



**TATHASTU**  
Institute Of Civil Services

# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

## 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2025



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# Govt. withdraws order to install Sanchar Saathi app

It recalls directive to handset makers after outcry over installing app 'without people's knowledge'; Telecom dept. claims spike in downloads; Minister says app helps track fraudulent connections

**Aroon Deep**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Department of Telecommunications on Wednesday walked back its directions to phone manufacturers ordering them to install a government app starting next year. The reversal caps a turbulent episode, in which the government first downplayed the nature of the mandate before committing to withdraw it altogether, arguing that a recent spike in downloads of Sanchar Saathi meant that there was "no need" for smartphone manufacturers to preload the app on their devices.

"The number of users has been increasing rapidly, and the mandate to install the app was meant to

## Rollback after backlash

Following criticism, the Department of Telecom withdraws order to mandatorily pre-install Sanchar Saathi app in mobile phones

### DoT's statements

**Dec. 1:** In order to safeguard the citizens from buying the non-genuine handsets, enable easy reporting of suspected misuse of telecom resources ... ensure that the Sanchar Saathi mobile application is pre-installed

**Dec. 3:** Just in last one day, 6 lakh citizens have registered for downloading the App which is a 10x increase in its uptake ... Given its increasing acceptance, govt. has decided not to make the pre-installation mandatory for mobile manufacturers

accelerate this process and make the app available to less aware citizens easily," a statement said.

### DoT's three directions

The original direction was one of at least three issued after the DoT gave itself new powers to regulate Telecommunication Identifier User Entities (TIUE), a

concept the department created to allow it to issue such orders to any entity that used phone numbers, not just telecom operators. The order, not shared publicly but leaked by one or more recipients who were not expecting it, sparked immediate uproar as Internet users, civil society and the Opposition collectively

criticised the idea of a government app being placed on phones of all Indians without their knowledge.

### Minister defends app

Responding to Congress MP Deepinder Singh Hooda in Parliament, Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia defended the app, saying that "1.5 crore fraudulent mobile connections were disconnected, 26 lakh lost phones were traced ... we have only taken steps to make the app available to everyone". Still, Mr. Scindia said, "This app's success is premised on public support; if, based on feedback, we have to change the order, we are ready to do that."

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## A dismantling of the base of environmental regulation

On November 18, 2025, in *CREDAI vs. Union of India*, through a 2:1 majority, the Supreme Court of India reviewed and recalled its judgment from May this year, where it had declared notifications permitting persons to secure ex post facto environmental clearances (ECs) to be legal. The original judgment was hailed as a landmark moment, as a state instance of the Court grounding its rhetoric in enforceable discipline. But the Court has now asserted, with a strong dissent from Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, that its earlier ruling misinterpreted binding precedents and failed to appreciate that retrospective ECs may, in some situations, further the cause of public interest.

Our immediate reaction might well be to ask: how? To answer this, the Court employs a wholly circular logic. As the then Chief Justice of India, Justice R.K. Gokhale put it, to entirely deny retrospective clearance undermines public welfare because it could well compel authorities to halt or rear down completed projects that had begun without prior permission. Thus, the illegal act is, by itself, turned into a justification. The fact of a violation – of a project unlawfully commenced without an EC – winds up forming the rationale for granting the very clearance that the law requires in advance. In other words, the rules become fungible, to accommodate a *fait accompli*.

**An undoing of a reasoned judgment**  
For seven years, nearly half a century, the Supreme Court has spoken in soaring terms about the right to a clean and healthy environment. Through numerous judgments, it has located this promise within Article 21 of the Constitution of India's guarantee of a right to life. It has cited the precautionary principle – which requires the state to adopt protective measures even when scientific evidence about an environmental risk is uncertain – as a guiding norm. It has also acknowledged that ecological degradation burdens both the present and future generations. It has enunciated a right against the harms of climate change, and it has appealed to principles of intergenerational equity and sustainable development as constitutional goals.

