New AI-based blood test uses changes in DNA to identify multiple types of cancer

Afshan Yasmeen
BENGALURU

A blood test that looks for cancer-related changes in DNA has shown the potential to detect multiple types of cancer. In a study, the test detected 72% of cancer cases, with a false-positive rate of 1.4%.

The blood test, CancerSpot, developed by Bengaluru-based Strand Life Sciences, uses DNA sequencing and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify changes in DNA that can indicate the presence of cancer. The research, involving 1,480 participants and 43 hospitals across India, including five in Karnataka, was conducted over four years as part of the development and clinical validation of the test.



The blood test uses uses DNA sequencing to detect cancer.

The findings have been published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

Cells in the body release small fragments of DNA into the bloodstream. These are known as circulating or cell-free DNA. In people with cancer, some of these fragments originate from tumour cells and carry changes that can help identify the disease.

AI-based analysis

CancerSpot combines DNA sequencing with AI-based analysis to examine patterns of DNA methylation. Methylation refers to chemical modifications of DNA that influence how genes function. These patterns differ between cancer cells and normal cells.

By analysing these patterns, the test aims to detect multiple types of cancer through a single blood test, without requiring a tissue biopsy for the initial detection, said Ramesh Hariharan, CEO of Strand Life Sciences, who is one of the authors of the study.

CancerSpot was evaluated in newly diagnosed patients with 14 types of cancer and healthy individuals. In an independent validation cohort, it detected 72% of patients with cancer, with a false-positive rate of 1.4%.

A low false-positive rate is important in cancer screening, as it can help reduce unnecessary follow-up investigations and invasive procedures among healthy individuals.

GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- What is CancerSpot?
- What is DNA sequencing?
- What is DNA Methylation?
- What is Liquid Biopsy?

Many imperatives

India must shore up its partnerships in the Asian region

Each year, the summits of the 11-member Association of South-East Asian Nations mark an important moment on the diplomatic calendar: India is able to interact with all of its partners in the Indo-Pacific and engage global powers at the ASEAN-India Summit and the East Asia Summit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's talks with Indo-Pacific players focused on a future shaped "not by competition, but by cooperation". This year, the summit in Manila hosted by the Philippines had many other imperatives. These were the first ASEAN summits since the U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran and Iran's Hormuz blockade and strikes on Gulf countries that have upended energy and trade across South and South East Asia. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for "peace, stability, and predictability" in the world during the EAS was aimed as much at leaders from the U.S., Russia and China as it was for the region. The visit had a bilateral context – the Philippines and India have intensified ties considerably in the past year, since the visit of President Bongbong Marcos to Delhi in August 2025, including the upgradation of the Strategic Partnership, maritime exchanges and negotiations over the supply of more Indian-made Brahmos missile battery systems to the Philippines. This year, after months of concerns about U.S. President Donald Trump's lack of interest in the Quad grouping, the U.S. decided to host a summit of U.S.-India-Australia-Japan Quad leaders on the side-lines of the ASEAN summits, the first time the summit has been held in a non-Quad country.

Given the stakes, there were several outcomes from all the three summits that PM Modi attended back-to-back on Tuesday – the ASEAN India Summit launched a new cooperation on disaster management, and the East Asia Summit focused on countering cyber-crime. PM Modi's announcement that India would give all ASEAN citizens free tourist visas is expected to increase people-to-people interactions and trade. At the Quad summit, President Trump made a number of announcements including the launch of a Quad Business leaders forum, to be held in Mumbai next year, and the first Quad naval exercises with patrol aircraft. However, the outcomes in Manila paled in significance to the anticipation over Mr. Trump's next stop in Shenzhen for the Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC), with an unprecedented three-way summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping planned on Thursday. New Delhi must watch the outcomes of that summit among the "global superpowers" much more closely.

GS 2: International Relations

Key Pointers:

- What is ASEAN?
- Why is ASEAN strategically important to India?
- What is AEAN- India Summit?
- Why is the Philippines important to India?
- What is QUAD?
- What is APEC?

COVID-19 lessons should inform response to air pollution



Dr. Soumya Swaminathan
Former Chief Scientist of the World Health Organization



Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya
Author of "Pill-Free: You Don't Need Everything You Have Been Prescribed". He is also a former staff member of the WHO

There is an uncanny similarity between Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, and air pollution. During the pandemic, the virus entered our bodies through the air we breathed; harmful particulate matter and toxic gases enter through the same respiratory route. Additionally, both damage multiple organs, including the lungs, heart and brain. Yet, while COVID-19 prompted an unprecedented emergency national response, air pollution continues to be treated largely as a seasonal inconvenience.

The harmful effects of air pollution are well-established. An adult takes approximately 20,000-25,000 breaths daily, meaning that even a relatively miniscule worsening of air quality can have substantial health consequences over time. This alone should make improving the quality of air an urgent public health priority.

Unlike COVID-19, which was recognised as a public health emergency of international concern, air pollution in India receives limited policy attention despite being a longstanding, year-round threat. The State of Global Air 2025 report estimated that more than two million deaths in India in 2023 were attributable to air pollution, including household and ambient exposure. Beyond premature mortality, millions also experience pollution-related illnesses and hospitalisations. A burden of this magnitude demands urgent national attention.

Clean air should be a national priority

Air pollution is primarily seen as a respiratory issue. In reality, it is far more than a respiratory health concern; it contributes to cardiovascular disease, stroke, chronic respiratory disorders, lung cancer and diabetes. Evidence also links it to exposure to dementia and other neurological disorders. Pregnant women and unborn and young children face extended risks which can affect birth outcomes, lung development and cognitive development, with consequences extending into adulthood.

There is also a compelling ethical argument for sustained and decisive government action when it comes to tackling air pollution. Exposure to outdoor air pollution is largely involuntary, and individuals have little to no choice over the air they breathe. This burden is deeply unequal: poorer households, outdoor workers and children often face greater exposure while having fewer resources to protect themselves.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that governments can act decisively when health risks become politically visible. During the pandemic, India established national coordination mechanisms, expanded laboratory and surveillance networks, issued public advisories and mobilised substantial resources. Its institutional achievements offer valuable lessons for addressing India's air pollution crisis.

Tackling air pollution already attracts considerable expenditure, but allocations do not consistently reflect the greatest health risks

Action plan

The first lesson is the need for strong political leadership, collective action and coordinated governance. During the pandemic, health became a national priority requiring cooperation across Ministries and State governments. Air pollution demands comparable institutional coordination across State boundaries and political differences. The Ministries responsible for environment, health, transport, power, agriculture, and urban development must pursue shared objectives and coordinated interventions.

India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), launched in 2019, needs mission-mode implementation, supported by increased and dedicated funding, measurable outcome indicators and annual milestones. Success should be assessed through reductions in population exposure and improvements in health, rather than the number of restrictions announced.

