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SC stays 'arbitrary' Waqf changes, but upholds Act

GS-2 Governance

SC stays 'arbitrary' Waqf changes, but upholds Act

Court says judgment based on only a *prima facie* consideration of the 2025 law, its observations will not prevent parties from making future submissions about the validity of provisions in the Act

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday struck a balance by staying crucial portions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, which it found "*prima facie* arbitrary" while refusing to freeze the law in its entirety.

In a judgment on a plea for a interim stay of the law, a Bench of Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai and Justice A.G. Masih reasoned that parliamentary legislation was naturally presumed to be constitutional as the lawmakers would only have the public's best interests in mind, so much so that even discrimination woven into the statute would be based on adequate grounds.

However, this reasoning did not stop the court from staying key provisions of the 2025 Act, including the one which required a person intending to create a Waqf to prove that he had been practising Islam for five years.

The court clarified that the judgment was based on a *prima facie* consideration of the 2025 law.

The observations in the

Yes and no

A look at some of the key features of the Supreme Court ruling on the Waqf (Amendment) Act

■ **'Prima facie arbitrary':** The lack of a basic mechanism to ascertain whether the person has been practising Islam for at least five years, which is requirement to create a waqf

■ **'Totally unconstitutional':** Section 3C proviso that a Waqf loses its character immediately upon doubt of being government property, before inquiry completion; allowing the designated officer and State government to unilaterally alter revenue and Waqf Board records, respectively, changing the status of a Waqf property into a government property

■ **'Mandatory registration':** The court rejected arguments against the mandatory registration of Waqfs prospectively

■ **'Protected monument' status:** The argument that Waqf property loses its status if notified as a 'protected monument' was termed a 'fallacy'

■ **Tribal community donations:** It addressed concerns about restricting tribal Muslims from donating land as Waqfs, over the potential threat to cultural minorities

Govt., Opposition welcome order

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Monday welcomed the Supreme Court's judgment on the Waqf (Amendment) Act 2025.

"I believe that whatever the apex court has ruled is a very good sign for our

democracy," he said. Mr. Rijiju, however, added that all the provisions included in the Act were beneficial to the Muslim community.

The Opposition claimed victory over the order, and said that it was a vindication of its stand on a law that was "blatantly unconstitutional" and

designed to target a particular community. Had the government paid heed to the Opposition's views, the leaders said, they would have been spared this embarrassment.

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judgment would not prevent parties from making future submissions about the validity of provisions in the Act.

The court said there was nothing wrong in requiring

a person to prove that he had been practising the faith for at least five years, considering that Waqf endowments were misused as a "clever device to tie up property in order to defeat

creditors and generally to evade the law under the cloak of a plausible dedication to the Almighty".

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Amid an export surge, trade deficit comes down by 54%

GS-3 Economy

Amid an export surge, trade deficit comes down by 54%

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India's trade deficit contracted by more than 54% to \$9.9 billion in August, driven by a surge in merchandise exports, a continued strong performance in services exports, and a significant reduction in merchandise imports.

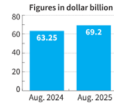
The trade deficit stood at \$21.7 billion in August last year. The data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed that exports to the U.S. increased to about \$6.86 billion in August 2025, from \$6.7 billion in August last year. This is despite the 25% tariffs imposed on Indian exports to the U.S. for most of that month, and 50% for a few days at the month-end.

"Despite the global uncertainties and the trade policy uncertainties, India's exporters have done extremely well," Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said at a press meet. "It shows that the policies of the Government of India have paid off well."

India's total exports increased to \$69.2 billion in August 2025, up 9.3% over its level in August last year. Within this, merchandise exports increased to \$53.1 billion in August 2025, compared with \$32.9 bil-

Exports surge

India's total exports increased to \$69.2 bn in August 2025, up 9.3% over its level in August last year



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

lion in August last year, a growth of 6.7%. Services exports increased to \$34.1 billion in August 2025, compared with \$30.4 billion in August last year.

