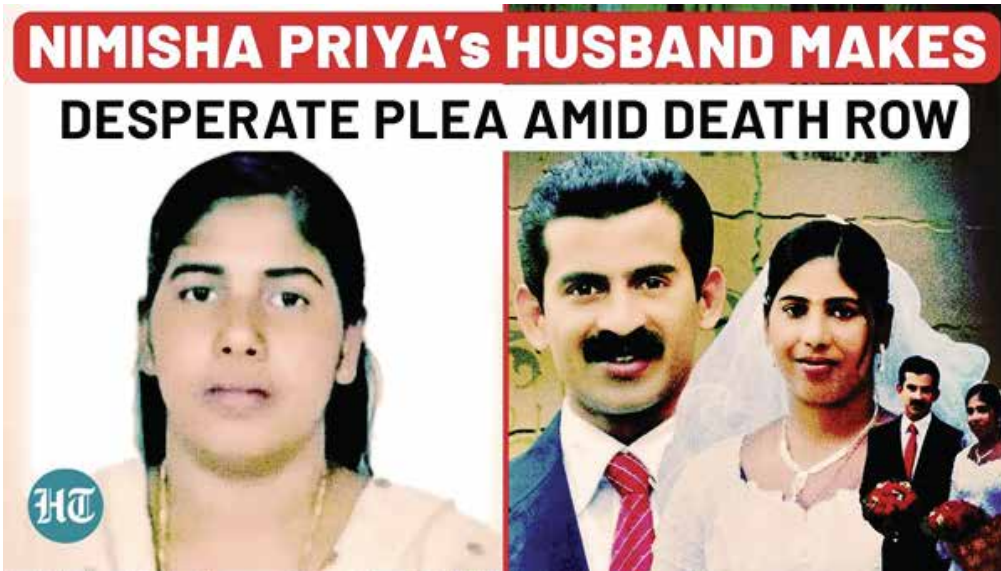




## WILL DO WHATEVER IS POSSIBLE IN NIMISHA PRIYA CASE, SAYS IRAN

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**CONTEXT:** Iran has offered to assist India in the case of Nimisha Priya, an Indian nurse sentenced to death in Yemen, despite the complex political situation and lack of official ties between India and the Houthi rebels who control the region.



#### Key Points:

- **Death Sentence:** Nimisha Priya, an Indian nurse in Yemen, has been sentenced to death for killing her Yemeni business partner.
- **Iranian Assistance:** A senior Iranian official has assured India of support in the case, despite the complex political situation in Yemen.
- **Houthi Control:** The case is being handled in Sanaa, the Yemeni capital controlled by the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels, making diplomatic efforts challenging for India.
- **Blood Money:** Indian officials have hinted at exploring the option of paying "blood money" to the victim's family as a potential avenue for

release.

- **Complex Case:** The case involves a decade-long business dispute, allegations of abuse, and a controversial incident leading to the victim's death.

#### Conclusion

The case of Nimisha Priya highlights the complexities of navigating international legal and political landscapes. While Iranian assistance offers a glimmer of hope, the situation remains precarious due to the ongoing conflict in Yemen and the limited diplomatic channels available to India. The Indian government faces difficulty securing Ms. Priya's release and mitigating the risks associated with the case.

## CENTRE TO IMPLEMENT SUGGESTIONS BY PANEL ON EXAM REFORMS

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

**CONTEXT:** The Government of India has informed the Supreme Court that it will implement all the recommendations of an expert panel on exam reforms, aimed at improving the integrity and fairness of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET-UG), following concerns raised about the 2024 exam.

#### Key Points:

- **NEET-UG 2024 Controversy:** Concerns were raised regarding potential irregularities and malpractices in the conduct of the NEET-UG 2024 examination.
- **Supreme Court Intervention:** The Supreme Court, while not annulling the exam, directed the formation of a seven-member expert panel headed by former ISRO chief K. Radhakrishnan.
- **Panel's Mandate:** The panel was tasked with reviewing the NTA's functioning and recommending reforms to enhance

the transparency and fairness of NEET-UG.

