# ED not a 'super cop', can't file private complaint: HC

ED's power under PMLA is 'derivative and not original', says Karnataka HC; it adds that the agency can't prosecute an offence on its own when competent agencies decline to act on its information

**Krishnaprasad**
BENGALURU

Declaring that the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) is "not a super cop," the High Court of Karnataka said the agency cannot file a private complaint to initiate a money-laundering probe when the competent agencies decline to prosecute a scheduled offence based on the information filed by the ED.

The court ruled that the ED's power under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is "derivative and not original," and that filing a private complaint under Section 200 of the Code of Criminal Procedure or Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita was not contemplated under the PMLA Act.

> One institution in the country does not become supreme so that it is in a position to abuse the powers conferred on it. Law recognises the requirements of checks and balances
> KARNATAKA HIGH COURT



"One institution in the country does not become supreme so that it is in a position to abuse the powers conferred on it. Law recognises the requirements of checks and balances. The ED is not a super cop to investigate anything and everything which comes into its notice," the court said, adding that the ED must exercise only those powers expressly conferred on it by the PMLA.

Justice M.I. Arun passed the order while allowing a batch of writ petitions filed by Malur MLA and Congress leader K.Y. Nanjegowda, who also chairs the Kolar and Chikkaballapur Milk Union Ltd. (KOMUL) and the Malur Land Grant Committee, and others.

**Case background**

The case stemmed from a private complaint about an alleged "land scam" on the basis of which the ED registered an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) in November 2023. While probing this, the ED reportedly found evidence of a "job scam" involving KOMUL, and shared its information with the police. As they did not act on this information, the ED itself filed a private complaint on this matter.

The petitioners challenged the ED's ECIR, the order confirming seizure of articles, summons issued to them, and the private complaint filed by the ED before a special court.

"If the ED is permitted to file a private complaint, it will be in a position to file a private complaint against any person by itself and take up investigation against them. This is not contemplated under the provisions of the PMLA," the court clarified.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 9

## ED can't file private complaint, says HC

The petitioners argued that once the predicate offence collapses, even on technical grounds, the ED cannot continue PMLA proceedings. If the ED uncovers a different scheduled offence, its only permissible course is to share information with the competent agency, not to file a separate private complaint and probe it, they said.

Accepting petitioners' contentions, the court held that Section 66(2) of the PMLA casts a duty on the ED to intimate the concerned agency, not to take up the investigation itself.

"In law, where an act is to be done in a particular way, it must be done in that way and in no other way," the court said, invoking the constitutional separation of powers and the need for checks and balances.

The court pointed out that the PMLA does not expressly empower the ED or its officials to file a private complaint in respect of a scheduled offence and, on that strength, investigate the accused under the PMLA.

Allowing the ED to prefer a private complaint by itself, when the other government authorities deem it inappropriate to initiate proceedings, "would amount to permitting the ED to act as a super cop and it goes against the philosophy of the Act which requires a predicate offence to be in existence for the ED to initiate proceedings as contemplated under the PMLA," the court said.

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GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- Powers and Functions of Enforcement Directorate (ED)
- Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002
- Why are ED's powers considered derivative?
- What is the significance of Section 66(2) of PMLA?
- What are the major concerns surrounding ED's functioning?

# Bihar mound named site of national importance

**Press Trust of India**
NEW DELHI

An ancient mound in Bihar's East Champaran district has been declared an archaeological site of national importance through a central government notification.

The site – Ranivas Mound, at Kesariya – is spread over 1.63 acres and is under the ownership of the Bihar government, reads the gazette notification dated November 4 that was issued by the Ministry of Culture.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by... the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (24 of 1958), the Central Government hereby declares the said archaeological site and remains specified in the site plan and schedule annexed hereto, to be of national importance," the gazette notification said.

A total of 3,686 sites around the country are under the care of the ASI, the Centre had informed Parliament in February 2026.

Currently, 70 sites in Bihar are under the ambit of the ASI.

GS 1: Art and Culture

Key Pointers:

- What is Ranivas Mound?
- Under which law was it declared a site of national importance?
- Significance of declaring a site of national importance
- What is the role of ASI?

# IAF's heavy-lift aircraft makes record touchdown at Ladakh's Nyoma airbase

**Press Trust of India**
NEW DELHI

In a historic feat, a Russian-origin heavy-lift transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) successfully landed at the Nyoma airbase in eastern Ladakh at an altitude of over 13,600 feet, achieving what the force described as the highest touchdown for the plane anywhere in the world.

The airbase is located at a distance of around 25 km from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China.

The IAF described the landing as an enduring capability of the aircraft backed by the "exceptional skill, precision and professionalism" of its crew.

"An Indian Air Force IL-76MD has scripted history with a successful landing at Nyoma, marking the highest-altitude landing ever achieved by the aircraft anywhere in the world," the IAF said on social media.



**Rarefied air:** The IAF described the landing as an enduring capability of the aircraft backed by its crew's 'exceptional skill'. PTI

The IAF said the touchdown was a "milestone" that reinforces India's strategic airlift capability.

The strategically significant air base, located at a height of 13,629 feet, was operationalised in November last year. The airbase is capable of handling fighter jets, helicopters and transport planes.