On the import side, India's total imports fell to \$79 billion in August 2025, compared with \$85 billion in August last year, a contraction of 7%. This was driven by a 10.1% contraction in merchandise imports to \$61.6 billion.

Services imports increased marginally to \$17.45 billion in August 2025 from \$16.5 billion in August last year. The relatively strong export performance has meant that the trade deficit in April-August of this financial year stood at \$41.4 billion, down 20.1% over its level in the April-August 2024 period.

Unlocking innovation with India's procurement reforms

GS-3 Science & Tech

Unlocking innovation with India's procurement reforms

Procurement policies, often designed with transparency and cost-efficiency in mind, have long had unintended consequences for research and development. While preventing fraud, these frameworks frequently kill innovation, one process at a time, by prioritising procedural compliance over scientific needs. India's recent reforms to its General Financial Rules (GFR), particularly exemptions from the Government e Marketplace (GeM) portal and enhanced financial thresholds for research and development (R&D) procurement – are a welcome change.

Procurement as innovation catalyst
The tug-of-war between procurement policies and innovation is not new. Studies have shown that public procurement, when done properly, can give a push to private-sector R&D by creating stable demand for advanced technologies. Moreover, it has been found that targeted procurement spending is associated with increased patent filings and private R&D investment, forming a virtuous cycle of innovation. However, as the Brazilian case study in EY's 2023 report notes, generic procurement rules rarely achieve this unless explicitly designed to spur innovation. India's pre-reform framework fell into this trap, mandating GeM purchases for all sub-₹200 crore equipment, regardless of specialisation, which forced scientists into a time-consuming exemption process for globally benchmarked tools. Vendors on GeM often supplied materials of poor quality, compromising research.

The Government of India's policy changes in June 2025 directly address these issues. By allowing institutional heads to bypass GeM for specialised equipment and raising direct purchase limits from ₹1 lakh to ₹2 lakh, the reforms acknowledge that cookie-cutter procurement is incompatible with R&D's bespoke needs. Delegating approval for global tenders up to ₹200 crore to vice-chancellors and directors eliminates bureaucratic lag – a chronic grievance highlighted by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. These adjustments align with theories of "catalytic procurement," where flexibility enables public institutions to act as early adopters of advanced technologies, stimulating private-sector innovation.

Yet, the reforms stop short of a full paradigm shift. While empowering institutional leaders, they retain safeguards such as departmental purchase committees for higher-value acquisitions. This could be argued as a necessary balance. However, even the revised ₹2 lakh direct purchase limit could remain inadequate for high-cost fields such as quantum computing or biotechnology. Additionally, the focus on global tenders, while ensuring quality, could marginalise domestic suppliers unless local R&D systems are empowered and left free to collaborate globally, and compete at that level. The policy's success will depend to a large extent on implementation. Trusting institutional heads with procurement discretion assumes high ethical standards, which is something that will have to be built up, slowly, in a system that has been historically plagued by inefficiency. As the policy rolls out, monitoring mechanisms will be vital to prevent misuse while preserving agility.



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How has procurement evolved globally? Globally, nations leading in R&D outcomes have already reimagined procurement as something that acts as a catalyst for innovation – not just a cost-control mechanism. India can learn from these. Germany's approach is a good example of balancing procurement checks and R&D ambitions. Through its High-Tech Strategy, the federal government mandates that public procurement be used to promote innovative solutions, supported by KONINK, which is a dedicated agency advising procurers, curating supplier databases, and hosting cross-sector innovation forums. This institutionalises what economist Mariana Mazzucato terms "mission-oriented procurement", where state purchasing power deliberately shapes technological markets. Similarly, the "Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program" of the United States reserves 3% of federal R&D funds for startups, using phased procurement contracts to de-risk early-stage technologies while maintaining competitive tension among vendors. These models recognise that procuring innovation is not about buying predefined products but in fostering ecosystems where suppliers compete on breakthroughs.