- **Government's Commitment:** The Solicitor General informed the Supreme Court that the government will implement all the recommendations outlined in the panel's report.
- **Court Adjournment:** The Supreme Court adjourned the matter for three months to allow for the implementation of the recommended reforms.

**Conclusion:**

The Indian government's commitment to implementing the expert panel's recommendations signifies a proactive approach towards addressing concerns regarding the integrity of the NEET-UG examination. These reforms are expected to enhance the fairness and transparency of the medical entrance exam, ensuring a level playing field for all aspiring medical students.

## SUICIDES AMONG CISF PERSONNEL DIP 40% DUE TO PROACTIVE MEASURES'

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

**CONTEXT:** The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has reported a significant 40% decrease in suicide rates among its personnel in 2024, attributed to proactive measures such as improved communication, grievance redressal systems, and mental health support programs, a positive development amidst rising national suicide rates.

## Mindful approach

**The CISF says the steps it has taken to address mental health challenges among its personnel has brought positive results**



Year	Cases of death by suicide	Total posted strength	Rate of cases per lakh
2020	18	1,40,351	12.82
2021	21	1,40,937	14.90
2022	26	1,43,468	18.12
2023	25	1,47,193	16.98
2024	15	1,51,978	9.86

SOURCE: CISF

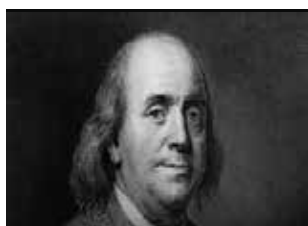
**Key Points:**

- **Significant Decline in CISF Suicides:** The CISF has achieved a 40% reduction in suicide rates among its personnel in 2024, bringing the rate below the national average.
- **Proactive Measures:**
  - Regular "briefing-debriefing" sessions by commanding officers at duty posts.
  - Online grievance portal for timely resolution of issues.
  - 24x7 tele-counselling and personal counselling services.
  - Collaboration with AIIMS, New Delhi for a comprehensive mental health study and implementation of its recommendations.

- **Addressing Underlying Factors:** Stress, prolonged family separation, and work-related pressures are recognized as significant contributors to mental health challenges among CAPF personnel.
- **Rising National Suicide Rates:** The NCRB data indicates a concerning increase in national suicide rates from 9.9 per lakh population in 2017 to 12.4 per lakh in 2022.

**CONCLUSION**

The CISF's success in reducing suicide rates among its personnel demonstrates the effectiveness of proactive measures in addressing mental health concerns within the force. These initiatives, including improved communication, grievance redressal mechanisms, and accessible mental health support services, serve as valuable models for other organizations to adopt in mitigating the impact of stress and promoting well-being among their employees.



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

*—Benjamin Franklin*

# EPFO 3.0 ROLLOUT BY JUNE; TO BE MORE USER FRIENDLY, SAYS MINISTER

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

**CONTEXT :** The Union Labour Minister, Mansukh Mandaviya, announced the launch of EPFO 3.0, an upgraded software system for the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), aimed at enhancing user experience and aligning with advanced banking systems. This initiative reflects the government's commitment to improving digital services for EPFO subscribers. Additionally, the Minister addressed employment statistics, contrasting the performance of the current government with the previous regime, supported by data from the Reserve Bank of India's KLEMS report.



## Key Highlights

### EPFO 3.0 Rollout and Features

#### 1. Launch Timeline:

- EPFO 3.0 to be launched by June 2025.
- The first phase of system and website upgrades to be completed by January 2025.

#### 2. User-Centric Enhancements:

- Redesigned website to offer a more user-friendly experience.
- Introduction of ATM cards for EPFO subscribers, enhancing accessibility to funds.

#### 3. System Upgrade:

- New software to be comparable with

advanced banking systems in the country.

## Employment Data and Government Performance

### 1. Employment Growth Statistics:

- Total employment increased to 64.33 crore in 2023-24, a 36% rise from 47.15 crore in 2014-15.

### 2. Comparison with Previous Government:

- UPA government (2004-2014): 2.9 crore jobs created over 10 years.
- NDA government (2014-2024): 17.19 crore additional jobs created.

