287 'other' religions briefly listed on the Census portal

The drop-down menu was taken down later; official says the list was meant to be 'predictive text entries' for the 'Other' religions category to help enumerators fill forms without 'spelling mistakes'

Vijaita Singh
Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Going by the government's initial classification of "other" religions in the self-enumeration portal for the population enumeration phase of Census 2027, 'ISKCON', 'Ramakrishna Paramahans', 'Sanatan', 'Shri Ram', 'Shri Krishna', 'Balmiki', 'Ramdev', 'Bishnoi', 'Sarna', 'Tantric', 'Yogi', 'Shia', 'Sunni', 'Methodist', and 'Pentecostal' are among the religions practised in the country.

While these were among 287 options given under the 'Others' category for the question pertaining to the respondent's religion in the self-enumeration portal that went live on Monday for four poll-bound States, the drop-down menu with these options was removed later in the day after *The Hindu* raised a query with the Union Home Ministry regarding the classification.



Taking a count: Enumerators during a door-to-door survey for Census 2027 in New Delhi. FILE PHOTO

Along the same lines as the previous Census exercises, there are seven main categories in the religion column: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, and Others. In a first, the 'Others' category had been expanded into at least 287 further options, many of which have previously been classified by the Indian government as sects within the six major religions or as respondents' entries in the "other religions and persuasions" category in the 2001 and 2011 Censuses.

The drop-down menu also had several options that had not been recorded before, such as 'Tirupati Balaji', 'Gorak Nath', 'Basaveshwara', and 'Dev Samaj', among others.

After the removal of the drop-down menu, a representative of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India said that, apart from the six major religions, there is the 'Others' category in which the "respondent is free to write any other religion as in previous censuses." The official also said that it was "incorrect to say the mentioned terms have been shown as other religions".

However, a government official told *The Hindu* that the list of options had been prepared as "predictive text entries" for the 'Other' religions category to help enumerators fill in the forms without "spelling variations and mistakes" when a respondent mentions any faith other than the six major ones. Giving an example, the official explained that if a respondent said they were a follower of ISKCON, the predictive text list would complete the entry.

How these appeared as options in a drop-down box is being inquired into, the official said.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

287 'other' religions briefly listed on portal

The self-enumeration portal (se.census.gov.in) went live on Monday for the States of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa, and Punjab, where elections are scheduled to be held in 2027. For the rest of the country, the portal will open in January 2027.

A retired Census official told *The Hindu* that the options in the now-removed drop-down box were "strange", particularly because there is no previous data to compare them with. In 2001 and 2011, the tables on classified sects within major religions and respondents' entries in the 'other religions and persuasions' category were tabulated later, after the enumeration was completed.

Before the drop-down box under the other religions category was removed, a government official in Uttar Pradesh, who provided training to Census enumerators, said, "The instructions are to record religion from the six mentioned categories. If a respondent chooses the 'Other' category, they can pick from the specified drop-down box with more than 280 names, and if the preferred religion's name is not there, they can enter the name and it will be recorded as is."

There has been a sustained movement by tribal communities calling for a separate religion column for Adivasi faiths, which they asserted was different from Hinduism.

GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- Objectives of Census 2027
- What was the controversy surrounding the Census 2027 religion column?

Cyclone Akvan likely to cross A.P. coast on November 20

Weather system over Bay of Bengal likely to intensify into a severe cyclonic storm today; rainfall may begin in State from November 18, IMD says: CM reviews preparedness, orders precaution

Nellore Sravani
VIJAYAWADA

The deep depression over southeast and southwest Bay of Bengal intensified into a cyclonic storm on Monday. Cyclone Akvan is moving north-northwestwards towards the Andhra Pradesh coast at 10 kmph.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), at 5.30 p.m., the storm was centred on the central parts of south and westcentral Bay of Bengal, which is about 610 km east of Chennai of Tamil Nadu, 630 km northeast of Trincomalee in Sri Lanka, 660 km southeast of Machilipatnam and 670 km south-southeast of Visakhapatnam and 790 km south of Gopalpur in Odisha.



A farmer ties paddy stalks together in Vijayawada Rural on Monday to minimise damage from the approaching cyclone. G.N Rao

The storm may continue to move north-northwestwards and intensify into a severe cyclonic storm over west-central Bay of Bengal by Tuesday evening and may cross the Andhra Pradesh coast around noon on November 20, as a very severe cyclonic storm, with windspeed gusting to 145 kmph. Rain may begin in the State from November 18, becoming very heavy on November 19 and 20. The IMD said that the probable landfall location could be anywhere between Nellore of SPSR Nellore district and Tuni of Kakinada district.

The districts of Konaseema, Kakinada, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, NTR and Guntur have been put on alert, as very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall is expected in these districts on November 19 and 20. Except for Krishna and NTR, the other districts bore the brunt during Cyclone Arnab and Cyclone Murasu too. Most of these districts are known for rich cultivation of paddy. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday reviewed preparations for the deep depression and instructed officials to consider the recommendations made by the Central team.

GS 1: Geography

Key Pointers:

- What is Cyclone Akvan?
- Why is Andhra Pradesh vulnerable to cyclones?
- Functions of IMD
- How are cyclones formed?
- What are the different types of Cyclone?

Clear the path

India should use multilateral fora to advance bilateral cooperation

While maintaining its hard stance on cross-border terrorism, India has an opportunity to recognise that many of its other interests still merit sustained cooperation with Pakistan as the latter's climate minister Musadik Masood Malik prepares to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Civilisational Dialogue Forum in New Delhi. India's official position since the Pahalgam attack and the ensuing confrontations along the border is that terrorism and bilateral talks cannot coexist. A month later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi signalled that India's relations with Pakistan would remain subordinate to its demands on cross-border terrorism by extending the condition to trade and water. South Asia is already one of the least economically integrated regions worldwide, with intra-regional trade at around 5%, and, as Chatham House has inferred, strained ties between India and its neighbours have created diplomatic vacuums that Beijing has taken advantage of through trilateral and regional groupings. Now, by inviting all SCO members to the national capital and participating in meetings ahead of the August 2027 Islamabad Summit, New Delhi has shown some maturity as a convening power. Islamabad is also being pragmatic in keeping channels open during its SCO chairmanship by participating in an initiative championed by Mr. Modi.

The pursuit of regionwide water security remains particularly fluid, with India seemingly overlooking the fact that it is upstream of Pakistan and Bangladesh and downstream of China. After India stopped sharing routine hydrological data of the Indus river and approved the Chenab-Beas link tunnel project, Mr. Malik fanned the flames saying Pakistan would "cut off those hands" seeking to restrict its share of the water. Yet China has now restricted the same data vis-à-vis the Brahmaputra while it builds the Medog mega-dam in Tibet. India has also protested the proposed Padma Barrage in Bangladesh, which has been increasing its alignment with China, echoing India building the Farakka Barrage over East Pakistan's objections in 1961. Climate change is rendering cooperation more essential to manage the integrity of contested geographies, the willingness of border populations to engage, and the potential to generate hydroelectric power. Suspending ties may communicate political resolve but will not diminish terrorists' capabilities in the region or improve India's security. It has already compromised India's ambitions to regional leadership, which require the ability to keep engaging even with difficult neighbours. India should go beyond using multilateral fora to assert its national position and start identifying areas where bilateral cooperation serves its interests, including with Pakistan.

GS 2: International Relations

Key Pointers:

- What is Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)?
- Pahalgam Terror attack
- India and its Neighbourhood relations
- What is Indus water treaty?

Taxes, policy uncertainty and lost investor confidence



Shashi Tharoor

Member of Parliament (Congress party) from Thiruvananthauram, and Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including *Why I Am a Hindu* and, most recently, *The Sage Who Reimagined Hinduism: The Life, Lessons and Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru*. His forthcoming book is *The Fight for Indian Liberalism* (January 2027)

The sudden infusion of ₹15,000 crore into India's equity markets after the U.S. midterm election results should not be allowed to obscure a more fundamental policy question: has India's investment policy environment become increasingly difficult for global capital to navigate? And is this hurting our economy?

A recent table doing the rounds on social media shows that, over the last two years, investors in South Korea's KOSPI Index gained 160%, Pakistan's KSE-100 grew 107%, Taiwan's TAIEX gained 105%, Japan's Nikkei-225 increased 70%; even the struggling economies of Europe gave their investors 30% (Germany's DAX) and 26% (UK's FTSE100), but India's Nifty 50 returned minus 14%. This weakness in Indian equities is the cumulative outcome of taxation, regulatory uncertainty, liquidity constraints, the cost of capital, corporate earnings pressures and, yes, the volatile priorities of international investors.

