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THE HINDU ANALYSIS

CURRENT AFFAIRS & EDITORIAL

2 JULY 2026

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IMPORTANT ISSUES OF THE DAY

COMPILED BY
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1 VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 Replaces MGNREGA — ₹300 Floor Wage

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WHY IN NEWS

The Central government has fixed a floor wage of ₹300 per day under the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025, which came into effect on Tuesday (July 1), replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The **21 States and Union Territories** that paid less than ₹300 per day under MGNREGA have had their wage rates raised to this level; States already paying above ₹300 saw only minimal hikes.
- Four major Hindi-belt States saw significant increases — **₹48 in Uttar Pradesh, ₹45 in Bihar, ₹39 in Madhya Pradesh, and ₹19 in Rajasthan** — compared with the last MGNREGA rates set in 2025-26.
- **Haryana (₹409), Goa (₹406) and Kerala (₹401)** are the only States with wage rates above ₹400. Excluding Sikkim's special ₹450 rate for certain gram panchayats, Haryana continues to have the highest wage but recorded one of the lowest increases (2.25%).
- **Telangana** recorded the lowest increase of just ₹1 (0.33%, from ₹307 to ₹308); wages in Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu remain unchanged.
- Northern and north-eastern States with hikes above 15% to reach ₹300 include **Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Assam, Tripura, Sikkim and West Bengal**.
- Congress leader **Jairam Ramesh** called the wages "unjustifiably low", reiterating the demand for a national daily minimum wage of ₹400; the **Anoop Satpathy Committee (2019)** had recommended a national floor of ₹375 per day.

KEY CONCERN — FISCAL FEDERALISM

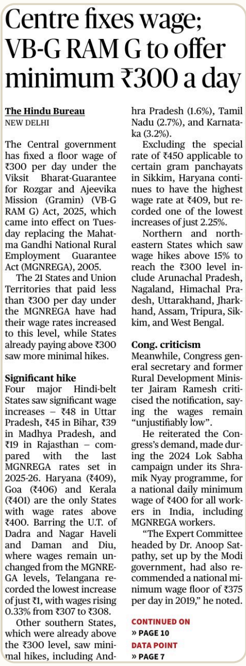
- A significant part of the financial burden shifts **from the Centre to the States**.
- Earlier sharing was roughly **90:10** (Centre:State); the shift to **60:40** may mean a nearly three-fold increase in States' expenditure.
- Several States raised serious concerns before the Act came into force on **July 1, 2026**.

MGNREGA VS VB-G RAM G — WHAT CHANGES

PIB INFOGRAPHIC — MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Feature	MGNREGA	VB- G RAM G Act
Employment guarantee	100 days	125 days
Core objective	Wage employment	Employment + livelihood + asset creation + climate resilience
Seasonal flexibility	No explicit provision	Work suspension allowed during peak agriculture season
Funding responsibility	Centre bears unskilled wage costs, States bear unemployment allowance.	State cost-sharing for wages: 90:10 for North Eastern and Himalayan States; 60:40 for other States/UTs with legislature; 100% Centre for UTs without legislature.

FEATURE-WISE COMPARISON



Centre fixes wage; VB-G RAM G to offer minimum ₹300 a day

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central government has fixed a floor wage of ₹300 per day under the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025, which came into effect on Tuesday replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005.

The 21 States and Union Territories that paid less than ₹300 per day under the MGNREGA have had their wage rates increased to this level, while States already paying above ₹300 saw more minimal hikes.

Significant hike

Four major Hindi-belt States saw significant wage increases – ₹48 in Uttar Pradesh, ₹45 in Bihar, ₹39 in Madhya Pradesh, and ₹19 in Rajasthan – compared with the last MGNREGA rates set in 2025-26. Haryana (₹409), Goa (₹406) and Kerala (₹401) are the only States with wage rates above ₹400. Barring the U.T. of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, where wages remain unchanged from the MGNREGA levels, Telangana recorded the lowest increase of just ₹1, with wages rising 0.33% from ₹307 to ₹308.

Other southern States, which were already above the ₹300 level, saw minimal hikes, including Andhra Pradesh (1.6%), Tamil Nadu (2.7%), and Karnataka (3.2%).

Excluding the special rate of ₹450 applicable to certain gram panchayats in Sikkim, Haryana continues to have the highest wage rate at ₹409, but recorded one of the lowest increases of just 2.25%.

Northern and north-eastern States which saw wage hikes above 15% to reach the ₹300 level include Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Assam, Tripura, Sikkim, and West Bengal.

Cong. criticism

Meanwhile, Congress general secretary and former Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh criticised the notification, saying the wages remain "unjustifiably low".

He reiterated the Congress's demand, made during the 2024 Lok Sabha campaign under its Shramik Nyay programme, for a national daily minimum wage of ₹400 for all workers in India, including MGNREGA workers.

"The Expert Committee headed by Dr. Anoop Satpathy, set up by the Modi government, had also recommended a national minimum wage floor of ₹375 per day in 2019," he noted.

