DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

Daily News Feed

D.N.F

22.10.2025

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

New H-1B visa fee will not apply for change of status: U.S. govt.

Fee will not apply to existing visa holders granted an amendment, change of status, or extension of stay, says the USCIS guidelines; the cut-off date is set at September 21, 2025, and current H-1B visa holders can travel freely to and from the U.S

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In a further relaxation of its rules relating to the new $100,000 fee on H-1B visas, the United States government said on Monday that the fee will not apply to applications for a change of status or an extension of stay in the U.S.

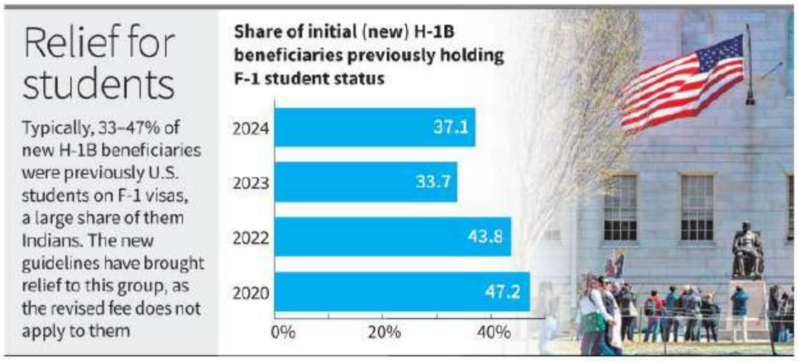
On September 19, U.S. President Donald Trump had signed a proclamation imposing a $100,000 fee on H-1B visas. Hours later, his government clarified that this would be a one-time fee and would only apply to new applications.

Guidelines issued by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services department on Monday reiterated this, saying that the proclamation "does not apply to any previously issued and currently valid H-1B visas, or any petitions submitted prior to 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on September 21, 2025".

"The Proclamation also does not apply to a petition filed at or after 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on September 21, 2025, that is requesting an amendment, change of status, or extension of stay for an alien inside the United States where the alien is granted such amendment, change, or extension," the guidelines added.

Notably, they also said that the proclamation does not prevent any holder of a current H-1B visa from travelling to and from the U.S.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce had filed a lawsuit last week challenging the $100,000 fee, saying it overrides existing provisions in current laws that apply to the H-1B programme, including provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act.



Indian interests

The H-1B visa, and any related fees, are of particular interest to Indians since they are the largest beneficiaries of this visa programme.

While the U.S. government does not share data on the number of H-1B visa holders currently located in the U.S., other sources – such as FWD.us, an immigration and criminal justice reform advocacy body co-founded by Meta chief executive officer Mark Zuckerberg – say that there were 7.3 lakh H-1B visa-holders in the U.S. as of January of this year. Of these, about 70% were Indian citizens.

Further, as per data from the USCIS, Tata Consultancy Services had 5,505 H-1B visas approved in 2025 as of the end of June, the second-highest number of H-1B visas granted to any company that year, after Amazon (10,044).

Other Indian companies that have significantly benefited from the H-1B programme include Infosys (2,004), Wipro (1,523), and Tech Mahindra Americas (951).

GS Paper Mapping:

- **GS Paper 2 – International Relations (India–U.S. relations, Migration & Visa Policy)**
- **GS Paper 3 – Economy (Services sector, Global Labour Mobility, IT Industry Impact)**

English Summary:

The United States government has clarified that the newly imposed **$100,000 H-1B visa fee** will **not apply to change-of-status, amendment, or extension petitions** for those already living in the U.S. under valid H-1B visas.

- The cut-off date is **September 21, 2025**.
- The rule targets **new applicants only**, not existing visa holders.
- Around **70% of all H-1B holders are Indians**, making this decision highly significant for Indian professionals and IT companies like **TCS, Infosys, Wipro, and Tech Mahindra**.
- The **U.S. Chamber of Commerce** has challenged the fee in court, arguing it conflicts with the **Immigration and Nationality Act**.
- The move is expected to **ease pressure on Indian tech workers** and **ensure continuity in bilateral service-sector collaboration** between India and the U.S.

