



## Free speech is an integral part of healthy society: SC

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court emphasized the importance of free speech through poetry, theatre, stand-up comedy, and satire while quashing a criminal case against Congress MP Imran Pratapgadhi. The case, filed by the Gujarat police under Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, accused him of inciting discord through his poem on "suffering injustice with love." A Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan ruled that restricting artistic expression would undermine fundamental freedoms in a democratic society.

#### Reasonable restrictions

The Supreme Court reaffirmed that restrictions on free speech must remain reasonable and not become oppressive. Justice Ujjal Bhuyan emphasized that such restrictions should not overshadow the fundamental right to expression. The court stressed that free speech is essential to a healthy society and cannot be silenced just because it is unpopular. Law enforcement and courts must assess speech with strong and rational judgment, rather than reacting to every opposing view as a threat. Justice A.S. Oka, with inputs from Justice Bhuyan, cautioned against the state and police being used to suppress dissent, urging them to protect individual rights rather than serve the insecurities of those in power.

The Gujarat Police filed a case against Congress MP Imran Pratapgadhi, accusing him of promoting enmity based on caste and religion. During a hearing, Justice A.S. Oka noted that the poem referenced non-violence, a principle upheld by Mahatma Gandhi. However, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta dismissed the poem as "sadak chaap" (cheap) and objected to its comparison with Gandhi. The FIR was based on an edited video featuring the MP with the poem in the background. Mehta also acknowledged that poetry can have multiple interpretations and suggested that asking a policeman to interpret poetry might be unreasonable.

## X Corp. trying to 'mislead' court with false claims, Centre tells Karnataka HC

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Union Government informed the Karnataka High Court that X Corp. is misleading the court about the legal basis for blocking harmful content. The Centre accused X of falsely claiming that authorities are issuing blocking orders under Section 79(3)(d) of the IT Act, 2000, instead of the Supreme Court-mandated Section 69A. Defending Section 79, the government stated it aligns with global practices to balance stakeholder interests. It also countered X's portrayal of the SAHYOG portal as a censorship tool, highlighting that 38 major IT firms, including Google, Microsoft, and Amazon, are already using it. Additionally, Meta Inc. is integrating API-based access for real-time content removal.

The Union Government clarified to the Karnataka High Court that it is not issuing direct blocking orders under Section 79(3) but merely notifying platforms of harmful content and warning them of legal liability if they fail to act. It emphasized that non-compliance leads to the loss of safe harbour protection under Rule 7 of the IT Rules, 2001, which is distinct from Section 69A blocking orders. The Centre accused X Corp. of misrepresenting takedown notices as blocking orders, calling this claim misleading and erroneous. It also denied issuing template blocking orders for state governments and police. The case, in which X seeks a declaration that blocking orders cannot be issued under Section 79, is set for a hearing on April 3.



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## Centre signs ₹62,700-crore deals with HAL for 156 LCH

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Defence Ministry signed two contracts with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) worth over ₹62,700 crore for 156 indigenous Light Combat Helicopters (LCH) and related training equipment. Of these, 90 helicopters are for the Army, and 66 for the Air Force. Deliveries will begin in the third year and continue over five years, enhancing combat capability at high altitudes. The LCH, India's first indigenously designed combat helicopter for operations above 5,000 metres, will have over 65% indigenous content. The project will involve 250+ domestic companies, mainly MSMEs, and create over 8,500 jobs. The Ministry also signed a contract with Metrea Management for Wet Leasing of one flight refueller aircraft for providing air-to-air refuelling training to pilots of the IAF and Navy. "Metrea will provide one KC135 aircraft within six months which will be the first FRA to be wet leased by IAF," the statement added. Another major deal, an order for 97 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Mk1A, is set to be concluded in the next few months.

The Army and IAF have already inducted 15 Limited Series Production models of the LCH which were approved at a cost of ₹4264 crore. The IAF inducted the LCH in October 2022 into 143 Helicopter Unit 'Dhanush' at Jodhpur Air Force Station. The Army raised its first LCH Squadron on June 1, 2022 at Bengaluru and it was later moved to Misamari in Assam.

## Even Indira couldn't change Pak.'s 'bigoted mindset', says Jaishankar

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated in Parliament that India cannot change Pakistan's bigoted mindset, citing even former PM Indira Gandhi's inability to do so in 1971. He emphasized that India raises concerns about minority rights in Pakistan and Bangladesh at international forums and directly with Dhaka. His remarks come ahead of PM Modi's visit to the BIMSTEC Summit (April 3-4) in Bangkok, though a bilateral meeting with Bangladesh's Chief Adviser remains uncertain.

