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## Latest ILO study links AI to dip in labour income

GS Paper III:  
Employment

NEW DELHI

Inequality is on the rise as the share of labour income has stagnated worldwide and a large share of youth remain out of employment, education, or training, according to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) World Employment and Social Outlook: September 2024 Update, released in Geneva on Wednesday. A major reason for this fall in labour income is artificial intelligence or AI, it says.

The ILO analysed the

impact of technological innovations over the last two decades across 36 countries and said that while these innovations have produced persistent increases in labour productivity and output, they can also reduce the labour income share.

"This is consistent with automation-based technological innovations driving the aggregate effects," the ILO said, warning that the absence of a stronger policy response across a wide range of relevant domains could push the labour income still further down. To



Without a strong policy response, wages will further go down, says ILO. GETTY IMAGES

mitigate the potential adverse impacts on inequality, the benefits of technological progress should be widely distributed, it said.

The report also indicated slow progress on key Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as their 2030 deadline approaches. The study revealed that the global labour income share, which represents the portion of total income earned by workers, fell by 0.6 percentage points from 2019 to 2022 and has since remained flat, compounding a long-running downward trend. "If the share had remained at the same level as in 2004, labour income would be larger by \$2.4 trillion in 2024 alone."

It said the COVID-19

pandemic was a key driver of this decline, with nearly 40% of the reduction in the labour income share occurring in the pandemic years of 2020 to 2022.

"Countries must take action to counter the risk of declining labour income share. We need policies that promote an equitable distribution of economic benefits, including freedom of association, collective bargaining and effective labour administration, to achieve inclusive growth," said Celeste Drake, ILO Deputy Director-General.

### Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA):

- The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) is a controversial law in India that grants extensive powers to the Indian Armed Forces in areas designated as "disturbed areas."
- These areas are typically regions experiencing high levels of insurgency, militancy, or violence.

#### Key Provisions of AFSPA:

- **Warrantless Search and Seizure:** Armed forces personnel can **conduct searches and seizures without warrants**.
- **Arrest and Detention:** They can **arrest and detain individuals without warrants for up to 180 days**.
- **Use of Force:** Armed forces personnel have the power to **use force, even if it results in death**, if they believe it is necessary for the maintenance of public order.
- **Protection from Prosecution:** Armed forces personnel are generally protected from prosecution for acts done "in good faith" while exercising their powers under AFSPA.

#### Controversies and Criticisms:

- **Human Rights Violations:** AFSPA has been criticized for its potential for human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence.
- **Lack of Accountability:** The protection from prosecution provided to armed forces personnel under AFSPA has been questioned, as it can make it difficult to hold individuals accountable for wrongdoing.
- **Impact on Civilians:** The law has had a significant impact on civilian life in areas where it is in force, leading to fear, insecurity, and restrictions on civil liberties.

#### Recent Developments:

- **Public Protests:** There have been widespread protests against AFSPA, particularly in regions like Kashmir and the Northeast, demanding its repeal or modification.
- **Government Stance:** The Indian government has defended AFSPA, arguing that it is necessary for maintaining security and combating insurgency.
- **Calls for Reform:** There have been calls for reforms to AFSPA, including stricter accountability mechanisms and limitations on the use of force.

## Madiga Dandora Movement

- The **Madiga Dandora Movement** was a significant social and political movement launched by the Madiga community, a sub-caste of the Dalits, in Andhra Pradesh, India, during the 1970s and 1980s.
- The movement aimed to address the socio-economic and political marginalization faced by the Madiga community and to demand their rights and dignity.

### Key Objectives:

- **Social Justice:** To achieve social justice and equality for the Madiga community.
- **Economic Empowerment:** To improve the economic conditions of the Madiga community through education, employment opportunities, and access to resources.
- **Political Representation:** To secure adequate political representation for the Madiga community in government bodies.
- **Cultural Identity:** To preserve and promote Madiga cultural heritage.

### Strategies:

- **Agitations and Protests:** The movement organized various forms of agitations and protests, including rallies, marches, and strikes.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** The movement conducted awareness campaigns to educate the Madiga community about their rights and to mobilize support.
- **Political Mobilization:** The Madiga Dandora Movement formed political organizations to participate in elections and advocate for their demands.

### Impact:

- **Social Change:** The movement played a crucial role in raising awareness about the issues faced by the Madiga community and challenging the prevailing social hierarchies.
- **Political Representation:** The Madiga Dandora Movement contributed to the emergence of Madiga leaders in politics and secured a degree of political representation.
- **Economic Empowerment:** The movement's efforts led to some improvements in the economic conditions of the Madiga community, through initiatives such as education and skill development programs.

### Recent Updates:

- **Continued Struggles:** While the Madiga Dandora Movement has achieved some gains, the Madiga community continues to face challenges such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of opportunities.

## Modi takes aim at China in Brunei, says India does not back 'expansionism'

GS Paper II:  
India-ASEAN

NEW DELHI

India supports “development, not expansionism”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Brunei on Wednesday, in a series of remarks that seemed to target Chinese moves in the South China Sea and Indo-Pacific region.

He was speaking at a banquet hosted by Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah in the tiny nation's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan.

His comments followed bilateral talks between India and Brunei, and the signing of a renewed cooperation agreement on space cooperation, with Brunei continuing to host the Indian Space Research Organisation's Telemetry Tracking and Command station. The two countries discussed ways to strengthen defence cooperation and the possibility of long-term cooperation in LNG supplies, given that India has dropped its demand for oil from Brunei in favour of Russian oil imports in recent years.

“Brunei is an important partner in India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific Vision,” Mr. Modi said at the luncheon banquet

“We support the policy of development, and not expansionism,” the Prime Minister added, calling for the finalisation of a ‘Code of Conduct’ for the region



Narendra Modi with Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. ANI/X

on the issue of sovereignty and violations at sea. In the joint statement issued at the end of the visit, the two sides also “urged all parties to resolve disputes through peaceful means in accordance with international law, particularly UNCLOS 1982”. This is a reference to the UN-led Convention on the Law of the Seas under which Brunei is a “claimant state” for the South China Sea, along with China, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

### Strategic location

Historically, Brunei's strategic location at the centre of the ASEAN region – surrounded by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam, and especially with American bases in the area – has given it an edge

in ties with the United States, and the two sides have had close defence ties.

In the last few decades, however, Chinese leaders have made a number of high-level visits to Brunei. China is now Brunei's largest trading partner and foreign investor, including in the Belt and Road Initiative projects in Brunei. The value of China-Brunei bilateral trade stands at about \$2.6 billion. In comparison, India-Brunei trade last year was approximately \$286.20 million.

Spooked by Chinese aggression

Mr. Modi is the first Indian PM to make a bilateral visit to Brunei, although Manmohan Singh had visited the country in 2013 when it hosted the ASEAN-India summit.



