Union Budget to bridge the gap between the skill sets of unemployable youth and those needed by employers.

As many as 111 corporates — including the Mahindra & Mahindra group, Max Life Insurance, and Alembic Pharma — had already signed up within hours of the portal's launch, offering 1,077 internships kicking off a process expected to result in about 1 lakh youngsters in the age group of 21 to 24 years joining the on-the-job training exercise. Prime Minister's Internship Scheme

The scheme that aims to train one Cr. youth in five years, with a pilot project being undertaken at a cost of ₹ 800 Cr. The lessons learnt from this will help fine-tune the scheme's design before the Cabinet's approval is sought for a full-fledged roll-out.

The portal, pminternship.mca.gov.in, is likely to be opened up for youngsters in the age group of 21 to 24

years to enrol for consideration by companies on Vijaya Dasami. The scheme is not open to post-graduates, children of regular and permanent employees in the Central or State governments, graduates from premier institutes like IITs, IIMs and NIDs, and professionals with qualifications such as CA, CS, and MBBS. Moreover, anyone from a household that includes a person who earned an income of ₹8 lakh or more in 2023-24, will not be eligible.

Internships under the scheme will be granted to candidates who have passed high school or higher secondary school, possess a certificate from an industrial training institute (ITI), hold a diploma from a polytechnic institute, or are graduates with degrees such as BA, B.Sc, B.Com, BCA, BBA, or B.Pharm. Those unemployed youth enrolled in online or distance learning courses are also eligible to apply, but anyone undergoing any skilling, apprenticeship, internship, or student training programme under a Central or State government scheme will not be allowed to apply.

Leopard population in Odisha jumps by 22 % in two years

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT



Odisha's leopard population increased by 22% from 568 in 2022 to 696 in 2024, despite concerns about poaching and the illegal trade of leopard skins. The All Odisha Leopard Estimation 2024 places the leopard count between 668 and 724, with a median of 696. However, this figure is still lower than the 760 leopards recorded in the 2018 National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) census. The Forest Department carried out an intensive monitoring effort across 47 divisions, using signs like pug marks, scats, vocalisations, and livestock depredation to identify the presence of leopards.

Camera trap

The passage discusses efforts to monitor Odisha's leopard population using

camera traps to identify unique adult leopards based on their rosette patterns, a scientifically recognized method for leopard population assessment. The 2022 survey covered a limited area, while the 2024 estimation spanned a larger region, discovering many melanistic leopards. Nationally, India's leopard population stands at 13,874, but has declined by 75-90% over the last 120-200 years. Poaching remains a major threat, with 1,485 leopards killed in the last decade. In Odisha, 116 leopards were killed for their skins between 2018 and 2024, with 59 skins seized from wildlife smugglers and 57 recovered by the Special Task Force. Experts suggest many cases of poached leopards go undetected.

Forest cover

Odisha's forest cover, which makes up 33.50% of the State's total area, and its wildlife conservation efforts has one national park, 19 wildlife sanctuaries, and two conservation reserves. Protected areas, particularly the Similipal Tiger Reserve, host the highest leopard populations. Similipal plays a crucial role in dispersing leopards to nearby sanctuaries like Hadagarh and Kuldiha. Satkosia and Hiraikud Wildlife Divisions also have significant leopard populations. Notably, 45 % of Odisha's leopards live outside protected areas. The rare melanistic leopard was recorded in three divisions. From next year, Odisha will synchronize its leopard and tiger estimations, assessing habitat occupancy, prey base, and human disturbances.

What is the status of the Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0?

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

India has more than 3,000 legacy waste dumpsites, with 2,424 of them having a waste load of more than 1,000 tonnes. The Centre launched the legacy waste management project as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) 2.0 in October 2021, for a period of five years till 2026. However, more than halfway through the time period, only 471 out of the 2,424, that is 19.43% of dumpsites have been completely remediated.

What are legacy waste dumpsites?

Legacy waste dumpsites are dumpsites that contain solid waste that have been collected and stored for years in an unscientific and uncontrolled manner. Municipal solid waste generation in India is estimated to be around 1,50,000 tonnes per day, according to the State of India's Environment 2023 report. Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils and Nagar Panchayats have traditionally opted for creating man-made garbage hills with almost no installed facility in India for handling solid waste.

