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Sexual abuse rampant in Malayalam film industry, says Hema Committee report

S.R. Praveen

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The K. Hema Committee report on the issues faced by women in the Malayalam film industry has revealed horrid tales of sexual exploitation, illegal bans, discrimination, drug and alcohol abuse, wage disparity and in some cases, inhuman working conditions.

The 235-page report, released on Monday without the names of the witnesses and the accused, five years after it was submitted to the Kerala government, notes that the industry is under the clutches of certain male producers, directors and actors, whom a prominent actor referred to as "mafia", as they could ban anyone.

The committee confirms the rumoured existence of the practice of "casting couch" in the industry.

Contrary to the other fields, sexual harassment starts even before a woman starts working in the film industry as demands for sexual favours are made by very well-known people in lieu of roles.

Some of the witnesses provided video and audio clips and screenshots of WhatsApp messages as proof of "casting couch" attempts.

Many of the women find it unsafe to stay alone in the accommodation arranged for them during shooting, as men in inebriated condition habitually knock on their doors. In an attempt to persuade newcomers, some people in the industry actively create the impression that successful women have made it through "compromises".

Horror script

The panel was formed on a demand by the Women in Cinema Collective to study the issues faced by women in the industry

Major findings in the panel report:

- The industry is in the clutches of certain male producers, directors and actors
- 'Casting couch' is a reality; even famous people in the industry ask for sexual favours in lieu of roles
- Many don't reveal things fearing adverse consequences



Many who were examined by the committee were afraid to reveal things which they experienced fearing adverse consequences. The fear is well-founded. The committee notes that it is concerned about their safety and that of their family. They also rarely approach the police fearing the consequences from powerful forces in the industry as well as cyberattacks due to their public profiles. When the Hema Committee formed a WhatsApp group with dancers in the industry, most of them left the group one after the other, after hearing the committee's intention. Similar was the case with junior artists, one of the most exploited lot in the industry.

'Power group'

Producers are warned by the industry's "power group" not to cast actors who fall out of favour with them. Even the release of movies can be prevented as the Film Chamber of Commerce has to issue NOC. Production controllers have a major role in getting people banned from cinema. Members of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC), following whose demand the Hema Committee was set up, were banned from cinema.

The report highlights the lack of changing rooms or toilets in the set leading to urinary infection for many women. The committee also notes that some of the men, including a prominent actor who deposed before it, said that the issue need not be taken seriously.

Junior artists are in some cases "treated worse than slaves" with work extending up to 19 hours. Intermediaries misappropriate a good part of their payments, which are not given on time. In the case of a big-budget movie, a 70-year-old woman who sustained serious burns in an accident in the set was not provided any money for medical treatment. The junior artists are not admitted into any film organisations.

The Hema Committee notes that an Internal Complaints Committee can be ineffective as powerful persons can threaten or coerce the ICC members to deal with the complaint in a manner they demand. The committee recommends the government enact an appropriate statute and constitute a Tribunal to address all these issues.

MORE REPORTS
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'Hema panel report warrants special probe' (20 August)

Women face sexual harassment even from well-known people in Malayalam cinema industry and some witnesses had 'produced video and audio clips' to prove sexual favours are sought, the report says; legal experts say the Kerala government should investigate the allegations

- The K. Hema Committee report highlighted issues faced by women in Malayalam cinema, particularly regarding sexual harassment.
- The report did not record the names or details of witnesses, but confirmed that sexual harassment exists in the industry, even by well-known figures.
- Some witnesses provided evidence, such as video and audio clips, and WhatsApp messages, showing demands for sexual favours in exchange for opportunities in cinema.
- Legal experts believe that while the report alone cannot lead to an FIR (First Information Report), the government must decide to accept or reject it.
- If the government accepts the report, an investigation agency should be instructed to register an FIR and investigate the criminal acts mentioned.
- The Kerala government has previously ordered a CBI investigation based on another report (Justice Sivarajan Commission) after accepting its findings.

'Constitute SIT'

- Asaf Ali, former Director-General of Prosecution, stated that it is the duty of the State government and the Police Chief to form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate the allegations of sexual harassment, which is a serious criminal offense.
- The report confirmed instances of sexual harassment, emphasizing the seriousness of the issue.
- Senior lawyer B.G. Harindranath, also a former State Law Secretary, noted that the government should form an opinion on the report and investigate the alleged criminal acts, including sexual exploitation.
- The Supreme Court has previously ruled that an FIR cannot be registered solely based on a commission's report.
- However, the government can order a criminal investigation based on the testimonies made before the panel and can also work towards introducing new legislation.
- A judicial officer mentioned that the police can still register an FIR and investigate the alleged crimes. Successful prosecution will depend on the evidence and the willingness of the women to stand by their statements.

Polygraph Test:

What is a Polygraph Test?

- It is also referred to as a "lie detector" test, a polygraph is a device that measures and records several physiological indicators such as blood pressure, pulse, respiration, and skin conductivity while a person is asked and answers a series of questions.
- The underlying assumption is that physiological responses can indicate deception.

How Does it Work?

1. **Preparation:** The test begins with a pre-test interview to gather information about the individual.
2. **Instrumentation:** Sensors are attached to the subject to measure physiological responses.
3. **Questioning:** A series of questions are asked, including control questions (irrelevant to the investigation) and relevant questions (pertaining to the matter under investigation).
4. **Analysis:** The polygraph examiner analyzes the recorded physiological data to determine if there are significant differences in responses to control and relevant questions.