**Push for integration:** Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, right, interacts with Indian Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi, left, and Indian Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi on the first day of the Joint Commanders Conference 2024, in Lucknow on Wednesday. Reviewing the current security situation and the defence preparedness of the Armed Forces, the CDS emphasised the importance enhancing integration across various domains, saying it is crucial for adapting to the contours of future warfare and conduct of operations. ANI/X/@HQ\_IDS\_INDIA

## Mahad Satyagraha

- The **Mahad Satyagraha** was a significant social and political movement led by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in 1927.
- It aimed to challenge the discriminatory practices of untouchability and caste-based segregation in India.

### Key Events:

- **March 20, 1927:** Dr. Ambedkar led a group of Dalits, formerly known as "untouchables," to the Chavdar Talao, a water tank in Mahad, Maharashtra.
- **Defiance of Caste Restrictions:** The Dalits **defied the social norms of untouchability by drinking water from the tank, which was traditionally reserved for higher castes.**
- **Symbolic Protest:** The act was a powerful symbol of resistance against the caste system and a demand for equality and social justice.
- **Mass Movement:** The Mahad Satyagraha inspired a wider movement against untouchability, gaining support from various social and political organizations.

## Kalaram Temple Entry Movement

- The **Kalaram Temple Entry Movement** was another significant struggle for Dalit rights in India.
- It aimed to challenge the discriminatory practice of denying Dalits entry into temples.

### Events:

- **1930s:** The movement gained momentum, with Dalits organizing protests and demonstrations demanding temple entry.
- **Challenges and Opposition:** The movement faced opposition from conservative elements within Hindu society.
- **Legal Battles:** Dalit leaders fought legal battles to challenge the discriminatory practices of temple entry.

## Exercise Tarang Shakti

- **Exercise Tarang Shakti 24** is a significant multilateral air exercise conducted by the Indian Air Force.
- It aims to enhance interoperability, cooperation, and understanding among participating air forces.
- **Participants:** The exercise involves air forces from various countries, including India, **Australia, Greece, Sri Lanka, the UAE, Japan, Singapore, and the United States.**
- **Scope:** The exercise covers a wide range of aerial warfare activities, such as air superiority, air defense, close air support, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).
- **Locations:** The exercise typically takes place in multiple locations across India, providing participants with opportunities to train in diverse terrains and conditions.



**In tandem:** The Indian Air Force's Suryakiran Aerobatic Team performing during Phase 2 of Exercise Tarang Shakti 24, at the Air Force station in Jodhpur on Wednesday. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE/ANI

### Recent Updates:

- **Second Phase in Jodhpur:** The second phase of Exercise Tarang Shakti 24 was held at **Air Force Station Jodhpur from August 30 to September 13, 2024.**
- **Australian Participation:** For the first time, Australia deployed combat aircraft, including EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft, to participate in the exercise.
- **Focus on Interoperability:** The exercise emphasized developing interoperability among participating air forces, ensuring seamless coordination and cooperation in joint operations.

## South Africa, India ink pact on submarine rescue mission

GS Paper II:  
India-Australia

NEW DELHI

The navies of India and South Africa on Wednesday signed an implementation agreement to enhance submarine rescue support cooperation that ensures the “safety of the South African Navy’s submarine crew in times of distress or accident”.

“Under this agreement, the Indian Navy will provide assistance by deploying its Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle (DSRV) when required, further strengthening the collaborative ties between the two navies,” the Indian Navy said in a statement. The agreement was signed by Indian Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi and Vice-Admiral Monde Lobese, chief of the South African Navy. “The Implementing Agreement underscores a shared commitment to maritime safety and mutual support. This partnership reinforces the longstanding maritime relationship between India and South Africa,” it added.

# Centre, Tripura sign peace accord with insurgent groups in the State

GS Paper III: Internal Security

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Wednesday that more than 300 armed cadres of two insurgent groups in Tripura have given up violence to join the mainstream and will “contribute not only in building a developed Tripura but also in building a developed India”.

He said that the **Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was removed from Tripura in 2015 itself** and it has also been withdrawn from many parts of the northeast. “Instead of deployment of armed forces, the Modi government is committed to the development of the entire northeast by preservation and development of the culture, languages and identity of northeast, especially the tribal groups,” Mr. Shah said.

A Memorandum of Settlement was signed between the Government of India, Government of Tripura and the **National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)** in the presence of Mr. Shah on Wednesday.

“Under the agreement,



Amit Shah at the signing of peace accord between the Centre, the Tripura government, the NLFT and the ATTF, on Wednesday. PTI

more than 328 armed cadres will give up violence and join the mainstream society, and contribute not only in building a developed Tripura but also in building a developed India. Government is making wholehearted efforts with due consideration to all sensitivities in implementation of all the agreements to ensure development of the area and eliminate the reasons responsible for people to take up arms,” Mr. Shah said.

He added that the Centre has approved a special package of ₹250 crore for the overall development of the tribal population of Tripura.

The NLFT and the ATTF

reaffirmed their commitment towards the development of Tripura by ending 35-year-long conflict in the State, a statement by the Ministry said.

As per the agreement, the NLFT and the ATTF have agreed to abjure the path of violence, lay down arms and ammunition and disband their armed organisations.

The armed cadre of NLFT and ATTF have also agreed to participate in peaceful democratic process established by the law and maintain the integrity of the country.

According to Tripura Police’s website, the NLFT, a banned organisation, has been active since 1989. It

says that the “tribal extremist outfit”, was formed under the leadership of Biswamohan Debbarma with the objective to liberate Tripura from the Union of India, to deport all foreigners who entered into Tripura after 1956 and to restore alienated tribal’s lands.

The ATTF was formed in 1990 with similar objectives and demanded removal of names of illegal migrants from electoral roll who entered Tripura after 1956 and the implementation of the ‘Tripura Merger Agreement’ which came into force on October 15, 1949. While the NLFT is accused of killing more than 600 people, according to police records, the ATTF is responsible for the killing of more than 300 people and abduction of hundreds of people. They operate their camps from Bangladesh.

Mr. Shah added that the peace pact is the 12th agreement for the northeast and the third agreement related to Tripura in the past ten years. “Through these agreements, about 10,000 insurgents have joined the mainstream by giving up arms,” he said.

# Did animals develop complex brains to deal with challenging habitats?

Traditionally, complex behaviour has been linked to brain size and the brain-to-body size ratio. But researchers have unearthed new insights. Analysing the brains of lizard species in Puerto Rico, a new study has spotted a link between diverse habitats and brain complexity

GS Paper III: Basic Science

Monika Mondal

“Most people are scared of them. Why would you want to look at something that’s scaly and has a creepy crawl?” Levi Storks, assistant professor at the University of Detroit, asked with a chuckle. Yet that’s exactly what got him interested in lizards when he was a child. He would catch them, pet them, and spend hours observing them.

Now, as an evolutionary biologist, Dr. Storks studies reptiles like lizards in a bid to bridge a research gap: we don’t have a complete picture of how brains and the behaviour of these animals are linked.

Traditionally, complex behaviour has been linked to brain size and the brain-to-body size ratio. But researchers have unearthed new insights that complicate this picture. Analysing the brains of closely related lizard species from the lush green biodiversity of Puerto Rico, for example, Dr. Storks and his team found signs of a relationship between diverse habitats and brain complexity.