It was the fourth such air force base in Ladakh. The three others are located in Leh, Kargil and Thoise. The Kargil airstrip is located at an altitude of around 10,500 feet.

The Defence Ministry has been focusing on enhancing infrastructure at almost all airfields along the LAC including the Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) as per operational requirements.

It is also boosting infrastructure at Daulat Beg Oldi Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) in the Ladakh region.

The Daulat Beg Oldi ALG is located close to the LAC at an altitude of 16,700 feet, and is known as the highest airfield in the world.

GS 3: Defence

Key Pointers:

- What is the significance of the IAF's landing at Nyoma?
- Why is Nyoma Airbase strategically important?
- What are the challenges of operating aircraft at high altitudes?
- What are Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs)?

# Rajnath warns of evolving threats, calls for highest military readiness

Addressing personnel at key airbase near China frontier, Defence Minister warns of adversaries exploiting 'vulnerabilities'; reviews Army's LAC infrastructure, lauds initiatives along the border aimed at strengthening ties with local communities

**The Hindu Bureau**
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited members of the armed forces at multiple locations in West Bengal on Saturday and highlighted a changing nature of warfare while describing the northeast as India's "first edge" rather than its "last edge".

The security landscape around the country has become increasingly complex and the armed forces must maintain the highest level of operational readiness to effectively counter any threats to national security, he told personnel at the Bagdogra Air Force station.

Delivering his message on the eve of Deepavali from the key airbase near the frontier with China in the Eastern sector, Mr. Singh, without naming any country, said the adversary now avoids direct confrontation but seeks to exploit certain "vulnerabilities".



Rajnath Singh shares sweets with Army personnel at Sukna Military Station in West Bengal's Darjeeling district. PTI

He called upon the armed forces to keep special focus on strengthening domain awareness, cyber resilience, and information integrity to effectively counter emerging security threats, according to the Defence Ministry.

Describing Bagdogra as a strategically important region and a crucial link in India's security framework, Mr. Singh commended the courage and dedication of the defence personnel towards safeguarding national interests. He stated that the Air Force personnel deployed in the region serve as a robust shield for the security of the eastern sector, and their preparedness is fundamental to maintaining stability in the region.

The Defence Minister later reviewed the operational preparedness of the Army's Trishakti Corps at Sukna, with a focus on infrastructure development along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), deployment of advanced military equipment, and adoption of emerging technologies to enhance combat effectiveness.

Mr. Singh appreciated its contribution to infrastructure development and community welfare initiatives in border areas aimed at strengthening ties with local communities.

Highlighting the changing nature of warfare, he said security challenges were no longer confined to conventional exchanges of gunfire and artillery but increasingly involved hybrid warfare, proxy wars, cyberattacks, drone incursions, and information warfare.

He cautioned that adversaries were using social media to spread rumours, deploying drones to monitor sensitive locations, and attempting to compromise military systems through cyber attacks. He exhorted personnel to remain vigilant and prepared to tackle emerging threats across all domains.

Describing Sukna as a critical logistics hub for eastern India, Mr. Singh said its geographical sensitivity necessitated round-the-clock operational readiness. He highlighted its importance in the movement of supplies, weapons, food, medical provisions, and personnel to forward locations. Mr. Singh also stressed the importance of soldiers' mental health and emotional well-being, urging them to communicate openly with their colleagues and seek support to deal with stress arising from demanding duties and separation from families.

GS 3: Internal Security

Key Pointers:

- What are the emerging forms of warfare?
- Why is domain awareness important for national security?
- What is the strategic significance of Bagdogra and Sukna?
- How does engagement with border communities strengthen national security?

# Northeast's first AI-enabled career intelligence facility starts operation in Manipur

**The Hindu Bureau**
GUWAHATI

Conflict-scarred Manipur has become the first State in the northeastern region to get an artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled facility that aims to mould careers.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Saturday inaugurated the AI-enabled Career Intelligence Hub at the Tamphasana Girls' Higher Secondary School in Imphal, the State's capital.

Established under the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme as the region's first-of-its-kind facility, the initiative marked a "significant step towards integrating AI into the education and career guidance ecosystem in the State".

The Chief Minister said the government undertook the initiative to provide students with technology-driven career guidance, personalised counselling, and information on emerging career opportunities.

He commended students who focused on their education and future instead of participating in agitations over the past few months, advising others to pursue dialogue as the preferred means of resolving any differences and addressing critical issues.



Manipur CM Yumnam Khemchand Singh interacts with students at a science event in Imphal on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"AI has advanced significantly and is increasingly transforming various fields and professions," he said, underscoring the need for students to upgrade for the career challenges ahead.

Earlier, the Chief Minister lauded two districts–Imphal West and Pherzawl–for achieving '*surakshit*' safe status in October under the National AIDS Control Organisation's (NACO) Mobilisation for AIDS Suraksha initiative.

"This achievement means that 95% of the estimated number of people living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in a district are aware of their status, 95% of those aware of their status are receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 95% of those undergoing ART have achieved viral suppression," he said.

GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- What is the AI-enabled Career Intelligence Hub?
- What are the major objectives of the facility?
- How can AI transform India's education system?
- What are the challenges of integrating AI into education?
- What is NACO's Mobilisation for AIDS Suraksha initiative?

# Rajasthan wins award for renewable energy efforts

**The Hindu Bureau**
JAIPUR

Rajasthan has received a national award for its outstanding performance under the Renewable Energy State Assessment Framework (RE-SAF), developed by the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. Vice-President C.P. Radhakrishnan gave away the award at a function in New Delhi over the week-end.

Minister of State for Energy Heeralal Nagar, who received the award, said Rajasthan had emerged as the country's largest green energy hub over the years. "The State now has an installed renewable energy capacity of 51.6 GW and a solar power capacity of 45 GW," he said.

Mr. Nagar said the State was playing a "pivotal role" in achieving the national goal of 500 GW non-fossil fuel-based installed power capacity by 2030. Rajasthan had received top honours under RE-SAF developed by the Union Ministry in collaboration with the Power Finance Corporation, he said.

GS 3: Environment

Key Pointers:

- What is Rajasthan's renewable energy capacity?
- Why is Rajasthan suitable for solar energy generation?
- What is Renewable Energy State Assessment Framework (RE-SAF)?
- What is India's renewable energy target for 2030?

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# 10 years of note ban: cash use consistent, fake notes on rise

This Deepavali marks 10 years since PM Narendra Modi announced overnight demonetisation of 86% of the country's cash; data shows some stated goals of the move remain largely unmet

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Ten years after Demonetisation, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data show the exercise has had little impact on reducing cash in circulation and detection of fake currency, particularly ₹500 notes also increased.

On the other hand, the value of transactions on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) had grown steadily year after year, even when measured as a percentage of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

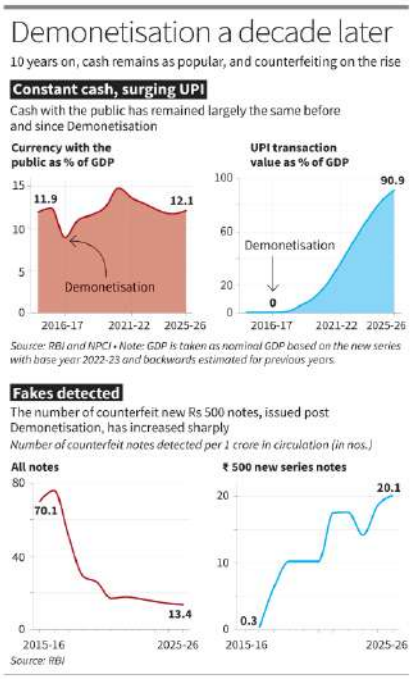
**Cash usage unchanged**

"The magnitude of cash in circulation is directly linked to the level of corruption," PM Narendra Modi said when announcing note ban decision on November 8, 2016. "Inflation becomes worse through the deployment of cash earned in corrupt ways."

The "high circulation of cash also boost hawala trade which is directly connected to black money and illegal trade in weapons".

One of the stated aims of demonetisation, therefore, was to turn India into a less-cash society. The data show that this objective remains largely unfulfilled.

The RBI's data on currency with the public show this amount, as a percentage of GDP, stayed largely the same as it was prior to note ban. Currency with the public as a percentage of GDP stood at 11.9% in 2015-16, the financial year preceeding demonetisation and rose marginally to 12.1% by March 31, 2026. The value of UPI transactions as a percentage of GDP, however, had grown from zero in 2016-17 to nearly 91% in 2025-26.




**Fake notes, a problem**

"Have you ever thought about how these terrorists get their money," Mr. Modi further said in his speech in 2016. "Enemies from across the border run operations using fake currency notes. This has been going on for years. Many times, those using fake ₹500 and and ₹1,000 notes have been caught and many of the notes seized."

Another aim of demonetisation was to end the scourge of counterfeiting of Indian currency. However, performance on this metric also was uneven.

The RBI has data on the number of counterfeit notes detected per one crore of notes in circulation. Across all notes, the data shows a significant improvement in terms of counterfeiting.

That is, the number of total fake notes detected per crore of notes in circulation fell from 70.1 in 2015-16 to 13.4 in 2025-26.

However, in the wake of demonetisation, the government also introduced a new series of ₹500 notes and ₹2,000 notes that were supposed to be more secure and difficult to fake.

**Detection up**

The RBI data shows the central bank's detection of fake ₹500 notes had shot up since demonetisation.

While it found 0.3 fake ₹500 notes per 1 crore of those notes in circulation in 2016-17 when they were introduced, this number stood at 20.1 as of 2025-26.

Making a calculation for the ₹2,000 note is more tricky because the RBI in 2023 began taking the note out of circulation.

However, the data shows once it started doing this, its detection of fake ₹2,000 notes shot up. The detection of fake notes can be for two reasons. The first is that there is a rise in counterfeiting, and the second is that detection has become better. It is unclear from the data which of these is the driving factor.

GS 3: Economy

Key Pointers:

- What were the major objectives of demonetisation?
- Has demonetisation reduced India's dependence on cash?
- How have digital payments evolved after demonetisation?
- What were the major economic consequences of demonetisation?