### 3. Source of Data:

- KLEMS report prepared by the Reserve Bank of India cited as the basis for employment statistics.

## CONCLUSION

The rollout of EPFO 3.0 signifies a major step forward in modernizing the EPFO's digital infrastructure, aimed at providing seamless services to subscribers. Coupled with significant employment growth under the current government, these developments underscore a focus on economic and digital empowerment. The NDA government's initiatives are poised to impact India's financial and employment landscape positively.



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# EXPERTS ON GM CROP PANELS TO DECLARE CONFLICT OF INTEREST

## ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

**CONTEXT:** The Indian government has amended rules for selecting experts to the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), requiring them to disclose any potential conflicts of interest, following a Supreme Court order and concerns raised about the influence of industry on previous decision-making processes regarding genetically modified (GM) crops.

### PARLIAMENTARY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS



**Field trials for GM crops** with states and universities for generating bio- and health-safety data



**Assess long-term impact**, put in place accountability regime, before introducing GM crops



**Appoint expert** in the field of biotechnology as head of GEAC



**Study impact** of GM crops on human health



#### Major Points:

- **New Rules for GEAC Experts:** The Ministry of Environment has amended rules for selecting experts to the GEAC, the body regulating GM crops in India.
- **Conflict of Interest Disclosure:** Experts must now disclose any potential conflicts of interest, including past professional affiliations with entities involved in the GM crop industry.
- **Supreme Court Order:** These amendments follow a 2023 Supreme Court order that, while not definitively approving GM mustard, emphasized the need for a national policy on GM crops and addressed concerns about conflict of interest.
- **Previous Controversy:** Concerns about potential conflicts of interest arose previously when it was alleged that a member of a court-appointed

committee had ties to Monsanto, a major player in the GM crop industry.

#### Conclusion:

The new rules aim to enhance transparency and accountability in the decision-making process regarding GM crops in India. By requiring experts to disclose potential conflicts of interest, the government seeks to ensure that the GEAC's decisions are based on sound science and free from undue influence from the industry. These measures are crucial for building public trust in the regulatory framework for GM crops in the country.

# GOVT. REPORT REVEALS STARK INFRASTRUCTURE GAP IN INDIAN SCHOOLS

## POLITY & GOVERNANCE

**CONTEXT:** A recent government report reveals significant infrastructure gaps in Indian schools, with a large number lacking access to basic amenities like electricity, functional drinking water, and disabled-friendly facilities.



#### Major Points:

- **Electricity:**
  - 1.52 lakh government schools lack functional electricity.
  - 4.07 lakh of the 4.54 lakh non-government schools have functional electricity.
- **Drinking Water:**
  - 14.11 lakh schools have functional drinking water facilities.
  - 60,000 schools lack functional drinking water.
- **Toilets:**
  - 14.04 lakh schools have functional toilets.

- 67,000 schools operate without functional toilets, with 46,000 being government schools.

#### • Disabled-Friendly Facilities:

- Only 3.37 lakh of the 10.17 lakh government schools have disabled-friendly toilets.

Conclusion:

The report highlights the urgent need for significant infrastructure improvements in Indian schools, particularly in government-run institutions. Addressing these gaps is crucial to ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students, especially those with disabilities.

## INDIAN RESEARCHERS DEVELOP INJECTABLE HYDROGEL FOR TARGETED CANCER TREATMENT

### SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

**CONTEXT:** Researchers from IIT-Guwahati and the Bose Institute have developed an injectable hydrogel that delivers anti-cancer drugs directly to tumors, minimizing side effects by sparing healthy cells, a significant advancement in cancer treatment.



#### Key Points:

- **Development of Injectable Hydrogel:** Researchers from IIT-Guwahati and the Bose Institute have developed a novel injectable hydrogel for localized cancer treatment.
- **Targeted Drug Delivery:** The hydrogel acts as a reservoir for anti-cancer drugs, releasing them directly at the tumor site, minimizing damage to healthy cells.
- **Addressing Limitations of Current Treatments:** This approach aims to overcome the limitations of traditional treatments like chemotherapy, which often have systemic side effects.
- **Hydrogel Composition:** The hydrogel is composed of

ultra-short peptides and is designed to remain insoluble in biological fluids, ensuring localized drug delivery.