To guarantee these constitutional goals, the Court's more progressive feet. But abstract doctrine takes us only so far. They serve little purpose if they are not meaningfully applied to real-world violations. Worse still, they collapse entirely when the Court undercuts its own carefully reasoned judgments. That is precisely the worry with the judgment in *CREDAI*. It turns non-compliance from an offence into an argument, and dismantles, in the process, the foundations of environmental regulation.



Justice Ujjal Bhuyan is an advocate practicing in the Madras High Court.

At its core, India's environmental laws mandate prior EC for certain industrial and development projects of specified sizes and types. This requirement, instituted through the Environment Impact Assessment (Notification) of 2006, has been waived down at least twice over. In 2017, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change issued a notification permitting those who had commenced work on site without an EC or expanded production beyond the limit of the EC, to apply for and secure a retrospective licence within six months from March 14, 2017. In 2021, the Ministry issued what it described as an "Office Memorandum" and instituted a "Standard Operating Procedure" allowing projects in violation of the law, where the window available under the 2007 order to apply could not be availed, to be regularised, by paying penalties and costs.

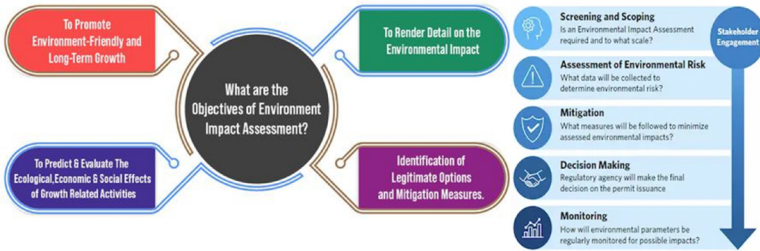
**The basis of the original ruling**  
The Court's original ruling, authored by Justice A.S. Okar, struck down both the 2017 and 2021 notifications. In doing so, the judgment returned to first principles and situated the controversy within the long arc of India's environmental jurisprudence. It traced the trajectory from the Stockholm Conference of 1972 to the enactment of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and then to the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) framework of 1994 and 2006, each measure constituting a building block in a regime that aims at preventing harm rather than condoning and regularising violations.

The verdict saw the insistence on a prior EC as no procedural formality. On the other hand, it insisted that this formed a central pillar in our statutory design. The EIA regime requires public hearings, scientific studies, expert appraisal and conditional approvals before a project begins, because the idea is to prevent irreversible harm. A prior EC, ensuring that project viability is assessed considering ecological limits, ensures that economic momentum does not predetermine environmental outcomes. The original judgment also drew upon long-standing decisions, including the verdict in *Common Cause vs Union of India* (2001), where the Court held unequivocally that retrospective clearances are "discriminatory in the environment and could lead to irreparable degradation of the environment", and the *M.C. Mehta* cases, which asserted that even the removal of a mining lease required previous approval. The logic was clear: if the law demands scientific scrutiny first, but construction proceeds sans such examination, the consequence cannot be a backdated validation of the legality. Equally significant was Justice Okar's account of the Union Government's own conduct. Before the Madras High Court, the State's lawyers gave a

casualty undertaking that the 2017 notification allowing ex post facto clearances was a one-time measure. That assurance was recorded and relied upon by a constitutional forum. Therefore, one would think the government would bind itself to its solemn commitment. But in the 2021 memorandum demonstrated, it was only too keen to liberalise compliance even further, allowing even those who had not submitted applications during the allotted time to seek retrospective validation.

Regrettably, the review judgment looks beyond all this. It frames for itself a narrower question: would enforcing prior scrutiny inconsistency those who have already violated the law? In so asking, it shifts the polestar from principle to expediency, marking, as Justice Bhuyan points out, a clear retrograde step. The dissenting opinion also lays bare the various other inconsistencies in the majority's approach. It points to the chief justification for repelling predicated ECs: the idea that our laws are built to anticipate harm rather than accommodate it. Replacing prior scrutiny with backdated licence dismantles the guardrails that the Court itself helped construct over decades. If the fact of a violation becomes grounds for erasing its consequences, any incentive to comply disappears. Project proponents will be happy to proceed without an EC, secure in the knowledge that the government, aided by the court, will help normalise their lapses through the payment of fines rather than the imposition of any serious consequences. In effect, what is rewarded is unlawful conduct with a declaration that the sheer scale of the wrongdoing compels the law to bend.