Let's face it: What matters to an investor is not simply how high India's tax rates are, but the predictability, consistency and overall competitiveness of the investment environment. The recent trajectory of India's equity markets raises serious questions about all three.

Take the history of taxation on listed equity shares in India: before October 2004, long-term capital gains (LTCG) on listed shares were generally taxed at 20% with indexation, or 10% without indexation, whichever resulted in a lower tax liability. Short-term capital (STCG) gains did not enjoy a special concessional rate and were added to the investor's taxable income. Securities Transaction Tax (STT) did not exist. In October 2004, the Finance Act introduced a fundamental change. LTCG on listed equity shares became exempt under Section 10(38), while STCG were taxed at a concessional rate of 10% under Section 111A, subject to the prescribed conditions. The exemption on LTCG was introduced alongside STT. The rationale was straightforward: rather than relying entirely on the assessment and collection of LTCG tax, the government could collect a small transaction-based levy immediately through the stock exchanges. The arrangement offered a measure of simplicity, brought in revenue right away, improved compliance and reduced the scope for disputes over capital-gains assessment. It also incentivised participation in the formal equity market.

But in 2018, the exemption on LTCG was withdrawn by the Modi government, which reintroduced LTCG taxation at 10% but still left STT untouched. This raised the obvious question: if STT had originally been introduced in lieu of LTCG, why was the transaction tax retained when capital-gains taxation was restored? Worse still, in July 2024, the government increased the LTCG tax rate on specified listed equity investments from 10% to 12.5% and the STCG tax rate from 15% to 20%. The 2026 Union Budget introduced another increase in STT, this time affecting futures and options transactions. The cumulative message to investors is difficult to ignore. Over the years, the tax burden on equity-market participation has increased, even as the government continues to depend on the capital market to mobilise resources, support investment and encourage household financial savings. The simultaneous imposition of capital-gains taxation and transaction tax therefore raises legitimate concerns about the cumulative burden, particularly during periods of market weakness. A tax regime that seeks to deepen equity participation must consider not only the revenue it generates but also the cost it imposes on participation, liquidity and capital formation.

Investor confidence, once weakened by a series of inconsistent or costly policy decisions, cannot be restored by optimism alone

Even seemingly unrelated policy developments can add to a broader perception of uncertainty. The retrospective tax controversy associated with the 2018 Flipkart-Walmart transaction also raised concerns about the predictability of India's tax regime. The demand for LTCG tax in connection with a transaction that had already taken place created apprehension among foreign investors. They value certainty and consistency highly. They may be willing to accept market risk, but they are less comfortable with the possibility that the rules governing their investments could change unexpectedly. The cumulative effect of taxation, regulatory uncertainty and changing policy signals can influence the perception of India as an investment destination.

For global capital, predictability is often as important as profitability. Frequent changes in regulatory or pricing frameworks generate concerns about the consistency of the policy environment. Some interventions may be necessary to protect consumers or address genuine market failures, but when policy signals appear unpredictable, or when investors are unable to anticipate the direction of future regulation, they won't invest.

As a capital-deficit economy, India faces structural constraints in attracting large amounts of capital at a low cost, compared to mature markets in the U.S. and Europe. Foreign investors may prefer markets where they can obtain better risk-adjusted returns or access industries with stronger growth prospects. Because the competition for global investment is a race between ecosystems, technologies, and policy environments, India cannot rely solely on its population, consumption base, or long-term growth potential. It must also offer a competitive environment in which capital can be deployed efficiently and generate sustainable returns. When investors ask if India's much-touted GDP growth story translates into earnings growth and sustainable wealth creation, the answer is largely negative. Our undoubted potential is not the same as realised investment returns. The government must therefore reconsider whether its taxation and regulatory policies are aligned with the broader objective of deepening capital markets and attracting long-term investment.

Global capital is mobile, and investors compare opportunities worldwide based on expected returns, risk, and policy credibility. No market enjoys an unconditional claim on global capital. Regulatory and taxation changes, transaction costs, liquidity conditions, currency depreciation, the cost of capital, slowing corporate earnings, valuation premiums and the limited presence of Indian enterprises in some of the promising emerging technology industries (including AI) - all influence the relative attractiveness of an investment destination. Confidence is built through stable institutions, transparent decision-making, and predictable rules. To prevent capital from moving away, which would harm business financing and India's economic development, the government must strike a balance between legitimate revenue needs and a competitive framework that ensures stable regulations and sustainable returns.

India cannot afford to assume that global capital will continue to arrive simply because its economy is growing. If investors perceive India as an expensive, uncertain or less competitive market, capital will seek alternatives. The consequences will extend beyond stock prices to the cost of financing businesses and the broader prospects of economic development. While domestic investors may continue investing through Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs), persistent market underperformance can affect their confidence and expectations gradually. Domestic inflows cannot indefinitely compensate for weak earnings, expensive valuations or sustained foreign capital outflows.

Ultimately, the most important asset of a financial market is investor confidence. And confidence, once weakened by a series of inconsistent or costly policy decisions, cannot be restored by optimism alone. It requires a sustained commitment to predictability, competitive taxation, credible regulation and the creation of an environment in which investors can reasonably expect the rules of the game to remain stable. It's time for the government to wake up and smell the proverbial coffee.

GS 3: Economy

Key Pointers:

- How has taxation on equity investments evolved in India?
- Why is the simultaneous imposition of LTCG tax and STT debated?
- How does policy uncertainty affect foreign investment?
- What is the significance of foreign portfolio investment (FPI)?

Outlook outage

The dangers of centralising the internet's architecture are now clear

Last week, Microsoft's suite of productivity and email software, which businesses, governments, hospitals and a host of other organisations rely upon round-the-clock, abruptly stopped working globally, affecting tens of millions of people around the world. The company has cited a network upgrade gone awry as the root cause of the incident. Incidents such as the Microsoft 365 outage are a natural consequence of businesses and governments allowing key digital systems to become centralised all over the world. The internet remains, and was pioneered as, a network of networks. If one business's networks went down, the reasoning went, others would not fall like dominos: everyone was, after all, connected to everyone else. But the economics have long been prohibitive, with dedicated servers and web-connected infrastructure infeasible for all but the largest businesses, with even those firms seeking the enticing cost savings from socialised infrastructure. That made sense: the internet made shared infrastructure more economical, allowing hardware and maintenance costs to be spread so far and wide that at a per-user level prices have been negligible. Competition among major cloud providers, the few that remain at Microsoft's scale, have kept prices affordable for enterprise software for all shades of organisations.

Digital services have grown more sophisticated, and more deeply integrated into the economy as this centralisation unfolded. But the downside is that, regardless of the sophistication and professionalism of any company, mistakes happen, and the scale of these mistakes can quickly cascade over to the entire economy. There are societal and organisational lessons to be gleaned from these episodes. There is no such thing as a reliable vendor. Governments must also draw a cyber sovereignty lesson here that does not simply entail swapping a global vendor for a domestic one. It is the subversion of the internet's architecture that is at the root of these incidents. Investing in resilience – and shielding critical operations from destabilising disruptions, no matter how improbable – should inform attitudes to digital systems. As a new generation of AI data centres is poised to supercharge the centralised systems of yesteryear, it is all the more imperative to mitigate even occasional vagaries of large systems.

GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- What is centralisation of internet architecture?
- Why is centralisation of digital infrastructure a concern?
- What is cyber sovereignty?
- What measures are needed to improve digital resilience?

The road to a disease-free world goes through water



H.E. Abdulla Balalaa

UAE Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for Energy and Sustainability

The global effort to eradicate polio has been one of the greatest success stories of public health. Since 1988, cases of wild poliovirus have fallen by more than 99%. Vaccination, surveillance, and community outreach have reduced the global threat of a disease to the brink of being eradicated.

However, as a marathon runner might know, the last mile is often the hardest, requiring tenacity and unwavering self-belief. This is the type of dedication that we need to sustain as the race to eradicate polio reaches its end game. As we work together to finish the job, we also need to think beyond vaccines, about the systems that may inadvertently enable transmission, and one of those critical systems is water.

Polio can spread through contaminated water, thus making safe water crucial to preventing transmission. To make progress permanent, we must understand that health and water are integral to the equation.