The second lesson concerns systematic data collection, timely information sharing and prompt actions. During COVID-19, enhanced surveillance and daily reporting of infections, hospitalisations, deaths, testing and vaccination helped governments monitor the evolving situation. Indian cities need comparable integrated environmental health intelligence. Although the Air Quality Index (AQI) is widely recorded and reported, it is rarely linked with data on respiratory emergencies, outpatient consultations and deaths. India should establish a national environmental health surveillance platform integrating air quality, weather, hospital admissions and mortality information, with appropriate safeguards for privacy and data quality. Such surveillance would help identify geographical hotspots, estimate pollution-related illness, evaluate interventions and inform timely, evidence-based action.

The third lesson is related to transparency and accountability. Public dashboards should report annual PM2.5 exposure, emission reductions, expenditure and health indicators, rather than focusing exclusively on daily AQI readings which offer only limited insight into long-term health risks and policy interventions. The fourth lesson is the need for outcome-based financing. Tackling air pollution already attracts considerable expenditure, but allocations do not consistently reflect the greatest health risks. A January 2026 assessment by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air found that ₹13,415 crore had been released through the NCAP and associated Finance Commission funding, of which approximately 74% had been utilised. Of the reported expenditure, 68% went towards road-dust management, 14% towards transport and 12% towards waste management and biomass burning. Industry and domestic fuel use each received less than 1%. While managing road-dust is necessary, particularly for reducing PM10, the bigger culprits are PM2.5 and ultrafine particles. The financial resources directed towards tackling sources and contributors to PM2.5, which include combustion, industrial emissions, transport, household fuels and chemical reactions involving gaseous pollutants, are insufficient, and need major increase in allocation.

Economic considerations further strengthen the argument for more and targeted financing. A study published in *The Lancet Planetary Health* estimated that air pollution caused economic losses equivalent to 1.36% of India's GDP in 2019. Investment in clean air is therefore an investment in better health, productivity and development.

Need for sustained effort

The fifth lesson is to distinguish emergency measures from sustained prevention and emission reduction. COVID-19 restrictions were intended to buy time until more effective tools became available. India's Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) serves a similar purpose during severe pollution episodes. However, repeatedly restricting construction, vehicles and switching schools to hybrid mode cannot substitute for reducing emissions throughout the year. Priorities must include reliable public transport, stricter industrial emission compliance, cleaner energy, effective waste management and urban planning that encourages walking and cycling.

The sixth lesson concerns revising and strengthening air-quality standards. The annual average PM2.5 standard of 40 micrograms per cubic metre remains eight times the WHO's guideline of five. A phased, scientific roadmap towards tighter standards is long overdue.

The seventh lesson concerns public participation and equity. During COVID-19, risk communication, community involvement and protective behaviours became essential components of the response. Clean-air communication must similarly explain health risks without creating panic or transferring responsibility entirely to individuals. Here it is important to note that face masks do nothing to reduce air pollution at its source. Similarly, air purifiers can reduce certain indoor exposures but cannot improve outdoor air quality. Therefore, an excessive focus on masks, air purifiers and hybrid schooling risks shifting responsibility from elected governments to citizens. There is also a need to strengthen institutional capacity for environmental health regulation and research in order to ensure that scientific evidence informs standards and public policy.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that protecting public health requires political commitment, scientific capacity and sustained financing. India must urgently apply lessons from the COVID-19 response to tackle air pollution without repeating the pandemic's mistakes.

GS 3: Environment

Key Pointers:

- Why should air pollution be treated as a public health emergency?
- Why is air pollution an issue of environmental justice?
- What is Air Quality Index?
- What is National Clean Air Programme?
- What is Graded Response Action Plan?

Climate promises need to become praxis



Vipin Benny

Research Consultant, Assistant Professor at St. Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur, Keralam. He is the author of "Elevating Excellence: The Relevance of Internal Marketing in Higher Education Institutions in India" and "Decoded Decisions: Behavioural Finance Meets Artificial Intelligence"

Climate change is no longer a distant concern. The question is no longer whether countries should act, but whether they can turn promises into praxis quickly and fairly.

During COP29 in Baku in 2024, countries agreed to provide up to $300 billion per year to developing countries by 2035. They also called for the mobilisation of $1.3 trillion a year from public and private sectors. While these commitments acknowledge that there is a need for vulnerable countries to receive more support, the true test is whether the funds are delivered on time to countries at affordable prices and in a usable format.

From announcements to access

The measure of climate finance must not be the magnitude of the promise but the amount of support that reaches the ground. Developing countries require resources to develop clean power plants, to enhance electricity grid resilience, create and upgrade public transportation, and defend their communities from climate disasters. Even good projects can be delayed by complicated procedures and lengthy approvals. A fair system must include grants, cheap loans, guarantees, and personal investments. Grants are particularly significant for communities that do not have the ability to obtain financial returns from climate protection. Concessional loans may facilitate infrastructure financing, but not unsustainable debts.

Additionally, investments need to be made beyond solar panels and wind turbines. There is a need for reliable transmission lines, storage, and advanced distribution networks. These supporting systems are needed to realise the full benefits of new renewable capacity. Climate finance needs to build up the entire energy system – from local energy networks to skilled workers and technical capacities.

> The world does not lack climate declarations. They simply do not have the speed, resources, and cooperation required to make them a reality

For India, transition is a climate responsibility as well as a development opportunity. The demand for electricity is on the rise due to the growing number of appliances in households, expansion of cities, growth of industries, and increased electrification of transport. According to the International Energy Agency, India's electricity demand in the next five years is projected to increase by approximately 6.4% per year. However, relying on high-carbon sources can "traplock" a country to pollution for decades.

While India has achieved a capacity of 300.5 gigawatts (GW) of non-fossil electricity by July 2026, which is over 60% of its 500 GW target by 2030, installed capacity does not equate to produced electricity. Solar and wind power are intermittent and dependent on the weather. India needs to make investments in electricity networks, energy storage, flexible power, and quicker links between renewable energy sources and end-users. Under the renewable consumption obligation, certain distribution licensees and consumers have to achieve 43.33% renewable electricity consumption by 2029-30. While this will stimulate the market for renewable energy, a reliable supply is important.

The transition must also acknowledge the employment and regional economic importance of coal. Retraining existing coal industry workers and engaging them in meaningful participation while planning for change are necessary.

Making the transition work for people

One of the global goals of COP31 is to raise the share of total final energy consumption from electricity to 35% by 2035. Although this is an important ambition, it does not mean that 35% renewable electricity generation is the target. This will involve a greater proportion of electricity in transport, buildings, and industry. The benefits from this goal will be proportional to the level of "clean" that the electricity is and the efficiency with which it is utilised.

