

DISCIPLINE



Important Issues of the Day

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NSO survey shows better health-seeking behaviour, relatively low medical charges

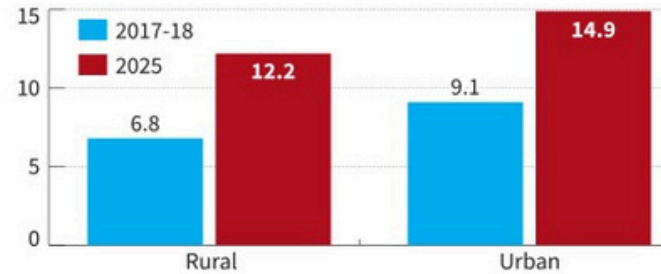
Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Health-seeking behaviour in India is improving as the proportion of the population reported ailing (PPRA) in 2025 nearly doubled from 2017-18 figures, with rural area numbers going up to 12.2% from 6.8% and those of urban areas rising to 14.9% from 9.1%, according to the latest findings of the National Statistical Office (NSO) in the 80th round of the household consumption health survey released on Wednesday.

Expansion in coverage under government health insurance and financing schemes rose more than threefold – increasing to 45.5% from 12.9% in rural areas, and 31.8% from 8.9% in urban areas, the NSO reported.

Health report

The proportion of urban and rural populations reported to be ailing in 2017-18 to 2025



SOURCE: NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICE

Institutional deliveries have risen to 95.6% in rural areas, and to 97.8% in urban areas, the survey said.

Covering both rural and urban areas across the country, the survey canvassed 1,39,732 households, including 76,296 households in rural areas and 63,436 households in urban areas.

The findings of the NSO noted that median out-of-

pocket medical expenditure (OOPE) per case of hospitalisation in 2025 has been recorded as ₹11,285, indicating that relatively low expenditure was incurred in over half of the cases of hospitalisation in the country.

Only a small number of high-cost cases were observed to push up the average (mean value), the NSO said.

“This shows that high expenditure is not widespread but limited to specific cases requiring specialised treatment. Moreover, the OOPE in more than half of the entire hospitalisation cases in the public health facilities incur only ₹1,100. Importantly, for non-hospitalisation (outpatient) care, the median OOPE in public health facilities is zero, reflecting that a large proportion of citizens are able to access essential healthcare services entirely free of cost,” the survey said.

India has also registered a decline in infectious diseases and a rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular conditions.

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- **Additionally, in India, financial risk protection has expanded with the rapid scaling-up of government-financed health insurance coverage, including under the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, and various State schemes.**
- **The percentage of population covered under these government health finance and insurance schemes in the country has notably increased from 12.9% to 45.5% in rural areas, and from 8.9% to 31.8% in urban areas, the survey said.**
- **There is an increasing trend towards the utilisation of public health facilities, the NSO survey has also shown.**
- **In 2014, around 28% of the rural population headed to public facilities for outpatient care, and this surged to 35% in 2025, the survey said.**

- **The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) serves as the central nodal agency for the country's official statistics system.**
- **The National Statistics Office (NSO), under MoSPI, oversees the integrated development of the national statistical system.**
- **NSO comprises the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). Apart from NSO, various line ministries/departments maintain statistical establishments for data collection, dissemination, and coordination with NSO.**

- **National Statistical Commission (NSC):**
- **Established in 2006 based on recommendations from the C. Rangarajan Commission, NSC serves as the apex advisory body on statistical matters.**
- **Placement in Seventh Schedule:**
- **The subject of 'Statistics' is included in both the Union and Concurrent Lists of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, specifically listed under Entry 94 (Union List) and Entry 45 (Concurrent List).**
- **Legislative Framework:**
- **Specific legislative acts governing statistics include the Census Act, 1948; the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969; and the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008.**

The war on Iran and the Gulf's shattered illusions

Wars are rarely confined to the battlefields where they erupt. Their shockwaves ripple outward, reshaping economies, societies and the narratives nations tell about themselves. The war in Iran has been no exception. It has left behind not only a devastated country but also a region forced to confront the fragility of its prosperity and the precariousness of its stability. What will emerge from this conflict is not simply a wounded Iran, but a Gulf stripped of its long-cherished image as a safe haven for capital, entrepreneurship, and migrants – and a broader region, including India, in peril.