India's GeM reforms partially embrace this philosophy by exempting specialised research equipment from mandatory portal use – a nod to the fact that Indian labs often face delays extending to a few months when dealing with niche instruments. However, the policy lacks Germany's proactive market-shaping elements or the SBIR's staged funding structure. For instance, India's ₹200 crore global tender limit for institutional heads still prioritises cost benchmarks over technical ambition, unlike South Korea's "pre-commercial procurement" model that pays premium prices for prototypes meeting moonshot criteria.

Procurement's evolutionary arc
Procurement's 5,000-year journey, from Egyptian scribbles tracking pyramid materials to AI predicting supply chain delays, reflects an evolution from control to creativity. The Industrial Revolution looked at procurement as a cost-centre function, but the two World Wars exposed its strategic role in securing scarce resources.

Post-1945, this duality deepened: corporations adopted Just-in-Time inventory systems while governments used procurement to spur sectors such as semiconductors (via National Aeronautics and Space Administration contracts) and renewables (through the European Union's green mandates).

Today's frontier is "cognitive procurement", where tools such as generative AI analyse supplier ecosystems, simulate scarcity scenarios, and automate compliance – freeing researchers to focus on creative problem-solving. Consider Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine effort, where AI optimised procurement identified multiple critical suppliers within a few hours, compressing a months-long process into weeks.

The discussion over procurement policies often leads to calls for privatisation of national

labs, as that would probably open up the procurement process. However, it would be wise to consider that the debate over privatising India's national labs hinges on a false binary. As the U.S. experience shows, privatisation is not about abandoning public oversight but redefining it. When the Department of Energy handed over the management and operation of Sandia National Laboratories in 1992 to a private company, it retained mission control through performance-based contracts while unlocking private capital for laser and materials research. The result? A huge increase in patent filings and partnerships with a number of small and medium enterprises within a decade.

India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) could adopt this hybrid model. Laboratories working in strategic fields such as space tech or quantum computing might benefit from corporate-style agility in procurement and hiring, provided the government maintains some control to safeguard national interests. However, success requires robust accountability frameworks and some alignment with innovation road maps.

Procurement as a research variable
India's procurement reforms are necessary but insufficient. Four systemic shifts could anchor deeper change. The first would be outcome-weighted tenders. Following Finland's example, there must be an evaluation of bids not just on cost but also on an index that weighs various qualitative factors such as supplier R&D investment and scalability potential.

The second would be providing sandbox exemptions. Allow institutions such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research or the Indian Institutes of Technology to bypass GeM entirely for some percentage of their purchases, provided they meet annual innovation targets audited by third parties.

The third intervention should be AI-augmented procurement. Deploy the IIT Bombay ecosystem to create a procurement assistant that scans global catalogues, predicts custom delays, and suggests alternative materials – reducing decision cycles from months to hours.

And finally, go for co-procurement alliances. Replicate the European Union's Joint Procurement Agreement, enabling multiple Indian labs to aggregate demand for high-cost items such as cryogenic coolers, achieving economies of scale.

Privatisation is not a silver bullet but a tool among many. As this study on U.S. labs warns, merely transferring ownership without performance-linked funding or competitive pressure risks creating ineffective labs. The goal must be creating a procurement continuum where public and private entities coexist – each accessing shared innovation marketplaces but governed by distinct risk-reward matrices.

India's GeM reforms are a tentative step toward procurement systems that value time to lab as much as cost savings. By marrying these changes with global best practices in market-shaping, cognitive tools, and hybrid governance, the nation could transform procurement from a research impediment to its accelerator. The lesson from history is clear: civilisations that procured for tomorrow's lab ruins, those that procured for inquiry built futures.

India's economic ambitions need better gender data

GS 1 Society, GS 3 Economy

India's economic ambitions need better gender data

Women contribute just 18% to India's GDP today, but continuing with business-as-usual means that trillions of dollars will be left on the table. India's aspiration to become a \$30 trillion economy by 2047 rests on a simple truth: inclusive growth cannot happen if half its population remains invisible in the data that drive policy and investment. Nearly 196 million employable women are outside the workforce. While the Female Labour Force Participation Rate has improved to 41.7%, only 18% of these women are in formal employment. The question is not just how India creates opportunities for women, but how it ensures that these opportunities are visible, measurable, and acted on across every department of governance.