Analytical Angle for UPSC:

- Reflects **protectionist tendencies** in U.S. immigration policy and their impact on India's **human capital exports**.
- Demonstrates **economic interdependence** in the IT and skilled-services sector.
- Useful for topics like *"Globalisation & Indian Diaspora"* and *"India–U.S. Strategic & Economic Partnership."*

हिंदी सारांश:
अमेरिका सरकार ने स्पष्ट किया है कि **नई $100,000 H-1B वीज़ा फ़ीस** उन लोगों पर लागू **नहीं होगी** जो पहले से अमेरिका में रह रहे हैं और जिनके वीज़ा में **स्थिति परिवर्तन, संशोधन या अवधि-वृद्धि** की जा रही है।

- यह नियम केवल **नए आवेदन** पर लागू होगा; कट-ऑफ़ तिथि **21 सितंबर 2025** रखी गई है।
- लगभग **70% H-1B वीज़ा धारक भारतीय** हैं, इसलिए यह निर्णय भारतीय पेशेवरों और आईटी कंपनियों (टीसीएस, इंफोसिस, विप्रो, टेक महिंद्रा) के लिए राहत है।
- अमेरिकी वाणिज्य मंडल ने इस फ़ीस के खिलाफ अदालत में याचिका दायर की है, यह कहते हुए कि यह **इमिग्रेशन एंड नेशनलिटी एक्ट** के प्रावधानों का उल्लंघन करती है।
- यह कदम **भारत-अमेरिका सेवा-क्षेत्र साझेदारी** को बनाए रखने में सहायक माना जा रहा है।

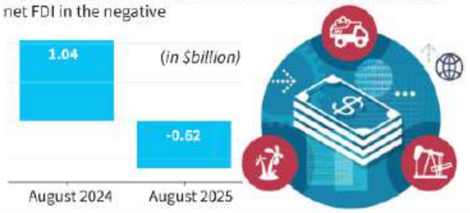
विश्लेषणात्मक दृष्टिकोण (BPSC/UPSC हेतु):

- यह **संरक्षणवादी प्रवृत्तियों** और भारत के कुशल मानव-संसाधन पर उनके प्रभाव को दर्शाता है।
- *वैश्वीकरण, प्रवासी भारतीय, तथा भारत-अमेरिका संबंध* से संबंधित प्रश्नों के लिए यह महत्वपूर्ण उदाहरण है।

Net FDI inflow fell by 159% in August: RBI's data reveals

FDI fall

While the total amount of money leaving the country fell in August 2025, the amount invested in India fell more, leaving net FDI in the negative



T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India fell 159% in August, with more money leaving the country than entering it, according to official data. This is the second time this financial year that outflows have exceeded inflows.

However, the picture is reversed when looked at over a longer time period, with net FDI between April and August 2025 more than 121% higher than in the same five-month period of the previous year.

The Hindu's analysis of data released by the Reserve Bank of India shows that the repatriation and disinvestment by foreign firms in India and the investments done abroad by Indian companies – which add up to the total money leaving the country – was higher than the gross amount that was invested into India in August 2025.

Gross investments into India stood at $6,049 million in August 2025, 30.6% lower than their level in August last year and 45.5% lower than in July this year. This was the lowest level of gross inflows in this financial year so far.

The amount repatriated and disinvested by foreign companies operating in India stood at $4,928 million in August 2025, down 5.4% from the amount in August 2024 but nearly 30% higher than the amount in July 2025.

Foreign investments by Indian companies contracted 29.7% in August 2025 to $1,736 million, the lowest in this financial year. Taken together, this meant that net FDI into India – the difference between the gross amount coming in and the total amount going out – stood at -$616 million in August 2025, 159% lower than in August last year. That is, more money left the country in August 2025 than entering it that month.