Further, while pollution can be reduced by the use of electric buses, climate benefits depend on the power used to charge them. There is a need to finance small industries to use efficient electric machines. When rooftop solar is affordable and charging stations are available, households will more easily adopt rooftop solar and EVs.

The transition must be people-centric rather than technology-focused. It is essential to have reliable networks in rural areas as well as in cities. Solar installation, battery maintenance, and energy-efficient manufacturing jobs should be encouraged; training institutions should prepare young people for such jobs.

Local businesses can be linked to clean energy supply chains if they are provided with finance, skills, and market access. Governments have a role to play in ensuring that the gains from clean energy do not go exclusively to big businesses or high-income households.

However, progress must be measured fairly. Countries need to be transparent about emissions, renewable generation, electricity access, project delays, and climate finance delivery. Transparent monitoring enables citizens to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and whether public funds are being well spent. This is crucial for establishing public confidence.

The world does not lack climate declarations. They simply do not have the speed, resources, and cooperation required to make them a reality. While COP29's finance goal and COP31's electrification ambition can help drive a cleaner future, it is crucial that these commitments are turned into bankable projects and better lives for people. In India, the challenge is to provide more power, reduce pollution, safeguard labourers, and distribute the benefits across various regions.

GS 3: Environment

Key Pointers:

- What were the major climate finance commitments under COP29?
- Why is climate finance important for developing countries?
- Why is India's electricity demand increasing?
- What is India's renewable energy progress?
- What is Renewable Consumption Obligation (RCO)?

Turning police reform into practice



R.K. Vij

former IPS officer and one of the domain experts in the IPF

Even after 79 years of Independence, people still feel reluctant to visit a police station. Sometimes, they must make multiple visits before their complaints are registered. They fear harassment and are not kept informed about the progress of inquiries into their complaints. On the other hand, police personnel raise concerns about excessive workloads and inadequate weekly rest days. These were some of the observations gathered through a sample survey conducted by a team from the Indian Police Foundation (IPF) as part of a project on 'internal police reforms', undertaken with the support of the Azim Premji Foundation.

The IPF is a multidisciplinary think tank dedicated to police reforms through research, capacity building, and policy advocacy. Set up on October 21, 2015, the Foundation is driven by a coalition of police professionals and citizen stakeholders who believe in the positive transformation of the Indian police.

Besides serving and retired police officers, its expert group includes researchers and academicians. The group met in New Delhi on November 4 and 5 to finalise the change manual for internal reforms.

The project on 'internal police reforms', headed by Ish Kumar, a retired IPS officer, is worth taking forward. Except for recommendations requiring structural changes, the proposed reforms would not burden the government with extra budget. Most recommendations are to be implemented at the police station level. The research methodology includes questionnaire surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews across 15 police stations in three States – Punjab, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. Four focus areas were shortlisted after initial discussions.

The Indian Police Foundation is a multidisciplinary think tank dedicated to police reforms through research, capacity building, and policy advocacy

Improving police response

The first focus area – 'improving complaint or FIR registration and the police response' – took centre stage. While the recently introduced concept of e-FIR under the BNSS and its implementation in Delhi were lauded, converting e-complaints into regular FIRs after obtaining complainants' signatures remained a challenge. Recording e-complaints solely to facilitate insurance claims was not considered sufficient to tackle property-related offences. The introduction of a visitor management system (VMS) facilitating digital record-keeping at the entry point and establishing a help desk were considered necessary to reduce unnecessary delays in registering complaints or FIRs. Installation of QR codes at police stations was also considered necessary.

About the second focus area – 'crime prevention, community outreach and citizen services' – the group recommended starting a night safety escort scheme for working women, ensuring mandatory QR codes and panic buttons in taxis linked with the district control room, use of body-worn and dash cameras, citizen sentinel scheme, increasing CCTV coverage and linking it to the district control centre, community engagement at the beat and police station level, students' internships with police, and skill training targeting school drop-outs and drug addicts, among others.

The third area of focus was 'prevention of misconduct and harassment by the police'. The suggestions included scrutiny of the reasons for arrest at DySP level, allowing an accused to make a phone call after arrest, apprising accused persons of their right to get free legal aid, standardisation of 'personal search' including videography to avoid loss of personal valuables, and online monitoring of lock-ups remotely by senior officers. These were besides the mandatory legal provisions which an investigating officer (IO) is duty-bound to enforce with respect to arrest.

The fourth focus area – 'improving working conditions of police stations'– is *sine qua non* for improving the functioning of police personnel. Availability of basic facilities such as rest rooms, weekly-offs, sufficient transport facilities to enable quick response or sanction of vehicle allowances for IOs, sufficient contingency fund to procure material required for investigation, each IO to have a tab or an equivalent device for implementing the e-Sakshya app, and establishment of a recruitment board were some recommendations. Periodic soft-skill training, police e-academy for continuous skill upgradation, linking of training with career progression, and empowerment of constables by involving them in investigation work were also recommended.

A phased rollout

The IPF has prepared the 'change manual', which will first be implemented in Punjab. Based on the outcomes and its acceptance by the Punjab police, the recommendations will be replicated in Telangana and Tamil Nadu before being rolled out across other States.

GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- Why are police reforms necessary?
- What is an e-FIR?
- What is e-Sakshya?
- Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006) case

A regulatory fix for India's campuses



Kalaiselvan Periyasamy
environmental and social expert

India's education infrastructure has always been the strongest foundation of its growth and development. However, recent Supreme Court judgments have reaffirmed that educational buildings exceeding 20,000 square metres require prior Environmental Clearance (EC) under the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006. Institutions that have already constructed such buildings without obtaining clearance are now left without any procedure to secure it, creating a serious obstacle. The issue has developed because of two major regulatory changes.

Before the EIA Notification, 2006, there was no built-up-area-based EC requirement for educational institutions. The Notification brought large construction projects, including educational campuses, within the prior EC framework. In December 2014, the Union government exempted schools, colleges and institutional hostels from EC, subject to environmental management conditions. The Kerala High Court quashed this exemption in March 2024. The government introduced a fresh exemption in January 2025, but Vanashakti challenged it before the Supreme Court. After staying its operation, the court cancelled the exemption in August 2025. Consequently, large educational buildings again became subject to prior EC requirements.

The second development concerns projects that commenced or completed construction without prior EC. Union government mechanisms introduced in 2017 and 2021 enabled projects categorised as violations to undergo environmental appraisal, damage assessment and remediation, and pay environmental compensation. In May 2025, the Supreme Court struck down these mechanisms. That judgment was subsequently recalled following review proceedings, including a petition by the Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India. After reconsideration, the court delivered its final judgment on July 29, 2026. The court reaffirmed that prior EC is mandatory and held that no fresh applications could be entertained under the 2017 Notification or the 2021 Office Memorandum. However, it clarified that the government could introduce a tailored, time-bound scheme through a valid statutory notification for categories of non-compliant projects where overriding public interest exists.

