



● POLITY

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SC stays HC's 'inhuman' remarks on rape bid

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court stayed an Allahabad High Court order that ruled certain acts, including grabbing a minor's breasts and attempting to remove her lower garment, were insufficient to constitute an attempt to rape. A Bench led by Justice B.R. Gavai criticized the High Court's decision as "insensitive" and legally flawed. The Supreme Court found the observations in the order to lack sensitivity, particularly in dismissing the trauma endured by the minor victim.

'Thoughtful decision'

The Supreme Court criticized an Allahabad High Court order that downplayed an attempted rape case, stating it was not a spur-of-the-moment decision but made after months of deliberation. Justice B.R. Gavai condemned the insensitivity of the ruling, rejecting a plea to restrict media coverage. The court, assisted by top law officers, issued a notice to the Centre and Uttar Pradesh, allowing the victim's mother to join the case. It directed the Supreme Court Registry to inform the Allahabad High Court for further action. The March 17 order had reduced charges against the accused from attempted rape to lesser offenses under IPC and POCSO, a move the Supreme Court found deeply troubling. The case will be reviewed in two weeks.

Trial trail

Timeline of key developments in the case

**Nov. 10, 2021:** Alleged incident takes place**Jan. 12, 2022:** Victim's mother files an application before the Special Judge,

POCSO Act, Kasganj district, U.P.

March 21, 2022: Special Judge treats the application as a complaint**June 23, 2023:** After recording statements, the Special Judge issues a summons to the accused**Nov. 13, 2024:** Revision petition against the summons order is filed and reserved for judgment by the Allahabad HC**March 17, 2025:** Judgment in question is pronounced

SC to list plea to file FIR on cash find at judge's house

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



Curious case:

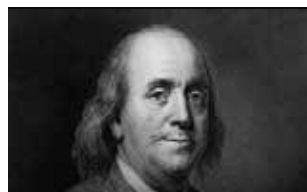
Burnt currency notes found near Justice Varma's residence in New Delhi. ❏

Seeking answers

Some key questions raised in the petition by advocate **Mathews J. Nedumpara**

- Why was no FIR registered on March 14?
- Why were no arrests made in the case?
- Why was the money involved not seized?
- Why did the public learn about the scandal after a week?
- Why did the Fire Force chief deny cash recovery, then contradict it?

Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna indicated that a petition seeking an FIR over unaccounted money allegedly found at the residence of High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma during a fire may be listed soon. The petition also challenges the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court-appointed inquiry committee. Petitioner-advocate Mathews J. Nedumpara requested an early hearing, but the Supreme Court Registry questioned the petition's maintainability, asking whether it was a PIL or a writ petition and seeking clarification on the advocate's locus standi. The petition argues that the police, not the committee, should investigate the incident.



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

—Benjamin Franklin

20 Chinese scholars to visit Visva-Bharati to mark 75 years of India-China diplomatic ties

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Around 20 Chinese scholars and experts will visit Visva-Bharati University on April 1 for an international seminar on Rabindranath Tagore, marking the 75th anniversary of India-China diplomatic ties. Chinese Consul General Xu Wei stated that the event at Cheena Bhavana will also commemorate 100 years since Tagore's 1924 visit to China, symbolizing India-China friendship. Xu highlighted that this will be the largest Chinese scholar delegation to Visva-Bharati. He also noted past events, including an Indian scholars' visit to China and a photo exhibition organized in 2024 to honor Tagore's legacy.

People-to-people ties

Cheena Bhavana at Visva-Bharati, established in April 1937 by Rabindranath Tagore and Professor Tan Yun-Shan, is the oldest Chinese studies department in the subcontinent, aimed at strengthening India-China cultural ties. Chinese Consul General Xu Wei emphasized the importance of enhancing people-to-people connections and expressed optimism about improving India-China relations.