A district-level tool
The launch of the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Index by the Government of Uttar Pradesh – the first in India – offers a glimpse of what is possible. This district-level tool tracks women's participation across five economic levers: employment; education and skillings; entrepreneurship; livelihood and mobility; and safety and inclusive infrastructure. Its significance lies beyond the index. It signals a shift toward embedding a gender lens in every dataset, every department, and every decision. India produces multiple indices on health, economic well-being and infrastructure. Very few disaggregate this data by gender. Without this lens, gaps remain hidden. Without visibility, reforms stall. And without reforms, exclusion becomes entrenched.



Pooja Sharma Goyal
is the Founding CEO of The Udaiti Foundation



Vivek Kumar
is Program Lead, The Udaiti Foundation

The Government of Uttar Pradesh's Women's Economic Empowerment Index is a model that can be replicated across the country

When inequities become visible, action follows. In Uttar Pradesh's transport sector for instance, data analysis of bus drivers and conductors in the State and the low percentage of women in this segment prompted the department to redesign recruitment strategies and address foundational infrastructure gaps such as women's restrooms in bus terminals. These changes, while modest, are catalytic, and are unlikely to have occurred without gender-specific insights.

The WEE Index shows how such insights can be systematized. By mapping where women drop off – from school to skilling, skilling to work, or entrepreneurship to credit – it moves the conversation beyond participation rates to structural barriers. Consider this striking pattern: while women dominate (more than 50%) enrolment in Uttar Pradesh's skilling programmes, they represent a fraction of registered entrepreneurs, with their access to credit being even more limited. This highlights not only participation gaps but also the systemic barriers to finance and enterprise support – data that can directly inform policy reform.

The need for data from every system
If India is serious about closing its gender gap at scale, gender-disaggregated data must become universal and normative. This requires integrating gender breakdowns into every departmental management information system – from micro, small and medium enterprises to transport to housing – and building the capacity of local governments to collect and use this data effectively to create effective gender action plans.

It also calls for moving beyond surface-level counts to track retention, leadership, re-entry, and quality of employment, particularly at stages after Class 12 in school and post-graduation, where female dropout rates surge.

Equally important is the need for a rethink on gender budgeting. Too often, gender budgeting is confined to finance departments or specific women's welfare schemes. True gender budgeting applies a gender lens to every rupee spent – across education, energy, infrastructure, and more. It is simple – you cannot budget for what you do not measure.

Help for States moving ahead

What Uttar Pradesh has piloted is a foundation that can be replicated and scaled. States such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Telangana have already set trillion-dollar economic goals. To achieve them, they must leverage their gender dividend. A robust framework such as the WEE Index can help States translate intent into implementation – turning data into district-wise gender action plans that guide budget allocations, infrastructure priorities and programmatic reforms.

India's gender gap is not new, but India's response to it must evolve. The solution would involve a fundamental change in how India sees, measures and responds to gender across every level of governance.

The WEE Index is not the finish line but the starting block. It makes visible what has long been invisible and offers a road map to move women from the margins to the mainstream of India's growth story.

Light Pollution

GS-3 Environment + Urbanisation challenges

As the lights stay on, birds are staying up past their bedtime

By combining millions of recordings from hundreds of species, scientists found that artificial light is nudging birds to stay awake longer. The timings for birds with large, watchful eyes shifted the most, while small-eyed species barely stirred. The changes were sharpest in the breeding season

Amritha Chandrasekaran

These days, an inky, starless night is a rare sight in much of the world. From the harsh glare of streetlights that make us squint to the gentle flicker of neon billboards that force singular shades, artificial light is blurring the line between day and night.

This has meant birds stay active for about an hour longer after sundown in brightly lit areas, according to a global study of 161 species and more than 60 million bird recordings, drawn from 111 million raw detections.

