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With new Bill, demand-led job scheme set to turn supply-driven

Viksit Bharat – Guarantee For Rozgar And Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill proposes to increase guaranteed workdays from 100 to 125, but raises the financial burden on States and dismantles the demand-driven structure of the MGNREGA

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Union government is set to introduce the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee For Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 in the Lok Sabha. The move will mark a shift from a “demand-driven framework” to a “supply-driven scheme”.

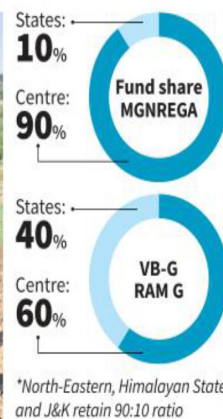
Under the new system, allocations will be capped at a fixed budget determined by the Union government based on “parameters” not yet specified. Employment will be provided only in rural areas notified by the

Framework change

The government has circulated the VB-G RAM G Bill to MPs, framing it as legislation to ‘establish a rural development framework aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047’

Shifts from MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G Bill

- Rights-based employment guarantee → **Supply-driven employment and livelihood scheme**
- 100 days of wage employment → **125 days**
- Flexible budget → **Budget cap**
- Year-round → **Seasonal pause allowed**



Centre.

While the VB-G RAM G Bill increases the number of guaranteed workdays from

100 to 125, it significantly raises the financial burden on States from the current 10% share to 40% of total ex-

penditure.

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Opposition raises several questions over new Bill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Monday raised questions about the Bill that seeks to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, ranging from the rationale behind removing the name of Mahatma Gandhi to increasing the financial burden on States.

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Massacre in Sydney

Australia should enhance monitoring of religious extremism

Bondi Beach in Sydney, one of Australia's most iconic locations, turned into a scene of massacre on December 14, the first day of Hanukkah, when two gunmen opened fire at a Jewish gathering. At least 16 people, including a 10-year-old girl and an 87-year-old Holocaust survivor, were killed and 40 others wounded. Police said the attackers were a 50-year-old man, who held licensed firearms, and his 24-year-old son, who had been under investigation by Australia's domestic intelligence agency for six months. The father was shot dead by police, while the son has been taken to hospital under custody. The attack was the deadliest shooting since the 1996 Port Arthur massacre in Tasmania, in which 35 people were killed. In recent years, Australia has witnessed growing antisemitic incidents, targeting its Jewish community, which makes up some 0.4% of its population. Last year, in October, a kosher food business in Bondi was targeted, while in December, a synagogue in Melbourne was firebombed. In August this year, Australia accused Iran of directing such attacks, and expelled the Iranian Ambassador and three other diplomats. After Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel and Israel's retaliatory genocidal war on Palestinians in Gaza, antisemitic incidents in Australia rose by 316%, between October 2023 and September 2024, with more than 2,000 cases reported, according to the country's special envoy to combat antisemitism.

Australia's Labour Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, has urged unity and asked citizens to be "each other's light". The rise in antisemitic violence should be a grave concern for Australia, which hosts the world's eighth largest Jewish community. His government must swiftly investigate the attack and bring all to justice. He should also remain alert to forces, domestic and foreign, that seek to divide Australian society. While antisemitic extremists target the local Jewish community, critics of Mr. Albanese, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – under whose watch Hamas killed 1,200 people in Israel – have sought to blame Mr. Albanese's policies, including his government's recognition of Palestinian statehood earlier this year, for the Bondi shooting. Mr. Albanese should ignore such attacks and focus instead on healing society, combating hate crimes, and addressing concerns over gun violence. Australia introduced tough gun control laws after the Port Arthur massacre and enforcing a strict licensing regime, leading to a significant decline in gun-related violence and deaths. However, the Bondi shooting has again raised concerns about gun safety. Australia should now tighten regulations further, enhance monitoring of extremist ideologies and isolate and punish those who perpetrate hate crimes.

