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Daily News Feed

D.N.F

28.06.2025

**Sabaijor Complex, Near Jamunajor Pul, Castair Town
Deoghar, Mob:-9162500508**



Gross Value Added in agriculture surged 225% in 12 years: Centre

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Gross Value Added (GVA) of agriculture and allied sectors at current prices registered a growth of about 225%, increasing from ₹1,502 thousand crore in 2011-12 to ₹4,878 thousand crore in 2023-24, according to the 'Statistical Report on Value of Output from Agriculture and Allied Sectors (2011-12 to 2023-24)', released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation here on Friday.

The report, consisting of detailed tables on values of output of crop, livestock, forestry & logging and fishing & aquaculture



Welcome surge: Cereals, fruits and vegetables together accounted for 52.5% of total crop GVO in 2023-24.

sectors of agriculture and allied activities from 2011-12 to 2023-24 at both current and constant (2011-12) prices, also added that the Gross Value of Output (GVO) from the agriculture

and allied sector at constant prices has shown steady growth from ₹1,908 thousand crore in 2011-12 to ₹2,949 thousand crore in 2023-24, an overall increase of about 54.6%.

The share of crop sector with GVO at ₹ 1,595 thousand crore remained the largest contributor to total GVO (at constant prices) of agriculture and allied sectors with share of 54.1% in 2023-24.

"Cereals and fruits and vegetables together accounted for 52.5% of total crop GVO in 2023-24," the Ministry said in a release.

Among the cereals, only paddy and wheat constitute approximately 85% of GVO (at constant prices) of all cereals in 2023-24.

Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Telangana and Haryana contributed nearly 53% of GVO (at constant prices) of cereals in 2023-24.



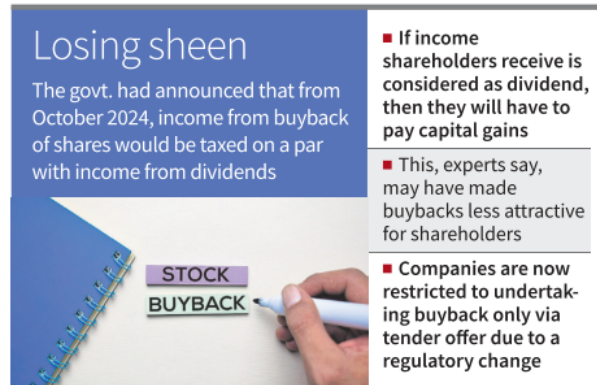
Tax, securities norm changes make buybacks less attractive

There were just four share buyback offers, amounting to a total of ₹186 crore as of June 26, 2025, against 38 with a total value of over ₹8,000 crore last year, according to PrimeDatabase

Ashokamithran T.
MUMBAI

A combination of taxation and regulatory changes has made Indian listed firms losing interest in buyback of shares. According to data shared by PrimeDatabase, there were only four share buyback offers, amounting to a total of ₹186 crore as of June 26, 2025. Last calendar year, this amounted to 38 offers with a total value of over ₹8,000 crore.

“As the data show, buybacks have completely dried up ever since the taxation rule change as per which has shifted the burden from companies to shareholders with effect from October 1, 2024 to bring it on a par with dividends,” said Pranav Haldea, MD of Prime Database Group. “Buybacks have been negligible despite the



bearish market which we had from October till March, during which buybacks typically thrive,” Mr. Haldea said.

“Companies who might have wanted to buyback shares may have already completed it in September 2024 after the Budget announcement,” he added.

“Companies which were considering a buyback may have accelerated their plans to launch before the new taxation rules came

into effect,” he said.

The Centre had announced that with effect from October 2024, income from buyback of shares would be taxed on a par with income from dividends. Earlier, companies were paying a 20% buyback tax. If the income that shareholders receive is considered as dividend, then shareholders will have to pay capital gains.

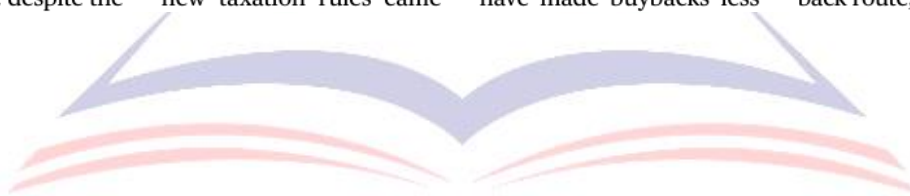
This, experts said, may have made buybacks less

attractive for shareholders and hence may not have led to such a demand even during a bear market.

Besides the North Block regulation, the markets watchdog might have also contributed to the trend.

“The reduction is primarily a consequence of SEBI’s regulatory changes. SEBI had been progressively reducing the option for companies to buyback their shares through the open market, and beginning this financial year, has eliminated it. Companies are now restricted to undertaking a buyback only via the tender offer route,” said Arindam Ghosh, partner at Khaitan & Co.

“It is possible that merchant bankers previously active in share buyback deals are facing challenges, given the recent regulatory changes by SEBI phasing out the open market buyback route,” he said.



The big AI shake-up



Illustration: Satheesh Vellinezhil

While Bengaluru is home to more than a lakh artificial intelligence professionals, AI has also brought with it fears of job loss. The launch of a survey recently by Karnataka's Department of Information Technology and Biotechnology to assess the impact of AI on the workforce is an indication of the State getting set to face up to this multi-dimensional issue, writes **Shilpa Elizabeth**

AI would impact 40% of the jobs worldwide and widen inequality. Amazon CEO Andy Jassy's recent comment about the company moving to a smaller corporate workforce due to the adoption of generative AI tools and agents has not helped allay fears, particularly as the tech giant has laid off more than 27,000 employees since 2022.