The Ministry must act without delay and issue a statutory notification, consistent with the court's judgment, for eligible educational campuses

Compliance gap

An Office Memorandum issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) on September 30, 2026 reiterates that only pending applications may proceed. Consequently, institutions that have constructed buildings exceeding 20,000 square metres without applying earlier have no route to obtain EC.

Most older universities administered by Union and State governments do not possess ECs covering all buildings developed over decades. Nevertheless, where post-2006 construction proceeded without the required EC, further expansion remains uncertain. Planning authorities, local bodies and Pollution Control Boards insist upon EC for additional buildings, revised planning permission, regularisation and other statutory approvals.

Educational infrastructure development is not a one-time activity but a continuous, dynamic process. To meet growing industrial and social needs, educational institutions must expand classrooms, laboratories, libraries, hostels and other facilities, introduce new courses and strengthen research. Delays in such development restrict opportunities for students. A suitable regulatory mechanism is therefore essential. This does not justify a blanket exemption, which could overlook environmental impacts; nor should institutions be left without a way to bring existing development into compliance.

Regulatory remedy

The Ministry must therefore act without delay and issue a statutory notification, consistent with the Supreme Court's judgment, for eligible educational campuses.

The Ministry's new mechanism should prescribe environmental scrutiny, damage assessment, proportionate compensation, remediation and compliance measures to restore environmental quality and green cover. It must also clearly distinguish deliberate violations from developments undertaken without any intention to violate environmental requirements.

Viksit Bharat cannot be achieved without Viksit Shiksha. India's goal of achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047 depends on the quality of its education, research, and educational infrastructure. Therefore, this regulatory gap is not merely an institutional concern; it could hinder India's overall development and aspirations.

GS 3: Environment

Key Pointers:

- EIA Notification: 2006
- Environment (Protection) Act: 1986
- What is Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)?
- Vanashakti v. Union of India (2025)

The average cost of a thali has jumped by 16% in 10 months

Food inflation has raised meal costs, forcing households to spend a larger share of their wages on food

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis
Sambavi Parthasarathy

Food inflation in India steeply climbed to 8.9% last month, which is the highest inflation recorded in at least 22 months of the new series and the highest this year.

The prices of several food items have surged by a large margin between January and October this year. For instance, the price of one kilogram of onions increased by over 100% since March this year. Essential commodities like garlic (22%) and rice (11%) also saw a sharp surge in their retail prices **(Chart 1)**.

Much of this can be attributed to the prolonged U.S.-Iran war, which began with the U.S. and Israel's joint attacks on Iran on February 28th. The disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, an important transit route for energy needs, especially for India, severely impacted the supply of crude oil and fertilizers.

For households, the rise in the prices of food items has translated into costlier meals. The average cost of a vegetarian home-cooked meal has increased by 16% in less than ten months since March this year **(Chart 2)**.

Compared with previous years, data show that Indians are spending 14% more than what they spent a year ago to meet their meal requirements and 35% more than what they spent five years ago **(Table 1)**.

For this analysis, it has been assumed that an average Indian family will be able to meet their daily dietary needs if they consume food equivalent to two *thalis* per day. Non-vegetarian meals were not considered due to lack of past data. *The Hindu* has analysed the impact of inflation using the same methodology earlier as well.

To decode how much two *thalis* cost, on average in India, select ingredients were identified – white rice, toor dal, onion, garlic, red chilli, ginger, tomato, potato, brinjal, atta, cabbage, sunflower oil, and salt– and their respective quantity required for two servings were measured. The average retail cost for buying those ingredients for previous months was collated from data available with the Consumer Affairs Ministry and the National Horticulture Board.

Costlier plate

It will now cost a household more than 2,500 rupees to make two *thalis* for every day of a month. This is much higher than the amount spent on meal requirements in the past. However, wages have not reflected a similar increase.

According to a survey conducted by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, average wages in September 2026 were ₹26,310, a 11% increase since November 2025. The average monthly wage has increased by nearly 12.7% in 2026 compared to the year-ago period. This is higher than the increase in the cost of making two *thalis* every day per month. The increase in the cost of making two *thalis* every day for a month increased by 13.4% in the same period **(Table 2)**.

The analysis does not capture other ingredients required for *thali* preparation, such as spices and ghee. Hence, the cost of making a *thali* would be even higher.

Despite a notable increase of at least ₹3,000 in the average salary in the last year, people are spending a marginally bigger share of their wages on meals. This is assuming that the labourer got paid on all days, including rest days.

This disparity between salaries and expenditure could mean that households with regular salaried people might be cutting back on spending on non-essential items and luxury products.

On the other hand, daily wage-earning households could be struggling to meet the expenditure on food.

Biting hard into the pocket

The data for the charts were sourced from the Consumer Affairs Ministry, the National Horticulture Board and CMIE Industry Outlook

With inputs from Gandla Sneha who interned with The Hindu Data Team



Chart 1: Select items in thali which saw a surge in prices between January and October this year. Cost is per litre for oil. Rest are per kilogram. Figures in ₹

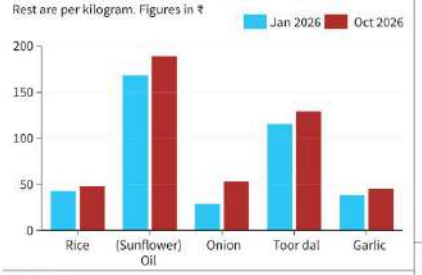


Chart 2: Monthly cost of two thalis per day in 2026. Figures in ₹

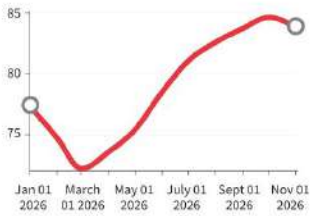


Table 1: The table lists the weight of commodities required to prepare two thalis and its retail prices in ₹

Item	Gram needed for 2 thalis	Buying price five years ago	Buying price one year ago	Nov 1 2026
Rice	125	4.43	5.33	6.00
Atta (wheat)	250	7.76	9.29	9.55
Sunflower oil	36.3	6.07	5.96	6.91
Tomato	100	5.02	3.82	3.67
Onion	100	4.07	2.65	5.18
Salt	12.8	0.23	0.27	0.29
Potato	300	7.34	7.93	6.64
Toor dal	125	13.22	14.32	16.78
Garlic	25	1.46	1.82	4.45
Red chilli	25	0.88	6.86	7.59
Ginger	7.5	0.30	0.50	1.00
Brinjal	250	6.11	8.28	9.38
Cabbage	250	4.67	6.48	5.72
Cost for 2 thalis		61.55	73.51	83.16

Table 2: The table compares the costs of a thali in ₹ in November 2026 as a share of average wages compared to last year and five years ago

	As on Nov 1, 2026	One year ago	Five years ago
Cost of one thali (in ₹)	41.9	36.8	30.8
Cost of two thalis (in ₹)	83.8	73.5	61.6
Cost of two thalis every day for a month (in ₹)	2514.6	2205.2	1846.6
Average wage/salary earnings during the preceding calendar month (in ₹)	26,310	23,622	16,149
Making two thalis every day as a share of wages (%)	9.6	9.3	11.4

To decode how much two thalis cost, on an average , select ingredients were identified — white rice, toor dal, onion, garlic, red chilli, ginger, tomato, potato, brinjal, atta, cabbage, sunflower oil, and salt— and their respective quantity required for two servings were measured

GS 3: Economy

Key Pointers:

- How has food inflation increased the cost of an ordinary Indian household's meals?
- Significance of Strait of Hormouz?
- How can geopolitical conflicts transmit inflation to Indian households?
- What is Engel's law?