A nation left gutted

All reports indicate that Iran today is a country physically broken. The war has reduced once-thriving cities to rubble, obliterated industrial zones, and crippled vital infrastructure. Power grids flicker unreliably, refineries lie in ruins, and transport networks are severed. The destruction is not limited to the material; it extends to the very architecture of governance. The decapitation of Iran's leadership has left ministries paralysed, security forces fragmented, and the chain of command in disarray. Assets painstakingly built over decades – military stockpiles, oil terminals, cultural institutions – have been degraded or destroyed. What remains is a nation gutted, its capacity to govern and protect itself gravely diminished.

The human toll is equally staggering: Millions displaced, communities uprooted, and generations scarred by violence. The war has not only destroyed buildings and bridges but also eroded the social fabric that held the country together. Trust in institutions has collapsed, and the sense of national cohesion has been vitiated by fear, uncertainty, and resentment.

The devastation within Iran has triggered economic consequences far beyond its borders. Fuel prices have surged as crude exports collapsed, sending tremors through global markets. Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and liquefied natural gas (LNG) shortages everywhere ripple through supply chains, disrupting industries that depend on steady energy flows. Factories in South Asia and East Africa have shuttered due to scarcity, disrupting supply chains and raising costs for Indian manufacturers, while restaurants from Dubai to Delhi struggle to keep stoves lit. Inflation bites hardest at the working class, who cannot hedge against volatility.

The Gulf, long seen as a stabilising energy hub, has been compromised. Its ability to reassure global markets of steady supply has been shaken, exposing the fragility of global dependence on



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The war has rattled the Gulf, shattering the illusion of stability and economic resilience

hydrocarbons concentrated in one volatile region. The war has revealed how quickly prosperity can unravel when the foundations of security are undermined and the promise of stability, the Gulf's greatest asset, fractures.

The Gulf is vulnerable

For decades, the Gulf cultivated an image of prosperity: gleaming skyscrapers, bustling free zones, a magnet for capital, entrepreneurship, and migrant labour. That narrative now lies considerably tarnished. The war has exposed the region's vulnerability, undermining confidence in its ability to remain a safe haven. Businesses reconsider expansion, and capital flows hesitate. Gulf labour, the backbone of India's remittance economy, faces uncertainty as employers tighten budgets and scale back projects, leaving migrants and their families in India anxious about livelihoods. Transit travel through Dubai, the world's most reliable hub, now feels precarious, as airlines reroute, passengers face delays, and the aura of effortless connectivity is replaced by anxiety. Investments from the Gulf's sovereign wealth funds are shadowed by doubt, their portfolios no longer symbols of confidence and permanence. Trade routes, too, are unsettled: Indian exporters who relied on Gulf ports as gateways to Africa and Europe now confront delays, higher insurance premiums, and diminished confidence in the region as a secure conduit for global commerce. The war has unsettled not only the movement of people and goods but also flows of capital, undermining the very foundations of the Gulf's promise as a safe haven for globalisation – and exposing India's deep entanglement with that promise.

The psychological blow is as significant as the economic one. Investors and entrepreneurs had long believed that the Gulf was insulated from the turbulence of its West Asian neighbours, a place where capital could thrive under the protection of strong states and predictable policies. That belief has been shattered. The war has shown that even the Gulf, with all its wealth and ambition, cannot escape the destabilising effects of regional conflict.