"I never knew I'd spend an hour of sleep," said Brent Pease, the lead author of the study. Dr. Pease is an assistant professor at the School of Forestry and Earth Culture at Southern Illinois University Carbondale in the US. "This was a great situation. But the picture is complex."

Scientists worry this disrupts birds' natural rhythms, altering migration, feeding, and breeding. This can turn harmless food chains and ecosystems.

Dr. Pease, this project began as a teaching idea to introduce students to birds at night. He set up a simple sound recorder and a small camera to capture bird calls. When he discovered a prompt asking if he wanted to link to a platform where volunteers shared bird sounds identified using artificial intelligence.

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing," Dr. Pease said. "There were thousands of sound recordings, all across the globe."

He shared the discovery of this source to an earlier revolution in wildlife science: trail cameras. Motion- and heat-triggered cameras transformed mammal studies, revealing behaviours once invisible to researchers, from hibernating grizzlies at den-grating at dawn.

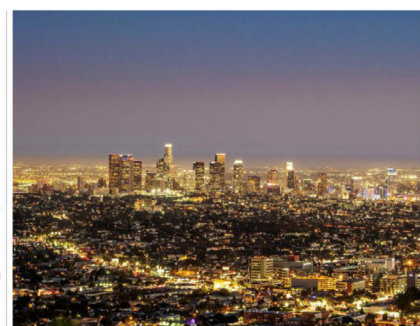
Birdwatchers, a volunteer-powered acoustic network analysed with an AI model called BirdNET, have done something similar for birds by automatically tagging and identifying their songs across continents.

Twilight chaos
"Light pollution is particularly interesting to me," said Neil Gilbert, a co-author of the study and a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Biology, King's College London in the UK. "I've thought a lot about how animals are responding to stressors and especially behaviour timing."

Dr. Pease looked at Dr. Gilbert to study how artificial light at night affected bird behaviour. They typed into the world's largest system of microphones and sensors placed in urban areas, forests and farms that built a real-time map of bird activity.

The scientists focused on two daily markers: the first song at sunrise and the last at sunset. They also looked at eye, nest, time, migration patterns, and habitats to understand which species were most vulnerable. Then they compared recordings from brightly lit areas with those from darker places.

Dr. Pease and Dr. Gilbert then found that light pollution was stretching the hours for which birds remained active. By combining millions of recordings from hundreds of species – most from the



Light pollution has been increasing the hours for which birds are active. <https://www.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/09597965231150047>



If they're spending an extra hour... they're going to need additional caloric intake for all this extra activity that they're doing. But this additional activity can also result in an increased foraging time and potentially even increased reproductive output.

BRENT PEASE

Lead author of the study and assistant professor at Southern Illinois University Carbondale

"Every organism that we know of on earth, every animal, even many plants, and phytoplankton – they all have some sort of sense of time," Dr. Shankar said. "And a lot of it comes from light cues."

Artificial light breaks these natural cues. For instance, across India cities, birds are dying after colliding with brightly lit glass facades, turning shiny office buildings into deadly traps.

"So if you disrupt these ancient rhythms, everything gets messed up," she said.

These mismatches can be devastating for migratory birds. Birds time their movements to food sources that also depend on seasonal light cues. If plants flower earlier or trees hatch later, journeys that evolved over time may suddenly become perilous.

Fluorescent light bulbs support keeping the night dark for people, animals, and stars. Through his research and film on fireflies, Dr. Marali has campaigned to raise awareness of light pollution. He calls these beetles the

"flagship species of the night." Fireflies use flashes of bioluminescent light to attract mates. In southern Indian forests and villages, their hypnotic on-and-off twinkle can be seen for a brief spell in May and June, just after sunset. The post-rainy, entire grows dimmer with their green-gold pulses. But they light strings across the trees. But artificial lighting backs this communication, making it harder for them to survive.

"We know that exposure to lighting affects the circadian rhythm," said Dr. Marali of our bodies' natural clock that controls sleep and wakefulness. "Doctors know it and we are careful about it for our own children. So then the question is, how do we teach people empathy and bring about change?"