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- **Employment guarantee:** 100 days → **125 days** of wage employment per rural household.
- **Strategic focus:** from multiple, scattered work categories to **4 clearly defined priority areas** — water security, rural infrastructure, livelihoods and climate resilience.
- **Funding:** wage cost-sharing **60:40** for most States; **90:10** for North-Eastern & Himalayan States; **100% Centre** for UTs without legislature.
- **Normative funding** replaces demand-based, unpredictable allocations — predictable budgeting while protecting the employment guarantee.
- **Seasonal flexibility:** States can notify up to **60 days** in a financial year when work will not be executed (a statutory "pause window" absent in MGNREGA).
- Integrates **institutionalised convergence** and infrastructure planning; Gram Panchayat planning was central under MGNREGA.

2 Fixing the Rot — Examination Paper Leaks Across States

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WHY IN NEWS

The Hindu editorial flags a recurring pattern in examination paper leaks across States — from the NTA having to re-conduct NEET to the postponement of the Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test just before its scheduled date (June 28).

Fixing the rot

There seems a recurring pattern in the examination paper leaks across States

Corruption in public life is often linked to "malfeasance", the venality of government officials in high places taking bribes and misusing their positions to enrich themselves or their cronies. But a more corrosive variant that impinges upon public life includes the systematic subversion of public examinations and recruitment. This is because public examinations and teacher recruitment are pathways to creating skilled individuals in a rapidly modernising economy where jobs increasingly depend on skills and training. Corruption in these processes, which should ideally be done on merit, will erode India's ability to fully realise its demographic dividend. Be it the National Testing Agency having to re-conduct NEET for medical undergraduate aspirants, or, the postponement of the Maharashtra Teacher Eligibility Test just before its scheduled date (June 28), the malaise seems depressingly familiar. It is driven by a cottage industry that leaks papers through insider networks and targets the vast coaching ecosystem to rake in money from those seeking shortcuts to pass. In the Maharashtra case, the alleged kingpin – a Patna resident suspected of links to an Odisha paper leak scam in 2024 and even to the NEET scam – reportedly ran teams from Bihar and Haryana that sought to sell papers to coaching classes.

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Eerily, a similar template surfaces in scam after scam. In Gujarat, the alleged mastermind of the 2023 junior-clerk recruitment exam leak was an employee at a Hyderabad press that printed the paper. In 2024, in Jammu and Kashmir, a printing-press insider and security men were chargesheeted in the 2022 services board exam leak case. In Rajasthan, the December 2022 teacher-recruitment paper was sold by a serving government teacher. The common element is the presence of insider networks that have worked out ways to scam the system. The vulnerability lies not only in how question papers are distributed, but also in how they are set, with the repeated involvement of a select group of experts – many are linked to the coaching ecosystem. This is why the ritual of hunting for "kingpins" and running performative investigations until public attention fades leaves the core problem untouched. Pertinent questions are rarely addressed. Is the paper set by the same closed pool of examiners each time? Are their antecedents and commercial links verified? Do the departments that run these exams scrutinise examiners for conflicts of interest? Lastly, even if the system undertakes such reforms, it would be incomplete without accountability. Education Ministers – at the Centre and States – must own these failures. When leaks recur as routinely as they now do, the Minister who presides over the system should not remain in the post.

CONTINUATION — INSIDER NETWORKS

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

- Beyond bribery-style "malfeasance", a **more corrosive corruption** is the systematic subversion of public examinations and recruitment — the pathways to skilled employment in a modernising economy.
- Corruption in merit-based processes **erodes India's ability to realise its demographic dividend**.
- A similar template recurs: Gujarat's 2023 junior-clerk leak, J&K's 2022 services board case, Rajasthan's 2022 teacher-recruitment paper sold by a serving government teacher — all driven by **insider networks**.
- The vulnerability lies not only in **distribution** of papers but in how they are **set** — a select pool of examiners, many linked to the coaching ecosystem.
- Hunting for "kingpins" and performative investigations leave the core problem untouched — are the same examiners re-used, are antecedents and commercial links verified, are conflicts of interest scrutinised?
- **Accountability:** Education Ministers, at the Centre and in States, must own these failures — when leaks recur routinely, the Minister presiding over the system should not remain in the post.

3 Yes and No — Respecting Gram Sabha Decision-Making

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WHY IN NEWS

A new report based on Rural Development Ministry surveys opens a rare data-backed window into the erosion of India's grassroots democracy — but frames as "vibrancy" what is really a crisis of disempowerment.

Yes and no

Governments must respect the decision-making of gram sabhas

A new report, based on Rural Development Ministry surveys, opens a rare data-backed window into the erosion of India's grassroots democracy. But where the state has framed the issue as one of "vibrancy", the report highlights a paradox. It acknowledges that "participation fatigue" has kept citizens from engaging in gram sabhas whereas its solutions, such as more meetings and oversight, are a recipe to further alienate the rural working class. The 73rd Amendment empowers gram sabhas, but governments have reduced them to clearinghouses for central and State schemes. This fundamental aspect must change. However, in response to 18%-28% of respondents citing a lack of outcomes as the reason for low interest, the report pushes for greater use of the NIRNAY app and to upload meeting minutes in real-time. In the real world, panchayat secretaries thus have less time facilitating discussion even as lacklustre oversight has allowed officials to tell workers that their MGNREGA demands were 'not entered in the system' due to server errors. Similarly, that more than half of the barriers to participation are related to livelihoods could point as much to visibly systemic issues – such as the precarious nature of rural labour today – as to deliberate economic exclusion by the state, as scholars have highlighted. But the report does not acknowledge such divergent possibilities. Due to the state failing to institutionalise attendance as a paid component of social protection, gram sabhas have remained a playground for the leisured elite such as landlords and contractors.