In a paper published recently in the journal *Biology Letters*, the researchers wrote, “Cognitive demands are likely higher in more complex habitats, as an animal must coordinate movement along a larger number of potential paths.”

## Similar lizards, different habitats

Lizards are a broad group of reptiles that includes a large variety of species with diverse characteristics. Anoles are a specific type of lizard known for their distinctive features, including an ability to change skin colour, the presence of a dewlap (a throat fan), and adhesive toe pads to climb vertical surfaces. Anoles are particularly common in the Americas, especially in tropical and subtropical regions.

Puerto Rico is an island in the Caribbean sea. Its forests are a mosaic of diverse ecosystems, including tropical rainforests like the El Yunque (montane cloud forests) meeting dry forests. The island is home to unique flora and fauna, including endangered species, and is very biodiverse.



A green anole trying to intimidate its reflection. RON ARDIS (CC BY-SA 2.0)

following species: *Anolis evermanni*, *Anolis stratulus*, *Anolis cristatellus*, *Anolis gundlachi*, *Anolis krugi*, and *Anolis pulchellus*.

From a 2014 study conducted by other researchers, the team had data about how complex the anoles’ habitat was. Those scientists followed more than 80 anoles of six species for at least 20 minutes and recorded (in drawings) how their movements responded to features in their surroundings. They paid attention to how many options an anole had and which



Across the six species, the study found that except in the cerebellum, the number of neurons increased with habitat complexity in the telencephalon and the rest of the brain. Anoles living in more complex habitats had a higher density of neurons including neuron number, neural

The findings suggest that differences in neuroanatomy among Puerto Rican anoles, which have similar social structures, diets, and sensory systems, could be the result of differences in their habitats.

Similar studies in other vertebrates like Aegean wall lizards, three-spined sticklebacks, and zebrafish have also found individuals living in more complex habitats performed better at spatial learning tasks. Other studies have reported similar findings at the level of

## Did animals develop complex brains to deal with challenging habitats? (5 September)

Traditionally, complex behaviour has been linked to brain size and the brain-to-body size ratio. But researchers have unearthed new insights. Analysing the brains of lizard species in Puerto Rico, a new study has spotted a link between diverse habitats and brain complexity

- Many people are afraid of reptiles, but Levi Storks, an evolutionary biologist, became interested in lizards as a child by catching and observing them.
- Dr. Storks now studies reptiles like lizards to understand how their brains and behaviors are connected.
- Traditionally, brain size and the brain-to-body ratio were believed to determine complex behavior, but recent research shows a more complicated relationship.
- Dr. Storks and his team studied lizards in Puerto Rico and found that living in more complex habitats may lead to more complex brain development.
- They believe animals in diverse environments need to navigate more challenging surroundings, which might increase cognitive demands.
- Anoles, a specific type of lizard common in the Americas, can change color, have a throat fan (dewlap), and adhesive toe pads for climbing.
- Puerto Rico has a variety of ecosystems, such as tropical rainforests and dry forests, with many unique and endangered species.
- Dr. Storks and his team went to Puerto Rico in 2019 and 2021 to collect lizard specimens.
- Puerto Rico is rich in anoles (a type of lizard), making it a great place to study them.
- The team collected 64 anoles from six different species, but they all had similar ecological roles and shared traits.
- Genetic data showed that these anole species had a common ancestor 20–30 million years ago, meaning they are closely related.
- Studying closely related species helps researchers isolate the effect of habitats on their brains and behavior.
- The six species studied were *Anolis evermanni*, *Anolis stratulus*, *Anolis cristatellus*, *Anolis gundlachi*, *Anolis krugi*, and *Anolis pulchellus*.
- Previous research in 2014 provided data on how complex the habitats of these anoles were.

- Researchers observed how these lizards moved through their environments, noting things like the number of branches, barriers, and distances they had to navigate.
- The anoles were divided into three habitat groups: 'grass bush,' 'trunk ground,' and 'trunk crown.'
- Lizards living on tree trunks have a simpler path (like navigating a country road), while those in the tree crowns face more complex challenges (like winding through a city).
- Different habitats create different levels of complexity for the lizards.

### **Neurons in complex habitats**

- The team airlifted the lizards from Puerto Rico to their lab in Detroit for brain analysis.
- They dissected the brains to study neurological differences between the species.
- Brain processing depends on factors like neuron number, plasticity, and signal speed.
- Recently, neuron density has been considered a good indicator of brain processing ability.
- The team focused on three brain areas: the telencephalon (higher thinking, sensory integration), cerebellum (motor coordination), and the rest (sensory input and motor output).
- They found that in more complex habitats, anoles had more neurons in the telencephalon and other brain parts (except the cerebellum).
- Lizards living in complex environments, like the tree canopy, had denser neurons compared to those living on tree trunks or shrubs.
- The study suggests habitat differences may cause neuroanatomy differences in anoles.
- Similar studies on other animals (like wall lizards and fish) also found better brain performance in complex habitats.

### **Brain's role in evolution**

- Around 320 million years ago, reptiles, mammals, and birds had a common ancestor.
- Over time, evolution made these animals look, behave, and function very differently.
- Despite differences, they share similarities in brain structure.
- Dr. Storks finds it fascinating that from one type of brain, various species now have similar but slightly different brains.
- The brain is a powerful organ that constantly changes.
- There is a lot of research on the human brain, but not much on how brains evolved or how they work differently in different species.
- Understanding these differences is important for studying evolution.

## **Climate change threatens South Korea's beloved kimch (5 September)**

- Climate change is affecting South Korea's famous kimchi, especially the napa cabbage used to make it.
- Napa cabbage grows best in cooler climates, but rising temperatures are making it harder to grow.
- If the climate keeps warming, South Korea may struggle to grow napa cabbage in the future.
- Ideal temperatures for cabbage growth are between 18 and 21 degrees Celsius, but summers are getting too hot.
- Farmers and kimchi makers are noticing that the cabbage is becoming spoiled and mushy due to the heat.
- The area used for cabbage farming has reduced by more than half in the last 20 years, from 8,796 ha to 3,995 ha.
- By 2090, it is predicted that cabbage might no longer be grown in the highlands due to climate change.
- Higher temperatures, unpredictable rains, pests, and fungal infections are making it difficult for farmers.
- South Korea's kimchi industry is also facing competition from cheaper kimchi imports from China.
- The government is using climate-controlled storage to manage shortages, and scientists are developing new cabbage varieties that can withstand warmer climates.

# Sub-classification verdict through Ambedkar's ideals

GS Paper I: Society

The Supreme Court of India judgment, on August 1, 2024, in *The State of Punjab and Ors. vs Davinder Singh and Ors.*, on the sub-classification of reservations, embodies the vision of social justice. It is a noteworthy development in Indian jurisprudence, especially in social justice. The judgment provides social jurisprudence using constitutional methods and ensures that social justice reaches the most neglected and deprived sections (which includes a majority of Dalit castes) among Dalits. The idea of sub-classification also aligns with B.R. Ambedkar's principles of fraternity and Maitri, emphasising the need for cooperation and mutual respect among Scheduled Castes (SC). However, the overreaching exercise of the judgment, reflected in the comments on the *varna* system and creamy layer, is uncalled for.