- **Response to Tumor Environment:** The hydrogel is responsive to elevated levels of glutathione (GSH), a molecule abundant in tumor cells, further enhancing targeted drug release.
- **Publication:** The research findings have been published in *Materials Horizons*, a journal of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

#### Conclusion:

This innovative hydrogel technology represents a significant advancement in cancer treatment. By enabling precise and localized drug delivery, it offers the potential to minimize side effects and improve the efficacy of cancer therapies. This research exemplifies how scientific innovation can address critical challenges in healthcare and improve patient outcomes.

## FORCE OF IDEAS

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**Context:** The recent truck attack in New Orleans, carried out by an individual inspired by the Islamic State, serves as a stark reminder of the enduring threat posed by this terrorist organization. Despite losing its physical caliphate, the IS continues to inspire lone-wolf attacks globally and is attempting to regain strength in conflict-ridden regions like Syria and Afghanistan.

#### Points:

- **New Orleans Attack:** A truck attack in New Orleans on New Year's Day, carried out by an IS-inspired individual, resulted in multiple casualties.
- **Resurgence of IS:** The IS, though weakened, is attempting to revive its influence, with a focus on Afghanistan and efforts to rebuild in Syria.
- **Lone-Wolf Attacks:** The attack highlights the ongoing threat of lone-wolf attacks inspired by extremist ideologies.



- **Global Reach:** The IS, at its peak, successfully inspired attacks worldwide, demonstrating its ability to mobilize individuals across geographies.
- **Counter-Terrorism Efforts:** Combating the IS requires a multi-pronged approach, including military action, enhanced security measures, and efforts to counter radicalization and extremist ideologies.

### Conclusion:

The New Orleans attack underscores the continued danger posed by the IS and the importance of sustained counter-terrorism efforts. Preventing the resurgence of the IS in West Asia and addressing the root causes of radicalization within societies are crucial to ensuring global security.

## COST AND BENEFIT

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**CONTEXT:** The ongoing diplomatic tension between India and Bangladesh over the presence of Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in India. Bangladesh has demanded her extradition to face charges, while India has maintained that it will not extradite her, citing historical ties and the illegitimacy of the current Bangladeshi government.

### Major Points:

- **Bangladesh's Demand:** The Bangladeshi government has formally requested India to extradite Sheikh Hasina, facing charges including corruption and "crimes against humanity."
- **India's Position:** India has not outright rejected the request, but emphasizes the historical ties between the two nations and the illegitimacy of the current Bangladeshi government.
- **Historical Context:** India provided refuge to Sheikh Hasina after the assassination of her family in 1975, strengthening the bond between the two countries.
- **Political Considerations:** India recognizes the legitimacy of the Bangladeshi people to determine their leaders and believes that pursuing charges against Sheikh Hasina should be the mandate of a duly elected government.
- **Impact on Bilateral Relations:** Sheikh Hasina's political statements from Indian soil have the potential to strain India-Bangladesh relations.

### CONCLUSION:

The extradition of Sheikh Hasina is a complex issue with significant political and historical implications. While Bangladesh has made a formal request, India is unlikely to comply, given the historical ties and the political sensitivities involved. Maintaining a constructive dialogue and finding a diplomatic solution that addresses the concerns of both sides is crucial for preserving the vital bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh.

## SHOULD VOTER ID BE LINKED WITH AADHAAR TO COMBAT VOTER FRAUD?

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

**CONTEXT:** Linking Aadhaar with voter ID is being debated as a means to address issues of voter fraud, duplication of votes, and electoral roll manipulation, but it is acknowledged that technology cannot address human integrity and administrative impartiality challenges.

### Key Points

#### BENEFITS OF LINKING AADHAAR WITH VOTER IDS

##### 1. Elimination of Duplicate Voter IDs:

- Ensures a unique voter ID for every citizen.
- Detects and resolves cases of individuals registered in multiple constituencies.