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According to the report, gram sabhas spend 13% of the time identifying local issues but only 4% discussing revenue generation. But gram panchayats have been systematically constrained from raising their taxes, leaving them dependent on grants. The 14th and 15th Finance Commissions grants tied panchayat spending to central priorities such as drinking water and sanitation, limiting local priorities to 'flagship' programmes such as the Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat. There is thus no incentive for citizens to attend a meeting if the funds are being earmarked by Delhi bureaucrats. The report also states that Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act areas have "reasonably strong physical infrastructure". Under the PESA Act 1996 and related forest rights laws, gram sabhas have the right to provide prior informed consent for land acquisition and mining. However, the state routinely bypasses them or uses the excuse of low participation to manufacture consent. The Hasdeo Arand protests were rooted in this issue. There is a right to say 'no' and the state simply needs to acknowledge it. If 'yes' must be the only answer, the report's grouses are a farce.

PESA AREAS & THE RIGHT TO SAY 'NO'

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

- "**Participation fatigue**" keeps citizens from gram sabhas; yet the report's solutions (more meetings, oversight) risk further alienating the rural working class.
- The **73rd Amendment** empowers gram sabhas, but governments have reduced them to **clearinghouses for central and State schemes**.
- Gram sabhas spend **13% of time identifying local issues but only 4% discussing revenue generation**; panchayats are systematically constrained from raising their own taxes, leaving them grant-dependent.
- The **14th and 15th Finance Commission grants** tied panchayat spending to central priorities (drinking water, sanitation) and flagship schemes (Jal Jeevan Mission, Swachh Bharat) — no incentive to attend when funds are earmarked in Delhi.
- **Panchayat NIRNAY portal:** schedules meetings, notifies agendas and records decisions digitally — but uploads cannot substitute deliberation.
- Under **PESA, 1996** and forest rights laws, gram sabhas can give **prior informed consent** for land acquisition and mining; the state routinely bypasses them or "manufactures consent" (**Hasdeo Arand protests**). There is a right to say 'no' — the state must acknowledge it.

4 Criminal Defamation — Special Court Ruling in the RSS Case

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WHY IN NEWS

A special court in Bengaluru rejected Karnataka Home Minister Priyank Kharge's contention that no RSS member can maintain a criminal defamation complaint because the RSS is "not a registered organisation" — terming it "wholly untenable and devoid of merit".

Special court rejects Priyank's claim in RSS defamation case

Judge terms Minister's contention that the RSS is not a registered organisation as 'devoid of merit'; refers to judicial precedents declaring the RSS to be a definite, identifiable body or class of persons

Krishnaprasad
BENGALURU

In a setback to Karnataka Home Minister Priyank Kharge, a special court in Bengaluru has rejected his contention that no member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) can maintain a criminal defamation complaint because the RSS is "not a registered organisation and it does not maintain any registered membership".

The court termed Mr. Kharge's contention "wholly untenable and devoid of merit" while referring to various past judicial precedents, in which the High Courts and the Supreme Court have clearly declared that "the RSS is a definite, determinate, and identifiable body or class of persons; and consequently, where defamatory imputations are made against the RSS as an organisation, an individual member of the RSS is competent to maintain a complaint for defamation".

Sandeep Patil, judge of the special court of magistrate for criminal cases against former and present MPs and MLAs in Karnataka, made these observations in his June 27 order of taking cognisance of the offence of criminal defamation under Section 356 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) against Mr. Kharge, and Mohammed Haris Nalapad, son of Congress MLA N.A. Haris, on a defamation case filed by Bengaluru-based RSS member Tejas A.

Relying on Section 2(26) of the BNS, the court pointed out that the definition of "person" expressly includes "any company or association or body of persons, whether incorporated or not", and "the statute does not prescribe any requirement of formal membership, registration, incorporation, or documentary proof of affiliation as a condition precedent for recognising a body of persons under the law".

Whether the complainant is part of such identifiable group is a matter to be established by evidence during trial, the court said.

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WHAT THE COURT HELD

- Judicial precedents declare the RSS a **definite, determinate and identifiable body or class of persons**; hence an individual member is competent to maintain a defamation complaint when imputations target the organisation.
- Relying on **Section 2(26) of the BNS**, the court noted "person" expressly includes "any company or association or body of persons, whether incorporated or not" — the statute prescribes **no requirement of formal membership, registration or incorporation**.
- Cognisance was taken of criminal defamation under **Section 356 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**; whether the complainant belongs to the identifiable group is a matter of evidence at trial.

CONCEPT REFRESHER — DEFAMATION

- **Defamation:** speaking, writing, publishing or making signs against someone intending to harm their reputation — can concern a living person, a company/association/group, or even a deceased person (harm viewed via family).
- **Libel:** defamation in permanent form (writing, images, published works); **Slander:** spoken words or temporary expressions.
- **IPC Sections 499 & 500** (now under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023**) define defamation and its punishment; it may be pursued as a criminal or civil wrong.
- **Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India (2016):** upheld the constitutional validity of criminal defamation — reputation is part of the **right to life under Article 21**; criminal defamation is a **"reasonable restriction" on free speech under Article 19(2)**.