These dumpsites originally developed on the outskirts of the cities. However, with the expansion of cities, these sites are now often found in the heart of cities on barren land or in landfills. According to estimates of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, approximately 15,000 acres of prime real estate is buried under nearly 16 Cr. tonnes of legacy waste across the country.

What are the health hazards?

Legacy waste dumpsites can pose a number of health hazards for citizens. Exposure to emissions from hazardous waste can irritate the mouth and throat. Inhaling methane from landfills can cause nausea, vomiting, and loss of coordination. Ragpickers who work at landfills can develop skin allergies from years of exposure to waste. People who live near landfills may be prone to developing tuberculosis, asthma, diabetes, depression, cholera, malaria, and other diseases. They are also a source of greenhouse gas emissions, such as methane and carbon dioxide.

What is the Swachh Bharat Mission?

The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) or Clean India Mission is a country-wide campaign launched by the Central government on October 2, 2014 to eliminate open defecation and to create Open Defecation Free (ODF) villages. The mission aimed to achieve an "open-defecation free" India by October 2, 2019 coinciding with the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi through the construction of toilets.

In 2021, the Government launched its second edition — the five-year Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Mission-Urban 2.0 (SBM-U 2.0), committing to making all cities "garbage-free cities" by 2026, while maintaining ODF status across 4,372 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). It also has a vision of 100% source segregation, door to door collection and scientific management of all fractions of waste, including safe disposal in scientific landfills. The SBM 2.0 aims to remediate all legacy dumpsites and convert them into green zones. The mission has also made provisions for scientific landfills to dispose of untreated inert waste and process rejects, in order to prevent fresh dumpsites being created.

Action plans amounting to ₹3,226 Cr. of Central Share (CS) assistance on remediation of legacy waste dumpsites has been approved so far. An advisory has also been issued to the States/Union Territory administrations on landfill reclamation. As per financial norms of centrally sponsored schemes, State/ UT governments are required to put in a matching share from their own side, while disbursing the funds to respective ULBs.

What has been the progress so far?

According to the dashboard of the Swachh Bharat Mission website, as on September 24, out of the 2,424 dumpsites, 471 sites have been remediated, remediation in 1,226 has been approved and is on-going, and 727 sites have been untouched. As far as area is concerned, of the total 17,039.71 acres, 27 % has been reclaimed and 73% is yet to be reclaimed. Among States, Tamil Nadu has the maximum area reclaimed from dumpsites at 837 acres (42%). Gujarat is the best performing State with 75% area (698 out of 938 acres) of landfills reclaimed.

Jaishankar to meet Dissanayake today

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will travel to Colombo on Friday to meet the Sri Lankan “leadership”, less than a fortnight after President Anura Kumara Dissanayake was sworn in. The visit underlines the shared commitment of the two countries to further deepen the longstanding partnership for mutual benefit in keeping with India’s Neighbourhood First Policy and SAGAR outlook.

The discussions would cover future of Indian projects, including the Trincomalee infrastructure and energy projects, and private investments such as the wind power project of the Adani

Group. In addition, the new government’s stance on issues of devolution and Tamil rights, which New Delhi has been vocal about in the past, will be watched most closely.

The visit will also be an opportunity to gauge future policies of the newly elected National People’s Power [NPP] government — led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna [JVP] — in Sri Lanka, which has never held power before, towards investment from China and the access to Chinese military and research vehicles as well as other “dual use” projects. Mr. Jaishankar will also be keen to secure Mr. Dissanayake’s commitment to visit India at the earliest, but officials said the visit may only take place after the Sri Lankan Parliamentary elections scheduled for November 14 this year.

Tamil question

Although Mr. Dissanayake’s campaign did not explicitly commit to implementing the 13th Amendment, the legislation born out of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987 that assures a measure of power to the provinces, he has committed to holding provincial council elections. Further, he has promised to address the country’s long-pending national question through a new Constitution.



