



● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

## South will not lose LS seats on delimitation, says Shah

POLITY &amp; GOVERNANCE



Union Home Minister Amit Shah assured that the southern States would not lose any Lok Sabha seats due to the delimitation exercise, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi had guaranteed that no seat would be reduced on a pro rata basis. He stated that if the number of seats increased, the southern States would receive their fair share. This was in response to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's concerns that the State could lose eight seats if delimitation were based on population changes recorded in the Census.

However, DMK leader A. Raja found Mr. Shah's assurance unclear, questioning whether the pro rata basis would be applied based on the existing number of constituencies or population. He argued that Tamil Nadu

should not be penalized for successfully implementing family planning policies. The DMK opposed any delimitation that increases seats for northern States while retaining Tamil Nadu's current number and insisted that the 1971 census should be the basis for any changes.

## Govt. questions petitions in apex court for lifetime ban on convicted politicians

POLITY &amp; GOVERNANCE

The Centre has opposed the demand for a lifetime ban on convicted politicians from contesting elections, arguing that punishments under penal law are for a specific period, after which convicts regain their rights. This response was given in a case seeking a permanent ban on convicted politicians, including a plea by advocate A.K. Upadhyay.

The government reiterated its 2020 stance that disqualification under Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, which bars convicted politicians from contesting elections during their prison term and for six years after release, is sufficient punishment. However, the Supreme Court, on February 10, raised concerns over the "apparent conflict of interest" in allowing convicted individuals to return as lawmakers.

In its latest affidavit on February 24, the Centre maintained that imposing a lifetime ban would be excessively harsh and disproportionate, as legal restrictions on rights should only last for the duration of the prison sentence.

The  
More  
You Learn,  
The  
More  
You Earn



www.vedhikiasacademy.org

VEDHIK  
IAS ACADEMY  
The New Learning Mantra



# Ukraine, U.S. agree on a preliminary minerals accord

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that a framework economic deal with the U.S. is ready, but key security guarantees remain undecided. The agreement, which includes U.S. access to Ukraine's rare earth minerals and an investment fund for Ukraine's reconstruction, requires ratification by Ukraine's parliament.

However, Zelenskyy emphasized the need for clarity on continued U.S. military support, especially as former President Donald Trump has suggested Ukraine must offer something in return for aid. Zelenskyy seeks to discuss whether military assistance will continue, the possibility of purchasing U.S. weapons directly, the use of frozen Russian assets for defense and investments, and the potential lifting of sanctions on Russia in upcoming talks in Washington

# A leap backward for maternity entitlements

## POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Despite increasing cash transfers for women across States, pregnant women remain deprived of their legal right to maternity benefits under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013. The Act entitles all pregnant women (except those in the formal sector) to ₹6,000 per child, which should be at least ₹12,000 at current prices. However, these benefits have not been fully implemented.

Instead, the central government provides limited support through the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), which restricts benefits to one child per family—recently extended to a second child if it is a girl—violating the NFSA. Moreover, the amount has been arbitrarily reduced to ₹5,000 for the first child, further diminishing the already inadequate support for pregnant women.

### Scant information

Many eligible women are being denied even the limited benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), with the Ministry of Women and Child Development failing to disclose key data. Despite the Right to Information (RTI) Act mandating transparency, crucial statistics on the scheme remain unavailable.

RTI-based estimates reveal that PMMVY's effective coverage—defined as the proportion of pregnant women receiving at least one instalment—peaked at just 36% in 2019-20 before declining sharply. By 2023-24, coverage had crashed to just 9%.

Government spending on PMMVY has also fallen drastically, with only ₹870 crore allocated in 2023-24, about a third of what was spent five years earlier. To cover 90% of births at ₹6,000 per child, the scheme would require at least ₹12,000 crore, highlighting the severe funding shortfall.

### The official line

Officials from the Department of Women and Child Development admitted that the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) had nearly stalled in 2023-24, blaming software and implementation changes introduced in late 2023. The main issue was not a drop in applications but a decline in disbursements, with frequent software failures.

However, PMMVY has faced difficulties since its launch in 2017, particularly due to Aadhaar-based payments and digital challenges, which have led to the exclusion of many eligible women. Despite multiple reports highlighting these issues, the government introduced further complications in 2023-24, worsening the situation. While this has had severe consequences for Indian women, the government benefits from reduced PMMVY expenditure.