## Social justice and B.R. Ambedkar's struggle

B.R. Ambedkar struggled all his life to ensure social and civil justice for the most oppressed sections. He also sought to secure separate cultural rights for former untouchables. Yet, these were often met with inadequate responses and resistance from the prevailing Hindu caste order. While reflecting on the Indian social structure, Ambedkar highlights how every *jati* occupies a distinct position on the social ladder. It draws attention to the nuances of internal divisions within the caste order. A newspaper of his times reported Ambedkar's response to "the welcome addresses by three scheduled castes' organisations after the resolutions were disposed of at the Scheduled Castes' Conference, held at Cawnpore on January 31[,] 1944... He (Ambedkar) urged that they (Scheduled Castes) must realise their responsibility to wipe out internal divisions among the Scheduled Castes when they demanded of other's removal of Untouchability".

His contribution to social justice goes beyond theoretical exercise. His practical measures to dismantle the caste hierarchy have been remarkable. He led movements such as the *Mahad Satyagraha and the Kalaram temple entry movement*, that highlighted the ritual discrimination faced by Dalits. Despite such efforts, Brahminical forces often undermined his quest for a just society. Yet, amid such challenges, Ambedkar's perseverance in fighting for justice in a hierarchical society illustrates his deep commitment.

In a media interview, Shahu Patole, who wrote a book on Dalit food in Marathawada, observed that different *jatis* experience varying degrees of discrimination. While talking about his experiences in the village, he says that "Mang was considered the lowest, above them were the Mahars. Mang and Mahars were deemed untouchable by Chamars, and the rest of the villages did not touch these communities". This affirms the existence of graded inequality, which Ambedkar also asserted in his sociological treatise.

These suggest the need for a more nuanced



**Professor B.S. Waghmare**

a retired professor of the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance at Jawaharlal Nehru University and who compiled the Lahuji Salve Commission report on sub-categorisation in Maharashtra in 2008



**Shivam Mogha**

a research scholar in sociology at the Jawaharlal Nehru University

The top court's judgment takes into account the different sociological realities of every 'jati' with the aim of addressing the disparity within Scheduled Castes

approach to social justice, which the Court's sub-classification judgment seeks to address – at least partly. This judgment can be interpreted through Ambedkar's social justice ideals. It underlines the existence of different lived realities of numerous *jatis* that experience levels of deprivation and discrimination. Thus, the judgment aims to mitigate the inequality within the SC community by addressing such heterogeneity. This is precisely where the judgment demonstrates the idea of social jurisprudence to the core because it takes into account the different sociological realities of every *jati*.

## Criticism from within

Even though it has still to be implemented in various States, the sub-classification decision has drawn criticism from some Dalit communities, especially from leading segments of Dalits who feel their political leverage might diminish. This fear results from the assumption that the sub-classification judgment might fragment the Dalit constituency and weaken the collective Dalit movement. Sadly, this argument also assumes that there is a single Dalit movement. In contrast, many sociological accounts show that there have always been different shades of Dalit politics, as reflected in the many Dalit movements.

However, this argument by the leading segments among Dalits discounts the underlying Ambedkarite consciousness of various shades of Dalit politics. In this context, 30 years of the *Madiga Dandora movement* are misrepresented as being detached from the sphere of an Ambedkarite consciousness. Even the *movements and mobilisations of the Mang caste in Maharashtra have Ambedkar's picture alongside that of Lokshahir Annabhau Sathe* among other leaders. This symbolises how every caste's issue may be different when they deal with other castes but are unified in the larger Ambedkarite idea of social justice.

The Bharat bandh called for by specific Dalit organisations in North India was a misstep that could affect the collective identity and mobilisation of Dalit castes. While the sub-classification debate in North India faces criticism, the situation is a bit different in South India. There, the discussion about subclassification among Dalits has largely been resolved, with most Dalit organisations supporting the demand for sub-categorisation among SCs.

The criticism from North Indian Dalit organisations – they argue that the judgment might create divisions within the Dalit movement – reflects a misunderstanding of the existing social structures among Dalits. Supporting the sub-classification movement and embracing its potential benefits for enhancing social justice politics at the *jati* level would be a mature approach. More importantly, sub-classification could strengthen the collective identity of SCs, furthering the Ambedkarisation process by including those on the margins. It would also

align with the principles of equitable representation articulated by leaders such as Manyavar Kanshiram, who advocated *Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari Uski Utni Hissedari*, an idea of representation based on numerical strength.

## Reflection of a long struggle, realities

The leading segments among SCs must avoid demeaning the relentless struggles of the marginalised communities, such as the Valmikis and Musahars in North India, and the Madigas and Arunthathiyars in the South. This is because the judgment is not an imposition from above but a reflection of years of grass-root activism and demands for sub-categorisation. It is a testament to the ongoing struggle for justice led by organisations such as the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS), conferences of the Mang community in Maharashtra, and the Valmiki movements in North India.

There is much concern about its execution. Though history also tells us about the success of the sub-classification model in Punjab and Haryana before the Chinnaiah judgment in 2004, which is an example of how such measures can work in practice. Despite criticism from some quarters, it is essential to recognise that the judgment is grounded in a historical struggle for equitable representation and justice.

The judges' affirmation was essential because it established that the SC category is not homogeneous but consists of distinct *jatis* with varying needs and challenges. The trajectories of *jatis* go beyond the idea of caste essentialism, and their behaviours are also in response to other *jatis*. On the other hand, recognition of the sociological fact that the SC community represents a union of *jatis* within their structures is a significant step towards addressing the nuanced needs of each group. The assumption that the SC is one homogeneous group fails in the face of prohibitions on inter-marriage even within the community. These are hard sociological facts that one must not deny.

Finally, while challenges remain about accepting this judgment, it is essential to recognise its potential to enhance social justice to the core and promote equitable representation of all Dalit castes. Embracing this judgment with the spirit of fraternity, as Ambedkar envisioned, will be crucial in achieving a more just and inclusive society that ultimately leads to the democratisation of the reservation system. While upholding Dalit civility and addressing the creamy layer issue with due seriousness, the collective Ambedkarite movement must also prevent political parties from exploiting this judgment for their gains.

In addition, the movement should broaden its focus beyond traditional reservation policies. Key initiatives should include advocating the extension of reservation policies to the private sector and pursuing land redistribution. These steps are crucial for advancing representation and securing material benefits for all Dalit communities.