Limitations and Controversies

- **Reliability:** While polygraph tests are used in many contexts, their accuracy is a subject of debate. Factors such as countermeasures, individual physiological variations, and the skill of the examiner can influence results.
- **Admissibility:** The admissibility of polygraph evidence in court varies widely. Some jurisdictions consider it unreliable and inadmissible, while others allow it under specific conditions.
- **Ethical Concerns:** There are ethical concerns about the use of polygraph tests, particularly in coercive environments.

While polygraph tests are widely used, their reliability and admissibility as evidence in courts vary across jurisdictions. It's essential to consult legal counsel for specific advice.

In SC, Centre defends 2019 law criminalising triple talaq (20 August)

- The Union government has defended the law criminalizing triple talaq, arguing it was a practice that allowed husbands to abandon their wives and was not lawful or Islamic.
- The government referenced a 2017 Supreme Court ruling that found triple talaq to be arbitrary and unjust.
- The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, makes triple talaq a criminal offense with up to three years of imprisonment.
- The government argues that triple talaq was not just a private issue but a public wrong that affects women's rights and the institution of marriage.
- They claim that the definition of crime evolves with social changes and that marriage, as a social institution, needs protection through criminal law, citing examples like the Domestic Violence Act and Dowry Prohibition Act.
- The government believes criminal sanctions are necessary because the practice of triple talaq continued even after the Supreme Court declared it void in 2017.
- They argue that without the 2019 Act, the prohibition on triple talaq would be ignored.
- The law is challenged by organizations like Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, which argue that it unfairly targets Muslims while other people who desert their spouses are not punished.
- These organizations also believe the law makes triple talaq a more serious offense compared to other crimes like rioting, kidnapping, and death by negligence.

In SC, Centre defends 2019 law criminalising triple talaq

GS Paper I: Society

The Union government in the Supreme Court has justified the law criminalising triple talaq, saying the “practice legitimised and institutionalised abandonment of wives by their husbands” and was “neither Islamic nor legal”.

A 433-page counter affidavit filed by the Centre in the court reminded the court of its own Constitution Bench judgment of 2017 in the *Shayara Bano* case, which had held triple or instant talaq (*talaq-e-biddat*) manifestly arbitrary.

The government said all it did with the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 was make a practice, called “manifestly arbitrary” by the Supreme Court, a non-bailable criminal offence punishable with imprisonment for three years. “Triple talaq was not a private wrong done to one woman. It was a public wrong which militates against the rights of women and the social institution of marriage itself,” it said.

The Centre said the concept of crime keeps on



The practice was made a crime as it legitimised abandonment of Muslim women, says Centre.

changing with changes in the political, economic and social set-up of the country. The 2019 law seeks to criminalise a practice which had neither legal nor religious sanction and is discriminatory towards married Muslim women.

“There is no basis to the claim that marriages come under the personal law, and are exempt from the application of the general criminal law... Marriages are a social institution which the state has a special interest in protecting. It is beyond doubt that the state can protect the stability of marriages by resort to the devices of criminal law. Examples are Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961,” the Centre argued.

The government said criminal sanction was necessary though the act of pronouncing triple talaq by a man to his wife was declared void by the Supreme Court in 2017. “But if the sanctions of the 2019 Act do not exist, the prohibition on criminal conduct [triple talaq] itself would become a dead letter to be freely disregarded,” the affidavit reasoned.

The government said the 2019 Act was required as Muslim men continued the practice of triple talaq despite the 2017 verdict.

The counter by the government was in response to petitions filed in the top court by organisations, including Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, which have challenged the 2019 Act. They argued that while a Muslim would suffer imprisonment for pronouncing triple talaq, a man from another faith could desert his wife without fearing punishment. Desertion was at best a ground for divorce. The organisation said the law has made the declaration of triple talaq an offence graver than other crimes like rioting, kidnapping, and death by negligence.

Reforms panel mooted lateral entry only of specialists: Moily

As Opposition continues to criticise the recruitment plan, Congress leader who chaired the second Administrative Reforms Commission says its lateral-entry suggestion was not meant to bypass the usual government appointment process

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Former Union Law Minister M. Veerappa Moily on Monday acknowledged that the second Administrative Reforms Commission chaired by him in 2005 did recommend lateral entry into government service to perform specialised roles that were not “easily available within traditional civil services”.

“It [lateral entry] was meant to be a value addition to the government’s appointment process. We had suggested a very transparent process for lateral induction,” Mr. Moily told *The Hindu* over phone from Bengaluru.

“The lateral-entry suggestion was not meant to



It was meant to be a value addition to the govt.’s appointment process. We had suggested a very transparent process for lateral induction

M. VEERAPPA MOILY
Congress leader

bypass the usual government recruitment process or for any political reason. We didn’t deal with the reservation aspect at all,” the Congress leader said.

Mr. Moily’s comment comes after the Narendra Modi government accused the Congress of “hypocrisy” following the allegation by Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, that lateral entry was “openly snatching

away” reservations from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. The Union Public Service Commission on Saturday notified the recruitment of 45 specialists, including those from the private sector, as Joint Secretaries, Directors and Deputy Secretaries in government departments.

Continuing his criticism, Mr. Gandhi, in a post on X, said, “Lateral entry is

an attack on Dalits, OBCs and Adivasis. BJP’s distorted version of Ram Rajya seeks to destroy the Constitution and snatch reservations from Bahujans.”

In an X post, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge addressed the BJP’s charge that lateral entry was introduced by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government.

“We had brought lateral entry to appoint select specialists and experts in some sector-specific posts as per their utility. But the Modi government has made provision of lateral entry not to appoint experts in the government but to snatch the rights of Dalits, tribals and Backward Classes,” he said.