What is going to be the net result of this disruption and how is it going to play out in India? "I think, in the future, all of us will be AI-augmented humans," says Guruprasad Mudlapur, vice-chairman of the Confederation of Indian Industry, Karnataka, vice-president of Bosch Group in India, and managing director of Bosch Ltd. While acknowledging the possibility of significant disruption across industries, he believes the net outcome will be positive.

Skilling crucial

While it is clear by now that the IT and ITes workforce stands to see the biggest impact of the technology, changes are expected in sectors such as financial services, manufacturing, healthcare, and e-commerce.

"Skills in general will undergo massive change. The skills required in the new world of AI will necessitate a high level of digital literacy. AI-ML (machine learning) skills even in non-technical roles will be very essential now," remarks Mudlapur.

According to him, while Bengaluru, or Karnataka at large, can boast of the highest AI-ready talent pool, specialist AI talent – which is required to develop an AI model, for example – is in short supply. "We can see why we have not built a GPT of our own," he points out, while adding that universities also need to take note of the requirements of the future and act on training students accordingly.

Initiatives in skilling

Karnataka's IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge notes that shaping strategic interventions under the government's skilling initiative, NIPUNA Karnataka, is among the aims of the AI survey. The survey is the first such initiative by a State government and a serious step in the direction of skilling.

"There is a strong need to understand the actual disruption that is happening. A lot of people are saying a lot of things, but is that disruption going to result in actual job loss, or is it something that can be addressed through reskilling or up-skilling? It is to understand this that we have reached out to stakeholders through the survey. If you see the way AI and other emerging technologies have disrupted over the last four years, we would require some collective feedback from the industry so that we would be able to give out the most conducive policy for growth," he says.

With technology poised to change the way the IT and ITes sectors work, companies too have been moving in the direction of skilling.

"I'm constantly trying to repurpose my people to shift them towards the demand," says Ravi Vasantraj, Global Delivery Head, Mphasis.

"I'm now changing my talent management systems to start allowing for people to get trained or hyper-specialised in their training. Let's say someone is a full-stack Java developer, but we are seeing demand for people with React.js or Node.js skills. We will start prodding this person to get trained in them, showing his

chances to get higher billing and hence higher compensation," says Vasantraj who likes to see AI as "an intelligent assist – like J.A.R.V.I.S. to Stark in Avengers".

Sindhu Gangadharan, MD of SAP Labs India and chairperson of the National Association of Software and Service Companies, notes that the company offers curated learning journeys tailored to individual skill profiles, leveraging internal platforms, global partners, and partnerships with institutions such as IIM Bangalore, IIT Bangalore, BITS Pilani, and Northwestern Kellogg. "The result is a future-ready workforce empowered to lead with an AI-first mindset. Today, 50% of our employees are already AI-enabled. Over the past year alone, they've completed more than 35,000 courses and clocked over 2,00,000 learning hours," she says.

Multiplying demand?

With almost every corporate investing in AI and demand for AI agents and tools increasing, the number of AI roles has also risen, creating a large demand for people trained in the same. A recent report by Naukri Jobspeak recorded a 25% year-on-year rise in hiring for AI and ML roles in India.

"It (AI) will create more than it will alter," says Vasantraj, who believes that not only will the technology not take away jobs, but will probably multiply the demand 10 times and enhance the productivity of employees.

"The combined industry of North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific spends anywhere between \$1.8 trillion and \$1.9 trillion to support leg-

cy technology. This is known as tech debt. People are worried that they will lose their jobs to AI. But our premise is that these \$1.9 trillion will come into the market because now it's viable."

According to him, the latent demand from clients who were earlier reluctant to deploy AI is now getting activated. Mphasis witnessed its pipeline jumping up by an unprecedented 70% between quarters three and four in the last financial year, he notes.

The other half

The high demand for AI talent in IT and ITes is, however, only half the story, say sources within the industry. While there is demand, the elephant in the room is the immense pressure on AI development teams within companies, says Radhika (name changed), who works as a project manager at the Bengaluru office of a global technology and service supplier.

"Companies like ours have purchased AI technologies from behemoths like Google or OpenAI for huge prices. The investment has been massive, and they need returns. To get the desired results, they put immense pressure on AI development teams, often pushing them to the limit," she notes. According to her, most IT and ITes companies have so far not been able to achieve the expected efficiency or profits by deploying AI in place of people. "Coding assistance is the only use case that is working to some extent," she says.



Our industry evolves very quickly. This industry was written down after Y2K. But we are shape-shifters, and we keep learning. My view is that there will be a decoupling between revenues and headcount, which means that with the same number of people, you'll be able to multiply revenues.

RAVI VASANTRAJ, Global Delivery Head, Mphasis

The way forward then, has been to extract more out of the remaining employees, alleges Radhika. "Even when they haven't fixed the issues with the existing AI tools, they invest in more. This will not only burden the employees, but also reduce the quality of products and services in the industry going forward," she says, citing the example of the customer services function, where several companies witnessed lower customer satisfaction after trying to replace executives with AI bots.