The need to expand Jan Aushadhi

The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana has put low-cost medicines within the reach of people; however, it has not caught on as widely as a country of India's size and income levels would warrant, pointing to an urgent need to scale up the scheme's reach and ease the medical burden on households

FULL CONTEXT

T.C. Suseel Kumar
R. Sudhakar

The monthly medicines bill for the mother of one of us comes to approximately ₹2,900. This month, a chance visit to the Jan Aushadhi outlet near home came as a pleasant surprise. The bill for the same monthly list of medicines was ₹863, a near 25 per cent of the usual spend. It provokes a question: how does a bill fall by more than three-fourths?

The bill is not a fluke. It is the visible end of a long chain of efforts by the Government of India to make medicines affordable for the common people. The Jan Aushadhi scheme, launched in 2008 and revamped in 2015, has put low-cost medicines within the reach of people across the country. It banks on a manufacturing base that has made India the largest supplier of generic medicines in the world. What remains to be done is increasing health expenditure as a percentage of the GDP to ensure meaningful outreach.

Extent of coverage

The scheme presently named the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana is run through the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Bureau of India. Its basket now covers 2,110 medicines and 315 surgical items. The network of outlets has grown to 20,547 as at the end of July 2026, up from 17,990 at the end of December 2025, displaying healthy growth. The target set by the Government is 25,000 by March 2027. The Government estimates the number of visitors at 10 to 12 lakh per day. The sales at maximum retail price for 2025-26 were ₹2,252 crore. Because the medicines sell well below the market prices, the Government also estimates that citizens saved about ₹9,000 crore for the year 2025-26 and about ₹45,000 crore over a period of 12 years. These estimates imply an average discount of about 80 per cent, which seems quite believable as seen from the bill cited in the introduction.

Yet, despite its obvious benefits, a scheme launched in 2008 has not caught on as widely as a country of India's size and income levels would warrant, where many households live close to the edge of financial distress. The reasons could be many and merit examination one by one.

The reach and awareness gap

The scheme, though appearing substantial with 20,547 Jan Aushadhi Kendras all over India, looks small against a reported 12 lakh chemists and druggists across India, the figure given by the Chemists' association. That is about 1.7 per cent, a comparison of scale rather than an exact count of shops, as we found no official data on the total number of shops in the country. Moreover, the Kendras may be located in slightly less busy areas, probably owing to their low-cost operating model, which helps save on rentals.

A large portion of the public may not know. In a small study of 200 outpatients in Port Blair, only a third had heard of the scheme, and more than half did not know what the outlets sell. There is also a perception among some that the Jan Aushadhi Kendras are for the poor. Admittedly, the Port Blair example cannot be construed as a national sample, and an informal poll among family members and friends would be no better. That is the very reason we shall discuss why a proper national-level survey is needed.



Growing reach: The Government estimates that Jan Aushadhi Kendras receive about 10-12 lakh visitors a day. MOORTHY M

A patient shows the prescription at the medical store and is handed over her medicines. She is not concerned about the generic description or the active ingredients, nor their proportions and strength within the medicines. It is the doctor who decides all this. When the National Medical Commission ordered prescriptions to be made using generic names, doctors' bodies objected, citing autonomy, accountability and quality, and the order was put on hold. Only 6 per cent of patients in the Port Blair study had ever asked a doctor for generic medicines. We both confess that we have never specifically sought generics until now.

The trust and availability deficit

The doctors' bodies are not wrong when they want assurances about the quality, and the Government has taken measurable steps for ensuring that the standards are met. A 2020 report counted 106 batches recalled over four years, but without stating how many batches were tested. According to the government, suppliers are required to hold WHO-GMP certification, and every batch must be tested. The reported rate of substandard medicines is 0.34 per cent against 3.70 per cent in the open market. The Government does not specify the period or testing method; therefore, transparent testing and reporting methods are what should be aimed for.

A willing buyer loses trust in the scheme when the Kendra is not fully stocked. There are reports of the stores running out of stock and certain medicines not being available consistently. Non-availability costs the customers' trust, leading to fewer customers and a weaker shop, which in turn stocks fewer medicines. We are not sure whether this is indeed the case, which is why measurement is necessary to make informed decisions.

Jan Aushadhi should be promoted for all. This is where the difference between a General Hospital and a for-profit store comes in. When patients from all segments throng the General Hospital, which provides subsidised medical care, the wealthier ones may be crowding out the less fortunate from the queue. By contrast, when the Jan Aushadhi Kendra is frequented by all, demand will rise, followed by an increase in sales, a greater propensity to stock medicines and higher volumes for manufacturers. In a country that supplies one-fifth of the world's generics, scaling up manufacturing should not be the constraint.

The way forward

What should be done? Six steps follow, the first of which is a precondition for the rest.

The Government has data on the number of functioning outlets, estimated footfalls and sales. However, we found no information on why people use or do not use them, no nationally representative survey on how these Kendras are perceived, the level of awareness among the public on the products they sell, or several other measures that can be used for future expansion and quality improvements. The Department of Pharmaceuticals, which runs the scheme, and the Health Ministry, which governs prescribing, should commission a proper survey, with an independent and qualified academic partner. It should cover what households know, what doctors prescribe and what is kept in stock, among many other qualitative questions.

The Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission has agreed to test random batches from the outlets. The results should be published regularly, with the period, the method and the laboratories named, so that the claim of 0.34 per cent becomes verifiable and not merely quoted.

An online stock-tracking system should dynamically optimise reordering so that stores seldom run out of stock. Buyers who leave without what they want may not return.

There is also a need to convince the doctors. Once the quality can be consistently proved, and repeatedly discussed with the doctors' bodies, the mandate to prescribe generics can be brought back. Showing bioequivalence status on labels, which critics want, would be of great help.