When the guns finally fall silent, Iran's regime will still be standing, albeit diminished, but the country will be devastated: its borders porous and internal order fragile; its economy battered, with oil revenues diminished and industries in ruins; its government weakened, its new leadership untested, and quite probably likely to be more hardline and repressive, focused as it will be on survival rather than reform. This last prospect is particularly troubling. History suggests that governments born in crisis often cling to power through coercion rather than

consensus. Iran's bruised new rulers may resort to repression at home and aggression abroad. They may seek to lash out asymmetrically – through cyber warfare, proxy militias, or global disruption – leveraging the few tools left to project influence through its capacity for regional disruption. The risk of instability radiating outward is real. The Gulf states, which invited U.S. bases onto their soil to enhance their own security, might now find the American presence only invites further attack and subversion.

Yet, is there a more hopeful scenario? Could reconstruction, however slow, open space for renewal? Might regional actors, even absent American support or Israeli intrusion, find common cause in rebuilding a shattered neighbour to prevent chaos from spilling over? The answer remains uncertain. What is clear is that the war has rewritten the Gulf's story: from a beacon of stability to a region grappling with fragility, volatility, and the spectre of prolonged unrest.

Once the Americans have flown away

Hope lies in the possibility of regional cooperation. The Gulf states, despite their own vulnerabilities, have the resources and the incentive to prevent Iran's collapse from spilling over into their territories. Reconstruction could become a shared project, not out of altruism but out of necessity. A stable Iran, even if weakened, is preferable to a chaotic one capable of exporting instability. The challenge will be to overcome mistrust and rivalry, and to see in Iran's devastation not an opportunity for dominance but a warning of shared fragility.

The war in Iran has left behind more than ruins; it has shattered illusions. The Gulf is no longer the untouchable safe haven it once claimed to be. Iran is no longer a formidable regional power but a wounded state struggling to survive. The region as a whole faces a crossroads: it can either descend into a cycle of instability and retaliation, or it can seize the opportunity to build a new narrative of cooperation and resilience. India can play a constructive role, leveraging its good relations with the Arab states and its historic ties to Iran, to serve as a bridge for reconstruction rather than watching as the region spirals into dysfunction and despair.

One lesson is undeniable: prosperity built on fragile foundations cannot endure. The Gulf must now confront the reality that its future depends not only on wealth and ambition but also on stability and cooperation. Whether it can rise to that challenge, once the Americans have flown away, depends on all of us in the region who have an interest in maintaining the stability and prosperity that was once the envy of the world.

- **All reports indicate that Iran today is a country physically broken. The war has reduced once-thriving cities to rubble, obliterated industrial zones, and crippled vital infrastructure.**
- **Power grids flicker unreliably, refineries lie in ruins, and transport networks are severed. The destruction is not limited to the material; it extends to the very architecture of governance.**
- **The human toll is equally staggering: Millions displaced, communities uprooted, and generations scarred by violence.**
- **The war has not only destroyed buildings and bridges but also eroded the social fabric that held the country together. Trust in institutions has collapsed, and the sense of national cohesion has been vitiated by fear, uncertainty, and resentment.**
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Compounding gains

The New Zealand Free Trade

Agreement builds on seven recent FTAs

The India-New Zealand Free Trade agreement (FTA) signed on Monday might look underwhelming when viewed in isolation, but is nevertheless significant when looking at what has been happening over the last five to six years. This impression is because New Zealand's economy is one-sixteenth the size of India's, and makes up less than 1% of India's total trade. Yet, this view ignores the fact that the FTA comes soon after the signing of, or closure of negotiations on, seven other trade agreements in the past three and a half years or so. It also ignores the larger policy goals that India is trying to achieve through such deals. The COVID-19 pandemic and the U.S. tariff frictions have shown India that it needs to diversify supply chains on the import and export sides. Weaning off imports from China is a tough task. Yet, any chipping away of the 16% of India's imports that China accounts for would be welcome. Importantly, the strategic need to diversify export destinations, especially while the mercurial Donald Trump is in charge of India's largest export market, is clear and urgent. The trade deals with Mauritius, the UAE, Australia, the EFTA nations, the U.K., the EU, Oman, and now New Zealand all provide Indian exporters opportunities that they should take advantage of. Finally, dismissing this FTA on the basis of its size would be unfair to India's negotiators who have done well to use India's comparative advantage to push through key victories.