### The examples of Tamil Nadu and Odisha

States like Tamil Nadu and Odisha have successfully implemented effective maternity benefit schemes, offering significantly higher financial support than the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY). Odisha provides ₹10,000 per child (recently doubled before the 2024 elections), while Tamil Nadu offers ₹18,000, with a promised increase to ₹24,000. In contrast, PMMVY benefits have never been raised and remain below National Food Security Act (NFSA) norms.

These State schemes also have better coverage—64% of births in Odisha (2021-22) and 84% in Tamil Nadu (2023-24), compared to PMMVY's dismal national coverage of under 10%. Meanwhile, maternity benefits in the formal sector include 26 weeks of paid leave, whereas women in the unorganized sector struggle to receive even ₹5,000 from PMMVY due to bureaucratic hurdles.

The PMMVY has failed due to the central government's focus on cost-cutting rather than supporting pregnant women, violating the NFSA. The scheme needs a complete overhaul, with increased benefits indexed to inflation, to ensure meaningful support for women and broader societal benefits.

# The bigger tragedy is the Railways and its systemic inertia

## DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Amidst the religious fervor of the Kumbh and Indian Railways' proclamations about passenger volumes, a harsh reality emerges: the approach to passenger safety is outdated and dangerously inadequate.

The February 15 stampede at New Delhi railway station exposed systemic failures in crowd management, not due to a lack of resources but due to indifference to basic safety measures. This tragedy highlights deep flaws in planning and execution, making such disasters tragically predictable.

### The half-truths

The stampede at New Delhi railway station was avoidable, as key crowd control measures—ensuring smooth movement, eliminating bottlenecks, and proper barricading with sufficient security—were ignored.

A last-minute announcement of a special unreserved train to Prayagraj on platform 12, when platform 14 was already overcrowded with passengers for another train, caused chaotic movement. Additionally, reports suggest that the control room failed to stop escalators, further worsening congestion, while security arrangements were inadequate.

The claim that such a large crowd was unforeseen is unconvincing. With over 15 lakh passengers traveling to Prayagraj in February, crowd surges were predictable, especially given past experiences with Kumbh gatherings. Blaming passengers for overcrowding is misleading, as festival rushes and unreserved ticket sales are routine. The Delhi railway division could have followed long-established crowd management protocols, such as those used during Chhath, to prevent the tragedy.

### Conflicting statements

The crowd control measures introduced after the New Delhi railway station stampede—such as extra security, holding areas, better CCTV monitoring, and halting platform ticket sales—were basic precautions that should have been in place earlier. This tragedy exposes the Indian Railways' failure to ensure safe and dignified travel despite its grand claims. In the aftermath, the Railways' response was marked by denial, conflicting narratives, and insensitivity, including premature ex gratia payments and baseless conspiracy theories about "fake news" triggering the stampede. This blame game reflects a pattern of avoiding accountability, as seen in past tragedies like the 2017 Elphinstone Road and 2013 Allahabad station stampedes. Despite repeated warnings from history, the Railways continues to ignore crucial lessons, making such disasters tragically inevitable.

### Another flaw

The accountability process for the New Delhi railway station stampede is flawed from the start, as the inquiry is being conducted by senior railway executives overseeing the very departments that may be responsible. Unlike train accidents, which require independent investigation by the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), this tragedy is being handled internally, raising concerns about transparency.

Beyond this immediate failure, the deeper issue lies in the Railways' systemic inertia. Despite being the nation's lifeline, it resists meaningful change, treating preventable disasters as mere unfortunate incidents rather than addressing their root causes. Until this mindset shifts, such tragedies will continue.

## Water blight

### DISASTER MANAGEMENT

A tunnel collapse in Nagarkurnool, Telangana, on February 22 trapped eight workers, echoing recent mining disasters. The collapse occurred due to water seepage, leading to an eight-meter section crumbling. Despite nine specialized rescue teams working continuously, progress has been slow, with water flow hindering efforts.

Rescue strategies are being drawn from the Silkyara Tunnel collapse in Uttarakhand (November 2023), where 41 workers were saved after a 16-day operation. However, the key difference in Srisailam is the presence of water, making rescue efforts more complex. Tunnel disasters, though rare, are often caused by underground water ruptures, highlighting the importance of thorough geological studies. Authorities must ensure a proper investigation into the collapse, particularly regarding potential lapses in pre-tunneling analysis.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

## Slow, unsteady

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Justice has finally caught up with Congress leader Sajjan Kumar, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for leading a mob that killed two people during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. However, the verdict, delivered 40 years after the crime, highlights severe delays in the justice system. Initially, investigations were deliberately weak, with the police failing to identify perpetrators and minimizing the scale of the violence.