SECTOR-SPECIFIC DEBATE

Technology vs. labour
Balaji Parthasarathy, professor at IIT Bangalore and principal investigator of the Fairwork India project, argues that in India, the impact of AI on the workforce will pan out differently as compared with the West. He points out how some companies, for example, have abstained from deploying AI in certain roles in India, simply because the labour is cheap and plant, and labour laws are loosely enforced.

"If you look at the warehouses of big companies like Amazon in the U.S., there are high levels of automation. In many parts of the world, they are experimenting with drones for delivery. But in a country like India, where labour is relatively inexpensive, it doesn't make as much sense. It may, in fact, be costlier for companies to bring in these technologies. Here, workers are replaced easily because there is high levels of unemployment and labour rights are not strictly enforced."

He notes that the AI vs. jobs debate is also sector-specific and a function of whether the AI tools can deliver on the organisational priorities. "In areas where you require precision or the job is hazardous, deployment of AI or robotics is critical. If there are tasks that can be easily automated at very low costs, AI will be used for them. Then there are fields where the technology will enter but will require human beings to know how to use them to augment what they do, rather than displace them. I think the word 'augment' is not considered enough," says Parthasarathy.

The fear of job loss is not entirely baseless though, admits Mudlapur. Repetitive manual skills may be the most vulnerable, and these might involve job roles such as coding, invoice processing, accounting, and research assistance. Mid-skilled white-collar jobs like analyst might also get replaced if they do not have deep domain knowledge, he remarks.

"We see the coding efficiency going up by 30% if we adopt AI, GPTs, and other tools to enhance the codes. But we can also say we may not require 30% of the software talent. But a positive way to look at it is this 30% could do more sophisticated work, like building models and so on," he says. "Overall, there will be a shake-up in the job market. That is very clear."

The shape-shifters

Vasantraj of Mphasis feels the anxieties, at least concerning the job losses in the IT/ITes sector, are part of the usual fears before any new technology takes off. "Our industry evolves very quickly. This industry was written down after Y2K. But we are shape-shifters, and we keep learning. My view is that there will be a decoupling between revenues and headcount, which means that with the same number of people, you'll be able to multiply revenues," he notes, attributing the lay-offs at the companies to macro-economic factors rather than AI.

According to Vasantraj, regulations, responsible AI, and data breaches should be the bigger concerns. "If AI is combined with quantum, you have a real problem. Your Gmail could be hacked in 30 seconds. Given the kind of geopolitical situations, there will be characters that might start using it in an obtrusive manner. It's similar to nuclear energy in that sense. If you have a J.A.R.V.I.S. with Stark, you also have a Thanos somewhere. But that's a problem for tomorrow," he says.

At a leading hospital in Bengaluru, an artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled invoice digitisation system was implemented around four months ago.

"Initially, the invoice details were documented on paper, and later entered manually into the system. Now, the job is being done by AI, which extracts details from the soft copies of invoices," says Vijay (name changed), who is overseeing the project and a few other AI initiatives at the hospital.

According to him, automation brought down human intervention in the process by at least 50%. "No one has been laid off. People were only repurposed," he says while admitting that the development may affect recruitments in the future.

Hima (name changed), a consultant at one of the biggest accounting firms, was part of an office meeting recently where people were encouraged to share their apprehensions on the firm's AI implementations. "Some of our coders were very upset about the introduction of AI. There is a resource crunch in the new world of AI will necessitate a high level of digital literacy. AI-ML skills even in non-technical roles will be very essential now."

GURUPRASAD MUDLAPUR, vice-chairman of CII Karnataka and vice-president of Bosch Group in India

coding team, and they are often very stretched. But with the firm investing in AI tools and code assistants, they say life has become easier for them," she notes.

Multifaceted effects

As AI reshapes the workforce across sectors, its effects are proving to be multifaceted, and far from uniform.

Bengaluru is today home to more than a lakh AI professionals. The city was also recently ranked among the top five AI ecosystems in the Global Startup Ecosystem Index. With Bengaluru positioning itself in the thick of AI advancements and the Karnataka government now on the cusp of launching the next IT policy, the State's Information Technology and Biotechnology Department recently launched a survey to assess the impact of AI on the workforce.

Among other things, it aims to understand how AI is being integrated into day-to-day operations across organisations, which business functions are seeing the biggest changes, and which job roles are most vulnerable to automation.

The survey is an indication of the State taking serious note of the big shake-up that is on our doorstep.

The AI-augmented future

From enhancing precision in surgeries to detecting fraud in banking and finance, enabling robotic automation in manufacturing, powering personalised recommendations in retail, and optimising traffic control in cities, AI is becoming increasingly ubiquitous and almost indispensable. According to the United Nations, the global AI market is projected to reach \$4.8 trillion by 2033.

The other side of this, however, is the fears of lay-off and displacement, especially in jobs involving routine and repetitive tasks, coupled with a growing sense of overwhelm as workers struggle to adapt to an ever-evolving workplace. A recent report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development predicted that



In contrast: Balaji Parthasarathy, professor at IIT Bangalore and principal investigator of the Fairwork India project, argues that in India, the impact of AI on the workforce will pan out differently as compared with the West. GETTY IMAGES

No time to rest

India did well in climbing up SDG rankings, but falls short in governance

India has been ranked among the top 100 countries in the Sustainable Development Report for the first time since this data began to be published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) since 2016. The SDSN is an independent body under the aegis of the UN, whose publications are tracked by policy-makers and governments. In 2016, India was ranked 110th out of 157 countries, making steady progress to reach 99 this year out of an expanded basket of 167 nations with better metrics and more granular comparisons. But it is no time to rest on this laurel. India must look at why this incline, by 11 points, was not achieved any sooner and the gaps to focus on. From a developmental perspective, the SDSN ranks India as having fared better in poverty reduction (SDG 1) even as India's poverty estimation continues to be mired in controversy due to a lack of publicly available consumption expenditure data since 2018 and the poverty line (Rangarajan line - ₹33/day rural, ₹47/day urban) not having been updated. Proxy data suggest a considerable poverty reduction, almost halving between 2012 (22% based on NSSO data) and 2023 (World Bank - 12%).