Panel seeks comprehensive review of GST framework

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

A smaller pie

The PAC has recommended the Finance Ministry to undertake a comprehensive review of the GST Framework to simplify compliance



- The Ministry has been asked to improve the user friendliness of the GST portal

- The committee has called for a revamped GST 2.0 after consultation with stakeholders

- PAC has recommended that the Ministry implement a more efficient and transparent refund processing system

that includes clear timelines and regular updates to taxpayers

- The PAC has asked the Finance Ministry to use data analytics and AI tools to get an accurate projection of the indirect tax revenue. The share of indirect taxes in total revenue receipts has declined from 38.76% in FY18 to 36.92% in FY20

Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has recommended a comprehensive review of the GST framework to simplify compliance and eliminate unnecessary procedures. It suggests streamlining return filing, adopting a tiered compliance approach for smaller businesses, and improving the GST portal's user-friendliness. The PAC calls for a revamped "GST 2.0" after stakeholder consultations and highlights taxpayer challenges, including severe penalties for unintentional errors. It raises concerns about biometric-based Aadhaar authentication in registration and warns that GST's goal of "One Nation, One Tax" may remain elusive. The committee urges the Finance Ministry to use data analytics and AI for accurate revenue projections and recommends a more transparent and efficient refund processing system with a dedicated grievance mechanism. It also proposes a simplified GST framework for MSMEs, with reduced filing frequency and automated processes.

India, China discuss ways to move ties to 'predictable path'

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India and China held talks in Beijing to explore ways to rebuild ties and promote people-to-people exchanges, including resuming direct flights and the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra. The meeting, attended by MEA Joint Secretary Gourangalal Das and Chinese official Liu Jinsong, aimed to restore dialogue in a gradual manner after tensions escalated following the 2020 Galwan Valley clashes. Both sides acknowledged progress since the Modi-Xi meeting in October 2024, including two meetings between Foreign Ministers and the 23rd round of Special Representatives (SR) talks on the boundary dispute. In December, NSA Ajit Doval met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi under the SR dialogue, following the disengagement agreement for Depsang and Demchok in eastern Ladakh.

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Centre slams 'biased' report by U.S. commission on religious freedom

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Union government criticized the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for its 2025 report, which raises concerns about attacks and discrimination against religious minorities in India. The report recommends designating India as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) and calls for sanctions against India's intelligence agency.

'Misuse of laws'

The USCIRF, a U.S. congressional advisory body, issued its strongest criticism yet of India, accusing the government of misusing laws like the UAPA, FCRA, and CAA to suppress religious minorities and civil society. It also accused Prime Minister Modi of using hateful rhetoric against Muslims for political gain. For the first time, the commission called for sanctions against India's intelligence agency, RAW, and Vikas Yadav, linked to the Pannun assassination plot. It also urged the application of the Transnational Repression Act on India and a review of the sale of MQ-9B Predator drones over concerns about their potential use in religious freedom violations.

'Politically motivated'

The Indian government rejected the USCIRF's latest report, calling it biased and politically motivated. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal accused the commission of misrepresenting isolated incidents to undermine India's democratic and multicultural society. He argued that the USCIRF itself should be designated as an "entity of concern." Despite the USCIRF recommending India's designation as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) for the sixth time, the U.S. State Department has consistently declined to do so. India has strongly opposed the USCIRF's reports and has largely denied its members entry, except in 2016. The commission is currently chaired by academic Stephen Schneck, a Biden administration appointee.

Non-performing assets of banks at multi-year low due to govt. measures, says Sitharaman

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The Rajya Sabha passed the Banking Regulation Bill, amending provisions in five banking sector Acts. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman called it a significant reform, impacting 19 sections to strengthen governance, improve bank reporting, protect depositors, enhance audits, and streamline customer services, including allowing up to four nominees per account. She highlighted the NDA government's banking sector reforms since 2014, noting that gross NPAs hit a multi-year low of 2.5% in September 2024, while public sector banks recorded a record ₹1.41 lakh crore net profit. She defended the government's actions against wilful defaulters, emphasizing the Enforcement Directorate's role in recovering bank funds.

Debt waiver

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman rejected demands for a debt waiver, stating that the Modi government supports farmers through schemes like Kisan Samman Nidhi, unlike Congress, which only made unfulfilled promises. She highlighted that 68 lakh street vendors benefited from the PM Svanidhi scheme and 50 crore loans were sanctioned under PM Mudra. She also noted that 98% of villages have banking access and 3.9 lakh public sector bank posts were filled in 10 years. During the debate, the Opposition criticized the government's handling of wilful defaulters. Congress MP Shaktisinh Gohil alleged that ₹87,000 crore in loans was written off for 50 defaulters, including Mehul Choksi and Rishi Agarwal, while small traders and farmers faced asset seizures. TMC MP Saket Gokhale warned that banks were burdened with rising NPAs.