This had happened in May 2025 as well, albeit at a smaller scale, as net FDI had stood at -$5 million during that month.

Rosier long-term

Net FDI in the April-August 2025 period was $10,128 million, more than 121% higher than in the same period last year. This was driven by an 18.2% increase in gross inflows ($43,760 million) entering the country and a 6.1% contraction in repatriation and disinvestment ($21,205 million) leaving India during this period.

Foreign investment by Indian companies stood at $12,427 million in the April-August 2025 period, up nearly 26% over the same period of the previous year.

Core sector growth slows to 3-month low

NEW DELHI

Growth in activity in the eight core sectors slowed to a three-month low of 3% in September on contraction in the coal, crude oil, natural gas and refinery products, as well as a relatively sharp slowdown in fertilizers, as per official data. » PAGE 12

GS Paper: *GS III – Indian Economy / Investment Flows*
English:
RBI data showed outflows exceeded inflows (–$616 million). However, April–August period saw 121% year-on-year increase in net FDI due to higher gross inflows and lower repatriation.
हिंदी:
अगस्त 2025 में भारत से विदेशी निवेश निकासी अधिक रही — शुद्ध FDI -159%। परंतु अप्रैल-अगस्त अवधि में कुल FDI 121% अधिक रही।

Deepavali fireworks send Delhi air quality inching to a five-year low

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Following Deepavali, pollution in Delhi inched close to a five-year low with average concentrations of particulate matter (PM) 2.5 across several locations crossing 400 microgram per cubic metre (μg/m³) – levels not seen since 2021.

On Deepavali day, nine cities out of the 293 monitored by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) reported an air quality index (AQI) value of above 300, classed as 'very poor' air quality. On the day after Deepavali, Tuesday (for most of the country), this rose to 16 cities. Nearly all of these cities fell in North India and in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Nationally, Dharuhera in Haryana reported the worst AQI reading of 462 on Tuesday.

Violation suspected

An analysis of PM 2.5 trendsrecorded by CPCBand by independent weather-and-climate agency, Climate Trends, showed a spike in particulate matter concentration from 4 p.m. on Deepavali (October 20) in Delhi. From values of around 150 at 4 p.m., it spiked to nearly 650 by 11 p.m. This coincides with the period during which bursting firecrackers was legally permissible (8 p.m. to 10 p.m.) on Deepavali, per the reprieve by the Supreme Court.

The SC had allowed the use of only CSIR-validated 'green crackers', which reportedly emit a minimum 30% less smoke than their traditional counterparts. However, the sheer volume of fireworks during the period, anecdotal reports of the unavailability of these firecrackers, and the air quality index of the day following Deepavali (Tuesday), suggest that these norms were violated.

Wind vs pollution

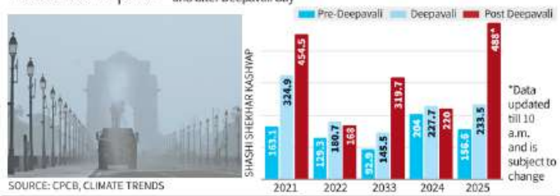
A key parameter that determines air quality levels is wind speeds on the festival night as well as temperatures.When night temperatures are low, smoke and chemical pollutants hover like haze and will not rise to higher reaches of the atmosphere and get flushed out.

Temperatures on Deepavali night this year ranged from 23-25 degree C, the warmest in five years but low wind speeds and the quantity of smoke retarded its egress out of the Delhi and the Gangetic plain airshed.

"When examined together, PM 2.5 and temperature data reveal a consistent pattern: high emissions from fireworks and low night-time temperatures jointly contribute to elevated PM 2.5 concentrations. The sharp post-Deepavali spikes indicate both sustained emissions and poor atmospheric dispersion," the Climate Trends report notes.