But SDG 2 (zero hunger) has remained a cause for concern. It also reveals the wide disparity between income groups and rural and urban areas on access to a nutritious diet. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) estimates that over a third of Indians (35.5%) were stunted (NFHS-5, 2019-21), only marginally better than 38.4% (NFHS-4, 2015-16). Similarly, wasting, which is low weight for height, reduced from 21.0% to 19.3%. Obesity in the working age population (15-49 years) has almost doubled between 2006 and 2021, and concentrated in wealthier urban areas. Electricity access (SDG 7) is another indicator where India has done well. While the country has achieved near universal household electrification in the past two decades, the quality of power and duration vary vastly based on regions and urban/rural fault lines. It is, however, laudable that India today ranks as the fourth largest renewables capacity deployer, mainly solar and wind. And while India has bettered its score in infrastructure provision (SDG 9), noteworthy additions being rapid mobile penetration and financial inclusion through UPI-linked digital payments gateways, COVID-19 revealed the stark difference between rural and urban Internet penetration, which must be addressed to achieve even higher educational outcomes (SDG 4). It is telling, however, that throughout the Modi years, India's performance in governance, the rule of law, press freedom and strong and independent institutions (SDG 16) has been lagging.



A China-led trilateral nexus as India's new challenge

Last week, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh held their first trilateral meeting in Kunming, China. The discussions focused on furthering cooperation and exploring the possibilities of deeper engagement. This meeting closely follows another trilateral meeting between China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, held in May, with the aim of extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and increasing cooperation. These trilaterals, led by China, come at a time of Pakistan's little relevance to the region, India's increasing relations with Afghanistan, and New Delhi's deteriorating ties with Bangladesh. The use of trilaterals underscores China's fresh attempts at making Pakistan a stakeholder in the region and keeping New Delhi preoccupied with immediate concerns.

A war that shaped alignments

The 1962 war between India and China has largely shaped regional alignments and geopolitics. Following the war, China found Pakistan to be an ally that could keep India engaged with immediate threats and limit it from challenging Beijing's interests, security, and status. On the other hand, Pakistan deemed China to be a country that would unquestionably offer economic and military assistance to support its aggression against India. To date, Pakistan is highly dependent on China for assistance, investments and infrastructure development. In fact, by the end of 2024, Pakistan had a loan of over \$29 billion from China. It is estimated that over 80% of Pakistan's arms imports are from China. In addition, China has also shielded Pakistan-backed terrorists at the United Nations Security Council and other multilateral platforms.

This camaraderie was largely visible during India's Operation Sindoor in May 2025. China termed India's retaliation to the Pakistan-sponsored attack in Pahalgam as "regrettable" and urged a political solution and dialogue. It backed Pakistan's stance of initiating an investigation into the Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025. The latest escalation also saw Pakistan deploying various Chinese-made hardware and weapons that ranged from surveillance radars, drones, missiles, guidance



Harsh V. Pant

is Vice-President,
Observer Research
Foundation



**Aditya Gowdara
Shivamurthy**

is Associate Fellow,
Neighbourhood
Studies, Observer
Research Foundation

The Beijing-led trilaterals are aimed at challenging India's long-term interests

systems, and fighter jets. In the immediate aftermath of Operation Sindoor, Pakistan's Foreign Minister met his Chinese counterpart to reaffirm its "iron-clad friendship." The trilateral with Afghanistan and other countries likely emerged from this meeting.

The resurfacing of an idea

This idea of China and Pakistan using plus one against India is not a new phenomenon. Even in 1965, Pakistan flirted with the idea of using East Pakistan, China and Nepal to cut off India from its strategic Siliguri corridor. This idea of using South Asian countries seems to have resurfaced as both China and Pakistan face a confident India. Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks in Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019), and Pahalgam have seen India retaliate in a befitting manner. It has shown that India will no longer tolerate Pakistan's nuclear blackmail. India has also used its diplomatic clout and growing economy to isolate Pakistan. India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, halting trade, restricting port access, and targeting military installations – all as a part of its retaliatory measures against the Pahalgam attack – has damaged Pakistan military's operational capacities and confidence, highlighting Rawalpindi's limitations and weaknesses. India's military and diplomatic responses to Chinese border intrusions in Doklam and Galwan have also likely taken Beijing by surprise. New Delhi has also increased close cooperation with like-minded countries to limit Chinese aggressions.

At the same time, India's pragmatic engagement and domestic politics of the region have slowed down China's momentum in South Asia. In the Maldives, Beijing appears reluctant to trust President Mohamed Muizzu and the country's economy, despite his initial anti-India rhetoric. Mr. Muizzu has now turned to India to keep the country's economy afloat. In Nepal, despite signing the framework for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation, major differences in funding remain unresolved and the progress of projects has been slow. In Sri Lanka, President Anura Kumara Disanayake is developing close ties with India by respecting its redlines. Despite ideological and historical differences with Delhi,

he visited India before China. In the case of Bangladesh, despite differences, India has not hindered the trilateral energy cooperation with Nepal.