The Oman visit is more than a routine diplomatic trip

The visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Oman (as part of the three-nation tour to Jordan and Ethiopia also, from December 15-18) comes at a crucial time when both nations are seeking to strengthen their partnership amid regional uncertainties, tariff wars, conflicts, energy transitions, and emerging connectivity corridors. The Oman visit is also amid tremendous geopolitical flux in the region, especially the uncertain peace that prevails after the Gaza ceasefire.

The visit, on December 17, marks 70 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations. This is Mr. Modi's second visit to Oman, after 2018. The Sultan of Oman, Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, had visited India on December 16, 2023.

A balancing factor and a trusted partner
Oman's importance to India far exceeds its geographical proximity or historical ties. Decades ago, when the region was still ambivalent towards India and soft and supportive of Pakistan, it was Oman which kept its doors open to India. In a conflict-prone region, Oman has always been an island of peace, pursuing a foreign policy which is based on the twin strands of moderation and mediation, which includes a policy of deliberate neutrality in dealing with regional issues and conflicts.

For India, Oman is a crucial pillar of its West Asia Policy, with the partnership taking a more strategic shape in recent decades. India signed a strategic partnership agreement with Oman in November 2008, and Oman was also invited by India as a guest nation during its G-20 Presidency in September 2023.

Defence and security engagement form a key pillar of this strategic partnership and are governed by a memorandum of understanding on military cooperation, signed in 2005. Oman is the first Gulf country with which all the three wings of India's defence forces hold joint exercises. Since 2012-13, an Indian naval ship has remained on duty in the Gulf of Oman for anti-piracy operations. Oman has allowed over flight/transit facilities for Indian military aircraft. In recent years, both countries have cooperated



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in ensuring maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.

Oman was the first Gulf country to purchase the Indian Small Arms System (INSAS) assault rifle in 2010. The logistics agreement on Duqm Port in Oman, signed during Mr. Modi's visit in 2018 is a landmark in India's security cooperation, providing basing facilities, operational turnaround and other logistics facilities to the Indian Navy. Oman's strategic location overlooking the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea also allows India to keep a discreet watch on growing Chinese PLA Naval activity in the region.

Economic and commercial relations form another pillar of engagement. Bilateral trade, though modest, has steadily increased to \$10.613 billion for FY 2024-25. Investment flows too have been robust. The cumulative foreign direct investment equity inflow from Oman to India from April 2000 to March 2025 is \$605.57 million.

A joint venture called the Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF), a 50-50 Joint Venture between the State Bank of India and Oman Investment Authority, has already invested \$600 million in India including a third OIJIF tranche worth \$300 million announced during the visit of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq in 2023.

Fintech and digital payments are another strong area of convergence. In October 2022, the Central Bank of Oman signed a landmark MoU with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to link the payment systems between the two countries and launched the Rupay debit card in Oman, a key footprint of India's initiative of promoting Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in the world.

Domains of cooperation

The visit offers a key opportunity not only to review an old friendship but also to set new benchmarks for bilateral cooperation, especially in trade, investment, defence, maritime security, energy, connectivity and technology. The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is likely to be signed, making Oman only the second country in

the region (after the United Arab Emirates) to sign such an agreement with India. This will help India to diversify trade options, especially in light of the tariffs imposed by the United States on Indian imports. There is a likelihood of increased engagement in strategic areas such as space cooperation too for which an agreement was signed during Mr. Modi's visit in 2018.

Connectivity is an important facet of discussions. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a key project announced during the G-20 Summit at Delhi in September 2023, could see Oman playing an important role.

Energy cooperation is another area that may see convergence. As both countries navigate the global energy transition, this may expand to include green hydrogen, renewable energy and critical minerals. There could also be a discussion on Oman holding strategic petroleum reserves in India, akin to the arrangement with the UAE.

Rapidly expanding defence ties could get a further boost. Setting up joint production facilities, supply of critical weapon platforms such as the Tejas fighter aircraft, naval patrol ships and radar equipment too may be finalised. Counter-terror and anti-piracy cooperation too may get a fillip. A deal with Oman to supply spare parts of Jaguar fighter aircraft to India too is likely.

On education and health

In the field of education and health, there is likely to be close cooperation which may see the setting up of offshore campuses of prestigious Indian institutes such as the Indian Institute of Technology and the Indian Institute of Management in Oman.