## Sub-classification verdict through Ambedkar's ideals (5 September)

- The Supreme Court of India delivered a judgment on August 1, 2024, in the case of State of Punjab vs Davinder Singh regarding the sub-classification of reservations.
- This judgment promotes social justice and is a significant development in Indian social jurisprudence, focusing on ensuring that the most neglected sections among Dalits (Scheduled Castes) benefit from reservations.
- The sub-classification idea is in line with B.R. Ambedkar's principles of fraternity and cooperation, encouraging mutual respect among Scheduled Castes.
- The judgment, however, includes unnecessary comments on the *varna* system and the concept of the creamy layer.
- B.R. Ambedkar dedicated his life to securing social and civil justice for oppressed sections, particularly the former untouchables.
- He also advocated for separate cultural rights for these groups, although the dominant Hindu caste system often resisted these efforts.
- Ambedkar highlighted the divisions within the caste system and urged unity among Scheduled Castes to eliminate these internal divisions.
- His contributions to social justice were not just theoretical but practical, as seen in his leadership of movements like the Mahad Satyagraha and the Kalaram Temple entry, which fought against caste-based discrimination.
- Despite opposition from Brahminical forces, Ambedkar remained committed to creating a just and equal society for all.

- A book on Dalit food in Marathwada highlights that different jatis (castes) within the Dalit community experience varying degrees of discrimination.
- The author shares that in his village, the Mang caste was considered the lowest, followed by the Mahars. Even these two castes were considered untouchable by Chamars, showing graded inequality within the Dalit community.
- B.R. Ambedkar also emphasized this concept of graded inequality in his sociological work.
- The Supreme Court's sub-classification judgment aims to address such internal inequalities by recognizing the different realities of each caste within the Scheduled Castes (SC) community.
- This judgment aligns with Ambedkar's vision of social justice by acknowledging the diverse experiences of deprivation and discrimination among Dalits.
- However, the sub-classification decision has faced criticism from some influential Dalit groups who fear that it might reduce their political power and fragment the Dalit community.
- This criticism assumes that there is a single unified Dalit movement, but in reality, there have been various Dalit movements with differing political agendas.
- Some leading Dalit groups criticize the sub-classification judgment, overlooking the different forms of Dalit politics that share a common Ambedkarite consciousness.
- The Madiga Dandora movement, active for 30 years, is wrongly viewed as separate from Ambedkar's ideals, but it is very much part of his vision.

## Gap between allocations for health, outcomes in States (5 September)

- The full potential of the Union Budget allocations for the health sector depends on how well the States handle various factors.
- Many health sector allocations are for Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS), where States share the cost and are responsible for implementing the programs.
- The success of these schemes is influenced by the financial and operational capacity of the States.
- Two key CSS initiatives by the central government aim to improve health infrastructure:
  1. **Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM):** Focuses on building health and wellness centres, public health units, labs, and hospital blocks to prepare for future emergencies like pandemics.
  2. **Human Resources for Health and Medical Education (HRHME):** Aims to expand medical personnel by setting up new colleges and increasing seats, while upgrading district hospitals and linking them with new medical colleges.
- Despite these initiatives, actual expenditure on them has been low. In 2022-23, only about 29% of the allocated funds for PM-ABHIM were used, and the revised estimates for 2023-24 show a utilization of only 50%, but actual spending is expected to be lower.
- HRHME also saw low fund utilization, with only about a quarter of the allocated budget being spent in both 2022-23 and 2023-24.
- Due to low fund usage, the Budget allocations for both PM-ABHIM and HRHME were reduced in the full Budget compared to the interim Budget.

### Several factors contribute to the low utilization of funds under the PM-ABHIM scheme:

- Around 60% of resources for health and wellness centers (AB-HWC) were to come from the 15th Finance Commission's health grants, but only 45% of these grants were used from 2021-22 to 2023-24. The complex execution process has been a hurdle.
- States were required to integrate various public health labs to avoid duplication, which involved significant reorganization and coordination, delaying progress.
- Many components, like block public health units (BPHUs) and critical care hospital blocks (CCHBs), involve construction, and rigid procedures have delayed fund absorption.
- Overlapping funding sources for similar activities has added complexity.

### Under the HRHME scheme, even if funds were better used for infrastructure, there are challenges in recruiting teaching faculty:

- A study showed that 40% of teaching positions in new All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and 30% in medical colleges in Uttar Pradesh were vacant in 2022.
- This shortage of specialists affects the ability to set up new medical colleges and upgrade district hospitals into medical colleges.
- Staffing for CCHBs also requires specialists, but many positions are vacant, particularly in rural and urban health centers.

### State governments face financial challenges:

- States will have to cover the ongoing costs of maintaining the infrastructure built under PM-ABHIM and HRHME after 2025-26, as the Union government's support ends then.
- States need to plan for these recurring expenses and create enough fiscal space to maintain these projects, in addition to funding other health schemes.

**In summary, turning capital expenditures into effective health outcomes requires:**

- States having enough financial capacity to cover ongoing expenses.
- Solving human resource shortages, particularly specialists.
- Improving financial management to execute schemes and use grants effectively.

## **Trading up (5 September)**

**World Bank's growth prognosis for India moots some policy shifts**

- The World Bank has increased its GDP growth forecast for India for 2024-25 to 7%, up from its earlier estimate of 6.6%.
- This aligns with the forecasts from the International Monetary Fund and Asian Development Bank but is slightly lower than the 7.2% forecast by the RBI and Fitch Ratings.
- Earlier, India's growth projections were modest due to strong 8.2% growth last year, weak global economic conditions, restrictive monetary policies, and geopolitical tensions.
- The World Bank expects global growth to remain at 2.6%, the same as last year, but well below pre-pandemic levels.
- Despite global challenges, India's growth is projected to remain strong at 7%, though risks like supply chain disruptions, rising commodity prices, and potential inflation could pose challenges.
- Private consumption in India is expected to rise by 5.7%, and the farm sector is projected to grow by 4.1%, improving from last year's slow growth.
- The recovery in the farm sector could help rural demand and support private investment in the medium term, with GDP growth hovering around 6.5%-6.7% in the coming years.
- While the Production Linked Incentive schemes and new Employment-Linked Incentives are aimed at boosting private manufacturing and jobs, they may not create enough jobs for India's growing workforce.
- India's global trade share is low compared to the size of its economy, and the country has not fully seized opportunities from China's reduction in labor-intensive production.
- The World Bank flagged concerns about a decline in export-related jobs over the past decade, partly due to a shift towards capital- and skill-intensive exports.
- Though India has taken steps like signing free trade agreements, new barriers to goods, services, and investments have slowed progress.
- The World Bank recommends reducing tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and foreign direct investment (FDI) restrictions, and suggests reconsidering India's reluctance to join trade agreements like the RCEP.
- Indian policymakers are urged to act on this advice to boost trade and economic growth.

## **Death for rape (5 September)**

**Homes and workplaces must first be made safe for women**

- Calls for the death penalty after heinous sexual crimes have become common, leading governments to pass laws or ordinances to meet these demands.
- The criminal laws were amended in 2013 following a brutal rape in Delhi, and several states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh have introduced stricter punishments for sexual assault.
- Recently, the West Bengal Assembly passed the Aparajita Women and Child (West Bengal Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2024, after a doctor was raped and murdered in Kolkata.