"The Diwali of 2025 was one of the most polluted in recent years. The spike between the nights of the 19th and 20th directly corresponds to the widespread use of firecrackers across Delhi-NCR. Moreover, visuals and ground data confirm that burning so-called 'green' crackers made no measurable difference," Palak Balyan, Research Lead, Climate Trends, said.

Pollution spike The graph depicts $PM_{2.5}$ concentration trends in Delhi before, during, and after Deepavali day



SOURCE: CPCB, CLIMATE TRENDS

GS Paper: *GS III – Environment / Pollution*
English:
Post-Diwali PM2.5 levels in Delhi touched 400 $\mu g/m^3$ —the worst since 2021. Despite Supreme Court restrictions, large-scale bursting of crackers raised AQI > 400 in several north Indian cities. Wind and temperature inversion worsened pollution.
हिंदी:
दीपावली के बाद दिल्ली की हवा पाँच साल में सबसे ज्यादा प्रदूषित रही। कोर्ट द्वारा सीमित समय और 'ग्रीन क्रैकर' की अनुमति के बावजूद प्रदूषण स्तर 400 $\mu g/m^3$ से ऊपर गया।

India upgrades its Technical Mission in Kabul to embassy

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Days after the visit by Taliban administration's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, India has upgraded its Technical Mission in Afghan capital Kabul to an embassy. In a statement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the upgrading took place with "immediate effect" on Tuesday.

"In keeping with the decision announced during the recent visit of the Afghan Foreign Minister to India, the government is restoring the status of the Technical Mission in Kabul to that of Embassy of India in Afghanistan with immediate effect. This decision underscores India's resolve to deepen its bilateral engagement with the Afghan side in all spheres of mutual interest," said the MEA in a statement. Official sources said a chargé d'affaires (CDA) would soon be appointed who would steer the embassy till the appointment of an ambassador.

Multiple major powers such as Iran, China, Russia, Gulf countries and Central Asian republics have engaged the Taliban but Russia alone has granted recognition to the Taliban as the *de jure* ruler of Afghanistan. Sources indicated that it may be sometime before India sends a formal ambassador to take charge of the embassy in Kabul.

The decision to upgrade the Technical Mission was taken after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met with Mr. Muttaqi on October 10 against the backdrop of intense hostilities that had broken out between Afghanistan and Pakistan along the Durand Line. India had shut its embassy in Kabul and withdrew the existing staff in August 2021 when law and order had broken down as the Taliban overthrew the government of President Ashraf Ghani.

GS Paper: *GS II – International Relations / India-Afghanistan*
English:
After Taliban FM Muttaqi's visit, India upgraded its Technical Mission in Kabul to full Embassy status, signalling formal engagement while avoiding de jure recognition of the Taliban.
हिंदी:
तालिबान विदेश मंत्री के दौरे के बाद भारत ने काबुल में अपना तकनीकी मिशन 'दूतावास' के स्तर पर अपग्रेड किया। यह संकेत है कि भारत तालिबान से सीमित कूटनीतिक संवाद जारी रखेगा।

Turning tides

Pakistan cannot ensure internal security by bombing Afghanistan

When the Taliban recaptured Kabul in August 2021, after two decades of insurgency, Pakistan viewed it as a tactical victory. Imran Khan, then Prime Minister, famously said the Afghans had "broken the shackles of slavery". But the Taliban's return emboldened the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is organisationally distinct from, yet ideologically aligned with, the Afghan Taliban. Over four years, Pakistan, particularly the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, has seen a dramatic surge in militant attacks. This year alone, at least 2,414 people were killed in militancy-related violence in Pakistan, according to an Islamabad-based think tank. Pakistan blames the Afghan Taliban for sheltering the TTP, better known as the Pakistani Taliban, and tensions escalated into full-scale cross-border clashes. On October 9, while Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was visiting India, Pakistan carried out air strikes in Kabul, apparently targeting the TTP. These strikes triggered a week of cross-border attacks that left dozens dead, before a fragile Qatar-brokered ceasefire took effect.