# Cellophane bees produce a kind of plastic that degrades: study

Divya Gandhi

In March 2023, a team of scientists travelled to eastern Tennessee, the U.S., trowels in hand, and dug a few centimetres into the earth to follow small tunnels into nests created by a ground-nesting bee, *Colletes inaequalis*. They collected the translucent cell lining of the nests and transported it on ice to a lab, for a reason: to test its unique composition.

At the peak of an active nesting period, they found the lining, much like synthetic polyester, "was quite flexible and could be folded without noticeable fracture or deformation," the scientists said in their paper, published recently in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

When the team returned to the bee nests the next year and tested the lining again – which now contained pollen and late-stage larvae – they found it had cracked and crumbled. Specifically, they found the nest linings 11 months after they were built suffered "significant degradation," with the polyester content falling from 73% to 40% in four months in ambient soil.

Indeed, these bees of the Colletidae familyare not called the "cellophane" or "polyester" bees for nothing: their nests are lined with a material that is a mix of silk and polyester secreted from the female bees' abdomen, and it degrades quickly.

The finding opens avenues to solving the long-standing quest to create a biodegradable plastic.

"Nearly a third of plastic produced globally is mismanaged and enters the environment. Roughly one third is polythene, which persists in the environment for centuries," the paper noted. The polluting material has become critical to a range of fields, from agriculture to pharmaceuticals. Almost none of this plastic is biodegradable because the polymers consist of entirely carbon-carbon bonds that do not break readily under natural or engineered biodegradation conditions.

"To address the plastic pollution crisis, many have attempted to design biodegradable polythene-like plastics, primarily polyesters... Unfortunately, most [polythene]-like polyesters exhibit little biodegradability due to their crystallinity and ability to repel water, the paper added. There is therefore a growing need for materials that are environmentally compatible while also meeting the needs of packaging", the researchers pointed out.

The paper conceded that it was intriguing that the Colletes polyester showed no evidence of accumulation in the environment over time, even though bees of this genus nest annually in aggregations that can consist of more than 10,000 individual nests. Subsequent generations of bees return to the same aggregations and build new nests underground every year for decades.

GS 3: Environment

Key Pointers:

- What are cellophane bees?
- What is unique about the material produced by these bees?
- Why is this discovery significant for biodegradable plastic research?
- Why are conventional plastics difficult to biodegrade?

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# House lizards can contaminate a meal but are not poisonous

Media reports from around India have periodically fuelled the belief that lizards can poison food; but while such incidents raise legitimate food-safety concerns, they also risk giving an already misunderstood animal a worse reputation

**Nobinraja M.**
BENGALURU

## Reptile reputation

Establishing whether a lizard actually caused the reported illnesses after falling in food requires careful investigation

- The common house gecko is frequently found in Indian homes but carries a false reputation as poisonous
- Recent news reports have mistakenly blamed these reptiles for causing sudden illness among many schoolchildren
- Scientific experts say these common house lizards lack any toxins or venoms that are harmful or dangerous to humans
- Reported sicknesses are often caused by highly unhygienic conditions or mass panic rather than the animal itself



**Eyes wide open:** 'If they bite you, or you bite them, there are no fatal consequences'. CRICKET RASPET (CC BY)

- Inconsistent media narratives emphasise a strong need for proper investigations into these alleged food-poisoning incidents
- People should often leave these geckos alone because they provide indoor pest control services, experts added

The common house gecko (*Hemidactylus frenatus*) is a familiar sight in many Indian homes and has adapted well to human life. But what does science say about the idea that it can poison food?

Recent reports from Tamil Nadu and other parts of India have put house lizards in an unfavourable spotlight. In September, children at a government school in Kottaiyur in Tiruvallur district reportedly fell ill after a lizard was found in their breakfast. Similar incidents were reported in Mannankadu, near Pattukottai, in February and in Jambai in Kallakurichi district in September 2025.

These and other reports have periodically fuelled the belief that lizards can poison food. But while such incidents raise legitimate food-safety concerns, they also risk giving an already misunderstood animal a worse reputation.

"There are no known toxins or venom in house geckos. If they bite you, or you bite them, there are no fatal consequences. If they fall in your food, there is no risk of transfer of any poison of any kind either," Subhasmita Patro, a herpetologist at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, said.

"Yes, house geckos are carriers of several disease-causing pathogens found on their skin and droppings that can potentially cause intestinal distress, diarrhoea, and typhoid," Dr. Patro added. "However, the chances of a gecko being infected with [these] pathogens is very low."

"But in contrast, a high percentage of geckos can be infected with several intestinal parasites such as nematodes and trematodes. However, these internal parasites generally do not pose any direct health risks to humans under normal living conditions."

House geckos are not the only potential source of microbial contamination. Houseflies, for instance, can transfer pathogens such as Salmonella and Escherichia coli to food.

The children may fall ill for other reasons. "While house geckos are not known to be poisonous or venomous to humans, hygiene remains a concern if they fall into food," Vrinda Lath, an assistant professor of emergency medicine at Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, said. "Although such incidents are uncommon, food contaminated by a gecko should not be consumed. Fear and panic may also trigger symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and hyperventilation."