During Question Hour in the Lok Sabha, Jaishankar highlighted Pakistan's failure to uphold minority rights, listing 10 attacks in February 2025 on Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Ahmadiyyas. He reaffirmed India's public and firm stance on the issue, stressing that despite international pressure, Pakistan has failed to act to protect its minorities.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar criticized Pakistan for human rights abuses, persecution of minorities, erosion of democratic values, and sheltering UN-sanctioned terrorists, citing recent speeches by Indian envoys at the UN and Human Rights Council.

On Bangladesh, he stated that India closely monitors the situation, having documented 2,400 incidents of violence against minorities in 2024 and 72 incidents in 2025. He confirmed raising the issue with Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain and that Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had discussed it during a December 2024 visit to Bangladesh. However, Jaishankar avoided direct references to Bangladesh in responses to some BJP and Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs.

His remarks coincide with a U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom report, recommending that Pakistan remain a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) due to mob violence, false blasphemy cases, and persecution of minorities. The Ministry of External Affairs rejected the report, as it also criticized India for attacks on religious minorities.

## Cabinet increases DA, DR for Central staff and pensioners

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Union Cabinet approved a 2% hike in Dearness Allowance (DA) for government employees and Dearness Relief (DR) for pensioners, effective January 1, benefiting 48.66 lakh employees and 66.55 lakh pensioners. The increase will cost the exchequer ₹6,614.04 crore annually. However, trade unions criticized the decision, alleging no stakeholder consultation. AITUC General Secretary Amarjeet Kaur claimed that amendments to the Central Civil Service-Pension Rules exclude existing pensioners from benefits under the proposed Eighth Pay Commission, applying only to future retirees. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw defended the move, stating it follows the Seventh Central Pay Commission's accepted formula.

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## Indian courts have 1.45 lakh contempt cases pending

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal informed the Lok Sabha that over 1,800 contempt cases are pending in the Supreme Court, while 1.43 lakh cases are pending in High Courts. As per Supreme Court data, 1,852 contempt cases were pending as of March 20. According to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), 1,43,573 contempt cases were pending in High Courts as of March 24. Meghwal stated that the government lacks information on why these cases remain unresolved, as compliance with court orders is the responsibility of respective administrative Ministries.

## Data protection Act sections undermine RTI legislation: Moitra

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra criticized Section 44(3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, in the Lok Sabha, arguing that it undermines the Right to Information (RTI) Act by restricting access to certain government data, including details of wilful defaulters. She also objected to provisions allowing journalists, activists, and political parties to be classified as data fiduciaries, making them subject to heavy fines. The Data Protection Board, appointed by the government, can impose penalties ranging from ₹250 crore to ₹500 crore, which she warned could discourage data requests. Moitra urged the government to repeal Section 42(3) of the Act.

## Cabinet okays ₹22,919 crore scheme for electronics component manufacturing

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The Union Cabinet has approved a ₹22,919-crore Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme for six years to boost domestic electronics production, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced. Unlike past production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes, this initiative will reward manufacturers based on factory turnover and job creation. It aims to attract ₹59,350 crore in investments, generate ₹4,56,500 crore in production, and create 91,600 direct jobs. The scheme focuses on sub-assemblies like display and camera controllers, as well as bare components such as circuit boards, hardware enclosures, and lithium-ion batteries, enhancing domestic value addition in electronics manufacturing.

## 'India unlikely to go in for across-the-board tariff cuts'

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### Tit-for-tat tariffs

A reciprocal product-wise tariff by the U.S. may hike India's import tariff to 15.7% from 2.7%

■ U.S. constituted 18% of India's merchandise exports in 2024, but this was only 1.6% of U.S.'s overall imports

■ Most affected would be agricultural exports, where the tariff differential is high

■ While India charges 40% on an average on U.S. agri imports, the U.S. charges just 2.9% on India's exports



India is unlikely to implement across-the-board tariff reductions and may instead ease non-tariff barriers to address reciprocal tariffs, according to Barclays Research. If the U.S. applies like-to-like tariffs, India's import tariff could rise to 15.7% from 2.7%, impacting almost all exports. To mitigate this, India may expand purchases from the U.S. rather than lowering tariffs.

The U.S. accounted for 18% of India's exports in 2024, while India made up only 1.6% of U.S. imports. The tariff gap is 6.5%, the highest among emerging markets, per Nomura. Agricultural exports would be most affected, as India imposes a 40% tariff on U.S. imports, while the U.S. charges only 2.9% on Indian exports. Barclays estimates a 2.3% higher import duty on Indian agri-products but suggests India may not need to reduce import tariffs on some agri goods despite reciprocal tariff threats.