5 CRS 2024 — Over 99% of Births and Deaths Registered

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WHY IN NEWS

India's latest civil registration data (CRS 2024), released on Wednesday, suggest registration is improving across the country and the sex ratio at birth is improving in some places — but progress remains uneven across States and UTs.

Over 99% of births, deaths registered in 2024: report

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

India's latest civil registration data, CRS 2024, released on Wednesday, suggest that registration is improving across the country, and that sex ratio at birth is improving in some places, but progress remains uneven across the States and Union Territories.

India's sex ratio at birth is 917 females per 1,000 males, meaning that 917 girls are born for every 1,000 boys.

While there is no surprise in the strong performance of Kerala (970 females per 1000 males) when it comes to sex ratio at birth, other States and Union Territories such as Arunachal Pradesh (1,050), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (984), Meghalaya (974), and Mizoram (972), are also top performers.

The weakest figures are from Nagaland (865), Lakshadweep (865), and Jharkhand (890).

A sex ratio at birth that is close to the biological norm, or slightly above it, is an indicator that birth rates are not heavily distorted by sex selective abortions/terminations. India, with its legacy issue of a son preference has struggled towards achieving a balance in sex ratio at birth historically. A masculine skew at birth has long dominated headlines in several parts of the country.

Haryana and Punjab have recorded the lowest child sex ratios at birth. In the 2011 Census, Haryana recorded 834 girls per 1,000 boys, followed closely by Punjab at 846. The battle to correct the skew has been long and hard fought from a policy level. The number of still births in 2024 was recorded as 81,117 with a heavy urban tilt, with 69% of still births happening in urban centres.

The civil registration system has continued to expand its coverage, and improving registration will offer a clearer picture of the country's demographic transition.

Expanded coverage

Registered births rose from 2.52 crore in 2023 to 2.54 crore in 2024, while registered deaths increased from 86.6 lakh to 89.4 lakh. Thirteen States recorded above 90% of births and 15 States recorded above 90% of deaths. The CRS report shows that the level of birth registration reached 99.1% in 2024 and the level of death registration reached 99.4%, both extremely close to full coverage.

The rise in registrations does not necessarily mean that either fertility or mortality is rising sharply; it means the system has begun to capture births, deaths, still births and sex ratio at birth more comprehensively.

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KEY FINDINGS

- India's **sex ratio at birth is 917** females per 1,000 males.
- **Top performers:** Kerala (970), Arunachal Pradesh (1,050), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (984), Meghalaya (974), Mizoram (972). **Weakest:** Nagaland (865), Lakshadweep (865), Jharkhand (890).
- A sex ratio at birth close to the biological norm indicates births are **not heavily distorted by sex-selective abortions**; India's legacy of son preference has historically produced a masculine skew.
- **Haryana and Punjab** recorded the lowest child sex ratios at birth — 834 and 846 girls per 1,000 boys respectively in the 2011 Census.
- Registered births rose from **2.52 crore (2023) to 2.54 crore (2024)**; registered deaths from **86.6 lakh to 89.4 lakh**. Thirteen States recorded above 90% of births and 15 States above 90% of deaths.
- Birth registration reached **99.1%** and death registration **99.4%** in 2024 — near-full coverage; still births numbered **81,117**, with a heavy urban tilt (69% in urban centres).
- Rising registration does not necessarily mean rising fertility or mortality — the system now **captures events more comprehensively**, offering a clearer picture of India's demographic transition.

6 On Curbing Young Adults on Social Media

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WHY IN NEWS

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer recently announced a policy to ban social media for children under 16 — part of an arc of initiatives in Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, France and Canada — triggering similar debates in India, especially at the State level.

On curbing young adults on social media

Incumbent Prime Minister of the U.K. Keir Starmer recently announced a policy to ban social media for children under-16. This was part of an arc of initiatives and announcements in Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, France, and Canada to curb children's access to social media. This has triggered debates in India, especially at the State level, along the same lines.

The various contentions against a social media ban are not uniformly convincing. There is the argument that bans limit an "important source of information and learning" for children. However, the extent to which social media is used by children for learning is empirically arguable. It is also normatively questionable whether such platforms are an apt space for learning in the first place.

Scientific literature is full of intense debates regarding a clear and uniform correspondence between children's usage of social media and harmful experiences. Young adults respond to similar online circumstances differently; more so in jurisdictions that are as socially, economically, and digitally variegated as ours. What is required, foremost, is to identify the conditions where a high degree of correspondence does exist, and understand who are the most vulnerable among the expansive category of 'children'.

Ineffective bans

Meanwhile, there are numerous reasons why a ban for below-16s is unlikely to be effective. Curtailing access assumes that stout mechanisms of age verification exist on platforms. One must also be aware that age-verification allows social media platforms to collect sensitive identity data of under-16s. Bans tend to get circumvented by teenagers using the credentials of a willing family member or older peers. Even without external support, many young adults can manage to gain access though technological circumvention. There is also the anxiety that bans could inculcate a wider culture of work-arounds among young adults – a behaviour which once ingrained could extend, in the years to come, to offline legal responsibilities too.

A combination of slack age verification systems and technological workarounds makes a mockery of a ban. Besides, the Australian experience has shown that 'age-gating' on social media platforms has pushed under-16s to migrate to less entrenched services; we are yet to know whether they are safe spaces.