- This Bill introduces the death penalty or life-long imprisonment for various rape-related offenses, including rape by a police officer, gang rape, and repeat offenders.
- The Bill also establishes special courts for quicker trials and amends laws related to child sexual offenses to include the death penalty.
- The Bill still requires the President's approval to become law.
- There is little evidence that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to sexual crimes, yet governments respond with stricter laws following public outcry.
- Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee emphasized the need for societal reforms rather than legal changes to address rape.
- The Justice J.S. Verma Committee recommended against the death penalty for rape, arguing it was a regressive step.
- Despite harsher laws, women continue to feel unsafe, and such incidents have also turned into political debates.
- Governments should focus on enforcing existing laws effectively and ensuring police act impartially to prevent and punish sexual crimes.
- True justice would be served by making workplaces and homes safer for women and removing barriers to their progress.

## From crisis to cascade of hope

GS Paper II: River water dispute

**T**he Cauvery river now presents a picture of calmness, much to the relief of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

In early July, both States were on the brink of a water crisis. However, since the second half of July, nature brought a dramatic change in the situation with rains, bringing copious inflow to the river. The situation turned positive with regard to the realisation of water by Tamil Nadu – from deficit to “over surplus.” In a matter of 15 days, Tamil Nadu received its entire share – even marginally higher – for July and August, as mandated in the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)'s final award of 2007, which was modified by the Supreme Court in February 2018. The spell of surplus flows continued in the subsequent weeks.

As of September 2, the lower riparian State received about 181 tmc ft since June 1, the inaugural date of any water year, whereas the stipulated quantum for the entire year – up to May 2025 – is 177.25 tmc ft. The Tribunal and the Court have fixed Tamil Nadu's share for July at 31.24 tmc ft; for August – 45.95 tmc ft and for September – 36.76 tmc ft. The southwest monsoon is crucial for both States, as it represents the wettest period for Karnataka and yields the highest quantum of (123.14 tmc ft) of water for Tamil Nadu. So, barring the initial five or six weeks, the 2024-25 water year has not been problematic for the two principal riparian States.

### Implementation mechanism

The current year is in stark contrast to the corresponding period (June-September 2) of last year when the aggregate realisation by Tamil Nadu was a mere 33.2 tmc ft. A close perusal of the data of 30 years (1994-95 to 2023-24) reveals that on 11 occasions, the realisation during June-September was less than 100 tmc ft, as against the stipulated 123.14 tmc ft. This means that at



T. Ramakrishnan

In an intense water conflict such as the Cauvery, the version of the affected parties, in times of crisis, cannot be expected to be impartial

least once in three years, there is distress. This is where the final award's implementation mechanism – Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) – and the Supreme Court assume importance, of course, apart from the spirit of accommodation.

The efficacy of the CWMA and its assisting body Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC), as institutional arrangements, was put to test during 2023-24. Unlike its predecessor, the Cauvery River Authority, which was a high-profile setup with the Prime Minister as the chairperson and Chief Ministers of all the basin States as Members, the CWMA is headed by a full-time official with government officers of all the States and various departments of the Union government. Many of their decisions last year were not to the liking of the two States, but given the constraints, the performance of the CWMA and CWRC can be considered satisfactory.

Needless to say, there is enormous scope for improvement on their part. First, there should be greater transparency in their functioning. Both the Authority and the Committee will have to make public, as quickly as possible, all their decisions in writing. In an intense water conflict such as the Cauvery, the version of the affected parties, in times of crisis, cannot be expected to be impartial. Even otherwise, dissemination of authentic information is vital in an inter-State water dispute. If the authority is constrained by a shortage of manpower, in carrying out its functions effectively, the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti should intervene and solve the problem.

Moreover, the Authority should enlarge its composition from being a body of only officials to one of multi-disciplinary and a mix of officials and non-officials, who could be drawn from farmers, environmentalists, and independent water experts. The Union government could follow the example of the Chennai

Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board Act. The law provides for six non-official directors on the Board of the water agency, which includes persons to represent the interests of the public, industrial, and commercial establishments.

As for the composition of the CWMA, the implementation mechanism that the Tribunal had in mind is only recommendatory and there is no bar on the Union government to fine-tune it. The presence of a non-official environmentalist can push the government to take the problem of environmental degradation of the much-venerated river more seriously in view of the challenges being caused by climate change.

### Water shortage

The “feel good factor” prevalent now can be used to look at the problem of Bengaluru's drinking water shortage, which assumed a serious proportion earlier this year. The Supreme Court, in its 2018 judgment, made a special allocation of 4.75 tmc ft for the city while the Karnataka government has been pressing for implementing the ₹ 9,000-crore Mokedatu Balancing Reservoir-cum-Drinking Water Project. At present, the Mokedatu project is before the Central Water Commission.

Given the trust deficit between the two States (which explains the reason behind Tamil Nadu's opposition to the project), the idea of the participation of a third party – say, the Union government – can be explored to execute not only the Mokedatu project but also any other project, including hydro-electric across the Cauvery, upstream of the Mettur reservoir. After all, attempts made since the late 1990s in this regard failed. There is no harm in making yet another earnest attempt as the intention is to optimally utilise the precious water resource which, if untapped, will go to waste, as is happening now.

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## From crisis to cascade of hope (5 September)

- The Cauvery river is now calm, which is a relief for both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- In early July, both states were facing a water crisis due to low rainfall.

- However, since mid-July, heavy rains dramatically improved the situation, bringing a large amount of water into the river.
- Tamil Nadu moved from having a water deficit to an "over surplus" within 15 days.
- By the end of August, Tamil Nadu received its full share of water for July and August, as per the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) and the Supreme Court's rulings.
- As of September 2, Tamil Nadu has received about 181 tmc ft of water, which exceeds its annual share of 177.25 tmc ft for the entire year (until May 2025).
- The Tribunal and the Court have set Tamil Nadu's share of water for July at 31.24 tmc ft, for August at 45.95 tmc ft, and for September at 36.76 tmc ft.
- The southwest monsoon is crucial for both states, as it brings the highest amount of water during this period.
- Despite initial concerns, the 2024-25 water year has been positive for both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

### **Implementation mechanism**

- This year has seen a much higher water realization for Tamil Nadu compared to the same period last year, when it received only 33.2 tmc ft.
- In the past 30 years (1994-95 to 2023-24), there were 11 occasions when Tamil Nadu received less than 100 tmc ft during the June-September period, showing that distress occurs about once every three years.
- The Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) and the Supreme Court are crucial in ensuring the proper implementation of the final award of water distribution.
- The CWMA, along with its assisting body, the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC), was tested in 2023-24, and their performance, despite some dissatisfaction from the states, can be considered satisfactory.
- There is room for improvement in CWMA's functioning, including more transparency in decision-making. Decisions should be made public quickly to prevent biased versions of events during water disputes.
- Authentic information is essential in an inter-state water dispute like the Cauvery issue.
- If the CWMA lacks manpower, the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti should step in to resolve the issue.
- The CWMA should expand its composition to include not just government officials but also farmers, environmentalists, and independent water experts to provide a more diverse perspective.
- The Union government could look to other models, such as the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board Act, which includes non-official members to represent public and industrial interests.
- The Tribunal's recommendation on CWMA's composition is not binding, and the Union government can adjust it to include non-official members, especially environmentalists, to address environmental degradation issues related to the river.