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Farmers earn less than 40 % of price paid for fruits, vegetables: RBI paper

AGRICULTURE AND RELATED MATTERS

A working paper ‘Livestock and Poultry Inflation in India’, prepared by RBI’s Department of Economy & Policy Research found farmers earning far lesser share of the consumer rupee in case of fruits, including bananas, grapes and mangoes and essential vegetables such as tomatoes, onions and potatoes, while the share was much higher in dairy, poultry farming and pulses. Middlemen and retailers seemed to have cornered a large part of the price paid by consumers, thus profiteering at the cost of farmers, during the time of high inflation in case of fruits and vegetables.

Farmer's share in consumer price

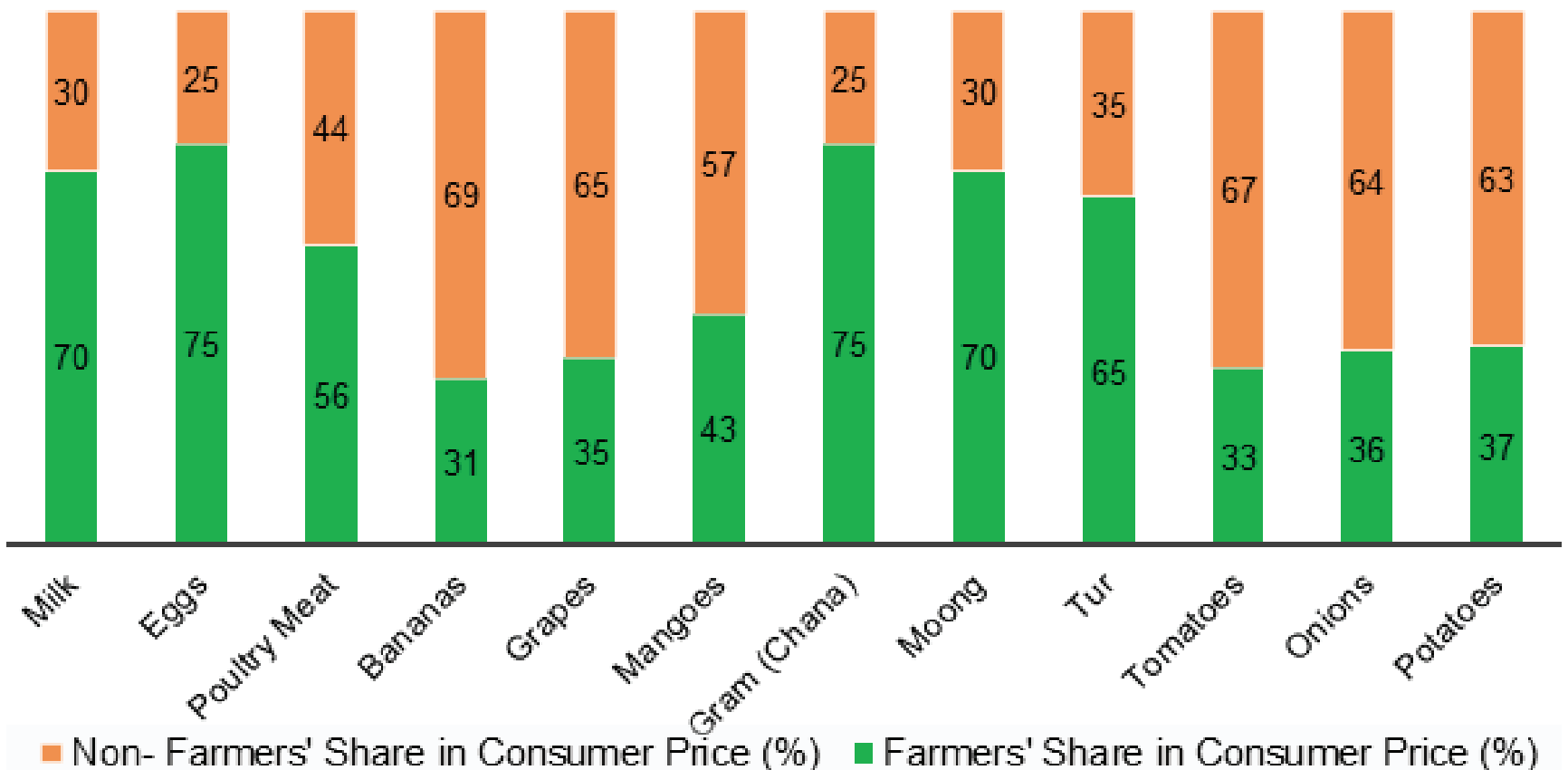


FIGURE: Column chart representation of share of stakeholders in the consumer price. The farmers’ share in the consumer rupee is estimated at 70 % for milk and 75 % for eggs; for poultry meat, the share of farmers and aggregators is 56 % together. According to Working Paper titled ‘Price Dynamics and Value Chain of Fruits in India,’ farmers’ share in the consumer rupee is estimated at about 31 % for bananas, 35 % for grapes and 43 % for mangoes in local value chain.

Pulses inflation

The paper ‘Pulses Inflation in India’ finds about 75 % of the consumer rupee spent on gram (chana) came back to farmers while the share was about 70% for moong and 65 % for tur. The paper on ‘Vegetables Inflation in India’ puts farmers’ share in consumer rupee at about 33% for tomatoes, 36% for onions and 37% for potatoes.

“Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you’re finished.”—Leslie Nielsen

U.K. to return Chagos to Mauritius in historic deal

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



The U.K. and Mauritius have reached a historic political agreement to secure the strategically important U.K.-U.S. military base on Diego Garcia and towards restoring Mauritian sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago. A treaty is now being worked out to firm up the agreement, the U.K. announced on Thursday.

MEA reaction

Welcoming the agreement on the return of Mauritian sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago, including Diego Garcia, India's Ministry of External Affairs said this "significant" understanding completes the "decolonisation" of Mauritius. The resolution of the long-standing Chagos dispute after two years of negotiations, in compliance with international law, is a welcome development.

India has consistently supported the Mauritian claim for sovereignty over Chagos, in line with its principled stand on decolonisation and support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, as well as its long-standing and close partnership with Mauritius, the MEA noted. India

remains committed to working with Mauritius and other like-minded partners in strengthening maritime safety and security and contributing to enhanced peace and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region, it added.

USCIRF flags India's 'collapsing religious freedom'