These increasing anxieties are likely to have motivated China to push for trilaterals with Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Before their respective regime changes in 2021 and 2024, both countries were staunch supporters of India's fight against both Pakistan and its state-sponsored terrorism. With the change in regimes, however, Pakistan and China have attempted to draw both countries closer to their orbit. They remain cautious of pragmatic engagement between India and the Taliban, fearing that Pakistan would lose its leverage. At the same time, Pakistan has increased security, economic and political engagements with the new government in Bangladesh.

Historically, both Bangladesh and Afghanistan have enjoyed close ties with Pakistan and provide a fertile ground for cross-border terrorism. Pakistan's influence, supported by China and its economic clout, could thus create new terror and security-related challenges. This will help Pakistan become a relevant country in the region, create rifts between India and its neighbours, and keep Delhi preoccupied with immediate security and terror-related challenges, making way for Chinese BRI projects, interests and investments in the region.

China efforts and setbacks

The developments in the region demonstrate, once again, that China, and not Pakistan, is India's biggest challenge. With both Pakistan and China confronting a confident India, China sees an opportunity to challenge India through the trilateral nexus. At a time when India is seeking support from South Asian countries to fight terrorism, Chinese efforts will create new setbacks. South Asian countries will thus have to learn to balance between India and China, as Beijing uses Islamabad to create new complexities in the region. On its part, Delhi will have to continue to express redlines and convey the point that any misadventures by its neighbours could have severe economic, military, and political costs.



Missed opportunity

India should convince SCO to take a strong stance against terrorism

The Qingdao meeting of Defence Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), that ended without a joint communiqué, indicates trouble within the 10-nation grouping. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh was forced to withdraw from the joint declaration as it contained no reference to terrorism at the behest of “one nation” – a reference to Pakistan. This is understandable, given that the meeting comes just weeks after the Pahalgam attack, and Operation Sindoor, after which India’s resolve to fight terrorism has redoubled. What sounds more surprising is that not only did the draft resolution fail to mention terrorism but member-states including host China and Russia had even reportedly considered referring to “disturbances in Balochistan”, at the instance of Pakistan, while leaving out mentions of the Pahalgam attack and cross-border terrorism, that India asked for. This is stark given that the SCO’s founding Charter in 2002 focused on the need to build “mutual intra-regional efforts to curb terrorism, separatism and extremism”, and the Director of SCO’s signature Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure was present. Statements by the SCO Secretariat and the Chinese Foreign Ministry stuck to anodyne statements such as “...cooperation ...on modern security challenges and threats”. All eyes will now be on the SCO Foreign Ministers’ July meet and the SCO Summit in August-September to see if India’s concerns are more appropriately addressed.

New Delhi must study whether there are shortcomings in delivering its message on the three-pronged “new normal” Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced after Operation Sindoor. In particular, China’s unhelpful role as Chair on the issue is disquieting, given its recent thaw with India. Unlike the SAARC grouping, where India held sway, the SCO is more focused on the original founders China, Russia and Central Asian States. Mr. Singh’s participation followed closely on the heels of India disassociating itself from a statement on Israel’s June 13 attack on SCO member Iran as it was critical of Israel. Post-Operation Sindoor, the government sent parliamentary delegations to 32 countries, but not to any SCO member-country. It is possible that the government lost a chance to give the grouping any prominence by doing so, although External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar chaired a meeting of the India-Central Asia forum in June. India’s decision to skip hosting an in-person Summit of the SCO during its turn in 2023 could also still rankle. Breaking with the grouping, which is an important regional forum, will simply leave an open platform for Pakistan. Instead of crying foul, the government must convince members that their interests lie in strengthening cross-regional support against terrorism.



Practising equality in constitutional courts

Recently, the Supreme Court of India decided to refix the methodology and the criteria for designating lawyers as senior lawyers. In *Jitender @ Kalla vs State (Govt.) of NCT Of Delhi* (2025), the Court revisited the earlier judgments in the *Indira Jaising vs Supreme Court of India* cases of 2017 and 2023 and directed the High Courts in the country to frame rules in the light of the instant judgment. Delivered on May 13, 2025, it did not earn much public attention because of an erroneous notion that it dealt with an internal issue within the judiciary.

The legal profession has a public character. Therefore, the inequality within the judiciary impacts not only judicial democracy but also the country's political democracy. The legal plutocracy in India is essentially systemic and it is perpetuated by the political and judicial wings of the state.

The Orwellian notion that some are more equal than the others was imported to the legal profession in the country as Section 16 of the Advocates Act, 1961. It classifies advocates into two: senior advocates and advocates. It says that, based on ability, standing at the Bar or special knowledge or experience in law, a 'deserving' advocate could be designated by the constitutional courts as a senior advocate. The very incorporation of this provision in the statute was problematic as it accepted the idea of unequal treatment of those who are otherwise equals. This led to a sharp division in the legal profession and created a legal oligarchy, which in turn deeply impacted our idea of justice. This division also had the tendency to accelerate the commercialisation of the legal profession, making it almost resemble the scene in the United States.

Situation in the U.S.

A Reuters report titled 'The Echo Chamber' (2014) says that in the U.S., "an elite cadre of lawyers has emerged as first among equals, giving their clients a disproportionate chance to influence the law of the land". The report added that a survey of cases between 2004 and 2012 showed that "66 of the 17,000 lawyers who petitioned the Supreme Court succeeded at getting their clients' appeals heard at a remarkable rate". The report demonstrates that during this period, less than 1% of lawyers were handling 43% of the appeals to the U.S. Supreme Court. It adds that 51 out of 66 were the most influential members of the profession and represented the corporate firms. This resulted in "a decided advantage for corporate America, and a growing insularity at the court", says the report.