##### 2. Authentication Capability:

- Aadhaar's real-time authentication system can prevent proxy voting.

##### 3. Improved Electoral Roll Accuracy:

- Helps identify and remove invalid or redundant voter entries.



**4. Database Integration:**

- Aadhaar has successfully cleaned up databases like PAN; similar benefits are expected for electoral rolls.

**CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS****1. Aadhaar is Not Proof of Citizenship:**

- Possession of Aadhaar does not confirm eligibility to vote; citizenship verification remains the Election Commission of India's (ECI) responsibility.

**2. Potential Privacy Concerns:**

- While Aadhaar data is minimal, activists argue linking databases could increase risks of misuse.
- The optional inclusion of mobile numbers raises concerns about unsolicited communication.

**3. Human and Administrative Errors:**

- Voter deletion due to clerical mistakes or intentional malfeasance remains a concern.

**4. Limited Scope of Aadhaar:**

- Aadhaar addresses duplication but cannot counter issues like booth capturing or biased electoral officers.

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES****• Biometric Identification in Elections:**

- **Brazil:** Uses biometric voter registration to reduce fraud.
- **Ghana:** Biometric verification machines have been implemented, though challenges with device reliability persist.
- **Kenya:** Employs biometric voter systems; however, there have been claims of tampering.
- **Philippines:** Biometrics ensure unique voter registration but face logistical issues in rural areas.

**ANALYSIS OF BIOMETRIC SYSTEMS IN ELECTIONS****1. Advantages:**

- Biometric systems provide high accuracy in verifying voter identities.
- Reduces chances of impersonation and duplicate voting.
- Enhances trust in the electoral process through transparency.

**2. Challenges:**

- High initial setup costs and maintenance.
- Potential technical failures during voting can disrupt the process.
- Requires robust data protection laws to address privacy concerns.

**3. Prerequisites for Success:**

- Comprehensive training for electoral staff on biometric devices.
- Regular audits to ensure systems are not tampered with.
- Public awareness campaigns to build trust in the technology

**Conclusion**

While linking Aadhaar with voter IDs offers a promising approach to eliminate duplicate entries and enhance voter roll accuracy, it is not a panacea for all electoral fraud issues. The effectiveness of such measures depends on addressing broader human and administrative challenges. Lessons from global practices underscore the importance of technological and procedural safeguards to ensure elections are transparent, secure, and inclusive. Ultimately, combining technological solutions with strong institutional accountability is key to fool proofing the electoral process.

## WHY HAS TRUMP CALLED THE PANAMA TREATY 'FOOLISH'?

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**Context :** The Panama Canal, a critical maritime trade route, has become a focal point of controversy due to rising transit fees and increasing Chinese influence. U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has criticized the 1999 Torrijos-Carter Treaties that transferred control of the canal to Panama, calling them "foolish," while Panama has defended its sovereignty and operational independence.

**KEY POINTS****Why is Trump upset with Panama?****1. High Transit Fees:**

- The Panama Canal Authority (ACP) increased transit fees due to reduced crossing slots caused by severe drought in

2023 affecting Lakes Gatun and Alhajuela.

- U.S. vessels are significantly impacted by these fee hikes.

## 2. Chinese Influence:

- Increased Chinese investment since Panama's 2017 Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) agreement.
- Hutchison Ports PPC, a Hong Kong-based company, operates ports near canal entrances, raising U.S. concerns about logistical control and potential surveillance.

## What is the U.S.-Panama Treaty?

### 1. Historical Background:

- The canal, constructed by the U.S., opened in 1914 and was controlled by the U.S. until 1999.
- It facilitates 6% of global maritime trade, reducing shipping time and costs.

### 2. Torrijos-Carter Treaties (1977):

- Panama Canal Treaty: Transferred control of the canal to Panama on December 31, 1999.
- Permanent Neutrality Treaty: Declared the canal neutral and accessible to vessels from all nations, with the U.S. retaining rights to defend its neutrality and prioritize military passage during emergencies.