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## Core sector growth slows to 2.9% in February from 7.1%

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

India's core sector output growth slowed to a five-month low of 2.9% in February 2025, compared to 7.1% in February 2024, as per official data. On a monthly basis, growth fell from 5.1% in January. The last recorded low was 2.4% in September 2024. Crude oil and natural gas output declined, while coal (1.7%), refinery products (0.8%), steel (5.6%), and electricity (2.8%) saw moderated growth compared to the previous year. However, fertilizer (10.2%) and cement (10.5%) output increased. For April-February FY25, core sector growth was 4.4%, down from 7.8% in FY24. The core sector contributes 40.27% to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

## Powerful earthquake kills over 150 people in Myanmar and Thailand

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

A 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar and Thailand on Friday, causing widespread destruction. The epicenter was near Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city, and was followed by a 6.4 magnitude aftershock. In Myanmar, at least 144 people were killed and 730 injured, with buildings, a bridge, and a dam destroyed. The military government warned that casualties could rise. In Thailand, at least eight people died in Bangkok, where a high-rise under construction collapsed. The full extent of damage remains unclear, especially in Myanmar, due to ongoing civil war and restricted information flow.

In the aftermath of the 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand, blood donations are in high demand in the worst-affected areas. Damaged roads, highways, a bridge, and a dam in Mandalay have raised concerns about rescue operations in Myanmar, which is already facing a humanitarian crisis.

In Bangkok, Thailand, a building collapse killed at least three people, with 90 still missing, according to Defence Minister Phumtham Wechayachai. Rescue teams have saved seven people so far. Two of the dead were construction workers killed by falling debris. The collapsed building was a China Railway Construction Corporation project for the Thai government. Authorities have advised Bangkok residents to stay outside due to the risk of aftershocks.

## Bangladesh welcomes China to participate in Teesta project

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Bangladesh has welcomed Chinese participation in the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project, as confirmed during Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' visit to China. Both countries also signed an agreement on hydrological data exchange for the Yarlung Zangbo-Jamuna (Brahmaputra) River and agreed to initiate Free Trade Agreement (FTA) discussions soon.

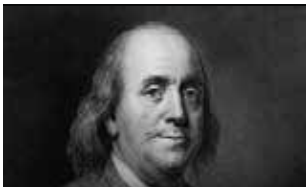
In a joint statement, the two nations committed to Belt and Road cooperation, industrial collaboration, and supply chain strengthening. Bangladesh reaffirmed its support for the One-China policy, recognizing Taiwan as part of China.

During Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' visit to China, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to non-interference, sovereignty, and mutual development. Bangladesh assured China of joint advocacy for an "equal and orderly multi-polar world."

Key agreements include:

- Optimizing the China-Bangladesh Investment Agreement
- Chinese participation in Mongla Port modernization
- Expansion of the Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone in Chittagong

The nations will also deepen cultural, tourism, media, education, and healthcare exchanges in 2025, marking 50 years of diplomatic relations. Additionally, they agreed to boost blue economy cooperation and hold a new round of maritime cooperation talks.



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

—Benjamin Franklin

# India's geopolitical vision should be larger

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for India's efforts in peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, sparking discussions on India's global diplomatic role.

Despite its history of decisive interventions—such as in Bangladesh (1971), the Maldives (1988), and Sri Lanka (2009)—India has not actively engaged in resolving broader international conflicts.

However, India has significantly contributed to global welfare through initiatives like 'Vaccine Maitri', the International Solar Alliance, the promotion of digital public infrastructure, and disaster relief efforts.

### A reticence

Over the past two decades, India has prioritized economic growth, becoming the fifth-largest economy. This focus has led to a cautious approach in global conflicts, fearing that active involvement could affect bilateral relations or economic progress.

While India historically led the Non-Aligned Movement, its current multi-alignment strategy focuses on strengthening ties with key nations. However, as a major democracy aspiring for a permanent UNSC seat and greater global influence, expectations from India are rising.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent gratitude toward Prime Minister Narendra Modi acknowledges India's balanced approach to the Ukraine war, including its UNSC abstentions and calls for peace. This could also be a subtle push for India to play a larger diplomatic role, leveraging its credibility with both Russia and Ukraine to be part of major peace negotiations.

### There is a global reset

If India does not step up diplomatically, it risks ceding space to countries like Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, which are actively mediating global conflicts. Key negotiations, such as Ukraine-Russia talks in Türkiye and U.S.-Russia discussions in Saudi Arabia, highlight their growing influence.

With a global reset underway, the U.S. shifting focus, and rising protectionism, India must engage more proactively. Given China's continued adversarial stance and deep trade ties, India must strengthen external alliances. This is crucial as the U.S.-China relationship evolves, potentially dividing regions into spheres of influence, which could diminish the Quad's strategic role and put India under pressure in Asia.

### A time for a shift and also reform

India must adopt regional policies that go beyond bilateral relations, particularly in West Asia, Central Asia, and East Asia. Despite strong ties with Central Asian nations, India has downgraded its role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and needs to re-engage with Europe while also pursuing internal economic reforms to boost competitiveness and trade ties with the U.S.