According to WHO and UNICEF, in the year 2024, 2.1 billion people lacked safely managed drinking water and 3.4 billion lacked safely managed sanitation. More alarmingly, no access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene contributed to at least 1.4 million preventable deaths in 2019.

This is where water presents one of the greatest opportunities to bolster global health.

We need to regard water infrastructure as preventive health infrastructure. Clean water can prevent disease. Safe sanitation can break the chain of transmission. Wastewater systems can help us identify pathogen circulation. By studying the presence of pathogens in wastewater, the spread of disease can be more closely tracked. These mechanisms enable states to evolve from responding to outbreaks to anticipating them.

The UAE has seen the power of this approach. For many years, the UAE and His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan have worked with The Gates Foundation and global partners to accelerate the eradication of polio and neglected tropical diseases. The Reaching the Last Mile Fund, established by the UAE and the Gates Foundation, works in dozens of countries to accelerate the elimination of diseases that disproportionately affect people living in poverty.

Together, we are focused on reaching the world's most underserved communities, particularly children living in areas where access to healthcare is extraordinarily difficult.

This is also the philosophy behind Reaching the Last Mile: marginalised communities who are at most risk cannot be left behind at the last mile. Though the last mile is where the work is hardest – it is also where investment can change most lives. That same thinking should equally be applied to water. What if wastewater networks could detect a pathogen before a patient appears before a doctor will illness? What if AI can identify a developing public health risk, giving communities the chance to act early? Much work in this direction is already in process. Wastewater surveillance has become an important tool in the fight against polio, because the virus can be detected in wastewater even when no case of paralysis is reported.

In Abu Dhabi, AI-enabled wastewater surveillance serves as an early detection system, able to identify potential public health risks and inform early intervention. In 2025, the European Commission unveiled the European Wastewater Surveillance Dashboard, a tool designed to track movements of diseases through wastewater monitoring and analysis.

This is the future we should be building towards: water systems that do more than moving water; water systems that help us predict and prevent diseases. The infrastructure that protects communities from poliovirus can help address other diseases too. The wastewater systems that detect one pathogen can help detect others too. The investments in sanitation that improve public health can support sustainable development and improve quality of life.

This is the future we should be building towards: water systems that do more than moving water; water systems that help us predict and prevent diseases

This is why water must be seen as an opportunity to save lives, strengthen resilience and build healthier communities. However, more must be done to bridge the gap between health and water policy. We need greater collaboration, more integrated investment and a shared understanding that progress in one area often depends on progress in another.

This is the ethos underpinning the upcoming 2026 UN Water Conference. Taking place in Abu Dhabi, the conference will bring the world together to accelerate action on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Together, we will envision a new world of possibilities with water, unlocking the value in the world's water systems through innovation, collaboration and financing in water infrastructure.

To achieve this, governments, development institutions and the private sector must work together to bring solutions to the communities that need them most. Global collaborations on the last mile of polio give us a reason to believe that progress is possible. We have an opportunity now to apply that mindset to water, because the future of water is not only about securing a resource; it is about protecting people.

And if we get this right, the water flowing through a community tomorrow will do more than keeping people healthy.

It will give the next generation something that should never have been out of reach: the chance to grow up healthy, safe and free from preventable disease.

GS 2: Social Justice_ Health

Key Pointers:

- What is the relationship between polio and water?
- How can AI improve wastewater surveillance?
- What is the Reaching the Last Mile initiative?
- What is the significance of the 2026 UN Water Conference?
- What is WASH?

The Sachar report awaits its due



Abdur Rahman

IPS (Special Inspector General of Police under application of VRS) and the author of *'Denial and Deprivation: Indian Muslims after the Sachar Committee and Rangnath Mishra Commission Reports'*

Prime Minister's High-Level Committee, chaired by Justice (Retd.) Rajinder Sachar and popularly known as the Sachar Committee, submitted its report on November 17, 2006, to then Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. The government made it public by placing it in Parliament on November 30, 2006. The Committee analysed data on population, education, economic status, unemployment, banking facilities, access to basic infrastructure, poverty, etc. It studied Muslims' share in government jobs, identification of deprived groups, and many prevailing perceptions in society, and then submitted a detailed report.

The Sachar Committee Report (SCR) is considered the most detailed and authentic report on Indian Muslims. It observed that the community exhibits deficits and deprivation in practically all dimensions of development and recommended policies focused on 'inclusive development' and 'mainstreaming'.

Exposing the disparity

The Committee showed that Indian Muslims were educationally backward, economically weak, and socially disadvantaged. The community lacked access to banking facilities, civic amenities, and government employment. It concluded that if corrective steps are not taken, Muslims would become the neo-Dalits. The report sent shock waves through the community, political parties, and scholars. The report also shattered the myth of 'Muslim appeasement' and 'pampered treatment' of the community being levelled by the BJP and other Hindutva organisations.

The Sachar Committee Report did not receive the attention it deserved. The government should set aside its prejudice and present the report in Parliament and discuss all its issues

Sensing the alarming situation, Muslim organisations and intellectuals demanded that the government take concrete steps to improve the situation. Parties with an OBC base demanded that the government implement the report in full and give reservation in jobs and politics. However, the BJP, which had opposed the Committee from the beginning, said it would strongly oppose implementation.

When implementation began, efforts were made to adopt community-specific recommendations. However, these had limited reach and were expected to yield only modest results. General recommendations such as the creation of the National Data Bank, Equal Opportunity Commission and Diversity Index, which could benefit Muslims and other deprived groups, were ignored. Two important initiatives – the pre-matric and post-matric scholarship schemes and the Multi-Sectoral Development Programme – were implemented effectively. The rest of the recommendations remained confined to paper. The government's approach remained 'minimalist' and 'cautious'.

From neglect to exclusion

After the regime change in 2014, many schemes implemented by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) were either stopped by the Narendra Modi government or rendered meaningless. Amid the BJP's majoritarian politics, there is no mention of this report in the public discourse, election campaigns, or the manifestos of so-called secular parties.

Going against the essence of "*Sabka saath, sabka vikas*", the government has made a systematic effort to push Muslims to the margins. Open discrimination, conspiracies to defame, hate speech, and incidents of constant humiliation have increased significantly. Incidents of mob lynching have increased on false accusations of cow protection, carrying beef, love jihad, etc. The brutal attitude of the police and bulldozer actions have created fear in the community. The result of all this is that Muslims are moving away from the mainstream and feeling insecure. In the post-Sachar era, they were being termed as a 'development subject'. Today, they have again become a 'security subject'.

An unfinished task

The Sachar Committee Report did not receive the attention it deserved. Twenty years later, its relevance has only increased. The Committee analysed not just Muslims' conditions but also those of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other minorities, Hindu OBCs and Hindu upper castes. If the condition of all deprived groups is to be studied honestly, it is necessary to revive the Sachar report.

The government should set aside its prejudice and present the report, which is gathering dust on the government shelf, back to Parliament and discuss all its issues. If the general recommendations mentioned in the report with far-reaching consequences are implemented, all deprived groups would get social justice, disparity would be reduced, and all groups would have equal opportunities in the country's development. What is needed today is that this report be revived.

GS 2: Social Justice

Key Pointers:

- What were the major findings of the Sachar Committee?
- What were the major recommendations?
- What is the Multi-Sectoral Development Programme (MSDP)?

A poverty line that falls short



Saumitra Bhaduri

Professor at the Madras School of Economics

There is no serious doubt that poverty in India has fallen sharply over the past decade. However, researchers and policymakers cannot agree on how many are still poor. Depending on the estimate, the share ranges from about 5% to more than 26%. Take the recent World Bank report. At its international line of $3 a day (2021 PPP), 2.6% of Indians were poor in 2022-23. Raise the line to $4.20, the bank's benchmark for lower middle-income countries, and the figure jumps to around 16.1%. Same country, same year. Only the yardstick changed. A low level of extreme poverty does not necessarily mean poverty is not still a major issue. Where you draw the line decides how much economic insecurity you see.

India's own figures tell a similar story. For example, SBI Research (2025) takes the Tendulkar line of 2009, adjusts it for inflation, and gets poverty of 7.2% in rural India and 4.6% in urban India for 2022-23. Rangarajan and Dev (2014), using an inflation-adjusted version of the Rangarajan Committee line, arrive at 10.8%. Further, Sethu, Surya and Ruthu (2024), who rebuild the Rangarajan method from the latest consumption survey, report 26.4%. Most of that gap boils down to the lines themselves: SBI's Tendulkar-based lines use, after adjusting for inflation, about ₹1,632 a month per person in rural areas and ₹1,944 in urban areas. In contrast, Sethu et al. use much higher thresholds of ₹2,515 and ₹3,639. And the outcomes are obvious: Higher lines, higher poverty. Method matters too. One camp takes an old line and adjusts it for inflation. The other reconstructs the line from spending patterns in the new survey.