Given the limited efficacy of bans, the alternative is to focus on the governance of social media platforms. This moves attention from those at risk to those contributing to creating the conditions of risk. Discussions on young adults' safety offer a potent opportunity to deepen debates on platform governance in India.

Charitable arguments point at design defects in some social media platforms that drive cravings and dependence among under-16s. But let's face it – addiction is central to the aims and operations of all service providers in the converged media environment. In fact, in the attention economy, platforms cannot compete without instituting, by design or deceit, some forms of dependence.

If addiction is the key concern, the Chinese response of capping screen time for children seems better directed. It amounts to the state mandating platforms to do what many concerned and informed parents do through other means. That said, in countries relatively less regulated, surveilled, and socially regimented than China, practices of borrowing credentials and technological workarounds to surmount screen-time caps will continue. Moreover, like bans, instituting caps requires age-verification, and will thereby legitimise platforms to harvest additional data of under-16s.

Limiting access and regulating platforms involve different registers of monitoring and enforcement. In the case of a ban or caps on social media use by under-16s, two levels of enforcement can be visualised. The first is at the individual and household level; here, enforcing a ban, if feasible at all, would lead to intrusive forms of monitoring by platforms. The second will be at the platform level; a ban or screen time caps would demand age-verification and safeguards to privacy by platforms be rigorously enforced by the government.

Holding platforms accountable

The alternative is to legally oblige platforms to be transparent on their design, and provisions on safe spaces. Here, governments are likely to face structural and operational barriers. Governments that rely on social media giants to promote or protect their own interests are unlikely to push platforms to create transparent and accountable mechanisms. Furthermore, ensuring compliance on matters of design would make governments vulnerable to allegations of selective enforcement.

Evidently, the policy option of curtailing access is easier than that of making platforms accountable. Governments find it socially acceptable and legislatively convenient to make a case for age-gating. Devising effective and fair protocols that hold platforms accountable for their unwillingness to design safe spaces is far more complex.

Those advocating to curtail access should be cognisant of three matters. Foremost, they ought to evidentially make their case against social media platforms. Second, they should realise that bans or capping screen-time is nowhere close to a well-rounded regulatory strategy to tackle online safety. Finally, they must anticipate the burden on regulatory and judicial bodies that bans and their enforcement could lead to, and the perils to privacy that come with age-verification.

Vibodh Parthasarathi

is with the Centre for Culture, Media and Governance, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

Given the limited efficacy of bans, the alternative is to focus on the governance of social media platforms. This moves attention from those at risk to those contributing to creating risk

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WHY BANS ARE UNLIKELY TO WORK

- Bans assume **stout age-verification mechanisms** exist; in practice age-verification lets platforms collect **sensitive identity data of under-16s**.
- Bans are circumvented via borrowed credentials and technological workarounds; the **Australian experience** shows 'age-gating' pushed under-16s to less entrenched services whose safety is unknown.
- Bans could inculcate a wider **culture of work-arounds** extending to offline legal responsibilities.

THE ALTERNATIVES

- Shift focus from those **at risk** to those **creating the conditions of risk** — the governance of platforms; a potent opening to deepen debates on **platform governance in India**.
- If addiction is the concern, China's **screen-time caps** are better directed — but caps too require age-verification and legitimise further data harvesting.
- Legally oblige platforms to be **transparent on design** and provide safe spaces; but governments reliant on social-media giants may not push accountability, and design compliance invites allegations of **selective enforcement**.
- Advocates of curbs must evidence their case, recognise bans/caps are no substitute for a **well-rounded regulatory strategy**, and anticipate the burden on regulators and the **privacy perils of age-verification**.

7 A Unified Policy Architecture for India's Energy Future

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WHY IN NEWS

A policy brief by the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) — Centre for Science, Technology, Innovation and Policy (May 2026) proposes a unified national energy framework to align diverse energy resources, technologies and institutions towards common national objectives.

A unified policy architecture for India's energy future

India has made remarkable progress in transforming its energy landscape over the past decade. From achieving near-universal household electrification and expanding access to clean cooking fuel to becoming one of the world's fastest-growing renewable energy markets, it has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring energy access while advancing sustainable development.

As India looks ahead to the goals of energy self-reliance by 2047 and net-zero emissions by 2070, the next phase of the energy transition will require an increasingly integrated approach to planning and governance. A policy brief released by the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) in May 2026 highlights the importance of a unified national energy framework that can help align diverse energy resources, technologies and institutions towards common national objectives.

The complexity of India's energy system

The need for such an approach is evident from the scale and complexity of India's energy system. While domestic energy production continues to expand, there is a dependence on imports for a significant share of oil and natural gas requirements. At the same time, energy demand is expected to grow steadily as economic development, industrialisation and urbanisation continue. Managing these multiple priorities, energy security, affordability, sustainability and economic growth, requires coordinated planning across sectors and fuels.

India has already established strong foundations through initiatives such as the Saubhagya Scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, and ambitious renewable energy programmes. Renewable energy installed capacity has grown from approximately 40 GW in 2015 to approximately 260 GW by 2025, reflecting a determination to diversify the energy mix. As the energy ecosystem becomes more diverse, however, greater coordination among generation, transmission, storage, distribution and emerging technologies will become increasingly important.