### **Water shortage**

- Bengaluru faced a severe drinking water shortage earlier this year.
- The Supreme Court allocated 4.75 tmc ft of water for Bengaluru in its 2018 judgment.
- Karnataka is pushing for the ₹9,000-crore Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir-cum-Drinking Water Project, which is currently under review by the Central Water Commission.
- Tamil Nadu opposes the project due to trust issues between the two states.
- A potential solution is involving a third party, such as the Union government, to oversee and execute the Mekedatu project and other projects on the Cauvery river.
- Previous efforts to involve a third party have failed since the 1990s, but another attempt can be made to ensure the water resource is utilized effectively rather than wasted.

# What do we know about ANIIDCO?

Why has the qualifications of the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation** come into question after it got permission to do a **₹72,000 crore mega infrastructure project in Great Nicobar**? Does the company have a proper internal environmental governance system?

GS Paper III: Development and Environment

## EXPLAINER

**Pankaj Sekhsaria**  
**Rishika Pardikar**

### The story so far:

**T**he Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) is the project proponent for the NITI Aayog-promoted ₹72,000 crore mega infrastructure project in Great Nicobar, the southernmost island in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago. The project entails the construction of a trans-shipment port, a greenfield airport, a tourism and township project and a solar and gas based power plant in Great Nicobar. ANIIDCO which has been granted permission for the mega project is a little known quasi-government agency based in Port Blair.

**What do we know about ANIIDCO?** ANIIDCO was incorporated on June 28, 1988 under the Companies Act. Its objective is “to develop and commercially exploit natural resources for the balanced and environment friendly development of the territory.” Its main activities, according to its website, include trading of petroleum products, Indian made foreign liquor and milk, managing tourism resorts and infrastructure development for tourism and fisheries. The company’s average annual turnover and profit over the last three financial years has been ₹370 crore and ₹35 crore, respectively. The corporation’s mandate, history, its structure and capabilities raise serious concerns about the process and possible outcomes of making them responsible for such a high profile, high investment and high risk project as the one in Great Nicobar. The 910 sq km island is not just a biodiversity hotspot but also home to indigenous communities with special rights and is also located in one of the most tectonically active zones. When the Andaman and Nicobar administration appointed ANIIDCO as



**Massive change:** An aerial view of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. GETTY IMAGES

project proponent in July 2020, ANIIDCO neither had an environment policy nor an environment cell. It did not even have the human resources needed to oversee, let alone implement and monitor the project it was tasked to implement. It was only in late 2022 more than two years after it was made the project proponent did it start a process for recruiting people with relevant expertise such as urban planners, environmental planners, architects, infrastructure specialists, and legal and financial experts.

In May, 2021, the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) under the Union environment ministry had asked ANIIDCO a number of important questions about its internal environmental governance system. The EAC asked if ANIIDCO had a corporate environment policy approved by its board of directors, an

administrative system to ensure compliance with environmental clearance conditions and if there was a prescribed standard operating procedure to deal with environmental and forest violations. ANIIDCO admitted later in August that it did not have an environment policy. The EAC, nevertheless, went ahead and granted environmental clearance to ANIIDCO more than a year later in November 2022.

### What are other conflicts of interests?

In 2022, the Mumbai based Conservation Action Trust had filed a petition before the National Green Tribunal challenging the Stage 1 forest clearance granted by the Union Environment Ministry. It had pointed out that at the time forest clearance was granted to ANIIDCO, the corporation’s managing director was the

same person who was also the Commissioner cum Secretary (Environment and Forests) of the island.

It is clear, the petition noted, that this is “a case of the project proponent certifying itself.” Further, it added that the responsibility to assess compliance with the Stage I forest clearance conditions vests with the same authority that has a responsibility to ensure compliance with the conditions. This same pattern was repeated when the Chief Secretary of the islands, who is also the chairman of the board of directors of ANIIDCO, was made a key member of the high powered committee set up by the NGT to look into complaints against the project. ANIIDCO was being allowed to evaluate its own actions again. Numerous persons employed at ANIIDCO in various capacities are currently civil servants with the Andaman and Nicobar administration in charge of environmental and tribal welfare issues. We sent questionnaires to both ANIIDCO and the chairman and secretary of the EAC. None responded.

### What have past administrators said?

Lt Gen A.K. Singh, Lieutenant Governor of the islands from 2013-16, said that ANIIDCO would be better suited than any other department or organisation in the A&N administration to handle this mega project, though a project of this dimension would require expert agencies from outside the islands to execute it.

Sanat Kaul, chief secretary of the islands in the early 90s, had critiqued ANIIDCO’s tourism operations in a book he wrote in 2015. On the current project, he said “I don’t think ANIIDCO can at all manage a ₹72,000 crore project unless its upgraded vastly with much better quality staff. If the idea of the government is to use ANIIDCO because it is an existing company fully owned by the government, it will need a full revamp from what it was when I was there.”

*Pankaj Sekhsaria is an author/editor with his recent work being The Great Nicobar Betrayal. Rishika Pardikar is a freelance environment reporter.*

## THE GIST

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) is the project proponent for the NITI Aayog-promoted ₹72,000 crore mega infrastructure project in Great Nicobar, the southernmost island in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago.

Its main activities, according to its website, include trading of petroleum products, Indian made foreign liquor and milk, managing tourism resorts and infrastructure development for tourism and fisheries.

When the Andaman and Nicobar administration appointed ANIIDCO as project proponent in July 2020, ANIIDCO neither had an environment policy nor an environment cell. It did not even have the human resources needed to oversee, let alone implement and monitor the project it was tasked to implement.

## What do we know about ANIIDCO? (5 September)

Why has the qualifications of the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation** come into question after it got permission to do a **₹72,000 crore mega infrastructure project in Great Nicobar**? Does the company have a proper internal environmental governance system?

- ANIIDCO (Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation) is leading a ₹72,000 crore infrastructure project on Great Nicobar Island, promoted by NITI Aayog.
- The project includes a trans-shipment port, greenfield airport, tourism and township developments, and solar and gas power plants.
- ANIIDCO is a small, quasi-government agency based in Port Blair, incorporated in 1988 to exploit natural resources in an environmentally friendly manner.
- Its main activities include trading petroleum products, liquor, milk, managing tourism resorts, and developing infrastructure.
- ANIIDCO’s average annual turnover is ₹370 crore, with a profit of ₹35 crore over the last three years.
- Concerns are raised about ANIIDCO handling such a large, high-risk project, given the island’s biodiversity, indigenous communities, and tectonic activity.
- When ANIIDCO was appointed in July 2020, it had no environment policy or the necessary expertise to oversee the project.
- In 2022, ANIIDCO began recruiting experts in urban planning, environment, and infrastructure.
- In 2021, the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) questioned ANIIDCO’s environmental governance, and ANIIDCO admitted it had no environment policy.
- Despite these issues, the EAC granted environmental clearance for the project in November 2022.