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High Court judge's remarks on rape feature in Zero Hour of Lok Sabha

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

During Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha, members raised concerns about a controversial judicial remark and the challenges faced by nurses. BJP MP Mukesh Rajput condemned an Allahabad High Court judge's ruling that grabbing breasts and pulling a minor's pyjama strings did not amount to rape, calling the remark "disturbing and condemnable." He demanded action against the judge and an apology to women.

Congress MP K.C. Venugopal highlighted issues faced by nurses, including the need for separate State registrations, delays in the Nurses Registration and Tracking System (NRTS), and non-compliance with Supreme Court-mandated salary structures in States like Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. He urged the government to establish a single national registration system to streamline the process.

Betting and gambling are State subjects: Union Minister in LS

During Question Hour in the Lok Sabha, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw stated that betting and gambling are State subjects, responding to DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran's demand for a nationwide ban on online gaming sites. Maran criticized the Centre for not banning such sites despite Tamil Nadu's efforts and accused it of only increasing GST on online gaming instead.

Vaishnaw countered by asserting that the Constitution defines the federal structure, with gambling laws falling under State jurisdiction (List 2, Entry 34). He emphasized that the Member should respect this structure and not question the Centre's moral authority on the issue. In reply to another query, the Union Minister said 1,410 sites had been blocked following various complaints.

GE Aerospace to deliver jet engines for Tejas LCA-Mk1A

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

GE Aerospace has delivered the first of 99 F404-IN20 engines to Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mark-1A fighter jet, marking the start of deliveries for the delayed program. Twelve engines are expected to be delivered this year, with the first set to arrive in India in April.

Once received, additional tests will be conducted at HAL's facility, but no firm delivery date to the IAF has been confirmed. HAL aims to deliver 12 Tejas jets this year and 24 next year. IAF Chief A.P. Singh highlighted the need for 35-40 new fighter jets annually. GE attributed delays to restarting a dormant production line.

Challenging process

GE Aerospace had delivered 65 F404-IN20 engines for the initial 40 Tejas jets by 2016, but with no new orders, the production line was shut down. In 2021, HAL ordered 99 additional engines for the Tejas Mk1A, requiring GE to restart the dormant production line amid COVID-19 challenges.

At Aero India, HAL Chairman D.K. Sunil confirmed that GE's supply chain issues had been resolved, and 12 engines would be delivered this year. HAL has already built three Tejas Mk1A jets, with 11 more expected by year-end. The existing order of 87 jets will be completed in 3.5 years, with an additional 97 jets to be delivered by FY 2031-32 at a production rate of 24 jets per year.

A high-level committee, led by Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, has identified key areas for enhancing the IAF's capabilities, with recommendations submitted to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.



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'Over half of ₹1-lakh crore collected for the welfare of mining districts not spent'

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

A study by iForest on District Mineral Foundations (DMFs) reveals that despite collecting nearly ₹1 lakh crore over the past decade, more than half of the funds remain unspent. Additionally, funds are often diverted to projects not directly benefiting mining-affected districts, violating government guidelines.

DMFs, set up in 645 districts across 23 States, are meant to use mining revenues for local development under the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY). Odisha holds the highest DMF share (₹30,126 crore), followed by Chhattisgarh (₹14,564 crore) and Jharkhand (₹13,791 crore).

The report highlights poor allocation towards poverty alleviation and skill development. For instance, in Dhanbad, only ₹1.86 crore has been spent on skill development out of 1,164 sanctioned projects, and in Kendujhar, just 3.2% of total allocations go towards livelihood projects. The study calls for better fund utilization to meet DMF and PMKKKY objectives.

The issue is about the 'quality' of India's publications

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

At a National Science Day event in February 2025, the Union Minister for Science and Technology stated that India is projected to surpass the U.S. in scientific publications by 2029. Currently, China leads with 8,98,949 publications, followed by the U.S. with 4,57,335, and India with 2,07,390 papers.

The minister acknowledged that China's research output excels in both quantity and quality, supported by significant investments in education and science. China's success is attributed to its well-planned medium-to-long-term strategy launched in phases since 2006. He emphasized that India must make similar high-level investments in science and technology to achieve substantial progress..

An international comparison

India face significant lag in scientific research investment compared to advanced nations. While countries like Israel (6.3%), South Korea (4.9%), and the U.S. (3.46%) spend a high percentage of GDP on civilian research, India invests only 0.67%, raising doubts about achieving "Viksit Bharat 2047."