Over the years, commissions and committees reopened probes, allowing some cases to proceed despite defence lawyers exploiting procedural delays. The testimony of three women, who witnessed the brutal killing of Jaswant Singh and his son, played a crucial role in Kumar's conviction. While proving criminal liability in mob violence is challenging, flawed investigations worsen the problem.

Although this conviction offers some hope to victims, it also raises concerns about the powerful evading justice for decades, enjoying full political careers before being held accountable. Kumar may still appeal, leaving the final outcome uncertain.

## A message to district magistrates and the police

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

In Indore, two FIRs were registered under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for violating prohibitory orders issued under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), which correspond to previous IPC and CrPC provisions. The district administration had imposed these orders on January 2, 2025, as part of a campaign to make Indore beggar-free. One FIR was against a person who gave alms to a beggar, while the other was against a beggar's son, who had pledged to prevent her from begging but failed to do so. Both complaints were filed by the Begging Eradication Squad officer.

### Registering an FIR

While the Indore district administration's intention to make the city beggar-free may be well-meaning, registering an FIR for violating orders under Section 163 of the BNSS is legally untenable. This section allows a District Magistrate to issue orders only in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger, which does not apply to begging. Even if the order were justified, an FIR cannot be registered for its violation due to Section 215 of the BNSS, which bars police action in such cases. Instead, the District Magistrate must file a written complaint in court, making the police FIRs invalid.

The Supreme Court held in a case that "Section 195 of the CrPC is in fact a limitation on the unfettered powers of a (judicial) magistrate to take cognisance under Section 190" and he must determine "whether his power of taking cognisance has or has not been taken away by any provision of Section 195(1)". Charge-sheet on a cognisable offence is not a complaint, it is a police report.

Several court rulings establish that an FIR cannot be registered for offenses under Section 223 of the BNS (previously Section 188 of the IPC). The Supreme Court in *C. Muniappan v. State of Tamil Nadu* (2010) ruled that non-compliance with Section 195 of the CrPC invalidates prosecution. In *State of U.P. v. Mata Bhikh* (1994), the Court emphasized that this provision prevents vexatious prosecutions. The Madras High Court in *Jeevanandham v. State* (2018) held that police officers cannot register FIRs for offenses under Sections 206–223 of the BNS, except when acting under Section 35 of the BNSS (formerly Section 41 of the CrPC) to prevent a cognizable offense. The *Lalita Kumari* case principles do not apply here, and the Chhattisgarh High Court recently quashed an FIR against a medical graduate under Section 188 IPC, reaffirming that such FIRs are legally untenable.

### Close the cases

The Indore police should close the cases and inform the District Magistrate, who may approach the court in writing if further action is required under Section 215 of the BNSS. While the State government could amend the BNSS or enact a law to make begging a cognizable offense, doing so would be inadvisable. Criminalizing begging may discourage almsgiving but would worsen conditions for beggars. Instead, rehabilitation, not prosecution, is the appropriate approach.



START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE  
**BEST**

**INDIA'S TOP MOST CIVIL SERVANTS FOR COACHING**

# Why are PwDs worried about DPDP rules?

## POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Disability rights activists are urging amendments to the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, ahead of the March 5 deadline for public consultations. They argue that a key provision of the Act infantilizes Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), undermines their decision-making abilities, and misinterprets the concept of guardianship.

### What does this provision state?

Section 9(1), in clubbing children with PwDs, has mandated that even in cases of adult PwDs who have legal guardians, consent for use of any personal data must be obtained from the guardian concerned. While government officials have said that the draft Rules have tried to address the issue by limiting the number of disabilities the provision would apply to, activists and experts maintain that there remain significant challenges in its implementation.

### What do the draft Rules say?

The Union government introduced the DPDP Act, 2023, to regulate digital personal data while balancing individual privacy and lawful processing needs. Section 9(1) mandates data fiduciaries to obtain verifiable consent from a lawful guardian before processing the personal data of a child or a PwD with a guardian. However, disability rights activists argue that the Act's definition of PwDs under Section 2(j)(ii) and its inclusion of guardianship raise concerns about decision-making autonomy.