The Kendras should be promoted as shops for everyone, not charity counters. This can be done through social media promotions and targeted advertisements, along with efforts to encourage people to download Jan Aushadhi Sugam, the scheme's app. It currently has a functioning store locator with phone dialling facility and links to Google Maps for navigation. It also has a medicine-wise price list. If possible, live medicine stock positions can also be provided to make this a go-to app for the public.

Medicines account for roughly 60 to 70 per cent of the household out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) on health in India, and outpatient drug costs are largely untouched by standard health insurance schemes like the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM JAY). Government health expenditure stood at 1.43 per cent of GDP in 2023-24, while the National Health Policy's target of 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2025 remains unfulfilled. As the government works to bridge this fiscal gap, a dedicated allocation should be channelled towards expanding and promoting Jan Aushadhi, thereby directly reducing the medical burden on households.

A bill that fell by 77 per cent in a single visit shows what India has already built. A survey would show why so few families get the same pleasant surprise. The concept's time is now, and evidence and funding will be key to making it an example to emulate.

(T.C. Suseel Kumar is the former Managing Director and Sudhakar is the former Executive Director of LIC. Views expressed are personal. All data are drawn from publicly available sources.)

THE GIST

- The Jan Aushadhi basket now covers 2,110 medicines and 315 surgical items. The government estimates that citizens saved about ₹9,000 crore in 2025-26 on medicines purchased through these outlets
- The scheme, though appearing substantial, with 20,547 Jan Aushadhi Kendras across India, looks small against a reported 12 lakh chemists and druggists in the country, according to the chemists' association
- The Kendras should be promoted as shops for everyone. This can be done through social media promotions and targeted advertisements

GS 2: Social Justice

Key Pointers:

- Objectives of Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana
- Why has PMBJP failed to achieve wider public acceptance?
- How can PMBJP reduce India's out-of-pocket health expenditure?
- How can quality assurance improve public confidence in Jan Aushadhi medicines?

KEYWORD



If the current data on productivity growth in AI-affected sectors hold across the economy, AI would indeed be epochal of the kind currently being debated. GETTY IMAGES

How AI could reshape global growth and productivity

A key expected impact of AI is an unprecedented rise in labour productivity, as its success as a technological revolution is premised on such an increase; what remains to be seen is how pervasive its impact will be across different sectors of the economy

Rohit Azad
Indranil Chowdhury

Many have likened the artificial intelligence (AI) phenomenon to the inventions of the steam engine or internal combustion engine in the 18th and 19th centuries, respectively. Only time can tell whether AI is epochal of that kind. In this two-part piece, we discuss the possible impact it may have on the global economy as a whole.

The productivity puzzle

A key impact of AI is considered to be an unprecedented rise in labour productivity. In fact, if there is one purpose AI is supposed to serve, it is enhancing labour productivity multifold. Since labour productivity is a key variable in this puzzle, consider what it constitutes of (**Box 1**). It is a ratio of output and workers employed. Now this ratio can rise in three different ways – a rise in output for a given number of workers employed (rise in the numerator); a loss of jobs which leads to a fall in the denominator; more jobs are created, but the output rises faster than the jobs (while both the numerator and the denominator are rising, the numerator rises faster than the denominator).

There is usually a distinction drawn between a case where there is a net loss of jobs versus one where jobs grow, but the output grows even faster. The latter is preferred over the former. Even though AI may displace white-collar workers, it may generate more jobs for the blue-collar workers, so in the net there may not be a job loss with AI adoption across the economy. However, for the argument we make below, it does not matter which of the three sources leads to a rise in productivity. Why should the rise in labour productivity matter? There are two contrasting takes on this question in the economics discipline.

Two schools of thought on growth

One which argues that productivity growth increases the growth of output in the economy. The idea is simple. Growth of output is a function of its two inputs – labour and capital. Since capital enhances the productivity of labour, the rate at which output can grow is the sum of the growth of the labour force and its productivity. So, if the workforce grows at 2% and productivity at 4%, the economy would stabilise at 6% growth over time. And if the rate of labour productivity rises, according to this framework, growth in the economy rises *pari passu* (**Graph 1a**).

Between the three variables – output growth, labour growth and productivity growth – output growth adjusts to the other two. This is what Robert Solow, a celebrated economist and a Nobel Laureate, showed in a seminal paper on growth theory. What he did not explain though was why and where did this labour productivity rise come from. Much later, his successors argued that the growth of labour productivity depends on investment in human capital, research and development, patent regimes, etc., what came to be known as endogenous growth theories.

The other framework – the heterodox approach to growth – argued that while the above could be a story of how much output can be produced, it does not tell us whether what is produced would also be demanded. And the output which is not demanded is never produced under capitalism; therefore, the above is an incorrect representation of such an economy. So, unless productivity growth increases growth in demand, there is no reason why the two will rise in unison.

Unlike in the previous case, a rise in labour productivity, therefore, affects the rate at which jobs are provided to workers. If demand is growing at 3% and productivity at 4%, jobs will be falling by 1%. Workers take the fall. If, on the other hand, demand grows faster than productivity, more jobs are generated. So, in this case, of the three variables – output growth, labour growth and productivity growth – labour (job) growth becomes the adjusting variable (**Graph 1b**).

This also implies that output growth is not limited by the total availability of labour. This has historically been true. The transatlantic (Atlantic) slave trade between the 16th and the 19th Century was essentially the adjustment of the supply of labour from one set of colonies to the demand for plantation jobs in another set of colonies. Closer home and in contemporary times, a higher growing State often draws upon labour from poorer States without compromising on the growth of output. If Punjab needs more agricultural workers during the sowing or harvesting season, it draws from the vast labour reserves of Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. This is true for manufacturing as well as service sector growth in some of the richer States in the south.

One may, mistakenly, think that with cross-border restrictions on labour movement, domestic labour may indeed set a limit to growth of output. But even now, if job growth is higher than the domestic workforce, international borders open. If the reverse happens, borders close. The reserve army of labour is not domestic; it is global. When the demand for Silicon Valley jobs rises in California, work visa conditions are relaxed. The anti-immigrant politics of the Far Right in the global North, under current conditions of rising unemployment, becomes clear when seen through this lens.

The productivity dividend

While it may be too early to say anything conclusively, **Chart 1** shows that there has indeed been a dramatic rise in productivity in sectors exposed to AI. This is to be expected because the success of AI as a technological revolution is premised on a rise in labour productivity (which potentially increases profit margins for the capitalists). What remains to be seen is how pervasive the impact of AI on productivity across different sectors of the economy will be. If the current data on productivity growth in AI-affected sectors hold across the economy, AI would indeed be epochal of the kind currently being debated.

In the next piece, we will explore the global macroeconomic implications of such a rise in productivity, which will perhaps give us a more comprehensive perspective on AI.

(The authors are a part of the DevMac [Development Macroeconomics] network, which seeks pluralism in Economics. This article is the first in a two-part series.)