Calling the lateral-entry policy “an attack on the

Constitution”, Mr. Kharge said the BJP had eliminated 5.1 lakh posts in the past 10 years by selling the shares of the government in public sector undertakings, instead of filling vacancies.

He said casual and contractual recruitment had increased by 91% and posts for Scheduled communities and Other Backward Classes decreased by 1.3 lakh by 2022-23. “The SC, ST, OBC, EWS posts will now be given to people of the RSS,” he alleged.

Communist Party of India general secretary D. Raja told *The Hindu* that after lifting the ban on government employees from participating in RSS activities, lateral entry into civil services was “the next step to fill higher administration with RSS men”.

Reforms panel mooted lateral entry only of specialists: Moily (20 August)

As Opposition continues to criticise the recruitment plan, Congress leader who chaired the second Administrative Reforms Commission says its lateral-entry suggestion was not meant to bypass the usual government appointment process

- Former Union Law Minister M. Veerappa Moily confirmed that the second Administrative Reforms Commission, which he chaired in 2005, recommended lateral entry into government service for specialized roles not available within traditional civil services.
- Moily said lateral entry was intended to enhance the government's appointment process and was meant to be transparent.
- He clarified that the suggestion was not meant to bypass regular recruitment processes or for political reasons and did not address reservation issues.
- Moily’s comments came after Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition, accused the Modi government of hypocrisy and claimed that lateral entry was undermining reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.
- The Union Public Service Commission recently announced the recruitment of 45 specialists, including private sector professionals, for senior government positions.
- Gandhi criticized lateral entry on X (formerly Twitter), claiming it threatens reservations for marginalized groups and attacks the principles of the Constitution.
- Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge responded to BJP’s claim that lateral entry was introduced by the Congress-led UPA government.
- Kharge stated that Congress used lateral entry to appoint specialists for specific roles based on their expertise.
- He accused the Modi government of using lateral entry to undermine the rights of Dalits, tribals, and Backward Classes, not to bring in experts.
- Kharge criticized the BJP’s policy, calling it an “attack on the Constitution,” and claimed that the government eliminated 5.1 lakh posts by selling shares in public sector companies instead of filling vacancies.
- He noted that casual and contractual recruitment increased by 91%, while posts for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) decreased by 1.3 lakh by 2022-23.
- Kharge alleged that these posts are being given to people affiliated with the RSS.
- Communist Party of India general secretary D. Raja said that allowing government employees to join RSS activities and the lateral entry policy are steps to fill higher administration positions with RSS members.

Girish Sahni, former Director-General of CSIR, passes away

PCS

CHENNAI

Former Director-General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Girish Sahni, passed away on Monday at the age of 68.

Multiple sources told *The Hindu* that he died of a heart attack.

The CSIR in a post on X said it “mourns the sudden loss”.

Dr. Sahni joined the Institute of Microbial Technology (IMTECH), a CSIR laboratory in Chandigarh, in 1991. He became its Director in 2005, a position he held until he was appointed the CSIR Director-General in 2015. He continued to be associated with IMTECH, sources said.

As a scientist, Dr. Sahni was known for his research on the formation and alleviation of blood clots and ‘clot buster’ drugs. Among



Girish Sahni

others, he developed clot-specific streptokinase, a drug whose licensing rights were sold to Nostrum Pharmaceuticals in New Jersey, the U.S., in 2006 for \$5 million.

He also led teams that developed the country’s first indigenous clot-buster drug later, marketed under the name ‘STPase’ by Cadila Pharmaceuticals Ltd., and another drug, recombinant streptokinase, subsequently marketed under the names ‘Klotbuster’ and ‘LupiFlo’.

Girish Sahni, former Director-General of CSIR, passes away (20 August)

- Former Director-General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Girish Sahni, passed away on Monday at age 68 due to a heart attack.
- CSIR expressed its sorrow over his sudden death in a post on X.
- Dr. Sahni joined the Institute of Microbial Technology (IMTECH) in Chandigarh in 1991 and became its Director in 2005.
- He was appointed CSIR Director-General in 2015 while continuing his association with IMTECH.
- He was known for his research on blood clots and clot-busting drugs.
- Developed clot-specific streptokinase, which was licensed to Nostrum Pharmaceuticals in the U.S. for \$5 million in 2006.
- Led teams that created India’s first indigenous clot-buster drug, ‘STPase,’ marketed by Cadila Pharmaceuticals.
- Also developed recombinant streptokinase, marketed as ‘Klotbuster’ and ‘LupiFlo.’

Clean Ganga mission head flags slow pace of projects

GS Paper III: Environment

The head of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), the Centre’s marquee project to clean the Ganga and its tributaries, in a recent meeting, expressed concern over the tardiness of river-cleaning projects being executed in various States under the mission.

A variety of projects have been commissioned since 2015 as part of the Namami Gange mission, the costliest and the most critical in the development of sewage-management infrastructure. In all, nearly ₹37,550 crore has been sanctioned under various Namami Gange projects but only ₹18,033 crore has been spent as of June 2024, records show. Sewage infrastructure projects alone make up ₹15,039 crore of the latter.

“DG, NMCG (Rajeev Mit-



This mission is the most critical project in the development of sewage-management infrastructure. RANJEET KUMAR

tal) observed that the pace of expenditure so far is extremely slow,” say records of a meeting conducted on July 12 to review projects. He asked authorities in Uttar Pradesh, which has the bulk of the projects, why expenditure was low. In response, the representative said that ₹15.16 crore have been spent on six projects in Jaunpur, Kasganj, Varanasi, Bareilly, Salori, and Agra. He said funds

that have come in April, or in the beginning of the quarter, were received in mid-June. “Payment amounting to ₹25 crore are under process,” the official said.