**A further weakening of accountability**  
The review judgment's implications for environmental governance are stark. First, it hollows out the EIA process. A series of *fait accompli* attaches itself to the requirements of public participation, expert appraisal and scientific evaluation. Scrutiny becomes ceremonial. Second, compliance is treated as voluntary. The state's regulatory hand weakens, and enforcement loses its deterrent force. But, ultimately, the most troubling consequence of the judgment is the signal it sends. We are living in a time of intensifying climate change and ecological fragility. But India's top court wants to dilute the already-flailing tools to ensure accountability. For an institution that has long prided itself on pioneering environmental protection, the review marks a decidedly dispiriting step backwards. The Court will now have to reassemble to hear the challenges anew. When it does so, it will do well to remember that the validity of the two notifications is not the only thing at stake here, but also the credibility of India's rule of law.



## Taking the leap

**Discriminatory provisions that impede lives of those with leprosy must go**

Systematic efforts are required to eliminate stigma, that are often seeded by fear, misinformation or ancient beliefs, and to remove the discriminatory attitudes towards those affected. The Supreme Court of India's intervention to battle stigma and discrimination in the case of leprosy is a corrective action that could not have been delayed any further. On a direction from the Court, the NHRC recently submitted that 97 central and State laws continue to contain provisions that discriminate against persons with leprosy. In sum and substance, these provisions deny access to things as basic as public transport and public spaces, right to run for elected office, and access to employment, or running a business venture. The Court was hearing a batch of petitions contending that there were a number of provisions across central and State statutes that discriminate against persons with leprosy. Caused mainly by the bacterium, *Mycobacterium leprae*, leprosy is among the earliest known infections to affect humans, with skeletal evidence dating back to 2000 BCE. Today, India continues to report about 57 % of leprosy cases worldwide, with genetic predisposition and living in unsanitary conditions raising the susceptibility. The NHRC, which has been in pursuit of this issue since 2021, first put out a comprehensive document that recommended early identification, timely treatment, rehabilitation, and removing discriminatory practices to ensure dignity and equal access to fundamental rights for persons with leprosy. This includes a plea to the Centre to enact a law to replace derogatory terminology that persists in the laws of the land, and a pointed recommendation to the Unique Identification Authority of India to promote the use of iris scans for Aadhaar enrolment, as leprosy primarily affects the fingertips, through nerve damage.

Given that a plethora of medical advancements have enabled leprosy to be a non-infectious condition, and be fully curable with the right interventions, it will be a shame to allow these discriminatory, antediluvian provisions to continue to be in force. The judges directed all States and Union Territories to submit reports detailing the steps that they have initiated in this regard. In fact, armed with the evidence that the NHRC has provided, the Centre and States must set themselves the urgent task of removing these provisions, and launching remedial action. In this day and age, it is unfathomable that the state continues to trap a group of citizens in the dark ages based on laws written by humans who did not know better.

# The climate is breaching the wall of urban metrics

**P**eople often discuss India's big metros as if they belong to the same category. Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai are similar in age, scale and cultural importance and all four appear in rankings of "global" or "liveable" cities. Yet, anyone who has lived in them knows how much the security that they offer their residents during cyclones or extreme monsoon days differs. That divergence is not just an Indian curiosity but points to a deeper problem with how we define and measure "modern" urban life, and which recent floods across Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines made clear.

The UN-Habitat City Prosperity Index combines productivity, infrastructure, quality of life, equity, environmental sustainability and urban governance into a single picture. The Global Liveability Index scores cities on stability, health care, culture and environment, education and infrastructure. The City Resilience Index focuses on how well cities withstand and recover from shocks, including extreme weather, across health and well-being, economy and society, infrastructure and environment, and leadership and strategy.