India's scholarly output in 2024 stood at 1,91,703 publications, far behind the U.S.'s 6,48,905, contradicting the Minister's claim that India will surpass the U.S. in research output by 2029. Additionally, India's quality indicator (CNCI) is 0.879, ranking 28th out of 30 countries, while China (1.12) and the U.S. (1.25) lead.

Despite 5,351 Indian scientists being in the top 2% globally in 2023, their rankings range widely from 163 to 68,55,948, reflecting a lack of research excellence. Comparatively, Japan and Germany have more scientists in the top 2% with significantly better rankings. The data underscores India's need for substantial investment and structural reforms in research and higher education.

The real benchmarks

The quality of Indian scientific research, arguing that mere quantity does not equate to global competitiveness. It highlights that true research impact is measured by metrics like the Hirsch Index (H-Index) and Impact Factor (IF) of journals, as well as citation frequency—areas where India lags significantly.

An analysis of publications in top chemistry journals between 2017 and 2024 shows India's poor standing compared to the U.S. and China. While China contributes significantly to high-impact journals like *Angewandte Chemie* and *Journal of the American Chemical Society* (JACS), India's contributions increase only in lower-impact journals. For instance, the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) alone has 15 times the number of JACS papers as all CSIR labs in India combined. Even second-tier Chinese universities outperform all Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) collectively.

The passage argues that China's success stems from heavy investments in university training and research, whereas India lacks a strategic focus on higher education. Despite quantifiable shortcomings, Indian officials make misleading claims about the country becoming a global research leader. The author calls for substantive investments in quality education and research rather than relying on self-congratulatory rhetoric.

Questionable ethics and practices in India

The passage highlights the deep-rooted issues of fraud and unethical practices in Indian science and technology, leading to international embarrassment. By 2020, the system had deteriorated to the extent that retractions, paid publications, fake journals, and piracy were rampant, driven by a clientelist culture of trading favours.

A significant example is the Hyderabad-based Omics group, which was fined \$50 million by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 2019 for deceptive practices, including misrepresenting peer reviews and journal impact factors. The group published 69,000 low-quality articles, polluting global scientific literature.

India is a major contributor to fake research, with a 2018 study estimating that 62% of the world's standalone fake journals originate from the country, and around 10% of India's total research output may be fraudulent. The passage argues that instead of focusing on quantity, Indian science leadership should address the root causes of poor research quality, echoing Einstein's wisdom that not everything measurable is meaningful.

The CBSE's 'two-exam scheme' overcomplicates things

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The CBSE's draft scheme proposes allowing Class 10 students to take board exams twice a year starting in 2026, aiming to reduce stress, provide a chance for score improvement, and promote holistic assessment in line with NEP 2020. While it appears student-friendly, concerns arise regarding its operational feasibility, financial implications, and educational effectiveness. Instead of easing the system, these challenges might make it more complex and burdensome.

Logistical issues, more stress

The CBSE's draft policy for Class 10 board exams from 2026, while aligned with NEP 2020's vision, focuses more on scheduling than true conceptual learning. Despite claiming to shift from rote memorization to competency-based assessment, it lacks clarity on how exams will be redesigned, risking continued reliance on coaching-driven preparation. Instead of reducing stress, the policy may intensify student anxiety by requiring preparation for two exams.

Logistically, managing two exam cycles for over 26 lakh students and evaluating 1.72 crore answer scripts poses significant challenges, straining teachers and school resources, especially alongside Class 12 exams. Additionally, the short gap between exams (February to May) may not allow for meaningful remediation, pushing students towards quick memorization rather than deep learning. This undermines NEP's goal of fostering conceptual understanding.

The issue of examination fees and equity

The CBSE's two-exam policy for Class 10 from 2026 may financially burden economically weaker students by mandating a higher, non-refundable examination fee covering both attempts, even if a student plans to appear only once. This contradicts NEP 2020's goal of equitable education and may widen disparities if coaching centers exploit the format.

Additionally, delayed results from the second exam (June-end) could disrupt school calendars and admissions for Class 11. With many schools starting in April or May, students awaiting results may face uncertainty in securing admissions and selecting subject streams, complicating the transition process.

What should be done

If the CBSE genuinely wants to align itself with the NEP's vision, it must go beyond logistical restructuring and ensure that competency-based assessments are effectively implemented. A structured remedial programme should be integrated between the two examinations so that students who perform poorly in the first attempt have a real chance at improvement rather than just getting another opportunity to attempt the same test. The examination fee structure should be revised to ensure that students who opt for only one attempt are not penalised financially.