Anjan Ray

Investment Partner, Navam Capital and former Director, CSIR-Indian Institute of Petroleum

Famida Khan

Project Scientist-II, Indian National Science Academy

A policy brief from the INSA-Centre for Science, Technology, Innovation and Policy outlines a four-pillar framework

How the framework works

The INSA policy brief proposes a framework built around four mutually reinforcing pillars: adequacy, access, affordability and appropriate sustainability.

First, adequacy focuses on ensuring reliable and diversified energy supplies through a balanced portfolio of conventional and emerging energy sources, supported by modern infrastructure, energy storage and digital technologies. The objective is to strengthen energy resilience while reducing long-term vulnerabilities.

Second, access emphasises reliable and equitable energy services for all citizens. Building on the country's achievements in electrification and clean cooking access, the framework advocates strengthening last-mile delivery, improving service quality and expanding decentralised energy solutions where appropriate.

Third, affordability recognises that a successful energy transition must remain economically viable for households, businesses and industries. The framework highlights the role of innovative financing mechanisms, efficient markets and consumer-focused safeguards in supporting an inclusive transition.

The fourth pillar, appropriate sustainability, underscores the importance of pursuing sustainability in a manner that is aligned with India's developmental priorities and resource endowments. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, the framework advocates solutions that reflect India's unique social, economic and environmental context. This includes support for local communities, workforce development and region-specific transition pathways.

The policy brief also identifies circular economy practices and carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) as important cross-cutting enablers that can complement renewable energy deployment and contribute to reducing emissions from industrial sectors.

Recognising that energy transitions occur over decades, the framework proposes a phased approach. Near-term priorities include strengthening infrastructure, accelerating renewable energy deployment, supporting emerging technologies such as green hydrogen, and developing institutional mechanisms that can facilitate long-term coordination. Over time, the emphasis would shift toward deeper integration of low-carbon technologies, expanded use of bio-resources and the development of a more interconnected and resilient energy ecosystem.

Viewing energy as whole

At its core, the framework highlights the value of viewing India's energy system as an integrated whole. Coal, renewables, biomass, natural gas, waste-to-energy systems and emerging clean technologies each have a role to play in supporting the country's development aspirations. Their effectiveness can be enhanced through greater coordination and long-term strategic planning.

India's energy transition is not only about expanding capacity; it is about creating a resilient, affordable and sustainable energy system capable of supporting future growth. By providing a common framework for aligning diverse energy pathways, the proposed approach offers a constructive road map for advancing national priorities while strengthening energy security for generations to come.

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CONTEXT

- India targets **energy self-reliance by 2047** and **net-zero emissions by 2070**; the next phase of transition needs an integrated approach to planning and governance.
- Foundations: **Saubhagya Scheme, PM Ujjwala Yojana**, and renewable capacity growth from **~40 GW (2015) to ~260 GW (2025)** — yet import dependence persists for oil and natural gas while demand keeps rising.

INSA'S FOUR MUTUALLY REINFORCING PILLARS

- **Adequacy:** reliable, diversified supplies via a balanced portfolio of conventional and emerging sources, modern infrastructure, storage and digital technologies.
- **Access:** reliable, equitable services for all — stronger last-mile delivery, better service quality, decentralised solutions.
- **Affordability:** innovative financing, efficient markets and consumer-focused safeguards for an inclusive transition.
- **Appropriate sustainability:** aligned with India's developmental priorities and resource endowments — not one-size-fits-all.

THE ROAD MAP

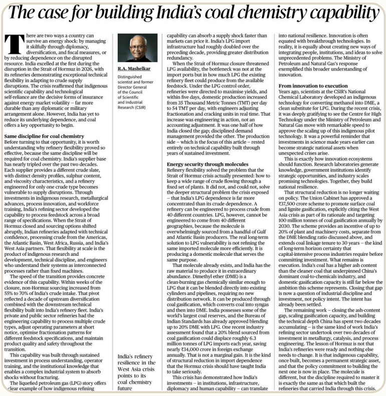
- **Cross-cutting enablers:** circular economy practices and **carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS)** to complement renewable deployment and cut industrial emissions; support for local communities, workforce development and region-specific transition frameworks.
- **Phased approach:** near-term — strengthen infrastructure, accelerate renewables, support green hydrogen, build institutional coordination; over time — deeper integration of low-carbon technologies, expanded bio-resources and a more interconnected, resilient energy ecosystem.
- Coal, renewables, biomass, natural gas, waste-to-energy and emerging clean technologies **each have a role** — effectiveness enhanced through coordination and long-term strategic planning.

8 Building India's Coal Chemistry Capability — DME

GS 3 · PAGE 6 | THE HINDU · 2 JULY 2026

WHY IN NEWS

R.A. Mashelkar, former CSIR Director-General, argues that India's refinery resilience during the 2026 Strait of Hormuz crisis points to its coal chemistry future — reducing LPG import dependence through indigenously produced Dimethyl Ether (DME).



The case for building India's coal chemistry capability

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KEY ARGUMENTS

- Two ways to survive an energy shock: manage it via **diplomacy, diversification and fiscal measures**, or **reduce dependence** on the disrupted resource — India excelled at the first during the Hormuz disruption; coal offers a way to begin the second.
- Indian refineries adapted with technical confidence — processing crude from the Americas, Atlantic Basin, West Africa, Russia and West Asia; non-Hormuz sourcing rose from **55% to 70%** of crude intake within weeks.
- A refinery can process crude from 40 countries, but **LPG cannot be engineered to come from 40 geographies** — it is overwhelmingly sourced from a handful of Gulf and Atlantic Basin producers.
- The real long-term fix: produce a **domestic molecule serving the same purpose** — not refine the imported one more efficiently.

