

NO MATTER HOW
HARD THE PAST IS, YOU
CAN ALWAYS BEGIN
AGAIN.

- JACK KORNFIELD

Important Issues of the Day

- **Index of Industrial Production – PageNo.1,GS3**
- **OPEC group – Page No. 1, GS 2,3**
- **Battle of wills – Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **RTE Act – Page No.6 , GS 2**
- **Cervical cancer – Page No. 7, GS 2**
- **Digital arrests – Page No. 12, GS 3**

Growth in industrial output at 5-month low of 4.1% in March

Slowdown in construction and consumer-centric sectors pulls down IIP growth in the first month of data since the crisis began in West Asia

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

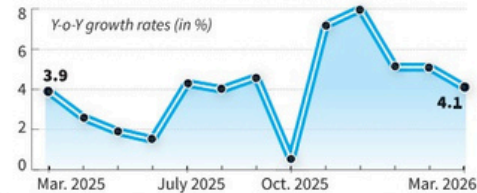
Growth in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) slowed to a five-month low of 4.1% in March 2026, the first month of data after the West Asia crisis began, pulled down by a near-halving in construction sector growth rates and low growth in consumer-centric sectors.

Data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Tuesday showed that growth in the IIP has been slowing since January, even before the West Asia crisis broke out on February 28. Economists point out that the full economic impact of the crisis will play out over the next few months. For the full financial year 2025-26, growth in the IIP stood at 4.1%, marginally faster than the 4.07% recorded in 2024-25.

According to Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda, the growth of 4.1% in March is "impressive given that the core sector growth was negative for the month". Data

Slippery slope

Latest official data showed that IIP growth has been slowing since January 2026, even before the West Asia war began



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF STATISTICS AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

released earlier this month had shown that the eight core sectors, which make up about 40% of the IIP, had contracted 0.4% in March.

Within the IIP, the manufacturing sector slowed to a five-month low of 4.3% in March, although this was faster than the 4% recorded last March.

"Domestic manufacturing has begun to bear the brunt of costlier and tighter supplies of petroleum products and natural gas," Dipti Deshpande, principal economist at Crisil, said.

Growth in the capital goods sector, notably, accelerated to a 29-month high 14.6% in March from an already-robust 12.4% in

February. While growth in the infrastructure and construction sector slowed to a nine-month low of 6.7%, economists still felt it highlighted strength in the economy. "Importantly, the strength in capital goods and infrastructure goods underscores that investment-led demand remains intact, even as consumer non-durables posted a muted 1.1% rise," Vikrant Chaturvedi, associate director of research at Brickwork Ratings said. The 1.1% rise in consumer non-durables came on a low base as the sector had contracted 4% in March last year.

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- **IIP is a monthly volume index that measures short-term changes in industrial output.**
- **Formula used: The index is calculated as a simple weighted arithmetic mean using Laspeyres' formula.**
- **Sectors covered: It tracks production in key industrial sectors and shows whether activity is expanding or contracting over a period.**

- **IIP covers three broad sectors: Manufacturing (77.6% weight), Mining (14.4%), and Electricity (8%).**

- **The eight core industries together account for about 40.27% of the weight of items included in the IIP.**

- **These are refinery products, electricity, steel, coal, crude oil, natural gas, cement, and fertilizers, listed in descending order of their share.**

- **Published by:** It is published by the The National Statistical Office (NSO) , Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
- **It is compiled and published every month, six weeks after the reference month ends.**
- **Base year:** The current base year is 2011–12, adopted to reflect the modern industrial structure.
- **The base has been periodically revised from earlier years such as 1937, 1946, 1951, and 1956, and so on, to keep the index relevant.**

Significance

- **Key high-frequency indicator of industrial momentum.**
- **Inputs for GDP nowcasting, monetary/fiscal policy, capacity and investment planning.**
- **Used to gauge business cycles and sectoral performance.**

UAE announces exit from OPEC group

Associated Press

DUBAI

The UAE announced on Tuesday that it will leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) effective May 1, stripping the oil cartel of

one of its largest producers and further weakening its leverage over global oil supplies and prices.