While there are reports that a pilot is under way in 30 schools in the science and social science subjects, where students are being assessed internally at two levels based on their choice, the ultimate design of the policy must still undergo a thorough review of these pilot outcomes. Any broader implementation should be in phases, beginning with additional pilot programmes in different regions. A trial phase in varied contexts would allow policymakers to assess practical challenges, refine logistics and gather feedback from schools, teachers and students before expanding it to the national level. Without such a phased approach, the scale of this change could lead to serious administrative challenges that disrupt rather than improve the board examination system.

The intention behind the reform is commendable, but intent alone is not enough. A scheme of this magnitude requires careful planning, clear communication, and a genuine commitment to shifting India's assessment culture towards holistic and meaningful learning. As it stands, the CBSE's two-examination policy risks becoming another bureaucratic overhaul that increases complexity without addressing the core issues that plague India's school examination system.



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Going electric

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

India's exemption of import duties on capital goods for EV and mobile phone battery manufacturing, announced in the Union Budget 2025-26, aims to boost domestic production and clean technology adoption. This move is crucial as batteries account for 40% of an EV's cost, slowing adoption in lower-income countries. China dominates EV battery production, manufacturing over 70% globally, while India lags in both battery technology and EV market penetration, with EVs comprising only 2% of its passenger car market. However, electric two-wheelers have gained traction, making up 60% of total EV sales in 2024.

Beyond trade benefits, India must integrate into the global EV battery value chain, from mining to manufacturing, to reduce costs and emerge as an alternative to China. Success in the EV sector will depend on strategic trade policies, research investment, and technological advancements to strengthen its position in the global market.

Whittling down sources of U.S. soft power

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Since beginning his second term in January 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump has focused on asserting American dominance through his "America First" agenda. However, these actions are eroding the U.S.'s global influence, particularly its 'soft power'—the ability to shape foreign policy through cultural, economic, and ideological appeal rather than military force.

Trump's recent policies have weakened five key pillars of U.S. soft power, diminishing its global attractiveness and diplomatic leverage. While intended as bold strategic moves, these shifts risk undermining America's long-standing global influence.

Alliances: Since World War II, the U.S. has expanded both its hard and soft power through alliances like the Five Eyes and NATO. However, President Trump's recent statements and actions are straining relationships with key allies. His territorial claims on Greenland and Canada, unilateral moves in the Russia-Ukraine war, and criticism of the U.S.-Japan alliance have unsettled European and Asian partners. Additionally, his praise for North Korea's leader and remarks on the AUKUS agreement have raised concerns in Tokyo, Seoul, and Canberra. These actions weaken U.S. influence in strategic groupings like the Quad and embolden its rivals. Meanwhile, Trump's unwavering support for Israel's actions in Gaza is eroding U.S. credibility in the Global South, further diminishing its soft power and diplomatic standing.

USAID: The Trump administration, through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) led by Elon Musk, has drastically cut USAID's budget, reducing its global humanitarian, health, and education programmes by over 80%. While some see USAID as a tool of U.S. political influence, its reduction weakens America's global reach and credibility. Additionally, cuts to key think tanks and media outlets like the U.S. Institute of Peace, Voice of America, and Radio Free Europe further diminish Washington's ability to shape international discourse and project soft power. These moves could make future U.S. aid and influence efforts face increased skepticism worldwide.

Trade: Trump's planned "reciprocal tariffs" on April 2 undermine the U.S.'s long-standing reputation as a champion of free trade. Since 1945, the U.S. has promoted global trade, supported the WTO, and once aimed for a "tariff-free world." However, growing protectionism in recent years, now escalated by Trump's tariff policies, risks damaging trade relationships and U.S. credibility as a reliable partner. As the U.S. seeks a bilateral trade deal with India, its treatment of existing Free Trade Agreement partners like Canada, Mexico, and Australia will be a key indicator of its commitment to fair trade practices.

Immigration: The U.S. has long been a nation of immigrants, symbolizing opportunity and diversity. However, the Trump administration's recent rejection of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies, mass deportations, stricter immigration controls, and attempts to ban birthright citizenship threaten this image. These measures not only impact immigrants within the U.S. but also tarnish its global reputation as a welcoming and inclusive society.