The draft Rules, notified on January 3, elaborate on Section 9(1), requiring data fiduciaries to verify guardianship under the RPWD Act, 2016, or the NT Act, 1999. They define PwDs needing guardian consent as those unable to make legally binding decisions despite support or those with severe multiple disabilities. However, unlike the detailed illustrations for parental consent in children's cases, the Rules lack clarity on how guardian consent applies to PwDs, leading to concerns about uniform application and procedural gaps.

### How do guardianships for PwDs work?

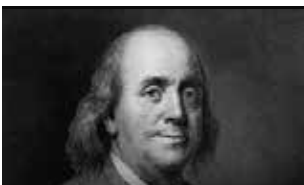
India's legal framework for PwD guardianship is governed by the NT Act, 1999, and the RPWD Act, 2016, which define different roles for guardians of adult PwDs. The NT Act applies to individuals with autism, cerebral palsy, or intellectual disabilities, granting full guardianship. In contrast, the RPWD Act applies to individuals with long-term impairments and provides for limited guardianship, supporting decision-making rather than replacing it. While the NT Act contradicts UNCRPD principles by using "decision-making capacity" as a criterion without clear definition, the RPWD Act aligns with UNCRPD by emphasizing support rather than control over PwDs' decisions.

### Where does the conflict arise?

A survey by PACTA and Saksham Disability found that 27.4% of PwDs had legal guardians, mostly under the RPWD Act's limited guardianship. However, in practice, guardians often manage all affairs, undermining PwDs' autonomy. A report by these organizations noted that while the DPDP Act, 2023, and its draft Rules align with the RPWD Act in theory, they risk depriving PwDs of independence. The NT Act's full guardianship contradicts UNCRPD principles. The report also criticized Section 9(1) of the DPDP Act for assuming that PwDs with guardians lack decision-making ability in digital spaces. Additionally, the law overlooks gender-disability intersectionality, potentially restricting access to essential services. Activist Nipun Malhotra argued that the Act and its definitions have further complicated rather than clarified its application, particularly regarding physical disabilities, which do not warrant legal guardianship under existing laws.

### What are the concerns being raised?

Key concerns regarding the consent clause for PwDs in the DPDP Act, 2023, and its draft Rules include the legal obligations of guardians, conflicts with the UNCRPD, and whether guardians can refuse consent for specific platforms. Saksham's report highlights fears over the handling of PwDs' personal data, as platforms would need to ask if a user has a disability, even when no guardian is involved, leading to unnecessary data collection. Questions also arise over whether guardians, as data principals, would bear full legal responsibility, potentially acting in their own interests rather than the PwD's. Additionally, experts stress that inaccessible digital platforms remain the biggest barrier to PwDs' digital rights, with a 2023 Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy study showing low accessibility scores for major apps like Paytm, Swiggy, Zomato, and Flipkart.



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

*—Benjamin Franklin*

## NAAC removes 900 peer assessors from evaluation duty after detecting irregularities

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE



The NAAC has removed 900 peer assessors from evaluation duties due to performance issues, irregularities, and feedback received over 18 months. The process was accelerated by the recent NAAC-KLEF corruption case in Andhra Pradesh, where assessors allegedly accepted bribes for awarding an A++ rating. Following the CBI probe, seven assessors were debarred, and NAAC has set up committees to review irregularities. To maintain transparency, NAAC has recruited 1,000 new assessors and introduced online and hybrid evaluations to minimize integrity issues. UGC Chairman M. Jagadesh Kumar endorsed these reforms, praising NAAC's efforts to enhance credibility in accreditation.

## 'Cancer-related mortalities increased faster among women in the past decade'

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

An ICMR analysis based on GLOBOCAN 2022 data reveals that approximately 60% of individuals in India die after a cancer diagnosis, with cancer-related deaths rising faster among women (1.2%-4.4%) than men (1.2%-2.4%) over the past decade. The lowest cancer risk is observed in children and individuals of reproductive age (0.08%-1.3%), while middle-aged and elderly populations face higher risks. As India's population ages, the country is expected to experience an unprecedented cancer burden. The five most prevalent cancers account for 44% of cases, and crude incidence and mortality rates are currently higher among women than men.