Making the announcement via its state-run WAM news agency, the UAE said it would also be leaving the wider OPEC+

group, which Russia had led in order to try to stabilise oil prices.

“This decision reflects the UAE’s long-term strategic and economic vision and evolving energy profile, including accelerated investment in domestic

energy production, and reinforces its commitment to a responsible, reliable, and forward-looking role in global energy markets,” the UAE said.

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Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

The OPEC is a permanent intergovernmental organization founded at the Baghdad Conference, in 1960 by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, headquartered in Vienna, Austria.

- OPEC currently has 12 members, including Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Venezuela.**
- OPEC works to coordinate oil policies among member countries to ensure stable prices, steady supply to consumers, and fair returns for investors.**
- OPEC nations produce about 30% of the world's crude oil, hold 80% of proven reserves, and account for nearly half of global exports, with Saudi Arabia as the largest producer among the OPEC.**

- **OPEC+ was formed in 2016 as an alliance between OPEC and 10 other oil producers to address declining oil prices due to US shale oil growth.**
- **OPEC+ includes the OPEC members plus Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan, and Sudan.**
- **The OPEC and OPEC+ countries combined produce about 60% of global oil production.**

9,400 accounts banned for being linked to digital arrests

In documents before Supreme Court, WhatsApp says its probe began from the initial input from govt. sources to identify and run down the creators or administrators behind scam operations

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Documents placed on record in the Supreme Court show WhatsApp asserting to the Home Ministry that it detected and banned up to 9,400 accounts linked to “digital arrests” and “law enforcement impersonations” after independent investigations.

The platform said it had focused on bringing down the entire network of scamsters, mostly active in Cambodia.

Not isolated

Warning signals sent from probe agencies and the Union government are not treated as isolated or one-off reports, but as a “seed” to map and disrupt the entire criminal network, the platform said.

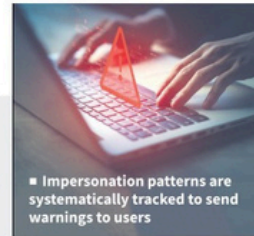
The platform said its probe fanned out from the initial “seed” input from government sources to identify and run down the creators or administrators behind scam operations such as digital arrests or accounts actively promoting scam activity within groups and channels.

The communication between WhatsApp and the Home Ministry was annexed to a status report filed on behalf of the In-

Curbing virtual fraud

The government and industry stakeholders are taking coordinated measures to fight digital scams

- WhatsApp is working on SIM binding — linking the account with physical SIM card — to detect SIM swapping and cloning
- Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning systems being used to detect impersonation of law enforcement agencies, misuse of official logos and synthetic content



■ Impersonation patterns are systematically tracked to send warnings to users

dian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) by the Ministry. Attorney-General R. Venkataramani appears for the Ministry in the Supreme Court.

The report said several steps were discussed in a meeting convened by the Inter-Departmental Committee under the chairmanship of the Special Secretary (Internal Security) in March. WhatsApp, along with major telecom service providers (TSPs) such as Airtel, Vodafone-Idea, Reliance Jio, and BSNL, were invited.

WhatsApp said its work on SIM binding — linking the account with the physical SIM card — was on and the platform would comply with the provisions of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Eth-

ics Code) Rules, 2021. These include the provisions related to identification and labelling of ‘Synthetically Generated Information’ (SGI) commonly used in video calls made for ‘digital arrests’.

The Ministry and other stakeholders also agreed on introducing mechanisms for identifying and blocking device IDs used in digital arrest scams. WhatsApp said it would continue to strengthen Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning-based systems to detect impersonation of law enforcement agencies, misuse of official logos and synthetic content.

Detection models

The report said the online platform has introduced detection models and warning mechanisms to

identify impersonation patterns and alert users. It had further agreed to retain data of deleted accounts for a minimum period of 180 days to assist law enforcement investigations.