It is not as if we have followed suit in India. The point is that our system is vulnerable to the



Kaleeswaram Raj

is a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India

danger indicated by the U.S experience.

Therefore, India must guard against the perils of growing inequality in the legal profession. The judgments in *Indira Jaising* and *Jitender* fail to address this fundamental issue and endorse Section 16 of the Advocates Act with inadequate reasoning. By way of these judgments, not only has the Court failed to put its house in order but has also perpetuated the inequality that can damage the justice delivery system enormously.

The basic judgment in *Indira Jaising* (2017) authored by Justice Ranjan Gogoi, sought to 'reform' the existing practice. The Court also considered a writ petition by the National Lawyers' Campaign for Judicial Transparency and Reforms, that challenged the classification of lawyers. The validity of Section 16 of the Advocates Act alongwith the corresponding provisions in the Supreme Court Rules 2013, were assailed. The prescription for pre-audience for senior advocates was also challenged. The Court, however, did not accept the contentions. In *Jitender* also, the Court endorsed the validity of these clauses and asked for peripheral reforms in the process of finding out the most 'deserving'.

Unaddressed questions

The latest judgment said that the point-based assessment followed hitherto "can hardly be objective" and that "it tends to be highly subjective". Yet, the Court permitted the application system to continue, saying that the application for designation could be treated as a consent for designation, as required by the Statute. That the Court wanted the High Courts to frame new rules for 'designation' does not eliminate the possibility for errors or extraneous considerations. Thus, the questions whether there could be a classification among lawyers at all and whether it passes the constitutional muster remain unaddressed.

The Court, in *Indira Jaising* (2017) said that the wrong or improper exercise of power is not a ground to invalidate the provision in the Act. But the contention was that the classification is inherently arbitrary and discriminatory. It was argued that "even if an objective criteria is laid down and is followed, the distinction between the two classes of advocates has no nexus with.... (the) advancement of the legal system, which in any case is also and in fact, effectively serviced by advocates who are not designated as senior advocates".

The Court, however, ignored this submission by saying that as long as the parameters to be followed could be prescribed by the Supreme Court, the classification would hold good. This answer begs the question. It is ironic that these norms and guidelines laid down in 2017 are held

to be fallacious and subjective by the Court in 2025 in *Jitender*. Yet, the Court did not revisit the basic contention against the offending clauses in the laws on lawyers, by referring the case to a larger Bench.

Towards a fairer system

The Indian legal profession has a symbiotic relation with the country's freedom struggle. The national movement, which was led predominantly by lawyers, presented a legal fraternity that was deeply societal and sacrificial. This was followed by the political era of Nehruvian socialism which lasted a few decades after Independence, visualising India as a socialist republic. The word 'socialist' was added in the Preamble, with effect from January 3, 1977, by way of the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution.

Instead of taking note of this historical trajectory in light of the equality clauses in the Constitution, the Court, in *Jaising*, rather mechanically noted the practice in other jurisdictions such as Nigeria, Australia, Singapore and Ireland. That there has been such a practice of classification elsewhere cannot justify its adoption when the statutory scheme was seriously challenged on constitutional and empirical grounds in the Indian context.

The result was devastating: The lack of objectivity in the process led to arbitrariness that created a legal plutocracy. Jurist F.S. Nariman lamented that we have established a caste system among lawyers. It is widely felt that the judges often get impressed by persons in their own image in the matter of designation. This is termed as 'homo social morphing' in academic circles. In this, women and the marginalised groups were sidelined. A creamy layer was segregated based on parameters which are flawed, as acknowledged by the Court.

The systemic disparity within the legal fraternity is so horrendous that thousands of eligible and deserving lawyers remain unheard and go unnoticed in court halls in India. Very often, "star lawyers" monopolise the system, without any legitimacy whatsoever, leading to intellectual apartheid. This situation negates judicial diversity based on a sense of egalitarianism and deprives the Court of the representative character of the bar. Sometimes, important national issues are adjudicated based on submissions of a chosen few, as illustrated by the recent *Waqf (Amendment) Act Challenge*. This too creates a situation where litigation, especially in the Court, becomes the privilege of the rich which is incompatible with India's constitutional scheme. In a profession where equality is an imperative, the Court ought not to have abetted the prevailing disparity.

The top court should not have abetted the systemic disparity within the legal fraternity in India



Assam, Mizoram draft rules to curb illegal immigration

Soon, only District Commissioners will have the power to issue Aadhaar cards, says Assam CM; in Mizoram, plans on to confiscate identity cards of Myanmar nationals who frequently cross border

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Two northeastern States have toughened their stand on identification documents to curb unauthorised cross-border movements of Bangladesh and Myanmar nationals.

The Assam government has decided to implement a policy to issue Aadhaar cards to adult citizens only through the District Commissioners (DCs) to prevent Bangladeshi nationals from acquiring them, while the Mizoram government plans to retain the identity cards of Myanmar nationals to regulate movement across the border.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the need to toughen the rules of issuing Aadhaar cards was discussed at the State Cabinet meeting on Friday. "Usually, people who come to Assam and Bharat from Bangladesh [illegally] are adults. Since we have already achieved 100% Aadhaar coverage, we will thoroughly enquire into the applications of new adults," he told press-



High vigilance: BSF personnel patrol the India-Bangladesh border at Golakganj in Dhubri district of Assam. AFP

persons in Guwahati.