While these approaches acknowledge that economic output, public services, social inclusion and environment all matter to urban welfare, they do not yet add up to a coherent way to judge whether a city actually affords its residents a "developed" life in a world in which the climate regularly breaches new extremes.

## The Asia floods

Cyclone Dittwah brought intense rain to Sri Lanka, triggering flooding and landslides that killed over 400 people and displaced tens of thousands in Colombo and in densely populated countryside settlements. In Indonesia, cyclonic storms triggered floods and landslides across Sumatra, killing hundreds and destroying villages in river valleys and on steep slopes. Southern Thailand,



**Vasudevan Mukunth**

The impact of extreme natural events in Asia points to a deeper problem of how 'modern' urban life is being defined and measured

including the city of Hat Yai, experienced rainfall reported to be the heaviest in centuries. The resulting floodwaters were several metres deep while national leaders also acknowledged failures in warning. In the Philippines, Typhoon Kalmaegi inundated parts of the Visayas region, including Cebu, leaving dozens dead and lakhs displaced.

Hat Yai and Cebu are secondary cities integrated into national economies. Hill towns near Colombo are similarly linked to the capital's labour and commodity markets. Yet, many of the affected settlements do not appear on the major indices. This is because liveability rankings typically cover capital regions and a small set of global hubs while global city indices focus on financial and research functions. The first flaw is that the places that absorb much of the real risk of rapid urbanisation due to a changing climate are often excluded from the systems by which "modern" urban life is assessed.

## Shortcomings in liveability indices

Where data does exist, the floods reveal a more structural problem. The grey infrastructure in the most affected places was designed for weaker storms and was quickly overwhelmed by more than 300 mm of rain in 24 hours. Early warning and evacuations were only partial, leaving families in south Thailand reportedly trapped on upper floors for two days. Landslides in Sri Lanka also struck at night.

However, liveability indices record whether a city has hospitals, schools, parks, and public transport but are nearly silent on whether drainage networks can handle 21st century cloudbursts, whether hillsides are free of construction, and whether there are safe and accessible alternatives to informal housing. Prosperity indices may measure the share of households in "durable" housing, yet rarely differentiate between a brick house on a stable terrace and one cut into an unstable slope.

These gaps matter because the assessment

paradigms have become part of the way States and investors decide where to deploy capital. A city that scores well on connectivity and business climate may also pay scant attention to drainage or slope stability, yet still attract more investment, even if that investment deepens exposure in floodplains or unstable hillsides. Public officials who are aware of what "moves the needle" prioritise airports, metro lines, and waterfront promenades, all of which signal modernity, while the less visible work of desilting canals, maintaining culverts, enforcing building codes and relocating people towards sites of lower risk remains politically thankless.

## The inequity

Because most indices use city-wide averages, they misprice risk and shift it to those with the lowest capacity to bear it. Rising land values and expanded infrastructure in flood-prone areas show up as higher prosperity and better access. When extreme rain arrives, wealthier residents benefit from better mobility and services and can often protect themselves with insurance while peri-urban settlers scramble in structures that crumble or flood first, even though they too live in a city assessed to be "modern".

International funds and technical assistance programmes often require cities to produce certain plans and indicators; cities that can already do this, which are typically larger and more prosperous, become the main recipients of adaptation support. Projects are then designed to satisfy reporting requirements, not necessarily to address the most acute local hazards. Eventually, the media and urban elites adopt the vocabulary of "top-10 most liveable", "world-class" or "smart" cities while planning curricula and engineering standards adopt global indices as reference points, embedding their biases into the next generation of urban professionals.