A simple switch
Whether switching a bulb's day to a blue or a warm white is still uncertain. Move the bed and make sure you're less time to rest may hurt.

The good news is that unlike many other human pressures, light pollution is reversible. Streetlights can be dimmed, billboards dimmed, and lights switched off when not needed. Dr. Pease pointed out that unlike climate change or habitat destruction, reducing light pollution doesn't require massive investment or decades of restoration.

"If light pollution turns out to be a negative thing for bird populations, we can do a behaviour change across the globe to turn off the lights and make the night dark again," Dr. Pease said. "We're just a light switch away here."

<https://www.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/09597965231150047>



Practice Question

Q. Consider the following:

1. Onset of Alzheimer's disease
2. Disturbance in breeding patterns of bats
3. Promote Algal blooms in lakes
4. Interference in observation of astronomical objects

How many of the above are the potential impacts of light pollution?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Rising Obesity, children exposure to ultra-processed foods

GS- 2 Soual Justice, GS- 3 Economy

Rising obesity, children's exposure to ultra-processed foods

Data show greater availability and widespread promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

A recent UNICEF report, 'Feeding Profit: How Food Environments Are Failing Children', estimates that one in five children and adolescents between 5 and 19 years are 'living with overweight'. It highlights that children and adolescents are increasingly being exposed to "unhealthy food environments" through advertisements and food service facilities, and even lack adequate legal protections against such environments.

Children between 5 and 9 years and 10 to 14 years make up the highest shares of children who are 'living with overweight' (Chart 2).

The report explores how the retail environment shapes what foods children are exposed to. UNICEF found a rise in the density of 'chain' outlets, which include convenience stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets with more than 10 outlets (Chart 3).

According to the report, chain outlets influence food access and diets by facilitating the widespread availability and promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages.

But children's exposure to these foods does not stem from chain outlets alone. UNICEF's U-Report poll in 2023, which explored both the availability and marketing of foods in secondary schools across eight South Asian countries, showed that unhealthy foods and beverages were more commonly available in schools than fresh fruits or vegetables (Chart 4a).

The report emphasised that mandatory national legal measures and policies are vital to creating healthy food environments. Data show that only 18% of the 202 countries analysed had mandatory nutrition standards for school meals, and only 19% have national taxes for both unhealthy foods and sugar-sweetened beverages (Chart 5).

Unhealthy diets

Charts were sourced from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)'s "Feeding Profit: How food environments are failing children", published in September 2025. For Chart 5, the data were examined for 202 countries and for a set of 10 legal measures and policies spanning breastfeeding and first foods, school food environments, marketing to children, food reformulation, food labelling, food subsidies and taxation. *Code refers to the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions.



Chart 1: The number (in million) of children and adolescents living with overweight by age group

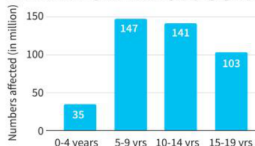


Chart 2: Percentage of children and adolescents with overweight, by age group, globally (in %)

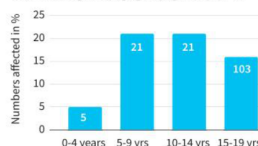


Chart 3: Trends of chain and non-chain outlets over time by income classifications of countries

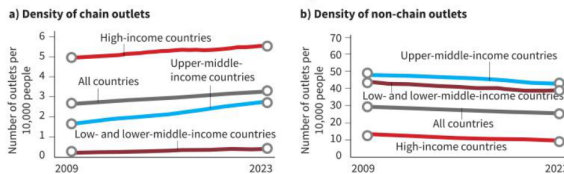


Chart 4a and 4b: Types of foods and beverages available in South Asia in 2023 (in %)