The visit to Oman is more than a routine diplomatic visit and a reaffirmation of India's oldest strategic partnership in the Gulf in a rapidly changing region. As India expands its economic and strategic footprint in its extended neighbourhood, Oman remains a key partner. Whether through a CEPA, green energy, connectivity or defence deals, the visit has the potential to set new benchmarks in India-Oman relations.

There are new and promising areas for stronger bilateral cooperation between India and Oman

One in six people exposed to conflict worldwide in 2025

ACLED's latest report indicates that civilians do not just face more violence, but more state violence this year

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

According to a new report from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), an estimated 831 million people, or 10% of the world's population, were exposed to conflict this year. That means roughly, one in six people globally were exposed to conflict in 2025.

The report says that conflict was characterised by less restraint and increasing violence targeting civilians. That is, armed actors around the globe were more likely to use force and disregard the consequences that came with it. Not only did the number of conflicts increase, but also, nearly three out of four such events directly involved state forces.

ACLED has recorded nearly 2 lakh violent events worldwide this year – nearly twice the number of events recorded just four years ago. A region-wise analysis shows that Europe recorded the greatest increase in violence, largely driven by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has affected the highest number of people since the invasion in 2022. While conflicts persisted in West Asia, the end of Syria's civil war and a series of ceasefires in Lebanon and Gaza decreased the number of violent events significantly (Chart 1). Compared to 2024, there was 48% decrease in violent conflicts in the region. Also, the decreases in air campaigns by Israel and Türkiye in Lebanon and Iraq, respectively, drove a 17% drop in aerial warfare globally compared to 2024.

Global trends indicate that civilians now do not just face more violence, but they also face more state violence. More than 56,000 incidents of violence directed at civilians were recorded in 2025. This is the highest in the last five years. Government forces were involved in 74% of violent events worldwide in 2025. Chart 2 shows

the share of violence by state actors in all recorded violent events since 2020.

Data show that state-led violence targeting civilians has increased since 2020. Where state forces were responsible for 20% of global violence directed towards civilians in 2020, they now make up 35% of such events.

While Israel and Russia were collectively responsible for about 90% of violent incidents that targeted civilians outside their borders, the Myanmar military accounted for nearly a third of violence committed by state forces against its civilians this year.

However, in terms of fatalities, about 60% were due to the actions of non-state armed groups and mobs. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Sudan's paramilitary group locked in a years-long conflict with the Sudanese army, killed more than 4,200 civilians in attacks till November this year. This is much higher than any other non-state armed group (Chart 3).

This figure makes up about 11% of all recorded fatalities caused by non-state armed groups and is likely to be a severe undercount. The Allied Democratic Forces, an armed group of former Ugandan rebels which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, was responsible for at least 1,370 reported civilian fatalities. The March 23 Movement (M23) is one of 120 insurgent groups active in the same conflict, and was responsible for more than 1,100 civilian deaths.

The report also highlights that the repurposing of readily accessible commercial drones as weapons in recent conflicts reflects changes in contemporary warfare. Data show that 469 non-state armed groups have deployed drones at least once in the past five years. This is a 14% rise compared to last year (Chart 4). ACLED says this indicates that non-state armed groups are either able to access technology previously reserved for states or adapt and use minimal resources to expand their arsenal.

Tracking conflict

The data for the charts were sourced from ACLED's report 'What's driving conflict today?', published on December 11, 2025. The report was authored by ACLED's Head of Analysis Andrea Carboni and Associate Analysis Coordinator Ciro Murillo