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## A missing link in India's mineral mission

**T**he Union Cabinet's new ₹7,280 crore rare-earth magnet scheme acknowledges a simple truth: digging without processing is just exporting prosperity. The new G-20 framework on critical minerals also makes value creation through refining and manufacturing its centrepiece. For India, which has reformed its mining laws but still lacks large-scale processing, this is a timely reminder. Every solar panel, electric vehicle, and wind turbine begins not on an assembly line but in a refinery, where ores are turned into battery-grade graphite, magnet-ready rare earths, or ultra-pure polysilicon. Yet almost all this processing happens outside India, increasing the vulnerability of domestic supply chains. That exposure has grown as U.S.-China trade frictions trigger new tariffs and export restrictions.

In recent years, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act has been amended to support domestic mining through exploration licences, national auctions, mining-associated minerals, and a national mineral exchange. These reforms help us dig, but they do not help us refine. India imports almost the entire amount of its lithium, nickel and cobalt. And the stakes extend far beyond clean energy. High-purity materials are also critical for semiconductors, telecommunications, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, and defence systems.

The midstream segment of the critical minerals value chain – processing and refining – is a global chokepoint. China still controls over 90% of global rare earths and graphite refining. Citing national security, China tightened export controls on rare earth and battery technologies earlier this year and has since expanded them even further in recent weeks. Without domestic processing, India will stay exposed to such shocks.

Hence, India must scale up its



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There's a pressing need to strengthen India's critical minerals sector but more focus needs to go into the often overlooked part of the value chain – processing and refining

processing and refining capacity, starting with the minerals it already produces or recycles. The recently approved ₹1,500 crore critical minerals recycling scheme is a promising start. A recent study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) shows India already mines and processes seven critical minerals – copper, graphite, silicon, tin, titanium, rare earths, and zirconium. But in each case, our refining lags behind either in scale or quality.

India can take five steps to develop critical mineral processing. **First, turn Centres of Excellence into innovation engines.** The nine Centres of Excellence under the National Critical Mineral Mission must drive applied research, specifically for producing high-purity compounds and materials aligned to industry needs. In the short term, their primary focus should be to develop processing technologies that can be implemented and operationalised at a commercial scale. Academic institutes such as IITs, NITs, industry and think tanks should work on life-cycle modelling and cost-benefit analysis for rapid technology adoption by the processing industry. What matters now is momentum to push innovative technologies from labs to commercial scale.

**Second, unlock secondary resources to recover critical minerals.** India generates more than 250 million tonnes of coal fly ash annually, containing both light and heavy rare earths. Red mud from aluminium plants holds gallium; zinc residues contain cobalt; steel slag carries vanadium. Pilot projects at CSIR and IITs show recovery is possible from fly ash and red mud. Embedding such recovery units in the proposed Critical Minerals Processing Parks would enable scale.

**Third, train and upskill a new generation of process metallurgists and technicians.** Critical minerals require

specialised hydrometallurgical and advanced refining techniques. The ₹100 crore allocation under the NCMM for skilled workforce should fund train-the-trainer programmes for existing workers, diploma-level courses, and new curricula at academic and CSIR labs. Developing such a workforce could create thousands of skilled jobs.

**Fourth, de-risk investment through demand assurance and financing tools.** The U.S. Department of Defence's deal with the U.S.-based MP Materials, rare earth minerals and magnetic producers, combining government offtake commitments and price guarantees, offers a model. India could adapt this by turning its proposed stockpiling of critical minerals under the Mission into an active market-maker, buying from domestic producers during downturns and releasing during demand surges. Key sectors such as defence, pharmaceuticals, and electronics should be mandated to source part of their inputs domestically, while processors should be encouraged to meet stringent quality standards.

**Fifth, link mineral diplomacy to processing capacity.** India's recent overseas acquisitions are significant but focus mainly on getting access to raw ores. If India can demonstrate consistent high-purity refining across the seven minerals it already handles, it could shift global partnerships from buyer-seller deals to co-investment alliances. Critical mineral parks could serve as collaboration hubs where foreign firms co-invest and co-process.