In response to a request for clarification from *The Hindu*, the NMCG said that the observation was made in context of all States and not specifically for Uttar Pradesh. The expenditure in the first quarter was normally “sluggish” and tended to accelerate in subsequent quarters. “The focus of the review by DG (NMCG) was to ensure that the pace of expenditure picks up in the remaining quarters of the financial year,” the note added.

Normally, the NMCG executed 15 or 16 projects in a year and has completed 112 projects in the past seven years, therefore, four projects in a quarter are a normal trend, the response added.

Clean Ganga mission head flags slow pace of projects (20 August)

- The head of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) expressed concern about slow progress in river-cleaning projects.
- Since 2015, the Namami Gange mission has been the main project for cleaning the Ganga, with nearly ₹37,550 crore sanctioned for various projects.
- As of June 2024, only ₹18,033 crore has been spent, with ₹15,039 crore allocated specifically for sewage infrastructure.
- The pace of spending has been slow, according to a review meeting held on July 12.
- The Director General of NMCG, Rajeev Mittal, questioned authorities in Uttar Pradesh about the low expenditure.
- Uttar Pradesh officials reported that ₹15.16 crore has been spent on projects in several cities, and payments amounting to ₹25 crore are in process.
- NMCG clarified that the slow spending was noted for all states, not just Uttar Pradesh, and that spending usually accelerates in later quarters of the financial year.
- NMCG typically executes 15 to 16 projects annually and has completed 112 projects in seven years, so completing four projects per quarter is considered normal.

National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)

The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) is a flagship initiative of the Indian government aimed at conserving and rejuvenating the River Ganga. Established in 2011 under the Societies Registration Act, it operates under the Department of Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation, Ministry of Jal Shakti.

Objectives

The primary goal of NMCG is to reduce pollution and ensure the rejuvenation of the Ganga river. This is achieved through:

- Promoting inter-sectoral coordination for comprehensive planning and management
- Maintaining minimum ecological flows in the river
- Ensuring water quality and environmentally sustainable development

Key Activities

NMCG undertakes a wide range of activities to accomplish its objectives, primarily under the umbrella of the Namami Gange Programme.

- **Sewage Treatment:** Construction and upgrading of sewage treatment plants (STPs) to prevent untreated sewage from entering the river.
- **Ghat Rejuvenation:** Development and beautification of ghats (river steps) to improve their aesthetics and accessibility.
- **Afforestation:** Planting trees along the riverbanks to enhance biodiversity and prevent soil erosion.
- **Industrial Effluent Monitoring:** Strict monitoring and regulation of industrial effluents to prevent pollution.
- **Public Awareness:** Creating awareness about the importance of Ganga river conservation through various campaigns and programs.
- **River Front Development:** Developing riverfronts as public spaces for recreation and tourism.
- **Scientific and Technological Interventions:** Utilizing advanced technologies for pollution monitoring, water quality improvement, and waste management.

Namami Gange Programme

- The Namami Gange Programme is the flagship initiative implemented by NMCG.
- It has a budget of Rs. 20,000 crore and focuses on the twin objectives of pollution abatement and river conservation.

A change in India's power export rules

When did India's first transnational power project that supplies all the power generated to another nation come into being? Why did the Bangladesh Power Development Board request a revision of the power purchase agreement? What does the latest amendment mandate?

GS Paper II:
External Sector

Saptaparno Ghosh

The story so far:

On August 14, *Reuters* reported on the introduction of an amendment to India's power export rules. Purported to hedge against political risks in Bangladesh, it allows Indian power exporters to reroute their output to Indian grids if there is a delay in payments from partner countries. Adani Power's plant in Godda (Jharkhand) supplies its entire generated power to Bangladesh. In a statement, a spokesperson of Adani Power emphasised their commitment of supplying electricity to Bangladesh, stating that the amendment does not affect its existing contract.

What is the Godda project?

The Jharkhand-subsiary of Adani Power supplies 1,496-megawatt net capacity power to Bangladesh from the ultra super-critical thermal power plant in Godda. This is facilitated under a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) entered with the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) in November 2017 for a period of 25 years.

The Godda plant is India's first transnational power project that supplies all the power generated to another nation. In a statement on July 15 last year, Adani Power stated that the electricity supplied from Godda will have a positive impact on the neighbour's power situation by replacing costly power generated using liquid fuel. It elaborated that the transition would help reduce the average cost of power purchased. As per the Bangladesh Power Development Board's (BPDB) annual report for 2022-23, the total installed generation capacity of the country was 24,911 MW in June 2023. Of this, 2,656 MW was imported from India (more than 10% of overall) with the Godda plant contributing 1,496 MW (about 6% of overall). On the policy prerogative for



GETTY IMAGES

power export, India's Ministry of Power illustrating the guidelines for power export in 2016 said the exchange of electricity across South Asia would promote "economic growth and improve the quality of life for all the nations".

Why was the project criticised?

The criticisms emanated from the use of coal imported from the Carmichael mine in Australia into India to produce power for Bangladesh. Thermal plants utilise coal as a primary fuel. The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), analysing the PPA back in April 2018 held that it allowed Adani Power to "push the high cost of importing and transporting coal into India, plus the cost of transmitting the electricity across the border onto Bangladesh." *United News of Bangladesh* had reported in February 2023 about the BPDB writing to Adani Power for a revision in the PPA. The

publication, quoting an official with anonymity, reported that in BPDB's view the coal price quoted at \$400/MT was "excessive", adding, "it should be less than \$250/MT, which is what we are paying for the imported coal at our other thermal plants". The other concern, as stated in the Bangladesh-based *Daily Star* in February last year, entailed the high capacity and maintenance charges regardless of whether it generates any electricity. The reportage held it was "very high" by industry standards.