"Soon, only the DCs will have the power to issue Aadhaar cards. If such a policy is made, it will be difficult for Bangladeshi people to obtain Aadhaar. Detecting and pushing them back will be easy if they do not possess this document," he said, hours after announcing that 20 more illegal Bangladeshi immigrants were pushed back.

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government has been working on plugging the vulnerabilities of Aadhaar since April, when, Mr. Sarma said, people who

did not apply for inclusion in the National Register of Citizens have been barred from getting the unique identification number.

In September 2024, he said that four Assam districts had more Aadhaar cardholders than their projected population. Bengali-speaking Muslims are a majority in these districts – Barpeta bordering Bangladesh, Dhubri, Morigaon, and Nagaon.

"We found that 103.74% of the population were issued Aadhaar cards in Barpeta, 103.48% in Dhubri, 101.74% in Morigaon, and 100.68% in Nagaon. Some

immigrants definitely managed to take Aadhaar," the Chief Minister had said.

In Aizawl, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma proposed the confiscation of the identity cards of Myanmar nationals who cross over into India frequently, amid the civil war in their country. He came up with this proposal at a meeting with Surinder Bhagat, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs and Protector General of Emigrants, at the Chief Minister's Office recently.

Acknowledging the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar forcing many to take refuge in Mizoram, Mr. Lalduhoma said, "Many refugees are law-abiding, but there are some who continue to cross the border to and from Myanmar, exploiting the ongoing crisis there."

He warned of stern action against those misusing the shelter provided, including the seizure of their Myanmar-issued identity documents. He suggested that such IDs be collected from each Myanmar national for the duration of their stay in Mizoram.

Centre plans initiative to boost execution of tribal schemes



The Ministry of Tribal Affairs organised the two-day national conference at Vanija Bhavan in New Delhi. PIB.GOV.IN

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

State and Central government officials from across the country working in the domain of tribal welfare have concluded after a two-day workshop in New Delhi that the reason tribal areas continued to face backwardness was not a lack of schemes for them but a “lack of motivation” in the implementers.

Based on these conclusions, parts of which were presented during the two-day “Adi Anveshan” National Conference of the Tribal Affairs Ministry, Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Jual Oram on Friday announced the govern-

ment’s “Adi Karmyogi” programme. The programme was announced at the end of the brainstorming session and is meant to build a “cadre of officers” dedicated to working with a citizen-centric ideation and delivery-orientated approach to implementation of schemes, government officials said on Friday.

The objective is to take capacity-building to about 20 lakh field-level stakeholders by creating a batch of trainers and master trainers at the State, district, and block levels. The government said it intends to give rise to 180 State-level trainers, over 3,000 district level trainers, and over 15,000 block level train-

ers to this effect.

A statement said that, “A unique presentation during the inaugural session highlighted the real challenge in tribal development – not a lack of schemes or resources, but a lack of motivation among implementers. The need to transform routine administrative practices into purpose-driven service delivery was underscored through anecdotal storytelling by officials.”

Officials said this presentation was borne out of an interactive session with multiple officials from across tribal welfare departments intervening with their respective ideas. “This built into an organic

unique presentation where this was the conclusion arrived at,” one official said.

They added, “Officials spoke about the conditions in tribal areas, healthcare infrastructure, lack of staff in schools, citizens having to travel far and wide for basic services. The overall conclusion was that schemes to address all this have been running and that the real problem is lack of the right approach in officials.” The officials explained that the idea is to incentivise officers – from IASs and senior bureaucrats to block level officials – to work with dedication on implementing the schemes that the government is designing.



India rejects 'supplemental award' on Kishenganga, Ratle hydropower projects

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

India on Friday "categorically rejected" the "supplemental award" by the Court of Arbitration on Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir, saying that it "never recognised" the Court of Arbitration, a "serious breach" of the Indus Waters Treaty, which has been put "at abeyance" after the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam.

"India has never recognised the existence in law of this so-called Court of Arbitration, and India's position has all along been that the constitution of this so-called arbitral body is in itself a serious breach of the Indus Waters Treaty and consequently any proceedings before this forum and any award or decision taken by it are also for that reason illegal and per se void," the External Affairs Ministry said after the World Bank's Court of Arbitration gave a "supplemental award" on the Kish-

India said it has never recognised the existence in law of this 'so-called' Court of Arbitration

enganga and Ratle projects.

'Unilateral action'

Pakistan had been raising objections about the design of the power projects, and the two sides held multiple rounds of discussions till 2015. In 2016, Pakistan approached the World Bank to establish a Court of Arbitration to resolve these technical disputes. Pakistan took three issues concerning Kishenganga and four concerning Ratle to the Court of Arbitration. India's position from the beginning has been that it was a "unilateral action" by Pakistan to approach the World Bank.

Reflecting that position, the Ministry said on Friday, "Today, the illegal Court of Arbitration, purportedly constituted under the Indus Waters Treaty 1960, al-

beit in brazen violation of it, has issued what it characterises as a 'supplemental award' on its competence concerning the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir."

The Ministry said that after the Pahalgam terror attack, India exercised "its rights as a sovereign nation under international law" and placed the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, "until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism". It described the Court of Arbitration's declarations as a "charade at Pakistan's behest".