Establishing whether a lizard actually caused the reported illnesses requires careful investigation. Often, the facts around such incidents are blurred. For example, the incident at Kottaiyur Panchayat Union Middle School in Tiruvallur district on September 24 acquired three different narratives across four news sources.

One news article said that the cooks spotted the lizard while transferring the food. Another said teachers had checked the food only after the students started complaining of dizziness.

They are effectively different accounts of when and how the lizard was discovered. The sequence of events is important to identify the cause. If the children were informed about the lizard before symptoms developed, panic may have played a role. If symptoms appeared before the lizard was found, food contamination will have to be investigated.

The reported student enrolment figures also vary, as does the type of food served. One report stated the children were made to drink salt water to induce vomiting. While 39 children were discharged and allowed to return home, one girl was admitted to hospital with diarrhoea. This also raises the question of whether the salt water itself contributed to her symptoms, as research has documented that consuming excessive amounts of salt can cause diarrhoea. These inconsistencies highlight why such incidents require careful investigation.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the symptoms of a Salmonella infection usually begin six hours to six days after infection. So children falling ill immediately after a meal does not fit the typical timeline for salmonellosis.

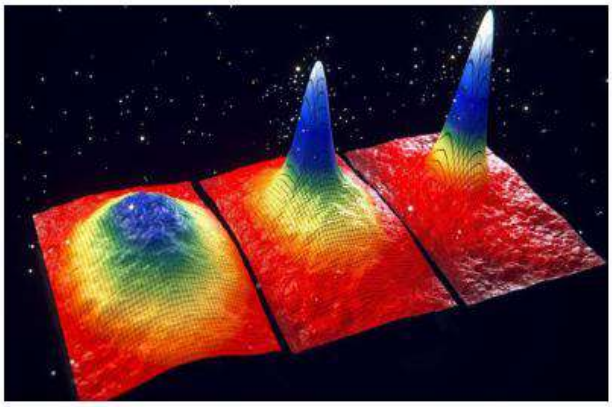
In 2014, when 350 schoolchildren in Bengaluru fell ill after a lizard was reportedly found in their midday meal, early media reports linked the discovery to the mass hospitalisation.. However, health officials later suggested mass hysteria may have contributed to the symptoms. A year on, the Forensic Science Laboratory ruled out the lizard as the cause and pointed to unclean utensils and unhygienic conditions, although no residues of the toxic substances they were looking for were detected.

"The fears surrounding house geckos in India stem more from folklore rather than biological reality," Dr. Patro said.

In fact, house geckos excel at indoor pest control. "If you spot a few geckos in your home, the best approach is simply to leave them alone," Dr. Patro said. "If you prefer to move them, you can gently usher them outside with a broom."

*(Nobinraja M. is a postdoctoral researcher at the Conservation Genetics Lab in ATREE, Bengaluru)*

GS 3: Science and Technology



# Lowest recorded temperature created on space station

Researchers onboard the China Space Station have made a breakthrough in quantum physics. Using specialised lasers to form an optical dipole trap, they created a Bose-Einstein condensate, an unusual state of matter, at just 9.7 picokelvins, or trillionths of a degree, above absolute zero – the lowest equivalent temperature ever recorded. The atomic cloud expanded so slowly that it remained visible for an unprecedented 7 s. The feat opens the door to highly sensitive experiments in space.

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GS 3: Science and Technology

Key Pointers:

- What is Bose–Einstein Condensate (BEC)?
- What is an optical dipole trap?

GS 2: Polity

Key Pointers:

- What are family cards and why are States introducing them?
- Why is linking voter IDs with welfare benefits controversial?
- How is the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls connected to this controversy?
- What are the risks of excessive dependence on digital and biometric identification?
- What is the significance of the Sixteenth Finance Commission's recommendation?

# *Why is the use of voter IDs for welfare schemes contentious?*

What did Panchayati Raj Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh say? Have voter IDs been used before? What are the concerns?

**Sobhana K. Nair**

**The story so far:**

On November 3, Union Minister for Panchayati Raj Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh announced that voter cards, along with biometric authentication, will replace Aadhaar as the basis for identifying beneficiaries and processing payments for welfare schemes. He argued that Aadhaar cards can be easily made at every street corner, implying that they can lead to fraudulent beneficiaries. He presented the use of voter cards along with biometric authentication as a possible mechanism to deal with such cases.

**Are voter IDs used as identification documents to access welfare schemes?**

In common Hindi parlance, the voter ID is often referred to as *pehchaan patra* (identity card). Like the ration card, it has often served as an entry document on the basis of which other entitlement documents are issued. For example, to obtain a job card under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, voter IDs were among the documents that could be used.

In some States, such as Delhi, governments have made voter IDs compulsory for accessing certain pension schemes. A beneficiary requires endorsement from the local councillor or legislator to be enrolled under the pension programme.

The government has not clarified whether Singh's proposed identification formula will be extended to all welfare schemes

However, voter IDs have so far not been used exclusively as the identifying or verifying document for welfare delivery across the country. Beginning with Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, 10 States have also introduced 'family cards', recognising that many schemes are targeted not at individuals but at families or households.