The World Bank does it differently again. Its international lines are set in PPP dollars so countries can be compared, which helps show where India stands globally. However, they are not built on a basket designed to reflect what it costs to meet basic needs in India itself. That is why the $3 figure sits near the low domestic estimates and the $4.20 figure near the high ones.

Poverty line problem

To understand why India is in the position today, we have to go back to how poverty was measured historically. It started with minimum calorie needs. The Alagh Task Force in 1979 set separate calorie norms for rural and urban populations, and later estimates built on them. The Lakdawala Committee refined the approach with State-specific poverty lines and price indices. In 2009, the Tendulkar Committee dropped the direct calorie method for a wider consumption basket that counted spending on health and education, and put poverty at 21.9% in 2011-12. Critics thought its thresholds were too low. The Rangarajan Committee then proposed higher lines, putting the poverty rate at 29.5% for the same year.

The problem was further compounded by the lack of comparable data. The 2017-18 consumption survey was never published, and the next full one did not arrive until 2022-23. For more than a decade, India argued about poverty without an official consumption-based number to anchor the argument. Researchers, as a result, have had to work with assorted poverty lines, price indexes and reconstructed estimates.

Multidimensional poverty has also gained prominence, since consumption alone clearly misses part of the picture. The MPI looks at deprivation across health, education and living standards, including sanitation, drinking water and housing. NITI Aayog says multidimensional poverty fell from 24.85% in 2015-16 to 14.96% in 2019-21. Its 11.28% figure for 2022-23 is a projection from earlier trends, not the result of a fresh survey. For comparison, the World Bank puts it at 15.5%, and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) at 16.4% for 2019-21.

Reliable poverty estimates are not just for academic purposes. India has made real progress, but without a credible benchmark, it is hard to say how much, or how much remains to be done.

A country that wants to be high-income needs to know how many can live decently. Until India sets a new official poverty line, "How poor is India?" will keep getting several answers. The 2022-23 HCES gave researchers fresh data to work with, and hopes to settle on a single answer.

To end, the World Bank's most telling figures are not about the fall in extreme poverty. Two other figures are insightful. First, 80% of Indians lived below the $8.3-a-day upper-middle-income line in 2023, even though per capita income per day is more than three times that threshold. A low extreme-poverty count is masking deep inequality. Second, 30% of Indians still lack access to basic sanitation, a number that should trouble us all.

Reliable poverty estimates are not just for academic purposes. India has made real progress, but without a credible benchmark, it is hard to say how much, or how much remains to be done

GS 3: Economy

Key Pointers:

- Why do poverty estimates differ in India?
- What is the evolution of poverty estimation in India?
- What is the significance of the Tendulkar and Rangarajan approaches?
- What is the problem with India's poverty estimation?
- What is Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)?

Traditional destinations see fewer student migrants

International student inflows to OECD countries decline for a second year, with key destinations losing students as European countries gain ground

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

International student migration to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries declined for the second consecutive year in 2025 following the strong post-pandemic recovery in 2023, when inflows peaked at 2.1 million **(Chart 1)**. The majority of this decline has been concentrated in a few countries, particularly Canada, the U.S., and Australia.

The latest International Migration Outlook, released by the OECD group of countries, shows that destinations have been changing. European countries, particularly Germany, Italy, and Austria, have registered huge inflows compared to pre-COVID levels.

Meanwhile, student inflow to Canada and the U.S. fell by more than 30% in just a year **(Chart 2)**. This could be due to the measures introduced to regulate student inflows by major destination countries to alleviate pressure on migration systems, housing markets, and infrastructure capacity. For instance, Canada introduced a temporary cap on new study permits in 2024, and Australia introduced a stricter Genuine Student test in 2024. Data show this has brought fewer students, not just lower than 2023 but even below the pre-COVID period **(Chart 3)**.

A large number of international students came from India and China **(Chart 4)**. While China formed a large share of international students in 2015, India has caught up.

The report showed that STEM and business courses are major attractions for international students **(Chart 5)**. Their share exceeds that of native-born counterparts across most OECD countries except Italy and Norway **(Chart 6)**. However, despite being highly educated, they tend to work in low- to medium-skilled occupations.

Course changes

The data for the charts were sourced from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s 'International Migration Outlook 2026' report released on November 12, 2026

In Chart 5, * Business, administration and law and ^ Social sciences, journalism and information. In Chart 6, STEM fields include natural sciences, mathematics and statistics, ICT, engineering, manufacturing, and construction



Chart 1: International student flows to the OECD countries between 2015-25. Figures in billions

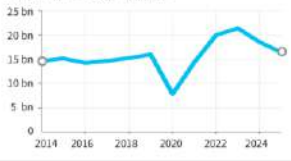


Chart 4: Change in international students to select countries in 2024 compared to pre-COVID levels and a year-ago period. Figures in %

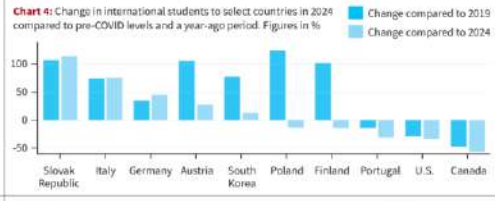


Chart 2: Country-wise international student flows to the OECD countries between 2015-25. Figures in billions

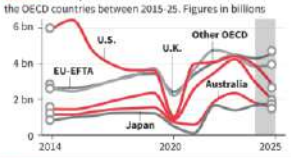


Chart 5: Distribution of national and international tertiary graduates, by field of education (2024). Figures in %

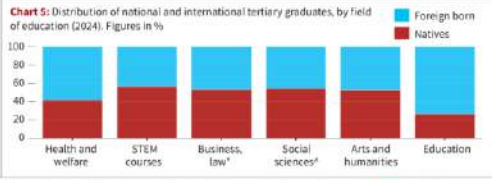


Chart 3: Top 20 nationalities of international tertiary-level students enrolled in OECD countries, 2015 and 2024. Figures in thousands

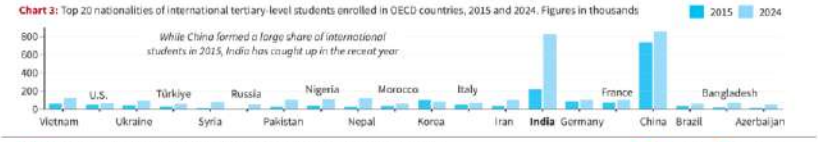
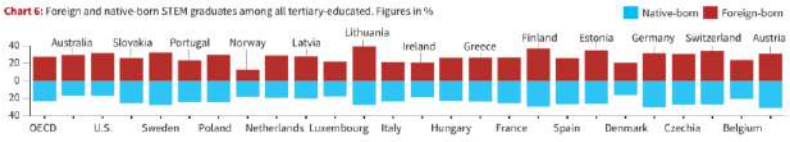


Chart 6: Foreign and native-born STEM graduates among all tertiary-educated. Figures in %



GS 2: International Relations

Key Pointers:

- What is the major finding of the OECD report?
- Why are traditional destinations witnessing declining student inflows?

How does India address service outages?

Does Indian law require Microsoft to have reported the recent outage that affected customers' ability to access its productivity suite? What rules apply in such situations and what are their shortcomings in the present form? How are cloud companies accountable in other countries? What are Indian customers' options?

EXPLAINER

N.V. Geetha

The story so far:

From November 12 to 13, an as-yet unspecified problem with Microsoft infrastructure affected customers' ability to access its productivity suite Microsoft 365 worldwide, including its Outlook email service. Microsoft apologised during the outage and attributed the incident to a fault in an upgrade of its network capacity, although more precise details are still expected. In India, among consequences in various sectors, IndiGo and Akasa Air alerted passengers of disruptions to their email support while Air India rerouted its email. The incident raises larger questions about whether companies providing services on which lakhs of people depend are required to account for such failures in India.

Does Indian law require Microsoft to have reported the outage?

Three sets of rules apply and each one has a gap.