Chart 1: Region-wise number of violent events recorded since 2020

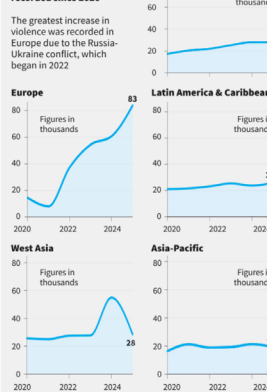


Chart 2: Share of violence by state and non-state forces

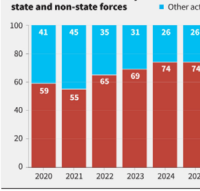


Chart 3: Civilians killed by non-state armed groups in 2025

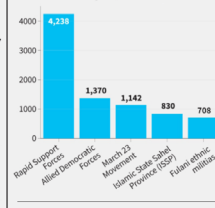
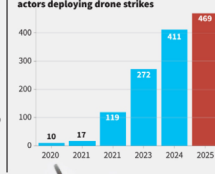


Chart 4: Cumulative number of non-state actors deploying drone strikes



SHANTI Bill to allow private sector to make, run nuclear power plants

Jacob Koshy
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The Centre introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday the SHANTI Bill that aims to incentivise private sector participation, both Indian and foreign, into nuclear power production. It does this by replacing India's existing laws – the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act, 2010, – with the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, 2025.

The latter creates an atomic energy regulatory structure that is answerable to Parliament, removes the Nuclear Power Corpo-

ration of India's monopoly over operating nuclear plants, and restricts the instances under which nuclear power plant operators can claim compensation from suppliers of equipment in case of an accident. Simultaneously, it also buffers operators by introducing limits on the extent of their liability, in case of violating the laws under the Act, based on the size of the plants they operate, and limits the maximum penalty on them to ₹1 crore even in the case of a "severe breach".

"The Bill proposes a revised and pragmatic civil liability framework for nuclear damage, confers statutory status on the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), and strengthens

mechanisms related to safety, security, safeguards, quality assurance and emergency preparedness," a statement by the Union Ministry of Science and Technology said. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Science and Technology, introduced the Bill.

Privatising the nuclear power sector, which currently makes up 1.5% of India's installed power capacity, and 3% of the electricity produced, has been on the government's agenda in recent years to boost clean energy production, improve grid stability, and move towards its 2070 net-zero (zero net-carbon emissions) targets.

This includes scaling-up installed nuclear power to 100 GW, up from the cur-

rent 8.8 GW, by 2047; a ₹20,000 crore mission launched in the Union Budget this year to develop 'small modular reactors'; and a slew of customised 220 MW pressurised heavy water reactors.

"The Bill gives hope for large-scale innovation in nuclear technology through amendments in patent laws, aligns with global liability conventions, and proposes the expansion of nuclear energy projects through private sector participation. Any explanation regarding the CNLD Act of 2010 seemed inadequate to foreign and domestic suppliers and vendors," M.P. Ram Mohan, Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, told *The Hindu*.

Unemployment rate dips to 4.7% in November: PLFS

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The unemployment rate (UR) among people aged 15 years and above declined to 4.7% in November, the lowest level since April, when it stood at 5.1%, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report for November released on Monday.

The PLFS, conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) of the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), stated that the overall Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) increased to 55.8% in November, the highest level recorded since April.

According to a MoSPI statement based on the PLFS report, the rise in LFPR was primarily driven by rural areas, where it increased to 58.6% in November from 58% in April.

On a month-on-month basis, the rural LFPR rose from 57.8% in October, while the urban LFPR decreased marginally from 50.5% to 50.4%.

Overall, the female LFPR showed a steady rise from June 2025 to November 2025, the MoSPI said.

"It increased from 32%

The overall LFPR increased to 55.8% in November, the highest since April, the survey found

to 35.1% during this period, driven mainly by higher labour force participation in rural areas, while urban female LFPR remained relatively stable. Rural female LFPR recorded a consistent upward movement, rising from 35.2% in June 2025 to 39.7% in November 2025," it added.

The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for persons aged 15 years and above in rural areas increased from 55.4% in April 2025 to 56.3% in November 2025, while the overall WPR rose from 52.8% to 53.2%.

"Urban WPR remained largely stable. Notably, rural female WPR improved from 36.8% in April 2025 to 38.4% in November 2025, driving the rise in overall female WPR from 32.5% to 33.4% over this period," the Centre said.

The NSO surveyed 3,73,229 people for the PLFS. 2,13,337 from rural and 1,59,892 from urban areas were surveyed in this round.