**What are the concerns about using voter IDs for accessing welfare programmes?**

Opposition parties have linked this announcement to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, in which more than 13 crore electors have been removed. They argue that disenfranchisement will now be coupled with exclusion from welfare programmes.

In West Bengal, Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari has already moved to restrict beneficiary lists to those whose names feature on the electoral rolls. On June 4, the West Bengal government issued an order through its Food and Supplies Department linking State-run welfare schemes, including Public Distribution System ration cards, to electoral rolls.

Nikhil Dey, founder member of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), said the move is questionable in its intent. He says, "The government had introduced Aadhaar as the single solution to plug leaks from the public exchequer. Now it is saying Aadhaar is no longer enough. It can be argued that Aadhaar serves as a financial address, since it is linked to beneficiaries' bank accounts. What purpose does the voter ID serve?"

Mr. Dey argued that the measure would heighten insecurity and inject panic, given the mass disenfranchisement associated with the SIR process. He pointed out that 22 lakh people in West Bengal had appealed against the Election Commission of India's decision to remove them from the electoral rolls and of them, 21 lakh are still awaiting a decision from judicial tribunals, which are expected to take decades to clear the backlog. Outside West Bengal too, there are numerous examples of alleged illegal exclusion.

"Now exclusion will operate at two levels: first by taking away people's right to vote and then by taking away their access to welfare," he said.

**What could the proposed change mean for welfare delivery?**

In a post on X on November 6, following a push back from Opposition parties and to counter Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi's remarks on the issue, Mr. Singh asserted that no rightful beneficiary would be left out. He also indicated that the voter ID would be used along with Aadhaar, a distinction he had not made earlier.

The Panchayati Raj Ministry itself does not administer welfare schemes aimed directly at individual beneficiaries. Instead, it works through gram sabhas. The Sixteenth Finance Commission, for the award period 2026-31, has recommended grants totalling ₹4,35,236 crore for 2.55 lakh panchayats and traditional local bodies. The distribution of these funds falls directly within the Ministry's ambit.

As the arm of government that deals with gram sabhas, the Ministry indirectly influences the delivery of a range of rural welfare programmes. So far, however, the government has not clarified whether Mr. Singh's proposed identification formula will be extended to all welfare schemes.

Mr. Dey cautioned that the proposal should not be dismissed as an empty threat, citing the precedent set in West Bengal.

# What are the changes to the Agnipath scheme?

What has changed for Agniveers? Why has the government introduced these changes? What did the assessment of the Agnipath scheme after four years of implementation show? How will the changes benefit Agniveers and the armed forces?

**Saurabh Trivedi**

**The story so far:**

On November 4, in a major overhaul of the Agnipath scheme, the government announced that Agniveers set to exit the military at the end of their four-year tenure will be given an additional two-year extension. This will be followed by an opportunity to join the armed forces as regular soldiers. The decision was approved by the Cabinet on the recommendations of the three services.

Under the revised arrangement, the existing provision of enrolling 25% of Agniveers into the regular cadre after completion of their initial four-year tenure will remain unchanged. However, the remaining 75%, who were earlier required to leave the service after four years, will now be offered a second engagement period of two years. At the end of this extended tenure, they will also be considered for regular enrolment, subject to their willingness and meeting the objective selection criteria.

The government has also approved higher remuneration and an enhanced Seva Nidhi package (a one-time lump-sum financial benefit paid to Agniveers upon completing their four-year engagement) for those opting for the second engagement period. However, upon regular enrolment, they will be placed one rank below those inducted directly into the regular cadre after the initial four-year tenure under the 25% retention provision.

Based on evaluations and feedback from the services, the armed forces recommended an additional two-year engagement period for the 75% of Agniveers who were not selected for regular enrolment



A newly recruited Agniveer embraces family members during a passing-out parade, in Patna, on May 31, 2026. PTI

### Why has the government changed the scheme?

The decision follows a comprehensive assessment of the Agnipath scheme after four years of implementation. Introduced on June 14, 2022, the scheme envisaged recruitment of young personnel for a four-year tenure, with up to 25% of each batch being retained in the regular cadre. The remaining 75% were to return to civilian life with a financial package and other benefits.

As the first batch of 18,000 Agniveers approaches the completion of its four-year tenure, the armed forces have undertaken a detailed evaluation of their performance, skills, physical fitness, motivation, and operational contribution. The assessment is aimed at determining whether the existing four-year engagement model adequately serves the organisational requirements of the three services and the aspirations of the recruits.

Chief of Defence Staff General N.S. Raja Subramani said the scheme was never intended to remain unchanged and that the armed forces had committed to periodically reviewing its implementation and the performance of Agniveers. According to him, a centralised database was maintained across the Army, Navy, and Air Force to track the performance of Agniveers, with annual assessments conducted against objective parameters. Based on these evaluations and feedback from the services, the armed forces recommended an additional two-year engagement period for the 75% who were not selected for regular enrolment. The recommendation, he said, had been under discussion for the past three or four months before receiving Cabinet approval.