When the Afghan Taliban were waging an insurgency, Pakistan offered them refuge and support. Pakistan's military establishment expected the Taliban to remain loyal once in power. But when the Taliban took over the reins in Afghanistan, the old patron-client relationship was replaced by state-to-state ties, with deep structural contradictions. The Pakistani Taliban, which oppose the merger of Pakistan's tribal areas with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, want their version of a strict Islamic code to be enforced and demand the release of TTP prisoners, drew inspiration from the Afghan Taliban's triumph. The Durand Line, the colonial-era border, re-emerged as another flashpoint as Kabul has never recognised it. Besides, Pakistan's decision to deport thousands of Afghan refugees strained ties further. What likely provoked the Pakistani establishment even more was India's diplomatic outreach to the Taliban. By carrying out air strikes on Kabul in response to militant attacks, Pakistan appears to be setting a new precedent – holding Kabul directly accountable for cross-border militant attacks – in a move reminiscent of India's doctrine of responding to terrorism with overwhelming force against Pakistan. Yet, the security crisis in Pakistan now engulfing its tribal areas is largely of its own making. For decades, it has followed a contradictory policy – fighting terrorism while harbouring terrorist/militant groups that were fighting its neighbouring countries. It backed the Taliban for over two decades, hoping that a Taliban-controlled Kabul would offer it strategic depth. That strategy has now backfired. If Pakistan believes that it can restore internal security by bombing Afghanistan, it is mistaken. Prolonged conflict and chaos will only deepen instability and strengthen insurgency.

GS Paper Mapping:

- **GS Paper 2 – International Relations (India–Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations, Regional Security, Terrorism)**
- **GS Paper 3 – Internal Security (Cross-Border Terrorism, Radicalisation, Counter-Insurgency Policies)**

English Summary:
When the Taliban regained control of Kabul in **August 2021**, Pakistan celebrated it as a **strategic victory**, expecting loyalty from the new rulers. However, the return of the Taliban **strengthened Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)** — an ideologically aligned but organisationally separate militant outfit.
Over the last four years, **Pakistan's tribal regions, particularly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**, have witnessed a **surge in terror attacks**, killing more than **2,400 people** in 2025 alone. Pakistan blames Afghanistan for **sheltering TTP militants** and recently launched **air strikes in Kabul**, escalating tensions before a Qatar-mediated ceasefire.
The editorial argues that Pakistan's policy has **backfired**.

- For decades, Islamabad **harboured the Afghan Taliban**, hoping to use them for strategic depth against India and influence in Afghanistan.
- Now, with the Taliban in power, the relationship has shifted to **state-to-state**, eroding Pakistan's control.
- The Taliban's resistance to Pakistan's border fencing along the **Durand Line** and the expulsion of Afghan refugees have worsened relations.

By bombing Afghanistan, Pakistan seeks to mimic **India's retaliatory doctrine against terrorism**, but its **own contradictory policies**—supporting terrorism while claiming to fight it—have created internal chaos.
The piece concludes that **Pakistan's security crisis is largely self-inflicted**, and bombing Afghanistan will only **deepen instability** and **prolong insurgency** in the region.
Analytical Insight for UPSC:

- Explains **interconnectedness of regional terrorism** and **blowback of proxy warfare**.
- Demonstrates how **strategic depth policy** has failed Pakistan.
- Relevant to **India's neighbourhood-first policy** and **Afghanistan's regional stability** debate.