The first key strength of the FTA for India, and

unprecedented, is that New Zealand will remove all goods tariffs immediately on execution of the agreement. The second strength is that India managed to avoid providing any concessions on any of its sensitive sectors. Key among these exclusions is dairy, something New Zealand had been especially keen to include. The third positive is New Zealand's commitment to facilitate investments in India worth \$20 billion over 15 years. This is similar to the provisions in the EFTA trade pact, wherein the four EFTA countries committed to facilitate \$100 billion of investments in India over 15 years. To be sure, these are commitments to facilitate and not commitments to invest, but getting them included in the text of the deal is nevertheless significant. To help this along, India will create a dedicated desk to address any issues New Zealander investors might face. Such a targeted approach to foreign investment is necessary if India wants to achieve the multiple goals of weaning off China, increasing and diversifying exports, creating jobs, bolstering the capital account, and generally increasing incomes. The other long-standing need of helping domestic manufacturers scale up remains a sticky problem.

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- **The India-EFTA FTA (Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) was finalized in March 2024, and came into effect on 1st October 2025.**
- **The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is an intergovernmental organisation consisting of four major non-EU countries: Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein.**
- **More than 300 Swiss companies such as Nestle, Holcim, Sulzer, and Novartis, apart from banks such as UBS operate in India, while Indian IT majors TCS, Infosys and HCL work in Switzerland.**
- **India is among the world's largest economy and fastest-growing major market. EFTA provides EFTA countries a foothold in India's 1.4 billion consumer base.**

Cart before horse

Roads need upgrade before tech solutions can reduce accidents

India is, in many respects, a country in transition and thus suffers varieties of a common chicken-and-egg problem: it adopts solutions that are only feasible at scale but struggles to operationalise that scale. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is set to introduce vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) communication technology that will allow vehicles on the road to send and receive data about their location and movement vectors, in a bid to improve road safety. This seems credible at a time when road accidents are increasing in India. A spate of accidents in April in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh killed more than 50 people. The Supreme Court of India took *suo motu* cognisance of two similar incidents in 2025 and, on April 26, asserted that the state must proactively enforce the constitutional right to life and remove any obstructions in highways' right of way. However, V2V is unlikely to help as its hardware demand is non-trivial relative to what exists, yet is crucial. V2V is part of the wider V2X, or vehicle-to-everything, technological scheme in which vehicles communicate with other infrastructure (V2I), such as traffic lights and tolling, and pedestrians (V2P), aside from V2V. However, India currently lacks the interoperability and backend systems to operationalise it. In fact, the Ministry has yet to specify the key, akin to the 'language' vehicles broadcast in, Indian V2V will use – DSRC or C-V2X – and has unsurprisingly spurred public concern.

Vehicle owners already face steep compliance costs, including having to pay for vehicle location tracking devices and high-security registration plates, sans subsidies or a competitive vendor market to defray the higher cost of approved devices. In the V2V network, each vehicle is a node where data are processed and interpreted for the driver. However, many commercial drivers are not used to driving environments with interfaces and are under-trained to interpret vehicle alerts. This raises the prospects of bad actors intercepting communications to send false warnings or trigger unnecessary braking, in the absence of strong security protocols, and of network channel congestion (5.9 GHz is the international standard) and packet loss. More fundamentally, the country lacks proper road design, routing, and speed control while road use is dominated by two-wheelers, pedestrians, and non-motorised traffic. If a city is not 'smart', a 'Smart City' solution such as V2V will be marginal at best. It will also be more useful when more users adopt it, but at present, early adopters will bear the full cost while enjoying underwhelming benefits. If the technology is to help mitigate the deadliness of India's roads, the Ministry must slowly roll out both infrastructure and training, with phased mandates and subsidies, first.