With China tightening mineral and technology exports, the real question isn't whether India has enough mines, but whether it can master the art of turning ores into materials. Processing is the missing link that will determine if India remains a supplier of raw resources or becomes a builder of resilient and clean industries. (With inputs by Vibhuti Chandhok. Views are personal)

## Economic offenders who fled India owe ₹39,000 crores

Just nine Fugitive Economic Offenders owed ₹58,000 crore, of which ₹19,000 crore was recovered

### DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

**J**ust nine Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEOs) owed Indian banks over ₹58,000 crore in principal and interest. Despite having arrest warrants issued against them, these FEOs have left India and refuse to return to avoid criminal prosecution. Of this, the principal amount owed is ₹26,645 crore, while interest accounts for ₹31,437 crore. To date, banks have recovered just over ₹19,000 crore – roughly 33% of the total dues (Chart 1).

Earlier this week, the Ministry of Finance informed Parliament that 15 individuals had been declared FEOs as of October 31. Nine of them are involved in large-scale financial fraud, and the amounts they owe have been made public.

State Bank of India (SBI) is owed over ₹22,000 crore, followed by Punjab National Bank and Bank of India (Chart 2). Notably, the SBI has achieved the highest recovery rate among these lenders, retrieving close to 52%. This is largely attributed to effective recovery measures, including liquidation, in Vijay Malviya's account. In contrast, the recovery rate for other banks remains below 40%.

In terms of total dues owed initially (principal plus interest), businessman Malviya tops the list with nearly ₹27,000 crore (Chart 3). He is followed by the Sandesara family (Sterling Group) and Nirav Modi. Over 56% of amount owed by Malviya has been recovered till date, date show, while for others, the rate is much lower at 17% for the Sandesara family and 7% in the case of Modi.

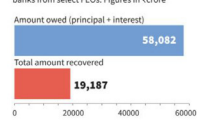
Charts 4, 5, and 6 detail the loan exposure and recovered amount for the top offenders. SBI led in exposure to Malviya, whereas PNB bore the brunt of Modi's defaults. For the Sandesara family, the exposure was shared among multiple banks.

## Amounts owed by and recovered from fugitives

The data for the charts were sourced from Parliament Questions and Answers



CHART 1: Amount owed and recovered by Indian banks from select FEOs. Figures in ₹crore



This analysis includes the two fugitive economic offenders who have negotiated loan settlement under One Time Settlement (OTS).

In the graph, members of the Sandesara family refers to amount borrowed by/recovered from Nitin J. Sandesara, Chetan J. Sandesara, and Dipi C. Sandesara as mentioned in the parliament document.

\*In chart 2, others include Bank of Maharashtra, Punjab and Sind Bank, and Central Bank of India

CHART 2: Amount owed to the banks and amount recovered. Figures in ₹crore

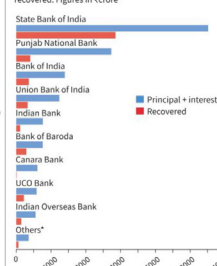


CHART 3: Amount owed by the offenders and amount recovered. Figures in ₹crore

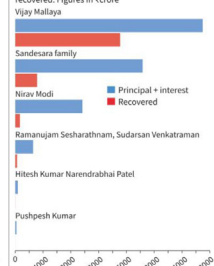


CHART 4: Loan exposure of various banks and the recovered amount in accounts related to Vijay Malviya

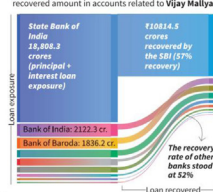


CHART 5: Loan exposure and the recovered amount in accounts related to the Sandesara family

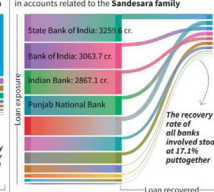
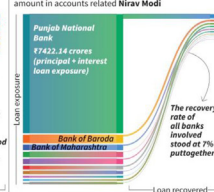


CHART 6: Loan exposure and the recovered amount in accounts related to Nirav Modi



# Why is volcanic ash a safety concern for flights?

How has the eruption of the Hayli Gubbi volcano in northern Ethiopia affected flights? What has the Director General of Civil Aviation ordered? How does the ash affect the engines of aircraft?