हिंदी सारांश:
अगस्त 2021 में जब **तालिबान ने काबुल पर कब्ज़ा किया**, पाकिस्तान ने इसे अपनी **रणनीतिक जीत** माना। लेकिन यह वापसी **तहरीक-ए-तालिबान पाकिस्तान (TTP)** को मज़बूत कर गई — जो अफगान तालिबान से वैचारिक रूप से जुड़ा है।
पिछले चार वर्षों में पाकिस्तान के **खैबर पख्तूनख्वा** और सीमावर्ती इलाकों में आतंकवादी घटनाओं में **2,400 से अधिक लोगों की मौत** हुई है। पाकिस्तान अफगानिस्तान पर **TTP को शरण देने** का आरोप लगाता है और हाल में **काबुल में हवाई हमले** किए, जिससे तनाव बढ़ा।
संपादकीय के अनुसार पाकिस्तान की यह नीति **उलटी पड़ गई है**।

- पाकिस्तान ने वर्षों तक अफगान तालिबान को **रणनीतिक गहराई (Strategic Depth)** के लिए समर्थन दिया।
- लेकिन अब तालिबान सत्ता में आने के बाद **पाकिस्तान के प्रभाव से मुक्त** हो गया है।
- **ड्यूरंड लाइन विवाद**, **अफगान शरणार्थियों की वापसी** और **सीमापार हिंसा** ने दोनों देशों के संबंधों को और बिगाड़ दिया है।

लेख के अनुसार, पाकिस्तान का अफगानिस्तान पर बमबारी करना **अपने ही आतंकवाद विरोधी सिद्धांतों के खिलाफ** है। उसने दशकों तक आतंकवाद को पनाह दी और अब खुद उसी का शिकार बन रहा है।
निष्कर्ष: पाकिस्तान की यह रणनीति उसके लिए आत्मघाती सिद्ध हुई है; अफगानिस्तान पर बमबारी से न तो आंतरिक सुरक्षा बहाल होगी और न ही आतंकवाद खत्म होगा, बल्कि **अस्थिरता और विद्रोह** और बढ़ेंगे।

Exam Relevance:

- UPSC GS Paper 2 & 3: *India's Neighbourhood Policy, Regional Security Architecture, State Sponsorship of Terrorism, and Counter-Insurgency.*

- Mains linkage: *"How Pakistan's security policies contribute to instability in South Asia."*

India's travails in negotiating a friendless world

For India, the challenge of adapting its foreign policy to emerging global realities is proving to be highly daunting for its foreign policy mandarins. Steeped in the traditions of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, they seem unable to come to terms with current realities. Adapting India's foreign policy to new global realities is, however, an urgent necessity.

With the advent of President Donald Trump in the United States, multilateralism or even plurilateral ways of advancing foreign policy, seem to have lost all meaning. India, however, is yet to demonstrate the necessary flexibility to deal with a seemingly friendless world, in its neighbourhood and well beyond. As days go by, India's trust deficit only seems to be growing, and the consequences can be serious.

The view about India

At one level, it would appear that India is losing its 'geopolitical relevance' despite the best efforts of its foreign policy establishment. Undoubtedly, Mr. Trump's pyrotechnics are aggravating the situation and his constant shifting of goal posts clearly demands extreme nimbleness on the part of the foreign policy establishments. For the present, India's foreign policy mandarins are finding themselves out of step, and increasingly isolated in the comity of nations. That we should find ourselves in this difficult situation is unfortunate. U.S. policy alone cannot be the reason, for there is much more happening across the world with India increasingly being seen as an 'outlier' when it comes to situations and events. All this at a time when India's economic heft is growing and it is among the top five economic powers of the world.

Two recent events bring this out in stark detail. Even as the world celebrates the new Gaza peace settlement – a critical breakthrough in the troubled politics of this region which was largely orchestrated by Mr. Trump and the U.S., with the support of Türkiye, Egypt, Qatar and a few other nations, India's absence or exclusion from the process smacks of its growing irrelevance in the politics of West Asia. That countries such as Türkiye, which demonstrate a degree of hostility towards India, should have been critical to the process of settlement adds further grist to India's growing irrelevance.

India appeared to compound this situation even further by sending the lowest level of representation for the grand reconciliation held to celebrate the end of the Gaza conflict and the return of peace to West Asia, at which most world leaders were present. For Indians across the world, this should be a wakeup call, something that needs to be remedied sooner rather than later.