First, the directions issued by the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) on April 28, 2022, under the Information Technology Act, 2000, require companies to report cyber incidents within six hours. The directions cover attacks and intrusions but not outages caused by technical faults. Still, CERT-In can call for information under Section 70B(6) of the IT Act to seek an explanation from Microsoft.

The second is the Reserve Bank of India's directions on managing risks in outsourcing, issued on November 28, 2025. They carry forward rules on outsourced IT services that first took effect on October 1, 2023. A bank buying cloud services must assess its dependence on the supplier and have an exit strategy. If the arrangement fails, the RBI can hold the bank responsible and the bank can seek an explanation from Microsoft under its agreement.

The third is the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. The Act defines a personal data breach to include an accidental "loss of access to personal data". Under Rules set to come into effect in May 2027, data breaches must be reported to the Data Protection Board and to each affected person. Failure to report could attract a penalty of up to ₹200 crore. The onus is on the organisation that collected the data, and the organisation is Microsoft's customer, even though the data sits on Microsoft's servers.



Locked out: Microsoft attributed the global outage this week to a fault in an upgrade of its network capacity and apologised, but the incident raises questions on accountability of service providers. AFP

While Indian law does not require a minimum threshold of harm to report a breach, it is unclear whether a temporary outage constitutes a "loss of access" and thus a breach. If yes, a company must report the outage; if not, the company need not report, even if customers complained throughout the day. Europe's regulators count even a temporary loss of access as a breach to be logged, but only demand a report if people are put at risk.

How are cloud companies accountable in different countries?

The European Union and the U.K. have placed the biggest tech vendors directly under financial regulators' watch. The EU's financial supervisors named 19 such companies under its Digital Operational Resilience Act on November 18, 2025, which includes Microsoft and Tata Consultancy Services. Thus, an Indian company already reports to European supervisors.

As of July 13, 2026, the United Kingdom had placed Microsoft and three other companies under the Bank of England.

Both schemes only cover services sold to financial firms.

Europe has a broader law, called NIS2, that covers cloud companies across all sectors. Under the October 2024 Rules, a cloud service suffers a "significant incident" if it is completely unavailable for more than 30 minutes. A partial failure also counts if it lasts more than an hour and affects over 5% or over 1 million of the service's users in the EU, whichever is smaller. The company should inform the national authority within 24 hours and file a detailed notification within 72 hours.

The threshold here is how long the service was down, so the Microsoft outage would have counted.

On October 7, Singapore passed a digital infrastructure law. It needs large data centres and cloud firms to have a licence and to report any service interruptions to the regulator. South Korea acted after a fire at a data centre in October 2022 knocked out messaging app KakaoTalk. Since July 2023, large platforms and data centres there have been required to submit disaster management plans to the government.

In each of these countries, the reporting obligation depends on the outage duration and the number of people affected. Under CERT-In's directions in India, it depends on whether an attack occurred.

What are Indian customers' options?

A customer's recourse is in their agreement with Microsoft. If the service level is not met, the customer may be entitled to a credit, which is a discount on a future bill.

Four paths are open to India. First, CERT-In could add major service disruptions, whatever their cause, to the incidents to be reported to it. Second, the government could also put the largest digital service providers under a direct regulator. Third, the Data Protection Board might clarify before May 2027 whether outages are breaches and who should report them.

Fourth, authorities could outsource such services to Indian vendors. In December 2025, the Union government had told the Lok Sabha that 12.68 lakh official email accounts had shifted to a platform run by Chennai-based company Zoho. This means less reliance on a foreign company. But if a technical fault brought down an Indian supplier's email service, that company would have no duty to report it to CERT-In.

Whichever path India chooses, a clear rule on who must report a major outage, and to whom, would serve users of foreign and Indian services alike.

(N.V. Geetha is former Senior Technical Director, National Informatics Centre. She writes about technology and data-driven stories.)

THE GIST

- Europe's regulators count even a temporary loss of access as a breach to be logged, but only demand a report if people are put at risk
- While Indian law does not require a minimum threshold of harm to report a breach, it is unclear whether a temporary outage constitutes a 'loss of access' and thus a breach
- A customer's recourse is in their agreement with Microsoft. If the service level is not met, the customer may be entitled to a credit, which is a discount on a future bill

GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- IT Act, 2000
- Functions of CERT-In
- Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023
- What is meant by IT outsourcing?

CACHE



Wing Commander Shubanshu Shukla, Group Captain Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, and Wing Commander Angad Pratap, who are under training for the Gaganyaan mission. FILE PHOTO

How did ISRO pick astronaut candidates and train them for the Gaganyaan mission?

As India embarks on its first manned space mission, developing indigenous capabilities in crew selection and training not only lays the foundation for sustained space activities but also gives an impetus to bioastronautics – the study of behavioural and medical aspects of humans living in space

Unnikrishnan Nair S.

The Kármán line is an imaginary line 100 km above sea level. It is widely regarded as the boundary at which space begins, and anyone who crosses this is considered an astronaut.

Historically, space agencies have sent military test pilots as the first astronauts. They are highly skilled persons who fly newly developed, modified, or experimental aircrafts to evaluate performance.

They routinely interact with aerospace engineers and help in identifying any design flaws in the aircraft. Test pilots are known for their ability to stay calm, make quick decisions, and have undergone very rigorous training to survive exigencies like high acceleration conditions or sudden cabin depressurisation.

How does one become a spacefarer?

Once a space agency has proven a launch system and matured it through test flights, it selects scientists, doctors, and engineers as mission specialists. With proper training and safety preparation, civilians and private citizens can also fly to space.

There are no universal criteria to become a spacefarer. However, there are certain requirements as to their age, height, weight, medical condition, and fitness, although they may also vary from one agency to the next.

There is no weight limit, but some agencies require a healthy body mass index and compatible body measurements.

In fact, good health, psychological stability, relevant education, technical skills, and professional experience are essential.

The upper and lower age limits also differ. The U.S. space agency NASA has not specified a formal age restriction but other agencies may do so.

The youngest person so far to go to space is the Dutch pilot Oliver Daemen, who was 18 years old at the time of his feat in 2024. The oldest spacefarer was U.S. astronaut Ed Dwight, at 90 years in 2024. Both flights were suborbital missions operated by U.S. aerospace company Blue Origin.

What are the ISRO criteria?

The selection process for Gaganyaan, executed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Indian Air Force (IAF), was multi-tiered and highly rigorous.

The Institute of Aerospace Medicine (IAM), Bengaluru, handled the evaluation given its researchers have experience dealing with the human body when it is subjected to extreme physiological and psychological stress.

The IAF also selected Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma for the Soyuz T-11 mission in April 1984.

The sequence of activities undertaken to select the final four astronauts for the mission started with short-listing candidates from a pool of test pilots after detailed evaluation of their dossiers, followed by exhaustive psychological, physical, and clinical evaluations by medical experts from IAM.

The selected four astronaut designates for Gaganyaan are Group Captains Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Ajit Krishnan, and Angad Pratap and Wing Commander Shubanshu Shukla.

They have undergone general training at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Russia, an internationally renowned facility.

How do astronauts train?

The programme covered centrifuge training, weightlessness simulations in parabolic aircraft flight, and harsh winter and sea survival drills to help in case of any unforeseen anomalous landings. Mr. Shukla and Mr. Balakrishnan Nair also underwent some training at the Johnson Spaceflight Centre under NASA in the U.S., ahead of the Axiom-4 mission. All four are undergoing further training specific to Gaganyaan at the Astronaut Training Centre in Bengaluru.

Training in simulators is an important part of crew workout.

A simulator is an advanced hardware-software system that replicates spacecraft environments where astronaut-candidates can master operations and handle emergencies during ground-based training.

All conceivable nominal and off-nominal conditions have to be simulated and the crew has to be trained to handle such situations.

Apart from full-scale fixed and motion-base simulators, there are part-task subsystem trainers – i.e. focused simulators designed to train on operating specific spacecraft systems or procedures rather than the entire vehicle – and immersive virtual/augmented reality systems to simulate crew operations in flight.

Why are astronauts quarantined?

The quarantine is part of a structured isolation protocol implemented roughly two weeks before launch to protect astronauts from catching any infectious illnesses. The small, sealed crew module, where the astronauts will reside for the course of the mission, can cause any germs to spread rapidly, severely compromising the crew's health and the mission's safety. It is also mandatory to maintain strict health protocols and isolation to prevent in-flight medical emergencies and to assure a hassle-free mission. The unprecedented medical evacuation from the International Space Station in January 2026 was triggered by an unexpected health issue with one of the U.S. astronauts – the first such instance in the 26-year history of the International Space Station.