Education: U.S. universities have long been a key source of American soft power, attracting students worldwide and influencing global elites. However, the Trump administration's crackdown on student protests, deportation of foreign students involved in activism, and funding restrictions on universities could diminish this influence. These measures risk reducing foreign student enrollment and weakening the U.S.'s reputation as a hub for free thought and education, as seen during Trump's first tenure when the U.S. dropped in global soft power rankings.

The decline in influence

Joseph Nye, who coined the term "soft power," initially argued in *Bound to Lead* that the U.S. was the world's most

influential power due to its combination of hard and soft power. However, in a recent *Financial Times* article, he warns that Trump's transactional and coercive approach will weaken U.S. influence, drawing comparisons to China's failed "wolf warrior" diplomacy. While acknowledging that Trump is not solely responsible for this shift, Nye believes checks and balances—such as the judiciary, public opinion, and the 2026 Senate races—could moderate his policies. Given this uncertainty, India may benefit from pacing its negotiations with the U.S. rather than making premature concessions.

Malhotra advises caution in battling money laundering

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

Double-edged sword

Multiple laws cast high level of compliance burden on regulated financial service providers, says Malhotra



■ Must have laws with surgical precision that target only the 'illegitimate and illicit'

■ Authorities must keep in mind its impact on persons and businesses

■ Such measures must be considered only as a step toward reducing the compliance burden

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, speaking at the FATF's Private Sector Collaborative Forum 2025, emphasized the need for financial regulations to effectively combat money laundering and terror financing without stifling legitimate investments. He cautioned against excessive compliance burdens on financial service providers due to multiple overlapping laws. Malhotra advocated for a risk-based approach to enforcement but acknowledged its imperfections, stressing the importance of continuously refining risk assessment models to ensure regulations precisely target illicit activities without harming honest businesses and individuals.

Centre unveils mandatory weekly wheat stock reporting to check market speculation

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The Union government has mandated weekly wheat stock reporting for traders, wholesalers, retailers, and processors across all states and Union territories starting April 1. This measure aims to manage food security and curb market speculation. Entities must declare their stock positions on the government's online portal every Friday until further notice. The existing wheat stock limit is set to expire on March 31.

Monitor disclosures

The Department of Food and Public Distribution will closely monitor the disclosures to control prices and ensure consistent wheat availability throughout the country. Entities not yet registered on the portal are urged to do so forthwith and begin their weekly stock reporting, according to the statement.

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Syria's new leader under pressure to rein in jihadists amid rising violence

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Mohammed al-Jolani) faces pressure from Western powers to crack down on jihadist factions, form an inclusive government, and maintain stability. European envoys warned Syria's leadership on March 11 that failure to act decisively against jihadist violence could jeopardize international support. Both the U.S. and European nations demand accountability for recent massacres and insist on security sector reforms. However, Sharaa's reliance on jihadist fighters for control complicates efforts to rein them in, as acting against them could risk renewed conflict, according to diplomats and analysts.

Sectarian overtone

During Syria's civil war, thousands of Sunni foreign fighters joined rebel forces against Bashar al-Assad and Iran-backed militias, intensifying sectarian divisions. Interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa, now reliant on 20,000 fighters from various groups, weakened Syria's stability by dissolving the national army, a move reminiscent of Washington's post-Saddam Iraq strategy. This decision, along with mass public sector dismissals, has fueled unemployment and deepened internal divisions, potentially driving former soldiers into insurgency. Additionally, Sharaa faces challenges from multiple foreign powers—including the U.S., Russia, Israel, Turkiye, and Iran—making Syria a battleground for geopolitical influence.

Stuck in a paradox

In post-Assad Syria, various foreign powers control key regions—Turkiye holds the north, the U.S.-backed Kurds control the oil-rich east, and Israel has expanded its military presence. Interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa faces challenges in maintaining order, as addressing jihadist-led civilian massacres could trigger factional infighting. While his investigation into the atrocities is a positive step, its credibility is questioned due to the lack of international oversight. Western nations have conditioned lifting sanctions on Syria's commitment to inclusive governance, but Sharaa's new constitution grants him absolute power, enshrines Islamic law, and is criticized for replacing autocracy with Islamist rule. The Kurds, despite agreeing to integrate, argue the constitution perpetuates authoritarianism, complicating Syria's path forward.

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Sector 4, Rama Krishna Puram,
New Delhi, Delhi-110022

Regional office

Vedhik IAS Academy
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Museum Road. Bangalore -
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GCC Office:

Bobscoedu,

Bobsco Educational Solutions WLL
Office No: 201, Floor: 2
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