Jagriti Chandra

The story so far:

**L**ast week, the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), India's aviation regulator, ordered airlines to brace for the impact of volcanic ash travelling from Ethiopia after volcanic Hayli Gubbi erupted for the first time in 12,000 years.

How did it travel?

Hayli Gubbi volcano in northern Ethiopia erupted on November 23 for the first time in nearly 12,000 years, sending thick plumes of ash up to 14 km into the sky, and across the Red Sea towards Yemen and Oman. It even drifted towards Iran. The volcanic ash reached India's western border on November 24 at 5.50pm and moved out of the country's airspace by

10.30pm on November 25. Moving at around 100-120 km/hour at an altitude of 15,000 to 25,000 feet the plume carried volcanic ash, sulphur dioxide and tiny particles of glass and rock, travelling over Rajasthan, parts of Gujarat, Delhi-NCR, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh before crossing over to China.

How does it impact aircraft?

A jet engine works by sucking in air, squeezing it, mixing it with fuel, burning it, and pushing hot gases out the back to produce thrust.

The engine runs extremely hot at temperatures of 1,600 degrees Celsius while turning very fast, with air racing through it at 600 mph. When volcanic ash gets into this environment, the silicate components melt and re-solidify at high temperatures creating a glassy deposit on

hot parts, which blocks tiny cooling holes choking off flow within the engine. This can lead to engines losing power or shutting down.

What did the DGCA order state?

The DGCA issued an advisory urging airlines to steer clear of affected altitudes and regions to ensure safety. Airlines were also advised to report any suspected impact of ash on engine performance or cabin smoke or odour. Airports were ordered to inspect runways for contamination and suspend or restrict flight operations, if need be.

Air India cancelled at least nine flights on November 24 and 25, including those originating from Dubai, Doha and Dammam and said it was carrying out precautionary checks on aircraft.

Akasa also cancelled flights to and from

Jeddah, Kuwait and Abu Dhabi.

How have flights been affected?

In 1982, a British Airways Boeing 747 flying at 37,000 ft enroute from London to Auckland flew through a volcanic ash cloud from Mount Galunggung near Jakarta. All four engines failed one after another due to the ash. As engines control the pressurisation system, the oxygen levels in the passenger cabin started to drop and passenger oxygen masks were deployed. With mountains blocking the way to the emergency airport, it seemed like the plane would have to ditch in the Indian Ocean. Luckily, after descending more than 25,000 feet, the pilots managed to restart one engine and then the other three, although one engine had to be shut down again. With enough power to reach the airport safely, the crew still faced the difficult task of landing with windscreens clouded almost completely by volcanic ash.

In 1989, a KLM Boeing 747-400 flying to Anchorage, Alaska, hit ash from the nearby Mount Redoubt eruption. All four engines shut down suddenly at 24,000 ft. The crew descended 14,000 ft and had to perform the engine restart procedure a number of times before it was able to successfully land the plane safely. But the engines worth \$80 million were severely damaged and had to be scrapped.

## THE GIST

Hayli Gubbi volcano in northern Ethiopia erupted on November 23 for the first time in nearly 12,000 years, sending thick plumes of ash up to 14 km into the sky.

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## Hayli Gubbi Volcano

### Location

- Located in Ethiopia's Afar region, around 800 km northeast of Addis Ababa, near the Eritrean border.
- Lies within the Danakil Depression, one of the hottest and most remote places on Earth.
- It is the southernmost volcano of the Erta Ale range.

### Volcanic Characteristics

- Volcano Type: Shield volcano.
- Part of the Erta Ale range, famous for persistent lava lakes and dominated by shield volcano formations.
- No recorded eruptions of Hayli Gubbi in modern geological history.



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## SC flags issues in payouts, free care for acid attack survivors

Bench headed by Justice B.V. Nagarathna to examine what ails disbursement of compensation to survivors; court mandates that its orders be brought to notice of State Chief Secretaries for action

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday decided to look into a plea that acid attack survivors, mostly young women, have neither been paid in full the minimum ₹3 lakh in compensation nor provided free critical care by private hospitals.