As India embarks on its first human spaceflight mission, developing indigenous capabilities in crew selection and training not only lays the foundation for sustained space activities but also gives an impetus to the nascent discipline of bioastronautics – the study of biological, behavioural, and medical aspects of humans living and working in space – in the country.

(Unnikrishnan Nair S. is Former Director, VSSC and IIST, Founding Director, IISPC, and an expert in launch vehicle systems, orbital re-entry and human spaceflight technologies. Currently Dr Sarabhai Professor at VSSC.)

GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- What is the Kármán line?
- What is Gaganyaan Mission?
- What were the selection criteria for Gaganyaan astronauts?
- What is the role of simulators in astronaut training?
- What is bioastronautics?

SC warns of contempt over Aadhaar accessibility issues

SC seeks response from Centre over claims that blind and low-vision persons remain unable to independently complete Aadhaar face authentication despite directions by top court in 2025

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court warned of initiating contempt action if the Union government and authorities did not give a detailed response to an application filed by advocate Amar Jain pointing out that many visually challenged and low-vision persons are still unable to independently complete their Aadhaar face authentication.

A Bench headed by Justice J.B. Pardiwala issued notice on Mr. Jain's application pointing out that the inability to complete Aadhaar face authentication was affecting e-KYC, which only relies on face authentication.

"The new Aadhaar App with face authentication interface which persons with blindness are unable to complete as it requires eyes to be attentive and looking into the frame," the application said.

Mr. Jain said he had personally suffered the obstacles pointed out by him in his application before the court.

"There is no grievance mechanism for accessibility complaints against apps, websites and software... Accessibility audits, nodal officers, human review of rejected KYC applications and compliance monitoring are not visible across regulated entities," the application noted.



Persons with vision disabilities are unable to complete Aadhaar face authentication as it requires the eyes to focus. FILE PHOTO

Latest rejection

He has annexed with his application what he said was the "latest rejection by a private sector bank of my e-KYC for a credit card in October 2026".

Mr. Jain, represented by advocate-on-record Ila Sheel, said the continued lack of easy access was in violation of a Supreme Court judgment of 2025 in *Pragya Prasun versus Union of India* that had given comprehensive directions to ease digital access for the disabled.

"Amidst this wave of digital progress, there remains a crucial and often overlooked aspect that demands urgent attention - ensuring that digital infrastructure and services are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups," the court had observed in the 2025 judgment.

Mr. Jain was one of the parties in the Pragya Prasun case. He urged the apex court to intervene, once again, to direct the Union government, the Reserve Bank of India, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, Department of Telecommunications, Securities and Exchange Board of India, Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority, and Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India to fully implement the 2025 judgment.

Monitoring compliance

The application has sought a clarification from the Ministry on how it intended to handle accessibility complaints about unregulated digital platforms and provide a mechanism to monitor compliance by regulated entities.

The court has also sought a response from the authorities on a separate application filed by the advocate-petitioner challenging the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas mandate, announced through a September press release, making biometric Aadhaar authentication compulsory for subsidised domestic LPG refills from October 1, 2026.

The court scheduled the next hearing in four weeks.

GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- Pragya Prasun v. Union of India case
- What were the concerns raised in the Aadhaar application?
- Which institutions have been asked to implement accessibility requirements?
- Why has compulsory Aadhaar authentication for LPG refills also been challenged?
- What measures can improve digital accessibility?

Dancing Girl, Nizam's jewels to move to Yuge Yugeen Bharat museum

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

The Dancing Girl from Mohenjodaro, a 4500-year-old artefact, the Nizam's jewels, the Taxila Jewellery collection, and the Gandhara collection are to be displayed in the first gallery at the Yuge Yugeen Bharat museum in the national capital.

The museum, which is envisaged as a landmark civilizational exhibit of the continuity, diversity and richness of India's civilizational heritage, has been established at an estimated cost of ₹3,230 crore at the North and South Block buildings, following the relocation of government offices. The Centre has said that the Yuge Yugeen Bharat museum would have the largest display area of any museum in the world.

Culture Secretary Vivek Agrawal said on Monday that the first exhibition space to be set up at the upcoming museum would be the "adornments gallery" and the Dancing Girl, currently displayed at the National Museum, would be moved there.

Some of the other prized antiquities that would be moved are the Nizam's jewels, which are in the RBI vault, the Taxila jewellery collection, Gandhara collection, and miniature paintings.



The Dancing Girl from Mohenjodaro is a 4,500-yr.-old artefact. FILE PHOTO

Mr. Agrawal said, to start with, the new galleries of the Yuge Yugeen Bharat museum would be curated followed by a recuration of all the source museums. "The Yug Yugeen Bharat is a civilizational museum while the National Museum is a historical one," he said.

The Culture Ministry has also launched an AI-semantic powered search and knowledge discovery platform with conversational assistant on the primary digital platform, which would help a unified search in the 65 digital platforms the ministry manages. The search results will be enriched with AI generated summaries, source references, multilingual translation capabilities, and relevant multimedia content.

GS 1: Art & Culture

Key Pointers:

- What is the significance of the Dancing Girl?
- AI-powered semantic search and knowledge discovery platform

AMRITA IAS

Indo-ASEAN ties at the heart of India's Act East Policy: PM

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

India's relationship with the ASEAN region is at the "heart of India's Act East Policy", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday, before leaving for Manila, where he is set to participate in the 49th ASEAN Summit.

He will also participate in the 23rd ASEAN-India summit and the 21st East Asia Summit on Tuesday.

"Our relationship with ASEAN countries is at the heart of India's Act East Policy and occupies a central place in our MAHASAGAR vision," he said.

The Hindu had reported earlier that the Quad leaders summit, featuring Mr. Modi, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and U.S. President Donald Trump, is also expected to be held on Tuesday evening.

India has been maintaining that the South China Sea should be open for global maritime traffic.

Sources here have said that the expected Quad meeting, which is yet to be announced officially, will send a constructive message on this matter as the Philippines is on the frontlines of territorial issues in the South China Sea.



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. welcomes Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of 49th ASEAN Summit in Manila. AFP

GS 2: International Relations

Key Pointers:

- What is the significance of ASEAN in India's foreign policy?
- What is India's Act East Policy?
- What is MAHASAGAR?
- Why is the South China Sea important for India?
- What is QUAD?

Marginal decrease in unemployment rate in October: survey

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Unemployment Rate (UR) in the country showed a marginal decrease in October, compared to last month for persons aged 15 years and above, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) released by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation here on Monday.

The UR was 4.9% in October, 0.1 percentage points less than 5% reported in September. Conducted by the National Statistics Office, the PLFS also noted that compared to October 2025, the overall UR declined by 0.3 percentage points.

The rural UR declined from 4.4% to 4.2% and urban UR declined from 7.0% to 6.7%. UR among rural males was 4.3% during October, and for rural females, it was found to be 3.8%. "In urban areas UR among female of age 15 years and above during October 2026 was 8.7% compared to 6.0% observed for male of the same age group," the PLFS noted.

On a year-on-year basis, the overall male UR declined from 5.1% in October 2025 to 4.9% in October 2026 and the Ministry said in a release that the improvement was more pronounced in rural areas, where male UR fell from 4.6% to 4.3%. Overall female UR decreased by 0.4 percentage points to 5.0% from 5.4% in the previous year.

Overall Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) improved to 55.7% in October 2026, compared to 55.5% in September 2026. In rural areas, LFPR increased from 58.0% to 58.4% , while the urban LFPR stood at 50.5% in October 2026 against 50.7% in September 2026.

GS 3: Economy

Key Pointers:

- What is the latest unemployment trend in India?
- What is the rural-urban unemployment situation?
- PLFS is released by?
- What is the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)?



Ashwini Vaishnaw

I&B Minister calls for talks on media governance

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Information & Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday called for deliberations on how the changing media landscape should be governed to empower citizens and address emerging challenges.

Speaking at the National Press Day event organised by the Press Council of India (PCI), Mr. Vaishnaw emphasised the need for accountability from digital platforms. He raised questions about whether community guidelines were sufficient, in the face of increasing misinformation, deepfakes, misleading advertisements, digital arrests, and harmful content affecting children, an I&B Ministry statement said.

The Minister underlined the vital role of the media in strengthening democracy and urged media professionals to adapt to the rapidly evolving media landscape and technological advancements.