Recently, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant had flagged digital arrest scams the “most disturbing” and lethal among cybercrimes, which not only result in merely financial loss to victims but also a “blistering sense of violation”. The CJI had said that such crimes must not be seen as mere economic offences, but an offence against human dignity.

The Home Ministry had clocked over 2.41 lakh complaints related to digital arrests scams alone, involving losses of approximately ₹30,000 crore.

The CJI’s Bench had taken *suo motu* cognisance of digital arrests scams in January this year, saying that victims were psychologically coerced by fraudsters dressed up convincingly as police officers and judicial officers to cough up huge sums of their savings to avert fictional arrests or punitive action. One of the cases before the Supreme Court was that of a 78-year-old woman lawyer, who was duped by fraudsters in a digital arrest scam.

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- isolated or one-off reports, but as a “seed” to map and disrupt the entire criminal network, the platform said. The platform said its probe fanned out from the initial “seed” input from government sources to identify and run down the creators or administrators behind scam operations such as digital arrests or accounts actively promoting scam activity within groups and channels.

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- **The Home Ministry had clocked over 2.41 lakh complaints related to digital arrests scams alone, involving losses of approximately ₹30,000 crore.**

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)

- **About: I4C was launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2020 to deal with all types of cyber crimes including cyber fraud in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.**

Objectives of I4C:

- **To act as a nodal point to curb Cybercrime in the country.**
- **To strengthen the fight against Cybercrime committed against women and children.**
- **Facilitate easy filing Cybercrime related complaints and identifying Cybercrime trends and patterns.**
- **To act as an early warning system for Law Enforcement Agencies for proactive Cybercrime prevention and detection.**

Mains Question

Cyber frauds such as digital arrests highlight the vulnerability of citizens in the digitaleconomy. Evaluate India's preparedness to deal with emerging cyber threats.

साइबर धोखाधड़ी जैसे "डिजिटल अरेस्ट" नागरकों की डिजिटल अर्थव्यवस्था में बढ़ती असुरक्षा को दर्शाते हैं। उभरते साइबर खतरों से निपटने के लिए भारत की तैयारी का मूल याकान कीजिए।

The fight to eliminate cervical cancer

Page No. 7, GS 2

In 2008, Professor Harald zur Hausen received the Nobel Prize for his discovery that persistent infection with high-risk strains of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the cause of cervical cancer, an important cause of morbidity and mortality globally, but more so in low and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs). His discovery paved the way for the development of prophylactic vaccines as well as tests to detect the infectious agent. A decade later, in 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced an initiative for the elimination of cervical cancer, and the global strategy was formally launched on November 17, 2020, endorsed by 194 countries, India among them.

Disease and prevention

Cervical cancer is a source of extreme physical misery, emotional strife and financial hardship. It is the second most common cancer among women in India, with approximately one lakh new cases every year, and half as many deaths, which is one quarter of the global burden. The years of life lost to cervical cancer are more than that of other cancers as these women are relatively younger, with active family and social responsibilities. Women diagnosed with stage 4 cervical cancer could develop urinary fistulas, postmenopausal bleeding, extreme sciatic and lumbar pain, obstruction to their ureters and renal failure. If one is lucky enough to get diagnosed at an earlier stage, the cancer is curable, but only with radical surgery or chemo and radiation therapy. There is also a risk of recurrence which will require even more difficult exenteration procedures, stomas etc. That is, while the cancer is curable by providing symptom relief, hormone replacement and other supportive care, it comes at a physical and financial cost.

However, such suffering was preventable. Since the 1940s, secondary prevention by regular



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pap smear screening had been set up in the West, enabling detection of not just cancer but also precancerous stages. The natural history of cervical cancer has been well documented for over a century. It has a long precancerous phase of 10-15 years termed Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia (CIN) which can be detected by the microscopic examination of cells collected on a slide by brushing the cervix. At this stage, the cancer can be easily treated by simple day care procedures that do not require the removal of the uterus.