DIMETHYL ETHER (DME) — PRELIMS POINTERS

- A **clean-burning gas chemically similar to LPG**; can be blended directly into existing cylinders and pipelines — no new distribution network needed.
- Produced via **coal gasification**: coal → syngas → DME; India holds some of the world's largest coal reserves.
- **BIS has approved blending up to 20% DME with LPG**; a 20% blend from coal gasification could displace ~6.3 million tonnes of LPG imports a year, saving nearly ₹34,000 crore in foreign exchange.
- **CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory** developed indigenous methanol-to-DME technology; scaling approved by the Centre for High Technology (Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas).
- Union Cabinet approved a **₹37,500 crore scheme** promoting surface coal and lignite gasification — targeting **100 million tonnes of coal gasification annually by 2030**, with up to 20% plant & machinery incentive and 30-year coal linkage tenure.

ESSAY TOPIC OF THE DAY

DRAWN FROM TODAY'S THEMES · 1000–1200 WORDS

ESSAY

"Guarantees written in law acquire meaning only when institutions on the ground can deliver them."

"कानून में लिखी गई गारंटियाँ तभी सार्थक होती हैं जब जमीनी संस्थाएँ उन्हें साकार कर सकें।"

HOW TO APPROACH — BRAINSTORMING DIMENSIONS

- **Anchor from today's paper:** the employment guarantee shifting from MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G — a 125-day promise whose fate rests on State finances and last-mile delivery.
- **Grassroots democracy:** the 73rd Amendment and PESA guarantee gram sabha powers on paper, yet sabhas are reduced to clearinghouses and consent is 'manufactured' (Hasdeo Arand).
- **Rights & the courts:** reputation under Article 21 and free speech under Article 19 — guarantees mediated through functioning courts.
- **Data & state capacity:** CRS 2024's 99% registration shows how patient institution-building converts a statutory duty into a lived reality.
- **Integrity of institutions:** examination systems as the guarantee of merit — leaks hollow out the promise of equal opportunity.
- **Counter-view:** laws also shape institutions over time (RTI, MGNREGA itself); the relationship is dialectical, not one-way.
- **Conclusion thread:** legislation is the beginning of a promise; capacity, accountability and federal trust decide whether it is kept.

QUOTE BANK

- "The Constitution is not a mere lawyers' document, it is a vehicle of Life, and its spirit is always the spirit of Age." — B.R. Ambedkar
- "However good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it happen to be a bad lot." — B.R. Ambedkar
- "Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes." — Mahatma Gandhi

PRELIMS PRACTICE — 10 MCQs

BASED ON TODAY'S CURRENT AFFAIRS

Q1 Under the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, how many days of wage employment are guaranteed per rural household in a year?

(a) 100 days
(b) 120 days
(c) 125 days
(d) 150 days

Q2 Consider the following statements about funding under the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025:
1. Wage cost-sharing is 60:40 between the Centre and most States.
2. North-Eastern and Himalayan States enjoy a 90:10 sharing pattern.
3. UTs without a legislature bear 40% of the wage cost.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q3 Which of the following States currently have VB-G RAM G wage rates above ₹400 per day?
1. Haryana 2. Goa 3. Kerala 4. Telangana

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1, 2 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q4 In Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India (2016), the Supreme Court held that:

(a) Criminal defamation is unconstitutional as it chills free speech
(b) Reputation is part of the right to life under Article 21, and criminal defamation is a reasonable restriction under Article 19(2)
(c) Only civil remedies are available for defamation of organisations
(d) Defamation of unregistered bodies is not legally actionable

Q5 Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, the offence of criminal defamation is dealt with under:

(a) Section 2(26)
(b) Section 302
(c) Section 356
(d) Section 499

Q6 As per CRS 2024, India's sex ratio at birth is:

(a) 870 females per 1,000 males
(b) 917 females per 1,000 males
(c) 943 females per 1,000 males
(d) 970 females per 1,000 males

Q7 According to CRS 2024, which of the following pairs is correctly matched?

1. Arunachal Pradesh — 1,050 (highest sex ratio at birth)

2. Kerala — 970

3. Nagaland — 990

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q8 The four pillars of the INSA policy brief on India's energy future are:

(a) Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, Adaptability

(b) Adequacy, Access, Affordability, Appropriate Sustainability

(c) Adequacy, Autonomy, Affordability, Atmanirbharta

(d) Access, Storage, Transmission, Sustainability

Q9 With reference to Dimethyl Ether (DME), consider the following statements:

1. It can be blended directly into existing LPG cylinders and pipelines.

2. It can be produced from coal through gasification via syngas.

3. The Bureau of Indian Standards permits blending of up to 20% DME with LPG.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Q10 The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act was enacted in the year:

(a) 1992

(b) 1996

(c) 2005

(d) 2013

ANSWER KEY

Q1 — (c)	Q2 — (a)	Q3 — (b)	Q4 — (b)	Q5 — (c)
Q6 — (b)	Q7 — (a)	Q8 — (b)	Q9 — (d)	Q10 — (b)

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MAINS PRACTICE — REPHRASED QUESTIONS

BASED ON TODAY'S CURRENT AFFAIRS · 12 & 8 MARKS

MAINS QUESTION 1 · GS 2

12 MARKS

Q. The replacement of MGNREGA by the VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 marks a shift from a demand-driven employment guarantee to normative, priority-based planning. Examine the opportunities and risks this transition poses for rural livelihood security and fiscal federalism.