## PSBs drive infra bond boom

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Banks raised 75% more funds through infrastructure bonds this financial year, collecting ₹89,588 crore in the first 11 months compared to ₹51,081 crore last year. Public sector banks accounted for 90% of these issuances, up from 51% the previous year. Meanwhile, tier-2 bond issuances saw a slight decline to ₹33,100 crore, and additional tier-1 (AT-1) bond issuances more than halved to ₹8,000 crore. The surge in infra bonds comes as deposit growth lags behind credit growth, making them a competitive funding option.

## Russia, U.S. envoys to meet in Turkiye to discuss the operation of embassies

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Russian and U.S. diplomats will meet in Istanbul to discuss embassy operations, following recent talks in Saudi Arabia aimed at improving diplomatic and economic ties. The discussions come after years of strained relations due to mutual diplomatic expulsions and Russia's actions in Ukraine. The meeting, led by high-level experts, will address obstacles created by past U.S. policies and Russia's reciprocal actions. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that the outcome will determine the pace of progress in restoring diplomatic relations.

# Over 70% farmers still use cash to sell their produce

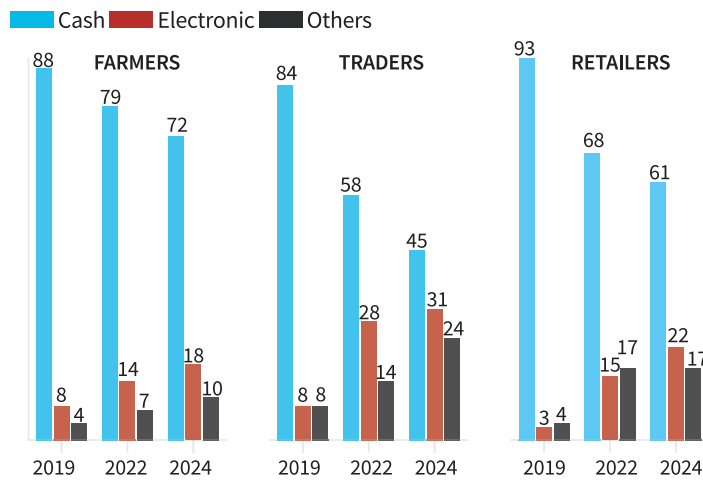
## ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

### Cash is still king

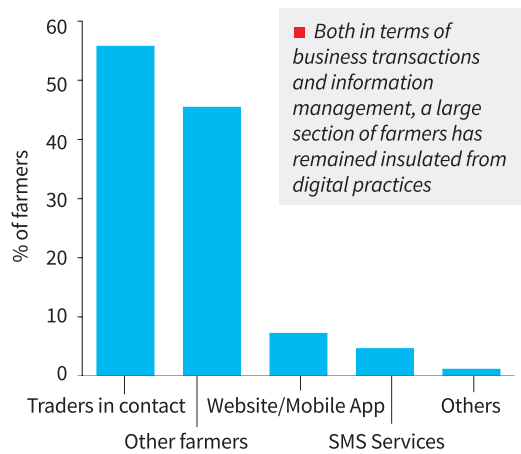
The data for the charts were sourced from a report released by the Reserve Bank of India titled, "Dynamics of Agriculture Supply Chain: Insights from Pan India Survey during Rabi Marketing Season" by Rajib Das, Rishabh Kumar, Monika Sethi, Love Kumar Shandilya and Alice Sebastian



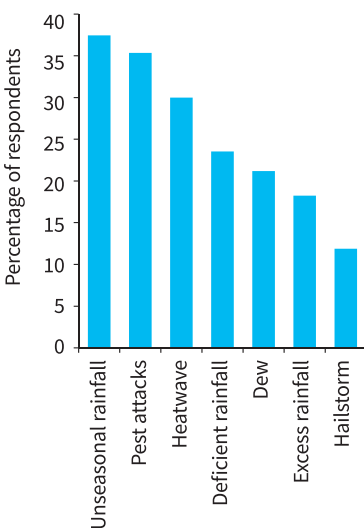
**Chart 1:** The chart shows the share of farmers, traders, and retailers using various modes of payment in 2019, 2022 and 2024. Figures in %