He encouraged young journalists to embrace change and continuously upgrade their skills.

The 2026 edition of the PCI's Norms of Journalistic Conduct was released at the event, incorporating updated guidelines on reporting during natural disasters and conflict situations; coverage of protests and demonstrations; reporting on sex workers and persons with disabilities; protection of children's privacy; and advertisements related to online money games.

GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- What is the role of the Press Council of India (PCI)?
- What are the major challenges in regulating digital media?
- What should a balanced media-governance framework focus on?

AMRITA IAS
An Amrita Group Institution



'India eyes place among top 10 shipbuilding nations by 2030'

India is targeting a place among the world's top 10 shipbuilding nations by 2030 and the top five by 2047, with investments of nearly $10 billion projected in five proposed greenfield coastal shipbuilding clusters, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said. Inviting global shipbuilders, shipping lines and financial institutions to invest in the country's shipbuilding sector, Mr. Sonowal said India was poised to emerge as a major global shipbuilding destination. The five proposed greenfield clusters are located at Dugarajapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, Kuchhadi in Gujarat, Dighi in Maharashtra, Kendrapada in Odisha and Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu.

GS 3: Economy

Tech, reforms help strengthen public accountability: CAG

Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India K. Sanjay Murthy on Monday said the institution should make full use of technology while remaining firmly grounded in its constitutional mandate to strengthen public accountability and contribute to the country's development. Addressing the 'Audit Divas' celebrations marking 166 years of the institution, he said the CAG's job went beyond protecting public money; it was also about earning people's trust. Every reform undertaken over the last couple of years, including breaking departmental silos; auditing themes, including 'Ease of Living' and 'Ease of Doing Business'; and focusing on local bodies, was aligned with the nation's development goals, he said.

GS 2: Governance

Key Pointers:

- Function of CAG
- Significance of Public accountability

'India shows us a picture of colour and complexity'

Prince William says every climate solution is a breakthrough making next goal easier 'until what once seemed impossible becomes inevitable'; two Indian firms among 15 Earthshot Prize finalists

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

India reached its target of 50% installed capacity from non-fossil fuels five years early, with solar capacity growing more than 50-fold in just over a decade, Prince William said on Monday.

Addressing a gathering of award finalists, philanthropists, government leaders and investors at the Earthshot Prize Impact Assembly in Mumbai, he said the transformation was about more than energy.

"Too often, the world's emerging economies are presented with false choices: growth or the environment, prosperity or protection. But India shows us a different picture – a picture full of colour, complexity and possibility," he said.

He added that each climate solution was a breakthrough making the next goal easier "until what once seemed impossible becomes inevitable".



Climate agenda: Prince William speaks during the Earthshot Prize Impact Assembly, 2026 in Mumbai on Monday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Earthshot's impact

During his address at the plenary session, Prince William reflected on the Earthshot Prize's growth and impact, and the role of innovation, investment and collaboration in accelerating environmental solutions. He hailed India as a leading source of Earthshot innovation, praising Mahila Housing Trust and Mahindra Last Mile Mobility Limited – finalists for the 2026 Earthshot Prize.

Prince William and Catherine arrived in Mumbai on Monday for a three-day official visit for the sixth edition of the Earthshot Prize. It is the couple's first joint overseas visit in four years and their second trip to India in a decade.

The Earthshot Prize was founded by Prince William in 2020. It recognises 15 global finalists annually and selects five winners across five categories: Clean our Air, Fix our Climate, Revive our Oceans, Build a Waste-Free World, and Protect and Restore Nature.

Rangbirangi duniya

This year, two Indian initiatives are among the 15 finalists. The winners will be announced at a ceremony in Mumbai on Tuesday.

Using the Hindi phrase *'rangbirangi duniya'* (colourful world), Prince William told the audience: "Perhaps that is how we should see the future. Not in black and white, not presented as false choices between people and planets."

India has more Earthshot prize winners and finalists than any other country, he said.

"But this is not India's responsibility alone. Our finalists span continents and industries from cleaner transport to agricultural insurance, from renewable energy to tackling dangerous chemicals. They show us that no country, company, or community has all the answers. We must learn from one another," he added.

Batting for change

Earlier on Monday, the royal couple played gully cricket with local children and former cricketer Sachin Tendulkar in South Mumbai's Ballard Estate, before travelling on the Mumbai Metro to the Bandra Kurla Complex.

Former New Zealand Prime Minister Dame Jacinda Ardern, a trustee of the Earthshot Prize, also addressed the gathering.

"With nearly half of humanity now living in cities, that is where tipping points are triggered. One city proves something works, the next one copies it, and soon, it's simply how things are done," she said.

GS 3: Environment

Key Pointers:

- What is the Earthshot Prize?
- India's achievements in Renewable energy sector
- Why are cities important for climate action?

Divergent positions mark draft text of COP31 in Turkiye

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Halfway into COP31 deliberations under way at Antalaya in Turkiye, developing countries have asked developed countries to "lead" efforts to achieve net zero by 2030 and achieve net negative emissions by 2045.

Net zero refers to carbon emissions being matched by carbon prevented from being emitted (through trees and other yet-unproven technological methods).

Several developed countries have set individual dates for achieving net zero by 2050 with major (fossil fuel-dependent) developing countries – India and China, for instance – committing to 2070 and 2060 deadlines, respectively.

Developing country positions are typically carried by a coalition called LMDC (Like-Minded Developing Countries, which includes India), the Arab Group, the African Group, and the LDCs (Least Developed Countries).

Developed country positions come mainly from the EU, the U.K., and Japan. The U.S. has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement.

There is language in the draft cover text that calls upon developing countries to "contribute voluntarily" towards climate finance – the trillions of dollars required for the globe to collectively adapt to a fossil fuel-free era as well as make good the losses that have already resulted from climate change.

The basic structure of the UN framework on climate change has a clear line separating developed countries – acknowledged to be responsible for most of the historically accumulated carbon – and developing countries, who in the course of developing their economies are to be incentivised to avoid such emissions but with assistance – finance and technology – by the developed ones.

Developing countries also called upon developed countries to eliminate measures such as the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) – a tariff to protect European manufacturers, in the steel sector primarily – who use lower emissions to make a unit of the metal than several developing countries, whose steel is cheaper but dirtier, by the end of 2027. There are also positions that countries "be under no obligation" to achieve a goal for 35% of energy use sourced from electricity by 2035, a proposal moved by the COP31 Presidency.

GS 3: Environment

Key Pointers:

- What is UNFCCC COP?
- What is the major disagreement at COP31?
- What are the demands of developing countries?
- What is Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)?
- What is the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)?

AMRITA IAS

Number of Indian students in U.S. varsities sees decline

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

There was a decline of as much as 6% in the number of Indian students in the U.S. for their studies in 2025-26 as compared with those in the previous year, with 3,39,435 enrolled in American universities during the year in comparison to 3,63,019 the year before, according to a report by the U.S.-based think-tank Institute of International Education (IIE).

According to The Open Doors 2026 Report on International Educational Exchange, most Indian students were studying at the graduate level, with up to 1,16,609 studying at various universities in 2025-26. This was a 34% decline in comparison to the prior year.

There were also 39,711 Indian students studying at the undergraduate level, which is 1% lower than the previous year.



India continues to send the largest chunk of international students to the U.S.

Despite the decline, India continues to send the largest chunk of international students to the U.S., the report states.

Indian student enrolments had earlier declined in 2020-21 to 1,67,582 from 1,93,124 in the previous year. After 2020-21, the enrolments continuously rose till 2024-25 and peaked at 3,63,019 before coming down in 2025-26.

Visa process a worry

The report states that the decline in 2025-26 was due to multiple contributing factors, with 88% of institutions citing the visa application process.

In addition, 70% of institutions cited travel restrictions, while 60% said students were enrolling in other countries for higher education. As much as 45% said that cost was a key factor reducing Indian students' ability to study in the U.S.

The number of international students from China decreased by 4% to 2,54,458 in 2025-26 compared with 2,65,919 in the previous year.

GS 2: International Relations

India's first open foetal spinal surgery performed

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi has performed India's first open foetal repair of a lumbosacral myelomeningocele – the most severe form of spina bifida – at 25 weeks' gestation.

"The six-hour operation repaired the cerebrospinal-fluid-leaking lumbosacral defect in utero," the AIIMS said. A myelomeningocele is an open neural tube defect in which the spinal cord and its coverings protrude through an opening in the spine.