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a Washington DC-based bipartisan U.S. federal government agency released a country update on India, flagging "collapsing religious freedom conditions". The report highlights that religious freedom conditions have "continued to worsen throughout 2024, particularly in the months prior to and immediately following the country's national elections". The report details changes in legal framework, including the strengthening of "discriminatory legislation like state-level anti-conversion and anti-terrorism laws", as well as the publication of the rules for implementing the 2019 Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), and the passing of a State-level Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in Uttarakhand. The USCIRF also recommended that the U.S. State Department designate India "as a Country of Particular Concern" for "engaging in severe religious freedom violations".

Ram temple issue

In a section titled "Expropriation and demolition of places of worship and Muslim property", the report highlights concerns over actions by Indian authorities in early 2024, where places of worship, including mosques, were expropriated to facilitate the construction of Hindu temples. Following the consecration of the Ayodhya temple in January 2024, there was an increase in attacks and instances of intolerance against religious minorities across six states. These incidents were often triggered by Hindu nationalist processions passing through

predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods, leading to outbreaks of violence.

The report notes the trend of authorities using State-level policies, especially anti-conversion laws, “to target religious minorities”, detailing that “since the beginning of the year, authorities have arrested dozens of Christians on allegations of conducting or participating in forced conversions”. It also flags the phenomenon of anti-cow slaughter laws being “frequently exploited” by vigilante groups to “target religious minorities, including Muslims, Christians, and Dalits”, noting that the perpetrators operate with impunity, rarely face punishment and “are often released on bail within 24 hours”.

All agri sector initiatives brought under 2 new schemes

AGRICULTURE AND RELATED MATTERS

The Union Cabinet merged all Central Schemes in the agriculture sector into two new schemes, Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY) and Krishonnati Yojana (KY). Both schemes will be implemented through the State governments Schemes such as Soil Health Management, Rainfed Area Development, Agro Forestry, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana will be merged in the two new schemes. The Centre said the rationalisation of various schemes was to avoid duplication, ensure convergence, and provide flexibility to States. The Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY) aimed at promoting sustainable agriculture has been allocated ₹ 57,074.72 Cr. The Krishonnati Yojana (KY) has an allocation of ₹ 44,246.89 Cr. to address food security and agricultural self-sufficiency.