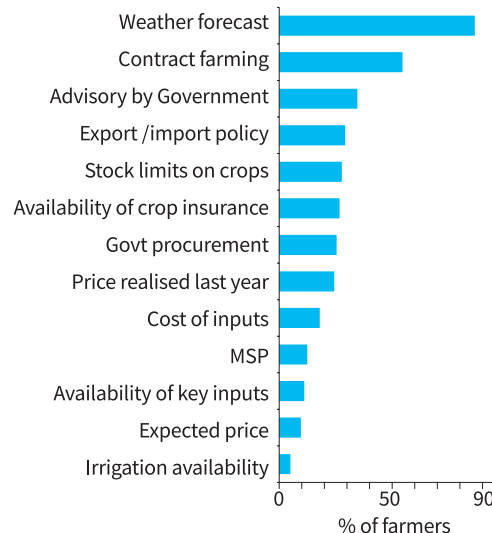
**Chart 2:** The share of farmers using various sources of information about market prices in 2024 (in %)



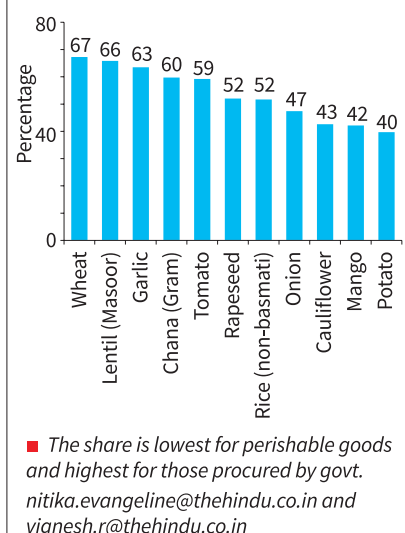
**Chart 3:** The surveyed farmers' reasoning for crop damage during the 2023-24 rabi season



**Chart 4:** The surveyed farmers' reasoning for factors influencing their crop-sowing practices during the 2023-24 rabi season



**Chart 5:** The chart shows the farmers' share in the final retail price of select products in 2024. Figures in %



# India singles out VW in \$1.4-bn tax dispute, says Kia corrected course

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

## Hitting the tax hurdle

Volkswagen's Indian subsidiary, Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, imported car parts over a 12-year period, from 2012 to 2024

**Sep. 2024:** Tax authorities issue a \$1.4 billion tax demand to Volkswagen, alleging misclassification of imports to evade higher duties

**Jan. 29, 2025:** Volkswagen approaches Bombay HC against the tax demand, says it contradicts India's import taxation rules

**Feb. 5:** Bombay HC begins hearing Volkswagen's case

**Feb. 17:** Carmaker's lawyers argue that complying with the tax demand would jeopardise its India operations

**Feb. 20:** Customs Dept asserts in court that Volkswagen must comply, emphasises uniform application of the law



Indian tax authorities have accused Volkswagen of wrongly classifying car imports for 12 years to evade \$1.4 billion in taxes, potentially facing a \$2.8 billion liability if found guilty. While other automakers, including Mercedes, BMW, and Hyundai, correctly classified their imports, Volkswagen allegedly used a scheme to bypass higher import taxes. South Korea's Kia initially followed a similar practice but corrected it after being warned, though it is still contesting a \$155 million tax demand. Volkswagen argues that the record tax demand threatens its survival in India, raising concerns among investors about prolonged legal disputes.



**VEDHIK**  
IAS ACADEMY  
*The New Learning Mantra*

**Comprehensive Coaching For  
568 Government Jobs**

[www.vedhikiasacademy.org](http://www.vedhikiasacademy.org)





# VEDHIK

## IAS ACADEMY

*The New Learning Mantra*

# START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE BEST

**INDIA'S  
TOP MOST  
CIVIL SERVANTS  
FOR COACHING**

[www.vedhikiasacademy.org](http://www.vedhikiasacademy.org)

Head Office:

Vedhik IAS Academy  
Mercy Estate,  
MG Road, Ravipuram,  
Ernakulam-682 015,

Corporate office:

Vedhik IAS Academy  
Samkalp Bhawan, Plot No.15,  
Sector 4, Rama Krishna Puram,  
New Delhi, Delhi-110022

Regional office

Vedhik IAS Academy  
202, Raheja Chambers, 12,  
Museum Road. Bangalore -  
560001. Karnataka, India.

GCC Office:

Bobscoedu,  
Bobsco Educational Solutions WLL  
Office No: 201, Floor: 2  
AL RAYA SHOPPING CENTRE WLL  
Bldg. 517, Road 2408, Area 324,  
Al Fateh, Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain  
[www.bobscoedu.com](http://www.bobscoedu.com)