A Bench headed by Justice B.V. Nagarathna decided to examine what ails the disbursement of compensation to acid attack survivors despite repeated judicial orders from the top court spanning years. The court had in 2006 taken judicial cognisance of the trauma undergone by acid attack survivors after witnessing and hearing Laxmi, who was ambushed by a trio of men, one of whom she had refused to marry.

The top court had ordered States to pay survivors a minimum ₹3 lakh compensation, of which ₹1 lakh was to be given within 15 days of the incident and the balance within two months. The court had banned over-the-counter sale of acid. It had declared

### Justice delayed

Despite judicial orders, survivors face delays in compensation and essential medical care

- **2006:** SC takes cognisance, acknowledges trauma of 15-year-old Laxmi, who was attacked by three men.
- **2013:** Court orders minimum aid of ₹3 lakh, free critical care at private hospitals and ban on over-the-counter sale of acid.
- **2015:** Orders on hospital compliance reiterated; district legal services authorities directed to function as criminal injuries compensation Boards.
- **2025:** Survivors given liberty to approach State or district authorities for delayed or defaulted payments.



that private hospitals would be held criminally liable for refusing free treatment to victims before referring them to a specialised facility. These directions were passed in judicial orders in 2013 and reiterated by the top court in 2015.

In April 2015, the court had directed that district legal services authorities would function as criminal injuries compensation boards and take up the compensation claims made by survivors.

On March 20 this year, the Supreme Court gave acid attack survivors liber-

ty to approach the State or district legal services authorities or legal services committee in case there was any default or delay in payment of compensation from the States. These statutory bodies, dedicated to providing free legal services to weaker sections of society, were also ordered to ensure that private hospitals did not turn them away.

Appearing before Justice Nagarathna's Bench on Wednesday, petitioner-NGO Acid Survivors Sahas Foundation said that apart from an initial ₹1 lakh, nothing further was re-

ceived by victims as part of the ₹3 lakh compensation, particularly in States like Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

Private hospitals were refusing treatment until victims had paid up in full. "That is what really hurts us, not only as lawyers, but as human beings," the NGO counsel submitted.

The court issued notice and impleaded the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in the case. The Bench directed NALSA to collect data from State legal services authorities about the amounts disbursed to acid attack victims as compensation.

A counsel appearing for NALSA orally submitted that ₹484 crore, approximately, was disbursed as compensation from March 2024 to April 2025.

The court further directed that its judicial orders be brought to the notice of the State Chief Secretaries for issuing directions for disbursement of funds to the State legal services authorities, which would in turn forward the funds to district bodies for payment to survivors. The next hearing is on February 3, 2026.

## BITRA ISLAND

The **Southern Naval Command** announced that the **Indian Navy** is establishing a detachment on **Bitra Island**.

The facility is **nearing completion**, making Bitra the **third island in Lakshadweep** to host a defence establishment (after **Kavaratti** and **Minicoy**).



## BITRA ISLAND

- **Location:** Northern Lakshadweep, **Arabian Sea**.
- **Smallest inhabited island** in the Lakshadweep group.
- **Land area:** 0.105 sq km
- **Lagoon area:** 45.61 sq km (much larger than the landmass).
- **Population (2011):** 271

### Cultural Significance

- Houses the **shrine of Malik Mulla**, an Arab saint believed to be buried there.
- Functions as an **important pilgrimage site** for Lakshadweep residents.

### Ecology

- Historically covered with thick shrubs.
- Once a **major seabird breeding site**; populations declined in the 19th century due to human interference.

### Strategic Importance

- Located at a **critical position in the Arabian Sea**, important for maritime domain awareness.
- Enhances surveillance over sea lanes near India's western maritime frontier.
- Adds to India's naval infrastructure in Lakshadweep:
  - ♦ INS Dweepakshak – Kavaratti
  - ♦ INS Jatayu – Minicoy
  - ♦ New Navy Detachment – Bitra Island