Focusing on emergent challenges of agriculture such as nutrition security, sustainability, climate resilience, value chain development, and private sector participation is also envisaged under the two schemes. State governments will be able to draw a comprehensive strategic plan suiting their requirements for agriculture sector. Annual Action Plan (AAP) of States can be approved in one go rather than approving them individually.

Mission for edible oils

The Cabinet also approved the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds) aims to increase primary oilseed production from 39 million tonnes (2022-23) to 69.7 million tonnes by 2030-31 and achieving self-reliance in edible oils.

The Mission will be implemented over a seven-year period, from 2024-25 to 2030-31, with a financial outlay of ₹10,103 Cr. would focus on enhancing the production of key primary oilseed crops such as rapeseed-mustard, groundnut, soybean, sunflower, and sesamum, as well as increasing collection and extraction efficiency from secondary sources like cottonseed, rice bran, and tree borne oils.

India to join energy hub

The Cabinet approved the signing of a Letter of Intent (LoI) enabling India to join the Energy Efficiency Hub. This move solidifies India’s commitment to sustainable development and aligns with its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Union Cabinet also approved payment of productivity-linked bonus of 78 days for ₹ 2,028.57 Cr. to 11,72,240 non-gazetted railway employees. The amount will be paid to various categories of railway staff like track maintainers, loco pilots, train managers, station masters, supervisors, technicians, ministerial staff and other Group C staff.



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Indian push needed to end AIDS as a global health threat by 2030: UNAIDS

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

UNAIDS Director (Asia Pacific and other regions) Eamonn Murphy asked India to commit itself heavily to meet the Sustainable Development Goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

There were 68,000 new infections reported in India, meaning that around 185 people were infected every day. The global AIDS strategy calls for 80 % of prevention services to be delivered by community-led organisations that are best placed to reach key populations. The annual new HIV infections in India had fallen 44 % between 2010 and 2023, better than the global average.

Approximately, 40000 deaths were reported in India by 2023. India has made notable progress in reducing annual AIDS-related deaths by nearly 80 % between 2010 and 2023, which is also above the global average. However, HIV prevention efforts will need to be accelerated if India is to close the gap with a focus on specific States and districts. The UNAIDS Director emphasised that the next five years would be critical for the country to accelerate efforts and share its experience with other countries in the region.

‘Prevention is key’

The planning for long-term sustainability beyond 2030 was crucial to preserving the gains made and ensuring that the impact is durable and transformative. There are sustainable health systems for HIV and health which are co-designed and co-implemented by communities and civil society so they respond to people’s needs,” he added. These organisations need the right space and resources to lead. UNAIDS is currently advocating for new technologies, including long-acting injectables, to reach all patients at affordable prices.

SC lays down ‘functionality’, ‘essentially’ test to claim ITC

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Supreme Court on Thursday declared that real estate companies can claim Input Tax Credits (ITC) under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, on costs of construction for commercial structures intended for renting or leasing purposes.

The judgment would give a fillip to the real estate sector. “If a building qualifies to be a plant, ITC can be availed against the supply of services in the form of renting or leasing the building or premises, provided the other terms and conditions of the CGST Act and Rules framed are fulfilled.

The court, however, noted that if the construction of a building by the recipient of service was for his own use, the “chain would break and ITC would not be available. Under the CGST Act, renting or leasing immovable property is deemed to be a supply of service, and it can be taxed as output supply. Therefore, if the building in which the premises are situated qualifies for the definition of plant, ITC can be allowed on goods and services used in setting up the immovable property, which is a plant.

The court said the question whether or not a mall, warehouse or any building other than a hotel or a cinema theatre could be classified as a ‘plant’ within the meaning of the expression “plant or machinery” in Section 17(5)(d) of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 was a factual question. This has to be determined keeping in mind the business of the registered person and the role that building plays in the business.

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