प्रश्न: मनरेगा के स्थान पर वीबी-जी राम जी अधिनियम, 2025 का आना मांग-आधारित रोजगार गारंटी से मानकीय, प्राथमिकता-आधारित नियोजन की ओर बदलाव का प्रतीक है। ग्रामीण आजीविका सुरक्षा और राजकोषीय संघवाद के लिए इस परिवर्तन से उत्पन्न अवसरों और जोखिमों का परीक्षण कीजिए।

ANSWER POINTERS

- **Intro:** VB-G RAM G in force from July 1, 2026 — 125 days, 4 priority areas, normative funding, ₹300 floor wage.
- **Opportunities:** more guaranteed days; strategic focus on water security and climate resilience; predictable budgeting; convergence with infrastructure planning.
- **Risks:** 60:40 cost-sharing may triple States' expenditure; 60-day pause window may dilute the demand-driven right to work; ₹300 floor vs Satpathy Committee's ₹375 and the ₹400 demand.
- **Conclusion:** the guarantee survives only with adequate, timely transfers and protection of entitlements at the last mile.

MAINS QUESTION 2 · GS 3

12 MARKS

Q. "India's energy transition demands that the energy system be treated as an integrated whole rather than a collection of competing fuels." In the light of INSA's four-pillar framework, discuss how India can balance energy security, affordability and sustainability.

प्रश्न: "भारत के ऊर्जा संक्रमण के लिए ऊर्जा प्रणाली को प्रतिस्पर्धी ईंधनों के समूह के बजाय एक एकीकृत समग्रता के रूप में देखना आवश्यक है।" आईएनएसए के चार-स्तंभीय ढांचे के आलोक में विवेचना कीजिए कि भारत ऊर्जा सुरक्षा, वहनीयता और स्थिरता में संतुलन कैसे साध सकता है।

ANSWER POINTERS

- **Intro:** targets of energy self-reliance by 2047 and net-zero by 2070; renewables ~40 GW (2015) → ~260 GW (2025) yet oil/gas import dependence persists.
- **Four pillars:** adequacy (diversified portfolio + storage), access (last-mile, decentralised), affordability (financing, markets, safeguards), appropriate sustainability (aligned with development priorities).
- **Integration:** coal, renewables, biomass, gas, waste-to-energy and clean tech each have a role; CCUS and circular economy as enablers; phased near-term/long-term road map.
- **Conclusion:** a common framework aligning diverse pathways strengthens energy security for future growth.

MAINS QUESTION 3 · GS 2

8 MARKS

Q. Recurring examination paper leaks reflect institutional decay rather than isolated criminality. Identify the systemic vulnerabilities in India's public examination architecture and suggest reforms to restore its credibility.

प्रश्न: बार-बार होने वाले परीक्षा प्रश्नपत्र लीक अलग-थलग आपराधिक घटनाएँ नहीं, बल्कि संस्थागत क्षय को दर्शाते हैं। भारत की सार्वजनिक परीक्षा प्रणाली की व्यवस्थागत कमजोरियों की पहचान कीजिए तथा इसकी विश्वसनीयता बहाल करने हेतु सुधार सुझाइए।

ANSWER POINTERS

- **Vulnerabilities:** insider networks in printing/distribution; a closed pool of paper-setters linked to the coaching ecosystem; unverified antecedents and commercial conflicts of interest; performative "kingpin" investigations.
- **Reforms:** rotate and vet examiners; scrutinise conflicts of interest; secure printing/distribution chains; fixed accountability — Education Ministers must own repeated failures.
- **Significance:** merit-based exams underpin the demographic dividend and trust in public recruitment.

MAINS QUESTION 4 · GS 2

8 MARKS

Q. Gram sabhas were envisioned as instruments of deliberative democracy, yet they increasingly function as clearinghouses for centrally designed schemes. Analyse the causes of this erosion and suggest measures to restore genuine local self-government.

प्रश्न: ग्राम सभाओं की परिकल्पना विमर्शी लोकतंत्र के साधन के रूप में की गई थी, किंतु वे केंद्र-प्रायोजित योजनाओं के वितरण केंद्र बनकर रह गई हैं। इस क्षरण के कारणों का विश्लेषण कीजिए तथा वास्तविक स्थानीय स्वशासन की बहाली हेतु उपाय सुझाइए।

ANSWER POINTERS

- **Causes:** participation fatigue; funds earmarked centrally (14th/15th FC grants tied to flagship priorities); panchayats constrained from raising own taxes; app-based reporting (NIRNAY) substituting deliberation; PESA consent bypassed or "manufactured" (Hasdeo Arand).
- **Measures:** untied funds and own-revenue powers; honour prior informed consent under PESA/forest rights; institutionalise attendance as paid social protection; make outcomes of sabha decisions binding and visible.
- **Conclusion:** the right to say 'no' must be respected — deliberation, not attendance, is the measure of grassroots democracy.