### What are other conflicts of interests?

- In 2022, the Conservation Action Trust filed a petition with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) challenging the forest clearance given to ANIIDCO for the Great Nicobar project.
- The petition highlighted a conflict of interest: ANIIDCO’s Managing Director was also the Commissioner of Environment and Forests, meaning ANIIDCO essentially approved its own project.
- The Chief Secretary of the islands, who is also the chairman of ANIIDCO, was made part of the committee to address complaints against the project, raising concerns that ANIIDCO was evaluating itself again.
- Several employees of ANIIDCO are civil servants responsible for environmental and tribal issues in the Andaman and Nicobar administration, further complicating oversight.
- No responses were received from ANIIDCO or the authorities regarding the conflict of interest concerns.
- Former administrators have mixed views: Lt Gen A.K. Singh (former Lieutenant Governor) believed ANIIDCO could handle the project but would need outside expert help, while Sanat Kaul (former Chief Secretary) criticized ANIIDCO’s ability to manage such a large project unless it was significantly upgraded with better staff.

# Why has H.P. raised the marriageable age for women?

What are the key provisions of the Bill? Why is the assent of the President required? What are the concerns?

GS Paper I: Society  
Aaratrika Bhaumik

## The story so far:

On August 27, the Himachal Pradesh Assembly passed a Bill raising the **minimum marriageable age for women from 18 to 21 years**. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Himachal Pradesh Amendment) Bill, 2024, was passed on the first day of the two-week monsoon session. It seeks to amend the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (2006 Act)** to advance gender equality.

## Why was the Bill passed?

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu told *The Hindu* that the passage of the Bill clearly demonstrates the Congress government's commitment to advancing the welfare of women. "We are the first State in the country to enact the legislation to increase the marriage age of girls to 21. The Congress has always been at the forefront to work towards the

betterment of women," Mr. Sukhu said.

Tabling the Bill in the House, Health, Social Justice, and Empowerment Minister Dhani Ram Shandil highlighted that early marriage obstructs girls' education and limits their potential for progress in life. He noted that the proposed amendments to the 2006 Act aim to reduce instances of early pregnancies and motherhood, which adversely affect women's health.

## What are the key provisions?

Currently, **Section 2(a) of the 2006 Act defines a "child" as someone "who, if male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if female, has not completed eighteen years of age."** The Bill removes this distinction, redefining a "child" as "a male or female who has not completed twenty-one years of age."

The Bill also extends the time period for filing a petition to annul a marriage. Under Section 3 of the 2006 Act, an individual who was a minor at the time of

marriage can file for annulment within two years of attaining majority – before turning 20 for women and 23 for men. The Bill extends this period to five years, allowing both women and men to file petitions before they turn 23, in accordance with the new minimum marriageable age of 21 years. A new provision has also been introduced to ensure that the Bill's provisions take precedence over all other existing laws.

## Is the President's assent necessary?

In this case, Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla's assent would typically suffice to enact the Bill into law. However, since the Bill introduces a different minimum marriageable age for women, its provisions will be deemed inconsistent with the 2006 Act – a law enacted by Parliament. This potential conflict brings **Article 254 of the Constitution into play. According to clause (1) of this provision, if a State legislature enacts a law on a subject covered by the Concurrent List**

[Entry 5 of the Concurrent list deals with the subject of marriage and divorce] that is "repugnant" to the provisions of an existing central law, then that repugnant or inconsistent portion of the state law will be considered "void".

To remedy this, the State legislation will have to be reserved for the President's consideration and receive his or her assent in accordance with clause (2) of Article 254. With the President's assent, the State law takes precedence over the central law, but solely within the jurisdiction of that State.

## What do experts have to say?

Author and activist Madhu Mera previously told *The Hindu* that raising the minimum marriage age for women to 21 years could upend young lives in a web of criminal prosecutions. "In our research at Partners for Law in Development, we looked at 10 years of use of the child marriage law. Overwhelmingly, the law was used by parents against eloping daughters. It has become a tool for parental control and for punishment of boys or men whom girls choose as their husbands. An increase in age to 21 years would mean persecution of girls right up till 21 years," she said.

The **2008 Law Commission Report recommended setting a uniform age of marriage for both men and women at 18 years**. The National Human Rights Commission in 2018 too proposed a similar reform.

## THE GIST

On August 27, the Himachal Pradesh Assembly passed a Bill raising the minimum marriageable age for women from 18 to 21 years.

Section 2(a) of the 2006 Act defines a "child" as someone "who, if male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if female, has not completed eighteen years of age." The Bill removes this distinction, redefining a "child" as "a male or female who has not completed twenty-one years of age."

Author and activist Madhu Mera previously told *The Hindu* that raising the minimum marriage age for women to 21 years could upend young lives in a web of criminal prosecutions.

## Why has H.P. raised the marriageable age for women? (5 September)

What are the key provisions of the Bill? Why is the assent of the President required? What are the concerns?

- Himachal Pradesh Assembly passed a Bill on August 27 to raise the minimum marriage age for women from 18 to 21.
- The Bill is called the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Himachal Pradesh Amendment) Bill, 2024.
- It aims to promote gender equality and improve women's welfare.
- Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said this shows the government's commitment to women's welfare, and Himachal Pradesh is the first state to take this step.
- Health Minister Dhani Ram Shandil said early marriage limits girls' education and potential, and leads to health problems due to early pregnancies.
- The Bill changes the definition of a "child" in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, to be anyone under 21, regardless of gender (previously it was 18 for girls and 21 for boys).
- The Bill extends the time to annul a child marriage from two years to five years after reaching the age of 21, allowing both men and women to file until age 23.
- A new provision ensures this Bill will override any conflicting existing laws.

## Is the President's assent necessary?

- Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla's assent would usually be enough to make the Bill law.
- However, since the Bill changes the minimum marriage age for women, it conflicts with the central Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
- Article 254 of the Constitution states that if a State law conflicts with a central law on a subject like marriage (under the Concurrent List), the conflicting part of the State law becomes invalid.
- To resolve this, the Bill must be sent to the President for approval. If the President approves, the State law will override the central law but only within that State.
- Some experts, like Madhu Mera, express concerns that increasing the marriage age to 21 could lead to more cases of parents controlling or prosecuting daughters and their chosen partners.
- A 2008 Law Commission Report recommended setting a uniform marriage age of 18 for both men and women, and the National Human Rights Commission supported this in 2018.

## Consumption choices shifting amid rural revival (5 September)

- Rural demand in India is starting to improve.
- A good monsoon and crop sowing progress could boost consumption, especially with an early festive season.
- India's private consumption spending grew 7.4% between April and June, the highest in six quarters.
- This growth was driven by demand for items like air conditioners (due to heatwaves) and other goods like TVs and mobile phones.
- Most durable items had lower inflation, except for air conditioners, which helped drive demand.
- In fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), mixed production data suggests changing consumer preferences rather than weak demand.
- Some items like biscuits and bread saw slight drops in sales (3%-5%), while products like coffee, tea, chocolates, and cakes had bigger drops (8%-18%).
- Demand for roasted cashews, however, surged by 43%.