### What did the four-year assessment reveal?

The government's assessment identified several positive outcomes of the scheme, including recruitment from a wider range of districts across the country and a more standardised and transparent selection process. The armed forces reported high levels of physical fitness, morale, motivation, competitive spirit, and discipline among Agniveers. The technological adaptability, skill development, and educational qualifications of Agniveers were cited as important gains. Another significant outcome was the opening up of various branches of the armed forces to women.

The decision to provide an additional engagement period was aimed at making better use of this trained manpower. General Raja Subramani said the fact that an Agniveer was not selected among the initial 25% did not mean that the individual was unsuitable or had performed poorly. The selection was relative, based on the requirements and available vacancies in the organisation. The additional two years would allow these personnel to gain further experience, improve their skills, and demonstrate their suitability for regular service.

### What does the second engagement period mean for Agniveers?

It provides a longer service opportunity to those who would otherwise have exited after four years. At the end of the six-year engagement, they will be considered for enrolment as regular soldiers provided they are willing and meet the criteria. Because all willing Agniveers now have a pathway to stay in the armed forces rather than exiting prematurely, they are no longer eligible for post-service reservation benefits in the Central Armed Police Forces or State Police forces that were previously announced.

### What changes for the armed forces?

For the armed forces, the arrangement is expected to help retain personnel who have already undergone military training and acquired operational experience. It could also reduce the need for them to repeatedly invest in training new recruits to meet certain organisational requirements.

GS 3: Internal Security

Key Pointers:

- What are the major changes introduced in the Agnipath scheme?
- What happens to Agniveers selected for regular enrolment after six years?
- What happens to post-service reservation benefits?

# How NHAI plans to use Bihar's river silt to construct highways, tame floods in the state

**Dheeraj Mishra**
*New Delhi, November 7*

THE MINISTRY of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and the Bihar government have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the scientific desilting of water bodies and the utilisation of suitable excavated silt in national highway projects.

It aims to address two key challenges of Bihar and the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI). Rivers like Ganga, Kosi, Gandak, Falgu and Bagmati flow through different regions of Bihar. However, heavy silt accumulation remains a persistent challenge for the state, causing flooding and complicating water management every year.

The NHAI also faces challenges in acquiring key construction materials such as soil and ballast for its highway and expressway projects in the state under Vision 2047, causing inordinate delays. Transporting these raw materials from distant sites consumes time and fuel while increasing project costs.

The new initiative aims to help NHAI contractors source silt free of cost from nearby rivers for highway construction while improving the rivers' carrying capacity through desilting to prevent flooding.

## *Scope of the initiative*

The NHAI is currently executing 39 projects spanning 1,561 km at Rs 58,340 crore in Bihar. Additionally, it has proposed 11 new projects in the state, covering 1,982 km for an estimated outlay of Rs 1,85,200 crore. These projects will require a huge amount of soil or silt for earthwork, embankments and the subgrade.

Officials said that under the MoU, 393 lakh cubic metres of free silt will be utilised across ongoing highway projects in Bihar, with a plan to utilise approximately 1,050 lakh cubic metres of silt in future projects.

NHAI will spearhead the dredging operation using advanced scientific methods. "The excavated silt will be repurposed as a primary material for building the state's expanding National Highway network. Since the silt will be free of cost, it will also help in lowering the construction cost. The scientific desilting will improve water-carrying capacity of Bihar's rivers and reduce seasonal flood risks," an NHAI official told *The Indian Express*.

Currently, contractors procure different waste materials such as fly ash, plastic waste, and construction debris to build structures like embankments and pavements in different national highway projects, subject to their availability, suitability and feasibility of use.

## *Buldhana pattern*

The MoU draws on the methodology adopted in Maharashtra's Buldhana district, which later became known as the 'Buldhana Pattern'. Under this model, soil excavated from ponds and rivers was used in highway construction.

According to Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, the initiative in Maharashtra utilised 225 lakh cubic metres of soil in National Highway construction. The resulting widening and deepening of water bodies increased their water storage capacity by 22,500 thousand cubic metres, at no cost to the state government.

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GS 3: Economy

Key Pointers:

- How will river silt be used in highway construction?
- How can desilting help in flood management?
- What is the significance of the initiative for infrastructure development?
- What is the Buldhana Pattern and how is it relevant?

AMRITA IAS

# Why are the U.S. midterm elections significant?

What do the results tell us about American voters' attitudes towards President Donald Trump? What do they mean for Democrats and Republicans? What lies ahead for Democrats? Why are these results so important for the rest of the world?

Narayan Lakshman

**The story so far:**

Midterm elections in the U.S. earlier this week ended President Donald Trump's trifecta control of the federal government, as Democrats swept the polls and the Republican Party lost control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The election result was particularly significant for Democrats as they won historically "red States" such as Texas, South Carolina, North Carolina, Iowa, Kansas, Ohio, and Maine, besides holding onto their traditional strongholds, such as Colorado, Oregon, and Illinois, and retaining control of key swing States, such as Georgia, Michigan, and Virginia.

Mr. Trump will now have to work with Democratic lawmakers on major policy issues including the economy and cost of living, immigration enforcement, and foreign policy, particularly the war in Iran and its impact on global oil prices.