However, in India and other LMICs, we lacked the infrastructure and manpower to implement a screening of all women over the age of 30 years even once, let alone the recommended three-year interval period. Even in good tertiary centres, the laboratory placed a limit on the number of women that could be screened in a day. Outreach camps were conducted at regular intervals by gynaecologists and pathologists around the country, but these were merely a drop in the ocean. Even today, despite a national programme for screening with visual inspection, the screening coverage does not exceed 5%. Moreover, bringing women who test positive into the hospital for a confirmatory biopsy and treatment has extremely poor compliance rates.

The promise of a vaccine

HPV vaccination entered this scenario in 2006 like a superhero for the primary prevention of cervical cancer. Starting off as a three-dose vaccination, research showed that it could be reduced to two, and then it was found that just one dose was sufficient to provide protection against 85-90% of cancers. Over 500 million doses have been delivered worldwide, and nearly four million in India.

Cumulative data from systematic trials and post-marketing surveillance show no increase in adverse events

among vaccinated women than in the general population. Transient mild reactions have been observed that are common to all vaccines. There have been no negative effects on reproductive performance, fertility rates, congenital malformations or menstrual patterns. The efficacy of the HPV vaccine is remarkable, with nearly complete protection against the strains which are present in the vaccine. The first generation of vaccines were directed against the two most virulent strains, HPV 16 and 18, that account for 70% of cervical cancers globally but 85% in India. Countries like Australia and the U.K. which introduced the HPV vaccine soon after its launch in 2007-8 have already witnessed significant reductions in pre-cancer and cancer. Similar reports have come from other countries like Sweden, Denmark, Canada and the U.S.

Widespread accessibility

The WHO's cervical cancer elimination initiative envisions making cervical cancer a rare cancer, with an incidence rate of four per 1,00,000. To reach this goal, we must achieve certain targets by 2030: HPV vaccination of 90% of girls before the age of 15 years, screening of 70% of women with an HPV test at 35 and 45 years, and treatment of 90% of those detected with lesions. While the country has already crossed the halfway point since the launch of the global declaration, we are still far away from reaching these targets. However, the launch of the National HPV Vaccination Campaign on February 28, 2026 by the Prime Minister himself signals the highest political commitment to women's health and reproductive rights. All parents need to be aware of this opportunity so that their 14-year-old daughters can avail free vaccination at the nearest government health facilities. One small jab will take us towards a cervical cancer-free future and a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