India should proactively shape conflicts without necessarily acting as a mediator. Historical examples, such as India's role in the Korean War (1951-52) and its UNSC term (2021-22), show its potential as a bridge between powers.

In a fragmented global order, India must balance economic development with geopolitics. Instead of waiting for an invitation, India should assert its role as a major global power, using the Trump 2.0 era as an opportunity to emerge as a key player in shaping world affairs.

# Advantage China in Africa's nuclear energy market race

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Russia-Ukraine war has highlighted the importance of energy security, prompting African nations to explore nuclear energy as a key solution. Currently, South Africa's Koeberg plant is the continent's only nuclear facility, but countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, Rwanda, Kenya, and Zambia are planning nuclear projects to expand electricity access. By 2035, Africa aims to generate 15,000 MW of nuclear energy, creating a \$105 billion investment opportunity, attracting global interest in this emerging market.

### The scramble for Africa's nuclear market

While France has historically dominated Africa's nuclear sector, its influence is waning, especially in Francophone Africa. The U.S., through the US-Africa Nuclear Energy Summit (USANES) since 2023, is exploring expansion, though its future depends on President Donald Trump's policies. Russia has secured nuclear agreements with Egypt, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Burundi, with Rosatom constructing a reactor in El Dabaa, Egypt, albeit at a slow pace. South Korea is also eyeing the market through Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power (KHNP). However, China is emerging as the leading player in

Africa's growing nuclear energy sector.

### Explaining China's dominance

China's nuclear expansion in Africa is a recent but strategic move, starting with a scholarship program in 2012 to train African and South Asian students in Chinese nuclear procedures and equipment. With over 50 operating reactors, China has become an attractive partner for African nations. Two state-owned companies, China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN) and China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC), lead China's nuclear efforts in Africa.

At the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Nigeria signed an MoU with China for nuclear power station development. Uganda also agreed to build a 2 GW nuclear plant, with the first 1 GW unit operational by 2031. Kenya plans a research reactor by 2030 but remains open to partners. Meanwhile, Ghana has chosen U.S.-based NuScale Power for Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), while China will build a Large Reactor (LR).

In West Africa, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali signed an MoU with Russia for nuclear development, but Russia's economic struggles due to sanctions and the Ukraine war may hinder investment. This could push these nations toward China for foreign investment and nuclear infrastructure.

### Africa's nuclear ambition, impact on India

As the global shift toward clean energy gains momentum, Africa sees nuclear energy as a key solution. Despite concerns about a debt trap, many African nations are likely to rely on Chinese financing for their nuclear projects. China already leads globally in constructing new nuclear power plants.

A major challenge for Africa is the lack of transmission networks for distributing nuclear power. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) could help develop these networks, further strengthening its influence in Africa's clean energy sector.

Meanwhile, India, with a current nuclear generation capacity of 8,180 MW, aims to generate 100 GW by 2047. To achieve this, securing African uranium is crucial. India signed a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with Namibia in 2009 and has plans for uranium mining in Niger and Namibia. However, China's growing dominance in Africa's nuclear market could make it difficult for India to access these resources, potentially affecting India's energy security in the long run.

## Equitable distribution

### ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

The 19th report of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) strongly criticizes the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, introduced in July 2017, for failing to achieve its goals of simplifying, unifying, and improving tax compliance. The report highlights a 2% decline in indirect tax revenue between FY18 and FY20, before the COVID-19 pandemic. A major concern is the non-auditing and non-finalization of the States' Compensation Fund for over six years, which has strained the federal tax structure. The Centre's failure to provide the Compensation Fund Account to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has delayed revenue loss compensation to States.

The centralized nature of GST has been a point of contention, especially for revenue-generating States, which have faced reduced fiscal autonomy and lower tax collections. Since GST is destination-based, it disproportionately affects manufacturing-heavy States, as tax revenue shifts to consuming States.

The GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017 mandated a Compensation Fund and assured 14% annual revenue growth for five years (2017–22), using FY16 as the base year. However, many States have faced delays or non-receipt of funds, affecting governance. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) attributes this to the Centre's indifferent approach.

The PAC highlights 2,447 discrepancies worth ₹32,577.73 crore in a sample of 10,667 cases and criticizes the Finance Ministry's weak audit practices. It recommends a formal audit mechanism with the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) for timely reviews and pending case resolutions.

The report also suggests a comprehensive GST reform ("GST 2.0"), aligning with State demands for a higher revenue share (70%–80%), compared to the current 50%.

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*Head Office:*

**Vedhik IAS Academy**

Mercy Estate,  
MG Road, Ravipuram,  
Ernakulam-682 015,

Head Office:

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

+91 7777 875 588 | +91 9778 639 288 | 0484 4527777

*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

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