Why does Bangladesh need imports?

The answer is underutilisation. In a separate context, Soumya Bhowmick, public policy analyst and economist, explained to *The Hindu* that Bangladesh has made notable progress in expanding electricity access, especially in rural areas. However, notwithstanding the increase in electricity generation, India's

South Asian neighbour continues to experience fuel and gas supply constraints, thus, contributing to the underutilisation of its power plants. In fact, in July 2022, Bangladesh had sought support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to cushion itself against a financial shock originating from volatile energy prices after Russian actions in Ukraine. This was after the country experienced blackouts, sometimes up to 13 hours a day, as utilities struggled to source enough diesel and gas to meet demand, *AFP* had reported.

Separately, Hasan Mehedi, Bangladesh-based activist specialising in matters relating to power and climate change, also pointed to "serious levels of overcapacity in Bangladesh". Quoting official figures, Mr. Mehedi pointed to total power generation capacity as on June 30 this year being 28,098 MW, of which the highest power generation was scaled at 16,477 MW – an unutilised idle capacity of about 11,621 MW.

Where do we stand now?

Mr. Bhowmick states that the regulatory change endows greater flexibility to power exporters by permitting them access to the domestic market and reducing the dependency on external markets. He explains that it mitigates risks associated with instability or economic challenges in neighbouring countries.

Further, Mr. Mehedi explained to *The Hindu* that delay in payments have been a standard phenomenon. "There is an entire internal vetting mechanism that follows after a bill is presented to the BPDB," he stated, elaborating, "The BPDB would then evaluate the prices of coal in the open market and that of other expenditures as stated in the bill. It would then send it back to the company for any corrections as necessitated."

On the potential impact to Bangladesh from the latest development, Mr. Mehedi said, "Even if the supply is stopped totally, the impact would last for 2 to 3 days because of the sudden nature, but not in the long-term."

THE GIST

On August 14, *Reuters* reported on the introduction of an amendment to India's power export rules. Purported to hedge against political risks in Bangladesh, it allows Indian power exporters to reroute their output to Indian grids if there is a delay in payments from partner countries.

The Jharkhand-subsiary of Adani Power supplies 1,496-megawatt net capacity power to Bangladesh from the ultra super-critical thermal power plant in Godda.

The criticisms emanated from the use of coal imported from the Carmichael mine in Australia into India to produce power for Bangladesh.

A change in India's power export rules (20 August)

When did India's first transnational power project that supplies all the power generated to another nation come into being? Why did the Bangladesh Power Development Board request a revision of the power purchase agreement? What does the latest amendment mandate?

- On August 14, Reuters reported a new amendment to India's power export rules.
- This amendment allows Indian power exporters to redirect their power to Indian grids if there are payment delays from partner countries.
- Adani Power's plant in Godda, Jharkhand, supplies all its power to Bangladesh.
- Adani Power stated that this amendment does not affect its existing contract with Bangladesh.
- Godda Project:
 - The plant in Godda has a 1,496-megawatt capacity and supplies power to Bangladesh.
 - This is under a 25-year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) signed with the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) in 2017.
 - It is India's first transnational power project, sending all its generated power to another country.
- Adani Power has said that the electricity from Godda will help Bangladesh by replacing expensive liquid fuel power, thus reducing the average cost of power.
- As of June 2023, Bangladesh had a total power generation capacity of 24,911 MW, with 2,656 MW imported from India. The Godda plant contributes 1,496 MW of this.
- India's Ministry of Power aims to use electricity exchange across South Asia to boost economic growth and improve living standards.

Why was the project criticised?

- **Criticisms:**
 - There are concerns about using coal from the Carmichael mine in Australia to produce power for Bangladesh.
 - The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) criticized the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), saying it shifts the high costs of importing and transporting coal and transmitting electricity onto Bangladesh.
 - In February 2023, United News of Bangladesh reported that the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) asked Adani Power to revise the PPA, claiming the coal price of \$400/MT was too high and should be below \$250/MT.
 - There were also concerns about high capacity and maintenance charges in the PPA, which were deemed excessive by industry standards.
- **Why Bangladesh Needs Imports:**
 - Despite progress in expanding electricity access, Bangladesh faces fuel and gas supply issues, leading to underutilization of its power plants.
 - In July 2022, Bangladesh sought help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) due to financial stress from volatile energy prices and frequent blackouts, sometimes lasting up to 13 hours a day, due to difficulties in sourcing enough diesel and gas.
- **Overcapacity in Bangladesh:**
 - Hasan Mehedi, a Bangladeshi activist, highlighted a significant issue of overcapacity in Bangladesh's power sector.
 - As of June 30 this year, Bangladesh had a total power generation capacity of 28,098 MW.
 - The highest power generation reached was 16,477 MW, leaving an idle capacity of about 11,621 MW.
- **Current Situation:**
 - The new regulatory change provides more flexibility for power exporters by allowing them access to the domestic market.
 - This reduces reliance on external markets and mitigates risks from instability or economic issues in neighboring countries.
- **Delay in Payments:**
 - Payment delays are common, with a thorough internal vetting process by the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) after receiving a bill.
 - The BPDB reviews coal prices and other costs, and may send the bill back to the company for corrections.
- **Impact of Supply Disruption:**
 - Mr. Mehedi noted that if power supply from India were completely stopped, the immediate impact would last 2 to 3 days but would not have long-term effects.

Ultra Super-Critical Thermal Power Plant (USC TPP)

- An **Ultra Super-Critical Thermal Power Plant (USC TPP)** is a highly efficient type of power plant that operates at extremely high steam pressures and temperatures.
- This technology is a significant advancement over traditional thermal power plants and offers several advantages.