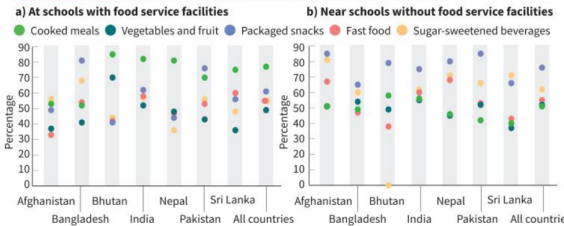
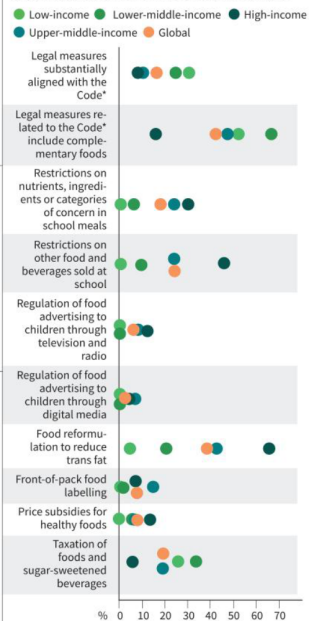


Chart 5: Share of countries with mandatory measures to protect children from unhealthy food environments





Court's nod to mental health as right

GS: 2 Social Justice, GS: 4 Ethics

Court's nod to mental health as right

In July 2025, the Supreme Court of India pronounced a verdict which has been called a constitutional landmark. The case, *Sukdeb Saha vs The State Of Andhra Pradesh*, was anchored in the anguish of a father who had lost his 17-year-old daughter, a NEET candidate, in a Visakhapatnam hostel. Dissatisfied with what he believed was the failure of the local police to make a full investigation of the cause, he demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry. His petitions were rejected by the Andhra Pradesh High Court, which then saw him approach the Supreme Court. The result was not only an order shifting the investigation to the CBI but also a much-needed acknowledgment of mental health being an integral part of the right to life, under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The top court's argument transcended the specific case and revolved around a crucial social issue: India's runaway epidemic of student suicides. From a criminological perspective, the case highlights what can be termed structural victimisation. Student suicides are rarely framed in these terms. Yet, systemic neglect of mental health combined with the exploitative culture of coaching centres and the indifference of schools and universities, produce an environment where young people become vulnerable to harm. By failing to provide safeguards, the state and institutions become complicit. When institutions create or ignore conditions that drive individuals to the brink, the line between personal tragedy and institutional culpability becomes blurred.

The gaze of victimology, which has long examined the dynamics between victims and perpetrators, can be extended to state institutions as de facto perpetrators. Students are not just 'victims' of internal psychological battles. They are the victims of an education system that treats them shabbily. It is also about social



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The Supreme Court's judgment in *Sukdeb Saha vs The State Of Andhra Pradesh*, acknowledges mental health to be an integral part of the right to life

values that link self-esteem to hierarchy and of a governance collapse that subordinates mental health as a secondary concern. By recognising mental health as an inherent right, the Court was recognising the structural aspect of victimisation. It recast the problem not as a personal bereavement but as a public injustice.

Legally, the verdict fills a vital gap. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 already enshrines the right to receive mental health care. But it has not been implemented consistently, and enforcement mechanisms are still poor. By entrenching mental health in the Constitution, the Court has established an elevated normative benchmark. Citizens can insist on safeguarding their psychic health as a fundamental right, not just a statutory right. To ensure that this did not become mere rhetoric, the Court ordered a package of binding interim orders - now referred to as the 'Saha Guidelines'. Here, schools, colleges, hostels and coaching institutes are required to proactively develop support systems to address the issue of mental health. They instruct States and Union Territories to bring the rules into force in two months and obligate the setting up of district-level monitoring committees. Until Parliament passes a full code, these guidelines will have legislative force.