The productivity debate

The impact of productivity growth on jobs depends on whether demand grows faster or slower than productivity

Chart 1: US: Real Output per worker in AI-adopting sectors

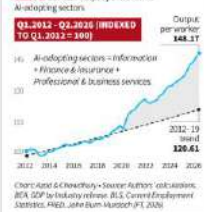
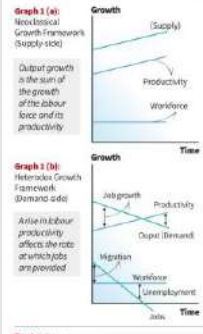


Chart: Azad & Chowdhury • Source: Authors' calculations, BEA, GDP by Industry release, BLS, Current Employment Statistics, FRED, John Burn-Murdoch (FT, 2026)



Box 1: Labour productivity can be estimated as the ratio of output to the number of workers employed

$$\text{Labour productivity} = \frac{\text{Output}}{\text{Workers employed}}$$

GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- How does AI increase labour productivity?
- How does AI-driven productivity growth affect employment?

Census portal lists 76 options for religion as predictive text

Entries such as 'Satguru', 'Ramdev', 'ISKCON', 'Ramkrishna Paramhans', 'Bishnoi', 'Vaishnaw', Sunni and Shia were among those removed from the initial 287 entries shown on a drop-down menu

Abhinay Lakshman
Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The 2027 Census self-enumeration portal is now showing a total of 76 entries under the "Other" religions that now appear as predictive text suggestions and not as a drop-down menu.

This comes days after *The Hindu* reported that at least 287 entries such as 'ISKCON', 'Ramkrishna Paramhans', 'Gorak Nath', 'Sanatan', 'Vedic Dharm', 'Ramdev' and so on had been listed in a drop-down menu for "Other" religions on the portal and then removed.

An examination of the new list of available "Other" religions showed that the Centre has removed over 200 entries that were previously listed under the same category on Monday, the day the portal went live for four poll-bound States – Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Punjab and Uttarakhand.

The deletions include entries such as 'Satguru', 'Ramdev', 'ISKCON', 'Ramkrishna Paramhans', 'Gorak Nath', 'Sanatan', 'Bishnoi', 'Vaishnaw', Shia, Sunni, and many others that were either classified in earlier Censuses as sects within the six major religions (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist) or seemed to be new entries not recorded in previous Censuses at all.



Massive undertaking: Enumerators being trained on Census operations in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh. X/@DCO_UP

Out of the 76 predictive text suggestions that now remain on the portal, nearly all appear to have been already recorded and tabulated based on the 2011 Census data on what people chose to write their faith as under the "Other" column. A majority of these entries include the religions and faiths of Scheduled Tribe communities across the country – such as Sarna, Doni Polo, Tana Bhagat, Birsa, Garo, Munda, Oraon, Santal, etc.

Apart from these, five entries in this new list of suggestive "other" religions do not feature in the 2011 or 2001 Census tables for "Other religions and persuasions". These include 'Adibasi dharma', 'Bura Deo', 'Karupa', 'Tingkao Rangong', and 'Tingwang Hingde'.

Soon after *The Hindu* reported the presence of a drop-down for "other" religions and its quick removal, Opposition leaders and OBC associations alike questioned the integrity of the way the 2027 Census was being conducted, with many of them questioning how the government was comfortable introducing a drop-down for religions but not for caste. Experts had also questioned the introduction of previously unrecorded entries in this drop-down, saying there would be nothing to compare these with.

On Monday, when the self-enumeration portal went live, the initial list of 287 entries for "Other" religions appeared as a drop-down menu from which respondents could select one in addition to writing in whatever they wanted. Within hours of *The Hindu* sending a query to the Union Home Ministry, this drop-down menu was removed and a representative of the Office of the RGI and the Census Commissioner said it would be "incorrect" to say these entries were shown as "other" religions.

However, a government official had told *The Hindu* at the time that this list was part of "predictive text entries" to help reduce variations and mistakes in spellings.

But officials did not clarify how previously unrecorded entries had appeared on this list either.

GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- Census 2027
- Why is accurate classification of religions important in the Census?
- What constitutional principles are relevant to the recording of religious identity?

New guidelines for complaints under job scheme

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI


MGNREGA also had provisions to address grievances like the new job scheme.

The Union Ministry of Rural Development on Wednesday issued guidelines for ombudspersons and appellate authorities under the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025 (VB-G RAM G) to tackle complaints during the implementation of the programme and establish a framework for accountability.

According to a press note from the Centre, each district will have an ombudsperson to deal with grievances, including those related to job cards, provision of employment, wage payments, delayed compensation, worksite facilities, muster rolls, and denial of statutory entitlements.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which preceded the present rural employment guarantee programme, also had similar provisions. The Centre said it had expanded the pool of eligible candidates for the role of ombudspersons to include individuals with experience in rural development, public administration, law, academics, social work and management. Provisions relating to tenure and remuneration had also been revised to support continuity and effective functioning of the institution.

A key feature of the new framework is a dedicated digital platform for ombudspersons. The platform will enable online registration and tracking of complaints, maintenance of records of proceedings, uploading of awards, and monitoring of follow-up action. The guidelines also mandate the use of geo-tagged and time-stamped photographs during field visits, reportedly aimed at improving documentation.

GS 2: Governance

Key Pointers;

- Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025
- How will digital monitoring improve accountability under VB-G RAM G?

Plea in SC seeks count of voters who refilled forms

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A fresh petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking the public disclosure of the number of Delhi voters whose names have been deleted from the draft electoral roll because they have been listed as absent, shifted, dead, or duplicate voters, who have then filled enumeration forms to get back on the voter list. The petitioners have sought the extension of the provision of filling the form and the restoration of old EPIC numbers to those ASDD voters who have already filled Form 6, so that they are not misclassified as new voters.

The petition was filed on Tuesday by transparency rights activist Anjali



Bharadwaj and Amrita Johri, who are also the petitioners in the original case on the SIR process in New Delhi. Form 6 is for new voters only, but was being used by voters whose names were deleted during the SIR.

During an earlier hearing, the SC had termed the use of Form 6 for voters excluded from the draft list and placed in the ASDD category as an "error", as Form 6 includes a declaration that the applicant is a first-time voter.

On November 6, the Election Commission of India had issued a directive that voters who have been marked as ASDD in the seven States, where the SIR process is ongoing, can now fill an enumeration form again to get back into the list instead of resorting to Form 6. These electors were marked absent as their enumeration forms had been issued but not received back, resulting in their exclusion from the draft electoral rolls.

The plea flags the misuse of Form 7 for targeted deletions, seeking an audit, disclosure of all Form 7s that have been submitted so far, and mandatory identification of booth level agents as party agents.

GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- What is SIR?
- Form 6 and form 7 of SIR
- Functions of ECI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Britain's William, Prince of Wales, and Kate, Princess of Wales, in New Delhi. REUTERS

Modi, Prince Williams, Princess Catherine discuss India-U.K. ties

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday met Prince William and Princess Catherine here and exchanged views on further strengthening the India-U.K. Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, including cooperation in defence and health, among other sectors.

During his interaction with the Prince and Princess of Wales, Mr. Modi welcomed the growing momentum in India-U.K. bilateral relations, guided by India-UK Vision 2035 and strengthened by the entry of the India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in July, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

He appreciated its recognition of Indian innovators and their contributions to addressing global environmental challenges, including at the Earthshot Prize Awards held in Mumbai on Tuesday.

GS 2: International Relations

Key Pointers:

- India-UK Relations
- India-UK Comprehensive strategic partnership
- What is India- UK CETA?

NCB-led drive targets illegal cannabis, opium cultivation

Devesh Pandey
NEW DELHI



The crackdown is part of the Centre's aim to eliminate illicit cannabis and poppy cultivation by December 2027. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has undertaken a series of operations across the country against illegal cannabis and opium cultivation, working alongside the State police, security forces, and other enforcement agencies.

The operations in Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand covered forest land, remote hill districts, and community lands. The NCB has also been training security personnel, and holding coordination meetings with other enforcement and intelligence agencies to improve the identification of cultivation sites and plan further action.

The ongoing crackdown is part of the target set in the Union Home Ministry's 'Vision Document on Narcotics Control (2026-2029)' of eliminating illicit cannabis and poppy cultivation in the identified areas by December 2027. It calls for mapping hotspots and launching coordinated destruction drives through a whole-of-government approach involving Central and State agencies, besides other stakeholders.

Between October 26 and November 3, a joint operation by the NCB, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Sashastra Seema Bal, the Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) of Arunachal Pradesh, State police and West Kameng district administration resulted in the destruction of over 1.37 lakh kg of cannabis plants spread across about 458 acres. The illicit cultivation was mainly being carried out on community lands.

To step up these efforts, the NCB has been organising training programmes for various agencies. On November 13, it held a hybrid-mode session on intelligence collection and identification of illicit cannabis cultivation in Odisha.

GS 3: Internal Security

Key Pointers:

- What is NCB?
- Functions od NCB, CRPF, ANTF

India, Israel sign contract to upgrade Barak missile

The Defence Ministry signed a ₹1,976.40 crore contract with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) on Wednesday to upgrade and manage obsolescence of the Barak Point Defence Missile System deployed onboard Indian Navy warships. According to the Ministry, the contract was signed in New Delhi in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh under the Other Capital Procurement Procedure. The upgrade is aimed at enhancing the operational capabilities of the Barak missile systems and strengthening the air defence capabilities of Indian Navy platforms.

GS 3: Defence

AMRITA IAS
An Amrita Group Institution

'No rule only policewomen must handle women in crowd'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police told the Supreme Court there was no strict rule that only women police officers must "handle" women in crowd-control operations.

The police were responding to allegations of women protesters and journalists being manhandled by male police officers during widespread protests demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar.

The allegations were made in petitions by the Network of Women in Media, India, represented by advocate Aarthi Rajan, and others like the Delhi Union of Journalists, Free Speech Collective and the Kerala Union of Working Journalists.

The legal requirement that only women police officers could arrest or carry out searches on women was not a mandate in crowd-control situations, the police submitted in an affidavit.

"With regards to the allegations of manhandling of women journalists, it is respectfully submitted that the requirement of women personnel handling women is not a statutory mandate in the context of crowd-control operations, in the same manner as it is expressly prescribed under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023 in relation to searches and arrests," the police said.

The police said the deployment of women personnel in a crowd-control situation was an "operational consideration" depending on various factors, including the need to maintain propriety, avoid unnecessary confrontation and defuse tensions at a protest site, particularly if there were women participants.



The Delhi Police also said there were individuals masquerading as journalists at protest sites. FILE PHOTO

Quick decision

There is no legal bar on a male police officer from acting as a first responder, it said. Nor is he stopped from assisting a woman police officer in the discharge of her duties. "Such decisions have to be taken at the fraction of a second," the police affidavit said.

The affidavit said an October 11 direction of the top court to the Delhi Police to not "hinder" journalists, lawyers and other professionals in the discharge of their professional duties did not extend to reel-makers, social media influencers or unruly elements who break the lawful directions of the police at the site of a prohibited assembly.

The police said it "fully respects the role of the press". However, there were individuals masquerading as journalists by using a camera and a microphone. The protest site, which the police repeatedly said was "illegal", was replete with 'content creators' for YouTube. The affidavit said though the police had found it difficult to distinguish between journalists and reel-makers, the latter were neither obstructed nor hindered unless they posed a risk to public order and law.

The police said it was yet to be determined if "reel-makers can be elevated to the status of journalists or reporters". The police said the lack of a clear distinction in law hampered the police in maintaining law and order, especially in a situation where thousands marched to the Parliament as part of an "unauthorised" protest. The July protests were against question paper leaks in the NEET-UG 2026.

GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- What safeguards does BNSS provide for arrest and search of women?
- How should police balance crowd control with women's dignity and safety?
- Which constitutional provisions protect journalists and peaceful protesters?

AMRITA IAS
An Amrita Group Institution

Govt. relaxes norms under EPM to help MSME exporters

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Wednesday amended various guidelines in its Export Promotion Mission (EPM) with the aim of further empowering exporters to expand into new markets, create awareness about their products, helping them meet international standards, and addressing logistical gaps within India.

The amendments have been made to three interventions under the Niryat Disha sub-scheme of the EPM. The Union Cabinet had approved the EPM on November 12, 2025, with an outlay of ₹25,060 crore for the period 2025-26 to 2030-31.

The amendments have been made to three interventions under the Niryat Disha sub-scheme

One of these, the Market Access Support (MAS) intervention, is aimed at providing structured support to exporters for activities such as Buyer-Seller Meets (BSMs), Reverse Buyer-Seller Meets (RBSMs), trade fairs, exhibitions and other related market access initiatives. Under the amended guidelines, the maximum eligible export turnover for availing airfare reimbursement for participation in BSMs, trade fairs and trade delegations has been increased from ₹75 lakh to ₹50 crore.

Further, the airfare reimbursement has been enhanced to up to 95% for micro and small exporters and up to 80% for other eligible exporters. The mandatory membership period with Export Promotion Councils has also been reduced from six months to three months.

The Trade Regulations, Accreditation & Compliance Enablement (TRACE) intervention is aimed at helping MSMEs in meeting international quality, safety, and technical requirements.

GS 3: Economy

Key Pointers;

- What is export promotion mission?
- What is Niryat Disha sub-scheme of the EPM?
- What is TRACE?