The procedure was provided free of cost to the family under the Union government's Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK).

GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- What is spina bifida?
- What is myelomeningocele?
- What is open foetal spinal surgery?
- What is Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)?

AMRITA IAS
An Amrita Group Institution

SC pulls up Centre over relocating heritage library

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

Court says it would examine govt. plan to permanently relocate library to Kartavya Bhavan-4 in Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday criticised the Centre's "*ad-hoc* approach" to relocating the 135-year-old Central Secretariat Library and asked it to halt the shifting of books from its premises in Shastri Bhavan until the next hearing on November 20.

The court said it would examine the government's proposal to permanently relocate the library to the under-construction Kartavya Bhavan-4 in central Delhi as part of the Central Vista redevelopment project.

A Bench of Justices Sanjay Kumar and Sanjeev Sachdeva was hearing a *suo motu* petition initiated amid reports that the library had been directed on September 17 to vacate its premises by September 30 as part of the redevelopment project. The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) had also asked the library, along with other offices in the complex, to remove all furniture and electronic equipment ahead of demolition work.

Earlier, the Bench had sought an affidavit from the Centre detailing the space proposed to be allotted for the library.

'In a hurry'

"You are just in a hurry to get done with this. What are you planning to do with these books? There seems to be an *ad-hoc* approach... this is some heritage. Basically, a heritage for us dating back to 1702. If you don't want them, give them to some other country that will value them," the Bench remarked, addressing Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre.

On existing site

In an affidavit filed on Monday, the Union government informed the top court that space had been earmarked for both the Central Secretariat Library and the Tulsi Sadan Library in the proposed Kartavya Bhawan-4, which will come up on the existing site of Shastri Bhawan in the national capital.

GS 2: Polity

Wholesale inflation rises to 12.3% in October

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Wholesale inflation surged to 12.3% in October 2026, the second consecutive month of double-digit inflation, official data released on Monday showed.

Fuel prices continue to be the main reason for the price rise, with the crude petroleum and natural gas sectors seeing inflation of more than 70%. The new series of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has data that goes back to only April 2024 and so a historical analysis for a longer duration is not possible. However, the data shows that inflation in October was the highest since at least then.

This data follows the release of Consumer Price Index data last week that showed that even retail inflation had climbed above the Reserve Bank of India's upper comfort mark of 6% in October 2026.

According to Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda, it is only a matter of time before wholesale inflation translates into a further increase in the prices consumers pay.

"It has been seen that manufactured goods in particular have witnessed an increase of 9.5%, with high inflation rates in textiles, tobacco products, chemicals, rubber products, metals and electrical equipment," Mr. Sabnavis pointed out.

"This will pressurise companies into increasing their product prices at some point of time."

GS 3: Economy

Key Pointers:

- What is wholesale inflation?
- What are wholesale price index(WPI) and consumer price index(CPI)?
- Functions of RBI

When orbit processing makes sense – and when it doesn't

To bridge the gap between data being recorded by satellites and data being available to users on the ground, operators are pursuing a solution called in-orbit computing; the basic idea is to analyse some data onboard the satellite and only send back the most relevant information

Ronak Kumar Samantray

Satellites observe floods by capturing images of inundated areas such as submerged roads, damaged infrastructure, and settlements in the path of flood waters. This data helps response teams make critical decisions but only if the data reaches them in time. To be useful in emergencies, data must get to users quickly.

Today's satellites monitor everything from weather to agriculture to our oceans. As satellite technology improves, so does the quality of the data they provide, giving us more and better information about our planet and its inhabitants. However, there is a gap between data being recorded and data being available to users on the ground. It has to be sent to the earth, downloaded at ground stations during satellite pass windows, then analysed in time for it to be put to use.

To speed up this process, one solution operators are pursuing is to process data in space, before it is beamed to the earth.

This concept is called computing in orbit. The basic idea is to analyse some data onboard the satellite and only send back the most relevant information.



At present, creating and launching satellites requires specialised knowledge and resources, not to mention a hefty price tag; this limits who can experiment with and benefit from technology in space; image for representation. GETTY IMAGES

Satellites working together

Imagine a satellite tasked with monitoring floods. Instead of sending every image back to the earth for analysis, an artificial intelligence (AI) model could screen for images with too much cloud cover and only analyse images where the extent of flood waters seems to change, while prioritising images of areas most affected by floods – and finally transmit just that data down.

Similarly, consider maritime monitoring, where ships are identified in certain areas, or precision farming, where crop health is monitored. Computing in orbit can help analyse satellite images in these use cases too, depending on image quality, the AI models onboard, and the satellites' communication capabilities.

The European Space Agency's Phi-Sat-1 recently showed how AI can be used to select earth observation images for further analysis on the ground. As computing and storage capabilities improve, more and better analysis can be done onboard satellites. Satellites could even talk to each other using optical inter-satellite links and pass on data or even computing tasks to each other.

Eventually, this could lead to multiple satellites working together as a system, sharing data and computing resources, and forming distributed computing systems in orbit. However, such computing will not replace data centres on the earth: they will continue to be needed to train AI models, store large quantities of data, and run other applications. Where data is created in space and needs to be analysed quickly or reduced in size before being sent back to the earth, however, computing in orbit could make more sense.

Computing resources as a service

At present, creating and launching satellites requires specialised knowledge and resources across engineering, design, testing, and regulatory clearances – not to mention a hefty price tag. This limits who can experiment with and benefit from technology in space. In future, however, just as computing resources are available on demand as a service on the ground, they could be made available onboard satellites. Researchers, developers, and businesses could use onboard computing resources to run applications without having to design, build, and launch their own satellites.

Picture a researcher who has developed an AI model that they want to test on satellite images. Instead of launching their own satellite, they could simulate the performance of their model on similar datasets available on the ground, request processing time onboard an already operational satellite, and analyse the results when the data is sent back down. Universities, start-ups, and other businesses working with data from space could also benefit from such a model.

Of course, this would only work if the computing resources in space are reliable, have standardised software interfaces, are secure, available in sufficient quantities, and offered at reasonable prices.

Computing in orbit is different

Most satellites generate electric energy using solar panels and store it in batteries for use when they are not sunlit. All systems onboard, including communications, navigation, data storage and computing, have to share this limited resource. And more powerful computers would mean more demand for energy.

Satellites generate crucial flood-monitoring data, but delays in transmitting and processing it can limit its usefulness during emergencies

Unlike on the earth's surface, there is no air in space to help cool electronics. The heat generated has to be conducted to other parts of the satellite and radiated into space. And engineers have to design every component keeping this in mind. Electronics in space are also subjected to radiation and temperature extremes and need to be able to withstand these conditions.

These realities affect the kinds of processors, power electronics, and other components used in satellites as well as their design and the software that runs on them. While off-the-shelf components offer attractive price and performance propositions, they need to be qualified for space or adequately protected from its harshness before being used onboard.

Also unlike on the earth, where engineers can easily replace failed components, satellites need to be designed with redundancy and error detection and recovery capabilities in mind.

Finally, whether or not computing in orbit makes sense also depends on economics. The cost of building satellites and launching them into space, generating enough solar power, the limitations of in-orbit servicing, and their expected lifetime all matter. In other words, if computing in orbit is to be adopted widely, there must be sufficiently compelling advantages, such as reduced data transmission and lower data latency, to justify the additional expenses.

Shot at stardom

India has built a strong base in satellite technology, launch vehicles, and space applications. With the Indian Space Policy 2023 and the creation of the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) to facilitate private sector participation in space technology development, companies in India have an opportunity to explore computing-in-orbit and contribute to developing this frontier.

Building these capabilities locally can help strengthen supply chains, reduce dependence on imported components where viable, and create opportunities for companies to participate in the global space infrastructure market. Progress will depend on continued investments in research, testing infrastructure, flight demonstrations, and collaboration between government agencies, private companies, academic institutions, and end users.

Overall, the technology's success should be determined by how reliably and economically computing it can solve problems that existing infrastructure cannot address as effectively. Satellites have already changed how we observe the earth. The next phase will be shaped by how effectively we can process those observations and turn them into information people can act on.

(Ronak Kumar Samantray is founder and CEO, TakeMe2Space.)

GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- What is in-orbit computing? Why is in-orbit computing needed?
- How does AI contribute to in-orbit computing?
- What is the significance of ESA's Phi-Sat-1?
- What is distributed computing in orbit?
- What is Computing-as-a-Service in space?
- What is India's potential in in-orbit computing?