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Why 'digital vigilantism' is not the problem

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The Delhi High Court recently made some observations about "digital vigilantism", and that statements can sometimes "transcend mere free expression and act as a catalyst for public shaming". The context is a defamation suit brought before the Court by an individual who allegedly misbehaved with a lady on a domestic flight. The lady attempted to amplify his conduct by posting her ordeal on social media, which was shared by media houses and an actress, who apparently did not verify the allegations made in the post.

These observations and statements once again highlight the growing use of social media to amplify claims of harassment and misconduct due to a sense of collective helplessness and people's lack of faith in systems to swiftly and adequately address sexual harassment claims.

Whether it was the role social media played in the #MeToo movement in attempting to bring justice to victims of sexual harassment or videos recording instances of harassment posted on TikTok, the bottom line is that social media is being used to "crowd source" retributive action, wherein exposure offers accountability due to institutional inaction, as per Sara Witmer.

Systemic apathy

Justice systems globally, due to their long-drawn-out processes, deliver justice in a belated fashion. Coupled with the apathy and unwarranted intrusion of police authorities and victim blaming, the process of speaking up against sexual harassment is even more challenging. The redress process often becomes a form of punishment for all parties involved.

Due to the lack of processes, systems and institutions in delivering justice, social media is used by victims to bridge the gap between harassment and redress mechanisms. This leads to problems like allegations being



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amplified without any mechanism to verify them, false allegations circulating because of the anonymity offered by social media, lack of accountability, and the reputational loss of all parties involved. It creates a public spectacle rather than actually addressing the issue.

However, when processes and systems continue to fail victims, the need to strengthen these processes is of the utmost importance so that victims do not have to use social media as a redress vehicle to achieve justice. It is crucial to ensure a balance between helping victims while protecting the reputation of the alleged harassers, so that one does not trample on the other in the quest for justice. It is important to maintain the principles of natural justice and fair trial.

On 'vigilantism'

Another issue is with the terminology of "digital vigilantism". The word vigilantism in itself invokes a negative connotation. As per Les Johnston, "vigilantism", by its definition, involves the premeditation of participants who are private citizens; their engagement with the issue would be voluntary.

It is also a social movement, which uses or threatens the use of force and arises when an established order is under threat from the transgression of institutionalised norms and aims to control crime or other social infractions by offering assurances of security both to the participants and to others.

Social media posts in the face of harassment do not fall squarely within the purview of vigilantism as there is no established order that is under threat and there is also absolutely no assurance of security to participants. In fact, both the victims and the perpetrators can be recipients of doxing.

Simply put, when there is a collective failure of processes, then one turns to social media to amplify harassment – this cannot

be defined as "digital vigilantism".

Social media redressal

There have been several instances of unwarranted behaviour during air travel. Case in point is the incident that occurred in November 2022, when a man urinated on a woman. The airlines was slow to act upon the complaint and it was only once details were made public that the airlines took action against the individual. The fundamental issue, therefore, is to have adequate processes at all levels so that a timely redress can be carried out. For instance, if airlines had proper systems in the form of strict no-fly lists, one may not have to resort to social media amplification.

To draw a parallel between consumer services, when a consumer has an unpleasant experience, they have the right to take to social media to express their displeasure. The outcome is two-pronged – either the service provider will respond with their defence or apologise for the bad experience. This helps other consumers make informed choices before availing the same service. Moreover, in consumer services there are adequate systems and processes that exist before a person takes to social media to express displeasure. Customer grievance teams are often prompt to act on complaints because of the fear of reputational and financial loss. However, justice systems and processes that help to achieve real, legal justice are significantly different. They are not prompt and often refuse to act on complaints of harassment, leaving victims with no choice but to take to other channels to amplify their grievances.