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- **His discovery paved the way for the development of prophylactic vaccines as well as tests to detect the infectious agent.**
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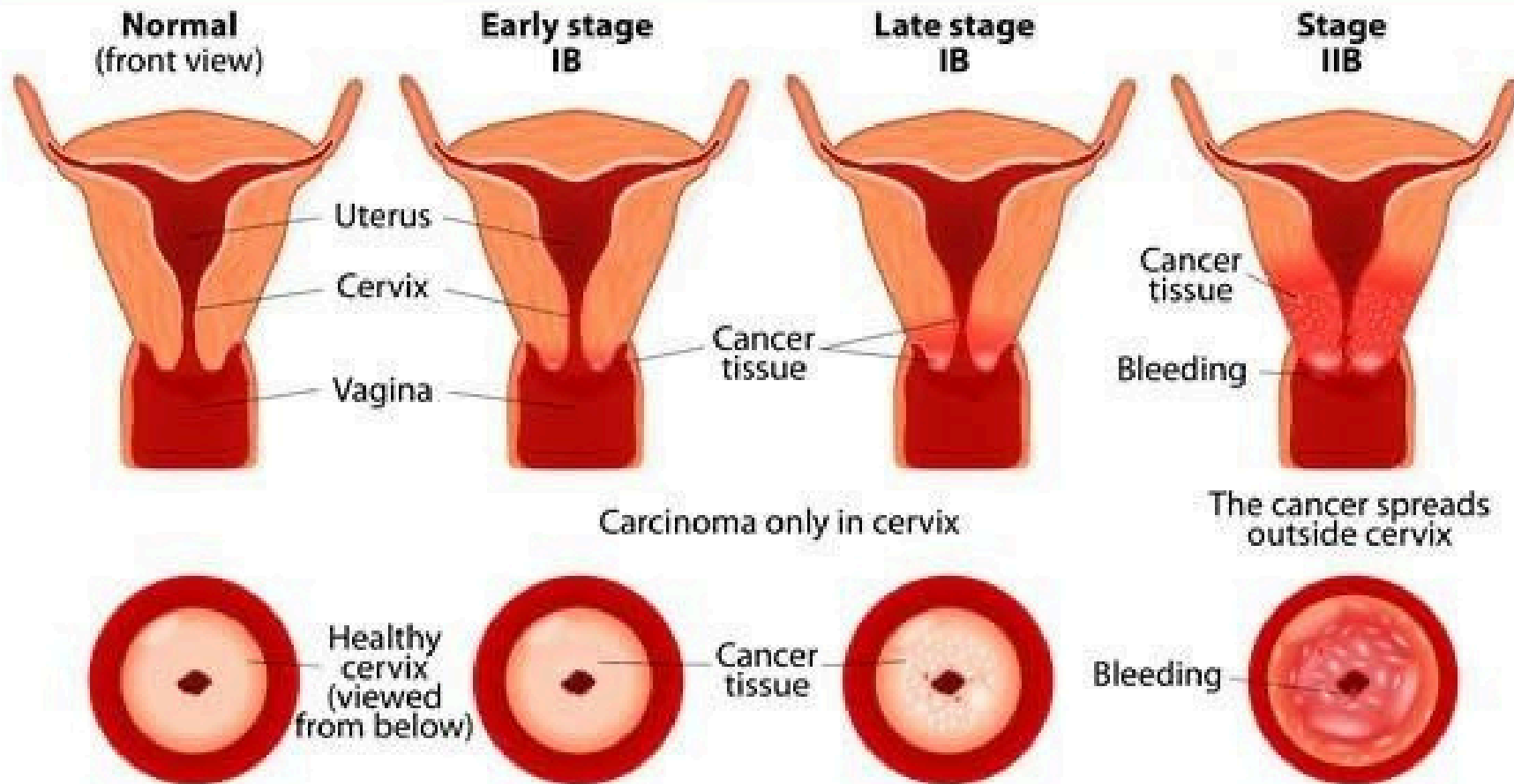
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- **Cervical Cancer develops in a woman's cervix. It is the 4th most common type of cancer among women, globally.**
Almost all cervical cancer cases (99%) are linked to infection with high-risk Human Papillomavirus (HPV), an extremely common virus transmitted through sexual contact.
- **High Prevalence and Mortality Rates: Cervical cancer ranks as the second most common cancer among women in India, with approximately 1.27 lakh cases reported annually and contributing to around 80,000 deaths each year.**
- **Comorbidities and Risk Factors: Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, primarily transmitted through sexual contact, is a leading cause of cervical cancer in India.**
- **The high prevalence of comorbidities like HIV/AIDS and risk factors such as early marriage, multiple sexual partners, and lack of contraception use further complicate efforts to eradicate cervical cancer.**

- **India's milestone in developing the indigenous quadrivalent vaccine, Cervavac, promises accessibility and affordability.**
- **CERVAVAC is India's first indigenously developed quadrivalent human papillomavirus (qHPV) vaccine that is said to be effective against four strains of the virus - Type 6, Type 11, Type 16 and Type 18.**
- **Priced at ₹2,000 a dose, Cervavac holds promise in the fight against HPV infections and cervical cancer.**
- **Cervical cancer has a 10–15 year pre-invasive phase, offering a window for early detection and outpatient treatment.**
- **Early-stage management yields a cure rate exceeding 93%, highlighting the importance of timely interventions.**

CERVICAL CANCER



The RTE Act and the idea of social inclusion

In its January 2026 judgment, the Supreme Court of India reaffirmed the purpose of Section 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, the landmark provision that reserves 25% of seats in private schools for students from economically weaker sections and socially disadvantaged groups. In words that are deeply symbolic, the Court observed that this provision makes it possible for “the child of a multi-millionaire or even of a Judge of the Supreme Court of India to sit in the same classroom and at the same bench as the child of an autorickshaw driver or a street vendor”. The judgment reasserted that this provision is a deliberate constitutional strategy to operationalise equality of status by creating shared learning spaces for all children.