"Until such time that the Treaty is in abeyance, India is no longer bound to perform any of its obligations under the Treaty. No Court of Arbitration, much less this illegally constituted arbitral body, which has no existence in the eye of law, has the jurisdiction to examine the legality of India's actions in exercise of its rights as a sovereign," the Ministry said.

Dhole spotted again in Assam's Kaziranga

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

The dhole, or Asiatic wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*), believed to have been locally extinct, has made a confirmed return to the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong Landscape (KKAL) of Assam, a new study by scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) says.

The findings, published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*, indicate that this elusive and less-charismatic carnivore may have gone unnoticed for an extended

period, despite its ecological significance.

A single individual was photo-captured on six occasions in the Amguri corridor, 375 metres from National Highway no. 37 and approximately 270 metres from the nearest human settlement. Mujahid Ahmad, Jyotish Ranjan Deka, Priyanka Borah, Umar Saeed, Ruchi Badola, and Syed Ainul Hussain are the authors of the study.

"This finding is significant as it highlights the ecological value of the corridor in supporting threatened species," Ruchi



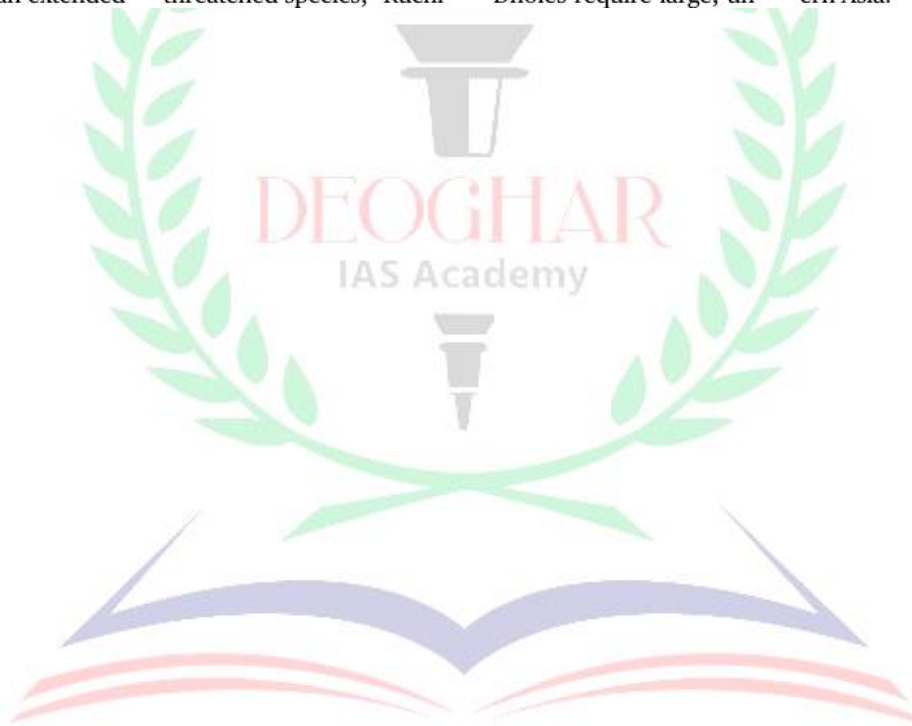
A dhole photo-captured in the Amguri animal corridor in Assam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Badola, Dean of the WII's Faculty of Wildlife Sciences, told *The Hindu*. "Dholes require large, un-

disturbed forest habitats, and their presence here confirms the need to conserve this dynamic wildlife corridor, which also supports tigers, leopards, elephants, and other species."

"With increasing threats from habitat loss and fragmentation, this discovery is a timely reminder of why these forest linkages must be protected and restored for the long-term survival of India's less-known carnivores," she added.

The current distribution of dhole is restricted to parts of central and eastern Asia.



India, China to continue dialogue on border issues

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh firmly conveyed India's stance on cross-border terrorism to his Chinese counterpart, Admiral Dong Jun, during a bilateral meeting held on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' meeting in Qingdao, China, on Friday.

During in-depth discussions on the need to maintain peace and tranquillity along the India-China border, the two Ministers agreed to continue consultations at various levels to achieve progress on issues related to disengagement, de-escalation, border management and eventual delimitation through existing mechanisms.

Mr. Singh acknowledged the work being undertaken by both sides to bring back normalcy to the bilateral ties. He highlighted the necessity of solving complex issues through a structured road map of permanent engagement and de-escalation. He stressed border management and a permanent solution of border demarcation by rejuve-



All for peace: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with his Chinese counterpart, Admiral Dong Jun, in Qingdao. PTI

nating the established mechanism on the issue.

The two Ministers discussed de-escalation, disengagement, demarcation, and Special Representatives-level talks. Mr. Singh emphasised the need to create good neighbourly conditions to achieve the best mutual benefits and to cooperate for stability in Asia and the world. He called for bridging the trust deficit created after the 2020 border stand-off, by taking action on ground.

He highlighted the important milestone of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. He also appre-

ciated the resumption of the Kailash Manasarovar yatra after a gap of five years. Mr. Singh briefed his counterpart on the Pahalgam terror attack and India's Operation Sindoor aimed at dismantling the terrorist networks in Pakistan.

Mr. Singh held bilateral meetings with the Defence Ministers Lieutenant-General Victor Khrenin of Belarus, Lieutenant-General Sobrizoda Emomali Abdurakhim of Tajikistan, and Lieutenant-General Dauren Kosanov of Kazakhstan.

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