The issue therefore, is not of freedom of expression versus public shaming but the fact that in the face of abject failure of processes, people are left with no choice but to use social media as a tool to achieve justice. To avoid "digital vigilantism", a collective strengthening of processes and faith in these processes is crucial.

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- **Simply put, when there is a collective failure of processes, then one turns to social media to amplify harassment — this cannot be defined as “digital vigilantism”.**

Bering Strait Dam



- **The Bering Strait is a critical maritime passage that separates the continents of Asia and North America at their closest point.**
- **Location: It links the Arctic Ocean to the north with the Bering Sea (Pacific Ocean) to the south. The international boundary between the U.S. and Russia runs directly through the strait.**
- **Naming: It is named after Vitus Bering, a Danish captain who sailed into the waters in 1728.**
 - **Dimensions: The strait is approximately 85 km (53 miles) wide at its narrowest point and averages 30 to 50 meters in depth.**
 - **Islands: It contains the Diomedede Islands (Big and Little Diomedede) and lies north of St. Lawrence Island.**

Leaf Spot Disease (LSD)



- **Leaf spot disease is a pathological condition that weakens trees and shrubs by interrupting photosynthesis, the process by which plants produce energy. While often a minor stressor, it can become a critical threat if it persists over several growing seasons.**
- **Vector/Spread: Pathogens are primarily spread by wind or splashing rain and irrigation, which carry spores to susceptible plant tissue.**
Causes: Most leaf spot diseases are caused by fungi, though some are triggered by bacteria or other pathogens. They thrive in environments with high humidity or water remaining on leaves for 12 to 24 hours.

- **Appearance:** Spots can be angular or rounded, raised or sunken, with smooth or fringed edges. Colors range from yellow and orange-red to brown or black.
- **Infection Pattern:** Symptoms usually appear first on lower and inner branches where humidity is higher.
- **Age Indicators:** Smaller spots typically represent younger infections, while larger spots indicate older ones where fungal spores may be visible at the center.

Managing LSD requires a package of practices rather than isolated chemical treatments.

- **Sanitation:** Raking and destroying fallen leaves before snowfall prevents the pathogen from re-infecting plants in the next season.
- **Cultural Practices:** Proper drainage of excess rainwater, pruning to improve air circulation, and spacing plants to avoid overcrowding.
- **Soil Health:** Liming acidic soils based on soil tests and balanced application of nutrients, micronutrients, and neem cake.

Sikkim



- Prime Minister of India visited Gangtok, to participate in the closing ceremony of Sikkim's year-long 50th Statehood celebrations.
- ~~The 50th Statehood celebrations, which began in May 2025, have not only highlighted~~ Sikkim's transition from a Himalayan kingdom to a leader in sustainable development.
- Establishment of the Kingdom: The Kingdom of Sikkim was established in 1642 with Phuntsong Namgyal as the first Chogyal (ruler).
- British Protectorate: In 1861, the Treaty of Tumlong established Sikkim as a British protectorate, serving as a buffer state against China and Nepal.
- Post-Independence Status: After 1947, Sikkim did not immediately accede to India. Instead, the 1950 Indo-Sikkim Treaty made it an Indian protectorate, granting India control over its defense, external affairs, and strategic communications while allowing internal autonomy.

- **Pro-Democracy Movements:** The 1960s and 70s saw rising demand for political reforms and closer ties with India, led by parties like the Sikkim National Congress (SNC).
- **Tripartite Agreement (1973):** Following massive anti-monarchy protests that surrounded the royal palace, a tripartite agreement was signed between the Chogyal, the Indian government, and major political parties to introduce reforms.
- **Referendum (1975):** In a historic referendum held in April 1975, 59,637 voters (roughly 97.5% of those who voted) chose to abolish the monarchy and join India.

Constitutional Amendment: Following the referendum, the Indian Parliament passed the 36th Amendment Act, officially recognizing Sikkim as the 22nd state of the Union on May 16, 1975.