How it Works

- In a USC TPP, water is heated to a supercritical state, where it exists as a fluid without distinct liquid or gas phases. This supercritical steam is used to drive turbines, generating electricity.
- By operating at these extreme conditions, USC TPPs achieve significantly higher thermal efficiency compared to conventional power plants.

Benefits of USC TPPs

- **Higher Efficiency:** USC TPPs convert a larger portion of the fuel's energy into electricity, resulting in lower fuel consumption and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Lower Emissions:** Due to their higher efficiency, USC TPPs produce fewer greenhouse gas emissions per unit of electricity generated.
- **Improved Resource Utilization:** By optimizing fuel consumption, USC TPPs help conserve fossil fuel resources.

Challenges and Future Developments

- While USC TPPs offer significant benefits, they also present engineering challenges due to the extreme operating conditions.
- Advanced materials and design considerations are required to ensure the safety and reliability of these power plants.
- Despite these challenges, research and development efforts continue to focus on further improving the efficiency and environmental performance of USC TPPs.

What inflamed the far-right riots in Britain?

What role did social media play? Has there been a change in the demography of the rioters?

GS Paper II: International Relations

Amir Ali

The story so far:

The recent far right riots in Britain are a continuation of the phenomenon of urban rioting that the country regularly experiences, especially in the summer months such as the 1981 violence in Brixton in London and Toxteth in Liverpool; or in northern deindustrialised towns such as Burnley and Oldham in 2001. While previous rounds of violence witnessed **youngsters from black and ethnic minority backgrounds in pitched battles with the police who were accused of being racially motivated and discriminatory**, this year's summer violence involved **men from white working-class backgrounds attacking, in some cases a mosque and hotels where immigrants were staying**.

What led to the riots?

In this round of race riots, social media played an almost incendiary role,

exponentially spreading misinformation. The immediate spark to the violence was the rumour that the **perpetrator of the knife attack in the town of Southport, which killed three young girls, was Muslim and an immigrant who had recently arrived on a boat**. Controversial far-right figures like the English Defence League co-founder, Tommy Robinson, took to social media on the issue, resulting in many of his followers violently taking to the streets.

The riots are a culmination of decades of dehumanising immigrants. Former U.K. Prime Minister, Theresa May, when she was Home Secretary in the David Cameron government, created what was called a 'hostile environment' in order to bully illegal immigrants into leaving. This reached even more extreme levels under Home Secretaries Priti Patel and Suella Braverman. Indian origin Prime Minister Rishi Sunak contributed his share with his **pull-up-the-drawbridges mentality and stop-the-boats-from-arriving sloganeering**. **Signals from the highest levels of the**

British political establishment reinforce the unfounded belief that immigrants are harmful for British economy and society. The highlighting and headlining of immigration also serves to obfuscate the manner in which unemployment has arisen through a deliberate **deindustrialisation**, rather than immigrants snatching jobs; how there has been a **shortfall in building social housing; and a general stretching, to breaking point, of public services such as the National Health Service (NHS) through systematic under-investment**.

How has right-wing media reacted?

A curious phenomenon of these riots has been the concern towards the English working class by the right-wing media and commentariat. This plight was itself created through the **declaration of a veritable class war when Margaret Thatcher during the miners' strike, called the National Union of Miners (NUM) as the 'enemy within', drawing a parallel to the 'enemy without' in the form of the**

Argentine junta that had been defeated in the 1982 Falklands War. Historically, working class unrest in Britain such as the **1819 Peterloo massacre, or the 1984 miners' strike** has had the potential to challenge and change the British establishment on more equitable and socially just grounds. The right wing commentariat does not visualise their working class framing of the current riots in this transformative manner. They have not been worried about the aggravation of working-class conditions owing to 14 years of austerity measures imposed by Conservative governments since 2010.

The current riots must also be understood as **a far-right reaction to pro-Palestine protests across British cities that have called for a ceasefire in the face of Israeli military actions in Gaza. These protests were labelled as hate marches and anti-Semitic by the right-wing media**. The possibility of further far-right violence was thwarted by anti-race protesters on the streets that the Labour government tended to be frigid towards. The Keir Starmer led government is unlikely to challenge the far-right, fearing a shift of support towards the immigration obsessed Reform U.K. Party, that received four million votes in the July elections. The Starmer government's ability to handle the violence is undermined by the prolonged austerity measures that have generally compromised the capabilities of the British state.

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THE GIST

▼ The immediate spark to the violence was the rumour that the perpetrator of the knife attack in the town of Southport, which killed three young girls, was Muslim and an immigrant who had recently arrived on a boat.

▼ In this round of race riots, social media played an almost incendiary role, exponentially spreading misinformation.

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What inflamed the far-right riots in Britain? (20 August)

What role did social media play? Has there been a change in the demography of the rioters?

- Recent far-right riots in Britain are part of a pattern of urban riots, similar to past incidents like the 1981 violence in Brixton and Toxteth, and the 2001 riots in Burnley and Oldham.
- Previously, riots involved black and ethnic minority youths clashing with police, who were accused of racial discrimination.
- This year's riots saw white working-class men attacking places like mosques and hotels where immigrants were staying.
- Social media played a big role in spreading misinformation, which fueled the violence.
- The riots were sparked by a false rumor that a Muslim immigrant was responsible for a knife attack in Southport that killed three girls.
- Far-right figures like Tommy Robinson used social media to incite violence.
- The riots are linked to decades of negative portrayals of immigrants.
- Former Prime Minister Theresa May's "hostile environment" policy aimed to force illegal immigrants to leave, and this approach became more extreme under her successors, Priti Patel and Suella Braverman.

- Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also promoted anti-immigrant rhetoric.
- Political leaders have contributed to the false belief that immigrants harm the economy and society.
- The focus on immigration diverts attention from issues like deindustrialization, unemployment, lack of social housing, and underfunded public services like the NHS.

How has right-wing media reacted?

- The right-wing media has shown concern for the English working class during the riots, even though this situation was partly created by past policies.
- Margaret Thatcher once framed the National Union of Miners (NUM) as an "enemy within" during the miners' strike, comparing them to the "enemy without" (the Argentine junta) from the Falklands War.
- Historical working-class unrest in Britain, like the Peterloo massacre and the miners' strike, has sometimes led to significant changes in society.
- The right-wing media does not view the current riots as a chance for positive change and has ignored the negative impact of 14 years of austerity imposed by Conservative governments.
- The riots are also a reaction to pro-Palestine protests in British cities, which the right-wing media labeled as anti-Semitic.
- Anti-racism protesters have tried to prevent further far-right violence, but the Labour government, led by Keir Starmer, has been reluctant to confront the far-right.
- The Starmer government is concerned about losing support to the Reform UK Party, which did well in recent elections.
- The Labour government's ability to address the violence is weakened by the effects of prolonged austerity measures, which have reduced the state's capabilities.

How the Banni grasslands of Kachchh, Gujarat can be restored

The Kachchh district in Gujarat houses one of the largest tracts of grasslands in the country. In a new study, researchers have assessed the suitability of different areas of Banni for sustainable grassland restoration, considering ecological value to be the primary criterion

GS Paper III: Environment

Dey, R., Sharma, S.B. & Thakkar, M.G., 'Maximising ecological value and assessing land suitability for sustainable grassland management in Asia's largest tropical grassland, Western India', *Sci Rep* 14, 13658 (2024). doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-62775-9

Grasslands are one of the largest ecosystems in the world. They are distributed mainly in semiarid and arid areas, and include savannahs, grassy shrublands, and open grasslands. They harbour a large number of unique and iconic species and offer a variety of material and intangible advantages to people, including several ecosystem services such as carbon storage, climate mitigation, and pollination. Like other types of biodiversity, they face the problem of degradation due to deforestation, overgrazing, agriculture, urbanisation, and other natural and human-made reasons. As much as 49% of grassland areas worldwide are estimated to be experiencing degradation.

In India, grasslands account for approximately eight lakh sq. km, or about 24% of the country's total land area (32.8 lakh sq. km). They are increasingly threatened by agricultural conversion, tree-based plantation projects, invasive species, and mega-development projects. The issue is exacerbated by the strong bias of government and non-profit organisations for the conservation and protection of forests.

The Kachchh district in Gujarat, in the western part of the country, houses one of the largest tracts of grasslands in the country. Popularly known as 'Banni', it once covered an area of approximately 3,800 sq. km but it has now decreased to

about 2,600 sq. km. In a new study, researchers at the Department of Earth and Environmental Science in Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma (KSKV) Kachchh University, in Bhuj, have assessed the suitability of different areas of Banni for sustainable grassland restoration, considering ecological value to be the primary criterion.

Findings of the study

They grouped the prospective restoration zones of the Banni grassland into five categories depending on how suitable each zone was for restoration. They have found that as much as 937 sq. km (or 36%) of the existing grassland area was "highly suitable", 728 sq. km (28 %) was "suitable", 714 sq. km (27%) was "moderately suitable", 182 sq. km. (7%) was "marginally suitable", and 61 sq. km (2%) was "not suitable" for restoration.

Speaking to this correspondent, assistant professor and leader of the study team Seema Bhargav Sharma said the first two categories of "highly suitable" and "suitable" zones – which accounted for nearly two-thirds of the complete Banni grasslands – can be restored easily by simply providing them with adequate water sources, either through irrigation or rainwater harvesting.

Grassland expansion should also not be much difficult in the third "moderately suitable" zone. Further, the "marginally suitable" and "not suitable" zones can also be managed through interventions such as terracing; with supplementary inputs like fertilizers; and by protecting from high water run-off and erosion, and salt intrusion, the researchers said.

The study could provide the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and policymakers a robust foundation for crafting policies aimed at protecting and rehabilitating degraded grasslands. "The detailed

assessment of land suitability can inform legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure sustainable land use and conservation practices," Dr. Sharma added. A key feature of the new study, she said, is that it provides a holistic assessment. The majority of research on grassland degradation has so far been performed only at the scale of sample plots. Some studies have been conducted at the regional scale but they also mainly used single vegetation indicators, such as net primary productivity (NPP) and the normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), without accounting for the characteristics of the soil. This compromised the accuracy of suitability analysis and grassland degradation assessment, she said.

"Our study fills the gap and also covers more aspects to get as comprehensive a picture as possible. We have analysed multiple characteristics of soil also, such as the availability of the three important nutrients, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, and four essential micronutrients, iron, manganese, zinc, and copper, ... soil acidity, soil texture, soil organic carbon, salinity, the water holding capacity, cation exchange capacity, bulk density, and infiltration rate," Dr. Sharma added. She also noted that the team used satellite data to check aspects such as land use and land cover, geomorphology, and land slope. "In all, 20 parameters were analysed," she said. "The study aimed at not only assisting identification of lands suitable for grassland development but also to help manage them in a sustainable manner."

Methodology and impact

The study was conducted across the area of the Banni grassland. The researchers collected soil samples from 45 locations, and data for geomorphological analyses.