This sentiment of social integration often comes alive in thousands of stories across the country. Take Karthik, a footwear vendor, and his wife, Sunita, for example. They always dreamed of providing their children with quality education despite their modest income. This became possible when their younger son joined a reputed private school through this provision. The boy thrived in the new environment, excelling in academics and his favourite sport, kabaddi. Teachers nurtured his growth, while classmates became close friends. For Karthik and Sunita, the RTE Act did not just change their son’s future; it altered their family’s life trajectory, with the potential to lift them out of poverty. Stories such as Prem’s are often told as narratives of access – of doors opened and opportunities unlocked. But at stake is not simply where a child studies, but whether the circumstances of their birth continue to determine the boundaries of their social world.

A constitutional strategy

Despite its intent, Section 12(1)(c) is frequently mischaracterised as a tool to promote private



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The Supreme Court of India’s judgment strengthens the vision of a socially integrated education system

schooling or to allow the state to outsource its constitutional duty to public education, citing falling government school enrolment alongside rising private school admissions.

This reading is misplaced. First, Section 12(1)(c) does not dilute the state’s duty to invest in public schools, but recognises that the right to free and compulsory elementary education, and the creation of shared learning spaces, must be realised within a schooling ecosystem where private schools are not incidental actors but natural participants in fulfilling a constitutional mandate. The RTE Act does not create a zero-sum contest between public and private institutions; it seeks to foster integrated educational spaces.

Second, the shift towards private schooling predates the RTE Act. The Annual Status of Education (ASER) Report of 2006 documents significant movement into private schools “at the expense of government school enrolment”. Declining admissions in government schools are rooted in deeper concerns around infrastructure, teacher presence, and perceived quality – not in Section 12(1)(c) itself.

Evidence from the ground

Since its rollout, over five million children have walked through the doors of educational spaces previously out of reach, with retention rates averaging over 90%. In cities such as Delhi and Ahmedabad, blended classrooms are no longer exceptions; they are the norm. Research (such as that by Rao, Gautam, 2019) indicates that mixed classrooms lead to increased generosity, reduced discrimination, and stronger pro-social behaviour, without any adverse impact on academic outcomes or classroom discipline. At scale, implementation has also stabilised: reimbursements under Section 12(1)(c) are centrally streamlined, and State-level online Management Information Systems (MIS) ensure

transparent, low-discretion processing.

For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, these classrooms offer more than just academics. They provide access to social capital, previously unexplored aspirations, peer networks, and institutional cultures. These experiences translate into higher self-belief, enhanced ambition, and a broader worldview.

Acknowledging challenges

There is no denying the challenges that persist in the implementation of Section 12(1)(c). Some private schools continue to resist full inclusion, while families often bear hidden costs for uniforms, books and materials. Implementation remains uneven across States, with persistent gaps in transparency, grievance redress, and last-mile outreach and disbursements.

These challenges do not change the fact that Section 12(1)(c) was not meant to rely solely on moral persuasion – it requires clear, enforceable rules to succeed. Encouragingly, recent experience demonstrates that these gaps are neither inevitable nor insurmountable. State-driven digital admission systems and improved monitoring mechanisms – particularly in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Delhi – have significantly strengthened access and accountability.

The Court’s reaffirmation of Section 12(1)(c) makes clear that it is neither a retreat from public education nor an endorsement of private schooling. The challenge now is administrative. States must ensure timely reimbursements, remove hidden costs by private schools, strengthen grievance redress, and enforce inclusion norms so that equality is experienced. The real test is whether we can operationalise the constitutional promise of social integration with the seriousness needed to match the ambition we hold for our children.