## What has been Panama's Response?

### 1. Transit Fees:

- Panama's President José Raúl Mulino defended the transit fees, stating they are determined by international standards.

### 2. Sovereignty and External Influence:

- Mulino rejected accusations of Chinese military involvement and emphasized the canal's operational independence and Panama's sovereignty.

## What has been China's Response?

### 1. Acknowledgment of Neutrality:

- Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning highlighted the canal's importance as a neutral passageway and expressed respect for Panama's sovereignty.

## What's Next?

### 1. Diplomatic Discussions:

- Likely negotiations between the U.S. and Panama regarding fee structures and operational logistics.
- Panama may seek international support to reaffirm its sovereignty against external pressures.

## Conclusion

The Panama Canal remains a vital global trade artery, but rising transit fees and geopolitical tensions have reignited debates over its management and sovereignty. While the U.S. may push for renegotiations, Panama firmly defends its independence, and international stakeholders like China emphasize respect for its neutrality. The resolution of these disputes will hinge on diplomatic engagement, balancing national interests with global trade imperatives.

# GOVERNMENT CONSTITUTES PANEL TO REJIG THE WHOLESALE PRICE INDEX

## POLITY & GOVERNANCE

**Context:** The government of India has constituted an expert panel to revise the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and explore the transition to a Producers' Price Index (PPI), reflecting the evolving economic structure and improving the accuracy of price measurement.



### Major Points:

- **WPI Revision:** The government has formed a panel to revise the WPI, currently based on 2011-12, to reflect economic changes since then.
- **PPI Transition:** The panel will also examine the feasibility of transitioning from WPI to PPI, a more comprehensive measure of producer prices.
- **Panel Composition:** The 18-member panel includes government officials, private sector economists (Dharmakirti Joshi, Indranil Sengupta, Nilesh Shah), and academic experts (Shamika Ravi, Surjit Bhalla).

### Key Objectives:

- Review the WPI and PPI computation methodologies.



- Improve price collection systems.
- Suggest a roadmap for transitioning from WPI to PPI.
- Timeline: The panel has 18 months to submit its final report.

### Conclusion:

This initiative underscores the government's commitment to improving the accuracy and reliability of price indices, which are crucial for economic policymaking and monitoring. By reviewing the WPI and exploring the potential transition to PPI, the government aims to ensure that price data accurately reflects the current economic landscape and provides a more robust foundation for economic decision-making.

## MANU BHAKER GETS THE GOVT.'S NOD FOR THE DHYAN CHAND KHEL RATNA

### CURRENT AFFAIRS

**CONTEXT:** The government of India has announced the recipients of prestigious sports awards, including the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna for Manu Bhaker, D. Gukesh, Harmanpreet Singh, and Praveen Kumar, and the Arjuna Award for 32 athletes, recognizing their outstanding achievements in their respective fields.



### Major Points:

#### • **Khel Ratna Awardees:**

- Manu Bhaker (Shooting)
- D. Gukesh (Chess)
- Harmanpreet Singh (Hockey)
- Praveen Kumar (Paralympics)

#### • **Arjuna Awardees:**

- 32 athletes, including 16 Paralympians, recognized across various disciplines.

#### • **Lifetime Awards:**

- Murlikant Petkar (Para Swimming) - Arjuna Award

(Lifetime)

- Sucha Singh (Athletics) - Arjuna Award (Lifetime)
- S Muralidharan (Badminton) - Dronacharya Award (Lifetime)
- Armando Colaco (Football) - Dronacharya Award (Lifetime)
- **Other Awards:**
  - Dronacharya Award: Subhash Rana (Para Shooting), Deepali Deshpande (Shooting), Sandeep Sangwan (Hockey)
  - Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar: Physical Education Foundation of India
  - Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Trophy: Chandigarh University

### Conclusion:

The announcement of these prestigious awards recognizes the exceptional achievements of Indian athletes across various disciplines and serves as an inspiration for future generations. These awards not only honor the dedication and hard work of the athletes but also contribute to the growth and development of Indian sports.

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