Meanwhile, a Democrat-controlled Congress will challenge the policies and actions of the Trump White House, likely putting the brakes on numerous initiatives of the President over the remaining two years of his term.

## How does this election boost the Democratic Party?

The loss of both houses of Congress implies that Mr. Trump will now have to strike deals with Democratic lawmakers to get his policies passed. Under the U.S. constitutional division of powers, Congress controls appropriations, has the authority to introduce and pass legislation, and can hold hearings and conduct investigations, including into federal agencies and private corporations that affect consumers. It also has the power to approve or reject nominations made by the President to government offices.

On the flip side for the Democrats, the President still holds the right to veto bills passed by Congress, and this limits the extent to which Congress can rewrite laws and regulations in areas such as immigration enforcement

On the flip side for the Democrats, the President still holds the right to veto bills passed by Congress, and this limits the extent to which Congress can rewrite laws and regulations in areas such as immigration enforcement made by the President still holds the right to veto bills passed by Congress, and this limits the extent to which Congress can rewrite laws and regulations in areas such as immigration enforcement. Despite their strong showing in the midterm elections, Democrats lack the two-thirds supermajority required to override the presidential veto.

The so-called "bluenami" also saw some new records set at the State level: Democrats won a Senate seat in Texas for the first time since 1988 after James Talarico ousted Republican Ken Paxton; in Texas, Gina Hinojosa is poised to become the first Latina Governor, defeating the high-profile, Trump-backed Republican incumbent, Greg Abbott; Democrat Abdul El-Sayed became the first Muslim Senator in history when he swept the Michigan race; Chris Pappas of New Hampshire made news as the first openly gay person to be elected to the Senate; and Senate Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries will soon be the first African American Speaker of the House.

## What is the Republican position after the loss?

On the Republican side, the election results might have come as a shock even though Mr. Trump's job approval ratings were at an all-time low for his second term before the votes came in. On the one hand, Mr. Trump fumed that it was because his name was not on the ballot that the Republican cause collapsed, yet, ironically, for many voters the midterm election was in fact a referendum on the second Trump administration's performance in office.

If the President intends to do more than serve as a lame duck, by preserving his policy agenda in the hope of leaving a legacy of his political values after two more years of governance, he will have to build bridges and negotiate and compromise with Democrats in Congress. The signs are not good as he has, in the days following the election, appointed hardliner aide Stephen Miller as his Chief of Staff, a move that might portend a tightening White House posture on the Iran war and immigration issues.

Simultaneously, fractures may be appearing in the Republican firmament as Vice President J.D. Vance said on social media that the primary reason for the election loss was the Iran war.

## Which issues has the election foregrounded?

Most analyses of the election outcome suggest that voters vented their frustration at soaring oil prices, specifically the price of gas at the pump. While Brent crude traded at around $70 per barrel prior to military action against Iran in late February 2026, it spiked past $110-$118 over the spring and summer of this year, only dropping below $100 after the midterm election results were in. Making matters worse, Mr. Trump's tariff regime also appears to have led to a setback to American households, whose costs rose sharply by $1,700 to $2,500 per year, as per the Joint Economic Committee of Congress.

Similarly, the widespread raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and deportation of ever-greater numbers of undocumented migrants led to protests across States and galvanised progressives around immigration reform. Matters reached a flash point when U.S. citizens Alex Pretti and Renée Good were killed by ICE agents on the streets of Minneapolis, Minnesota in January, and especially after Mr. Trump labelled Pretti an "insurrectionist" and "agitator".

## What is the way forward for Democrats?

Democrats are celebrating their victory and planning a series of investigations into, and interrogations of, the functioning of the Trump White House, to introduce accountability into the functioning of a runaway Trump machine. Yet they might consider that overreaching – for example, by initiating fresh impeachment proceedings against Mr. Trump – may score political points but yield little in the way of more inclusive, equitable, and democratically accountable policies for the people. A potentially more rewarding way forward for congressional Democrats may be to engage with the White House to address the pain points arising from the policies of the past two years. These include health insurance policies in some States that have moved away from the principles of the Affordable Care Act, and the internecine trade war with neighbouring countries, in which tariffs have been weaponised.

## How could the post-election scenario impact world politics?

The Democrat-controlled Congress could now set clear limits on U.S. involvement in conflicts abroad by curtailing military appropriations and refusing to certify war efforts that the White House may unilaterally embark upon, such as reckless nuclear adventurism with Iran. Similarly, through greater oversight of federal government agencies such as the Justice Department and ICE, the Senate and House could put pressure on enforcement policies involving the unlawful targeting of minorities, the inhumane treatment of migrants and asylum seekers, and the persecution of religious minorities seeking entry into the country.

In February 2026, despite being packed by Mr. Trump and his Republican predecessors with conservative justices, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that Mr. Trump lacks the authority to impose tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. Now, a "blue" Congress may not be able directly impact tariffs as it does not have the supermajority required to override the presidential veto, yet it could exert pressure on the White House and force compromise on this matter by agreeing to other avenues of cooperation that the administration values.




Democratic candidate Chris Pappas, seen with his partner Vann Bentley, celebrates his election to the Senate, in New Hampshire. REUTERS

GS 2: International Relations