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- Despite its intent, Section 12(1)(c) is frequently mischaracterised as a tool to promote private schooling or to allow the state to outsource its constitutional duty to public education, citing falling government school enrolment alongside rising private school admissions.
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- **Right to Education Act (RTE) provided free and compulsory education to children in 2009 and enforced it as a fundamental right under Article 21-A.**
- **Originally Part IV of Indian Constitution, Article 45 and Article 39 (f) of DPSP, had a provision for state funded as well as equitable and accessible education.**
- **The first official document on the Right to Education was Ramamurti Committee Report in 1990.**
- **In 1993, the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in the Unnikrishnan JP vs State of Andhra Pradesh & Others held that Education is a Fundamental right flowing from Article 21.**
- **Tapas Majumdar Committee (1999) was set up, which encompassed insertion of Article 21A.**
- **The 86th amendment to the constitution of India in 2002, provided Right to Education as a fundamental right in part-III of the Constitution.**
- **The same amendment inserted Article 21A which made Right to Education a fundamental right for children between 6-14 years.**

- **The RTE Act aims to provide primary education to all children aged 6 to 14 years. It enforces Education as a Fundamental Right (Article 21).**
-
- **The act mandates 25% reservation for disadvantaged sections of the society where disadvantaged groups include:**
 - **SCs and STs**
 - **Socially Backward Class**
 - **Differently abled**
 -
- **It also makes provisions for a non-admitted child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.**
- **It had a clause for “No Detention Policy” which has been removed under The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2019.**
- **It also provides for prohibition of deployment of teachers for non-educational work, other than decennial census, elections to local authority, state legislatures and parliament, and disaster relief.**

Battle of wills

The U.S. should lift its blockade so that
Iran can open the Strait of Hormuz

The U.S. war on Iran has turned into a battle of wills in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman, marked by duelling naval blockades and stalled diplomacy. Iran, which has effectively restricted the free flow of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz since the U.S. and Israel attacks on February 28, has refused to ease its control over the critical waterway. The U.S. insists that its blockade of Iranian ports will stay in place until a deal is reached. Last week, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi travelled to Pakistan, which mediated the first round of direct talks on April 11, but Iran declined further direct talks with Washington. The White House had earlier said it would send special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner to Islamabad, but President Donald Trump cancelled their trip after Mr. Araghchi left the Pakistani capital. Mr. Trump has repeatedly said that Iran wants a deal. Yet, Tehran continues to refuse talks with the U.S., citing Israel's attacks on Lebanon and America's blockade in the Gulf of Oman. On paper, a ceasefire is in place in Lebanon, and Mr. Trump said earlier this month that Israel was "prohibited" from attacking the country, but Israeli air strikes have continued. He has also indicated no urgency to lift the blockade, betting that sustained economic pressure will force Iran to change its position.

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The only silver lining is that the Iran ceasefire, announced on April 8, is still holding. Despite Mr. Trump's threats, he has held fire even after Iran seized ships in the Persian Gulf. Tehran, too, despite warning retaliation over a U.S. seizure of an Iranian tanker, has not followed through. Both sides have remained diplomatically engaged through Pakistan. The alternative to diplomacy is disaster. The U.S. and Israel bombed Iran for 40 days but failed to secure a favourable strategic outcome, and the global economic fallout of this illegal war is now being felt. For diplomacy to succeed, Mr. Trump and the Iranian leadership should adopt a phased approach. Rather than acting as if the war has not changed the region's strategic realities, the U.S. should offer tangible concessions to Iran in return for compromises on core issues. Iran has demonstrated a measure of deterrence by asserting control over the Strait of Hormuz. But if it continues to disrupt commercial traffic, further damaging the global economy, it risks squandering the goodwill it enjoys as the underdog. A practical first step would be reciprocal de-escalation: the U.S. lifting its blockade and Iran reopening the Strait to commercial shipping. This would also reinforce the fragile ceasefire and build confidence, paving the way for the next round of direct talks on outstanding issues, including the nuclear programme.

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