The ruling also poses significant criminological questions regarding state responsibility. If suicides among students are partially an outcome of institutional neglect, can this form of neglect be regarded as structural violence? Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence posits that societal structures causing systematic harm to individuals by depriving them of basic needs are equally blameworthy as direct violence. By not creating a safe environment, the state and educational institutions indirectly perpetuate harmful circumstances. This perspective

changes student suicides from being viewed as 'individual failures' to a result of systemic injustice. As a victimology case, it is a point where hidden victims become visible. Students, frequently silenced by stigma or system competitiveness, are seldom heard as rights holders when it comes to mental health. Placing psychological integrity in Article 21 means that the Court has opened up room for these victims to be heard and safeguarded. It leaves the door ajar for restorative measures - counselling, reform in institutions, mechanisms of accountability that go beyond retribution to prevention.

The way the judgment has been received by mental health activists and professionals highlights its revolutionary potential. But along with optimism there must be caution. Powerful judicial pronouncements cannot, by themselves, uproot established cultural and institutional norms. The challenge is whether schools, universities, and State governments will meaningfully apply the guidelines, invest in resources, and train personnel to deliver real mental health care.

Ultimately, *Sukdeb Saha* represents a convergence of law, criminology and victimology. It recognises that harm can be produced not just by individuals but also by institutions and systems. It acknowledges that students, often treated as passive subjects of education, are rights holders whose mental well-being deserves constitutional protection. And, it challenges society to confront an uncomfortable truth - that neglect, indifference and structural pressures can be as deadly as acts of direct violence. In affirming that the right to life must include a healthy mind, the Court has given voice to a generation of students who have too often been silenced by despair. Whether this voice translates into meaningful change will determine whether the judgment remains a beacon of hope or a missed opportunity.

India gets licence to scour Indian Ocean for precious metals

GS: 1 Indian Geography GS: 2 IR



CARLSBERG RIDGE



India gets licence to scour Indian Ocean for precious metals

Jacob Koshy
COPENHAGEN

India has bagged an exploration contract from the International Seabed Authority (ISA) to look for a class of precious metals in the northwest Indian Ocean.

This is the first licence granted globally for exploring polymetallic sulphur nodules in the Carlsberg Ridge, M. Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, told *The Hindu*.

The agreement with the Jamaica-based ISA was signed in Delhi on Monday, he added.

These nodules are concentrations of rock found in the deep ocean and said to be rich in manganese, cobalt, nickel, and copper. The Carlsberg Ridge is a 3,000,000-sq.km stretch that lies in the Indian Ocean, specifically in the Arabian Sea and northwest Indian Ocean. It forms the boundary between the Indian and Arabian tectonic plates, extending from near Rodrigues Island to the Owen fracture zone.

For exploration in areas part of the 'high seas' or part of the ocean that is so far away from any country, that it is not part of their territories, countries must

obtain permission from the ISA. Currently, 19 countries have such exploration rights.

India too had applied in January 2024 for exploration rights in two regions of the Indian Ocean. While one in the Carlsberg Ridge has been granted, the second - the Afanasy-Nikitin Sea (ANS) mount - is yet to be approved. The ANS is located in the Central Indian Ocean, and the territory has been claimed by Sri Lanka for exploration rights. While countries can claim up to 350 nautical miles from their coasts as their 'continental shelf', those in the Bay of Bengal can, in theory, claim up to 500 nautical miles as per the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Earlier exploration

Previously, India had obtained such exploratory rights from the ISA in the Central Indian Ocean Basin. The first was signed in March 2002 and is set to expire on March 24, 2027, after two extensions. The second was for polymetallic sulphides in the Indian Ocean Ridge. It was signed on September 26, 2016, with validity till September 2031.



SC dismisses plea to extend POSH Act to women in politics

SC dismisses plea to extend POSH Act to women in politics

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday said agreeing with a plea to bring women political workers within the ambit of protection of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 or POSH Act would "open a Pandora's box". Dismissing the plea, a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai questioned the submissions made on behalf of

petitioner-advocate M.G. Yogamaya by senior advocate Shobha Gupta and advocate Sriram Parakkat that political parties came within the definition of 'employer'.

The plea had contended that there was no rational or intelligible differentia to exclude women in politics from protections available in other professions. It had said the definitions of 'workplace' and 'employer' under the Act must be expanded to include the political spectrum.