The satellites in question that provided data on slope, land use, and land cover were the U.S. Sentinel 2 satellite and the Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer (or ASTER).

Research scientist Rupak Dey, whose doctoral work resulted in the study, said, "Our research can help generate evidence-based recommendations for sustainable grassland management, including biodiversity conservation and the enhancement of livelihoods for local communities dependent on grasses for their livestock."

The researchers' findings were published in the journal *Scientific Reports* in June. Apart from Dr. Sharma and Dr. Dey, the study team consisted of Mahesh G.Thakkar, the director of the Lucknow-based Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences.

Himender Bharti, a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Commission on Ecosystem Management South Asia Regional Network, said the study was appropriate as it could help provide action plans to conserve grasslands, which have a vital role to play particularly in the context of climate change as they are a great source for sequestration of carbon dioxide. Dr. Bharti wasn't involved in the research.

He also said that many bird species – such as the great Indian bustard and the Bengal florican – prefer to breed in grasslands, but grassland areas are shrinking constantly due to anthropogenic activities, threatening biodiversity as well as the ecosystem services they provide.

"There is an urgent need for government agencies and other stakeholders to make efforts to conserve them for the future generations," he said.

P. Sunderarajan is a Delhi-based freelance science correspondent.

How the Banni grasslands of Kachchh, Gujarat can be restored (20 August)

The Kachchh district in Gujarat houses one of the largest tracts of grasslands in the country. In a new study, researchers have assessed the suitability of different areas of Banni for sustainable grass land restoration, considering ecological value to be the primary criterion

- Grasslands are one of the largest ecosystems globally, found mainly in semi-arid and arid regions.
- They include savannahs, grassy shrublands, and open grasslands.
- Grasslands host many unique species and provide important services like carbon storage, climate mitigation, and pollination.
- They face threats from deforestation, overgrazing, agriculture, urbanization, and other causes.
- About 49% of grasslands worldwide are degraded.
- In India, grasslands cover around 800,000 sq. km, or 24% of the country's land area.
- Indian grasslands are threatened by agricultural expansion, tree plantations, invasive species, and large development projects.
- There is a strong focus on conserving forests, often neglecting grasslands.
- Kachchh district in Gujarat has one of India's largest grassland areas, known as 'Banni.'
- Banni used to cover about 3,800 sq. km but now covers approximately 2,600 sq. km.
- Researchers at Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma (KSKV) Kachchh University are studying Banni to find areas best suited for sustainable restoration, focusing on ecological value.



Greener future: A camel drinks water from a small pond in Banni near the Great Rann of Kutch in 2018. FILE PHOTO

Findings of the study

- The study categorized Banni grassland into five zones based on restoration suitability:
 - 937 sq. km (36%) was “highly suitable”
 - 728 sq. km (28%) was “suitable”
 - 714 sq. km (27%) was “moderately suitable”
 - 182 sq. km (7%) was “marginally suitable”
 - 61 sq. km (2%) was “not suitable”
- “Highly suitable” and “suitable” zones, making up nearly two-thirds of Banni, can be restored with adequate water sources through irrigation or rainwater harvesting.
- Expanding grasslands in the “moderately suitable” zone is also feasible.
- The “marginally suitable” and “not suitable” zones can be managed with techniques like terracing, using fertilizers, and controlling water runoff, erosion, and salt intrusion.
- The study aims to help the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and policymakers create effective policies for grassland protection and restoration.
- The research provides a comprehensive assessment by analyzing 20 different parameters, including soil nutrients, texture, and other characteristics, as well as using satellite data for land use and geomorphology.
- The study aimed to identify and manage lands suitable for grassland development sustainably.
- Researchers collected soil samples from 45 locations in Banni and analyzed geomorphological data.
- They used satellite data from the U.S. Sentinel 2 and ASTER satellites to examine slope, land use, and land cover.
- The research aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for managing grasslands, conserving biodiversity, and supporting local communities dependent on grasses for livestock.
- The study was published in Scientific Reports in June.
- The research team included Dr. Seema Bhargav Sharma, Dr. Rupak Dey, and Mahesh G. Thakkar.
- Himender Bharti from the IUCN South Asia Regional Network praised the study for its potential to help conserve grasslands, which are crucial for carbon sequestration and biodiversity.
- He noted that grasslands support bird species like the great Indian bustard and Bengal florican, but these areas are shrinking due to human activities, which threatens both biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Bengal Florican:

- The Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*), also known as the Bengal Bustard, is a critically endangered bird species native to the Indian subcontinent, Cambodia, and Vietnam.
- It is the sole member of the genus *Houbaropsis* and is considered one of the rarest birds in the world.

Key Characteristics

- **Appearance:** Males are distinctive with black plumage and white wings. Females are cryptically colored in brown and buff.
- **Habitat:** Primarily inhabits tall grasslands, especially riverine floodplains.
- **Behavior:** Known for its elaborate courtship display, where males perform aerial acrobatics to attract females.
- **Conservation Status:** Critically Endangered due to habitat loss, poaching, and disturbance.

Threats

- **Habitat Loss:** Conversion of grasslands into agricultural land is the primary threat.
- **Poaching:** Illegal hunting for their meat and feathers is a significant issue.
- **Disturbance:** Human activities, such as grazing and infrastructure development, disrupt their breeding and feeding grounds.

Conservation Efforts

- Recognizing the critical situation, various organizations and governments are working to protect the Bengal Florican.
- **IUCN Red List:** Categorizes the species as Critically Endangered.
- **Government Initiatives:** Indian government has implemented projects to conserve grasslands and protect the species.
- **NGO Involvement:** Organizations like the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) are actively involved in research, monitoring, and conservation efforts.



PATRIOTIC IAS