Closer home, another signal event where India 'was a conspicuous absentee' was the Gen Z revolution in Nepal that seemed to spiral out of control. It only seemed to further demonstrate that India's foreign policy lacked both depth and content, even where its vital interests are at stake. The revolution, on India's doorstep, may have followed a slightly different pattern than the youthful dissent seen in Bangladesh and Indonesia previously, but the fact that India found itself helpless and a mere bystander when tumultuous events were taking place on its doorstep, should make discerning observers of the scene sit up and take notice.

M.K. Narayanan

is a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

Adapting India's foreign policy to new global realities is a necessity

Additionally, there is a disconcerting strategic angle to India's displacement from the driving seat, with this space being filled by countries not so well disposed, if not inimically inclined, towards India. Türkiye is a case in point, for during the recent India-Pakistan conflict, it was seen siding with Pakistan. Recently, Türkiye along with countries such as Egypt and Iraq were the toast of West Asia even as Mr. Trump spread benediction across the entire West Asia.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have signed on to a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement to treat aggression against one as against both, which only seemed to confirm India's position as an outlier in a region where previously Indic influence reigned supreme. All this would suggest that India's foreign policy has not demonstrated adequate ingenuity and flexibility to deal with the many vicissitudes and problems that afflict the region.

The situation in the neighbourhood

India cannot afford to be complacent. In its immediate neighbourhood, the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict threatens peace across a swathe of India's northwest. India may tend to view the attacks by the Afghan Taliban on Pakistani cities as retributive justice, but this would be shortsighted. Since Field Marshal Asim Munir effectively took over the reins of power in Pakistan, the threat that Pakistan poses to India and the region has gone up significantly. There is every need to 'unfang' the Pakistani dragon to ensure peace in the region. Being satisfied with the Afghan Taliban's attacks on Pakistan's rear can provide cold comfort at best. India's efforts should be on how best to create a conducive atmosphere where wars remain the last resort.

The rest of India's neighbourhood also remains in turmoil, and the challenge before India's diplomats is how to persuade countries such as Bangladesh and Nepal, which are currently perceived as hostile to India, to retrace their steps and make it worthwhile for them to maintain better relations with India. India-Sri Lanka relations are seen like an enigma wrapped in a mystery. While outwardly, India-Sri Lanka relations are on an even keel, it would be a mistake to underestimate the intrinsic potential of countries such as China to muddy the waters.

Vis-à-vis China, while India's diplomacy may look like 'work in progress', it appears more an effort to patch over differences. This is specially so in the context of what may be termed as the current India-China bromance. Since Tianjin (August 2025), there has been a tendency in India's diplomatic circles, and possibly within the political establishment as well, to gloss over the June 2020 Galwan episode as a 'mere blip' in long-standing China-India ties.

This willingness to ignore the realities of a long-standing and fast-festering China-Indian border problem appears intended to give an impression that 'peace is at hand'. Little, however, has changed on the ground and the current diplomatic and military exchanges clearly lack candour.

Ties with China

Indians have seldom been able to comprehend Chinese elliptical thinking on global and regional issues, and even more so in its diplomatic manoeuvres. China-India ties today have not returned to the period that existed in 1988, following Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's highly successful visit to China. There is, hence, every need for India to be cautious; India would do well to acknowledge that China is a conundrum that is not easily cracked. China's President Xi Jinping is much less a statesman than his predecessors Deng Xiaoping and Hu Jintao, and India cannot be too careful in its dealings with Xi's China.

China and the U.S. are, without doubt, presently engaged in a 'cat and mouse game' on tariffs, and Mr. Xi's gambit, *viz.*, immediate and tangible concessions for long-term gains (including entering into deals with regard to the resumption of exports on rare earth materials to the U.S.) cannot possibly be the model for India to follow or adopt.

Also, what India needs to be concerned about is that, friendly or not, China is steadily expanding its influence across much of the region to India's east, and adopting devious ways, including proliferation of small businesses at one level to a growing presence in universities, research centres and in cyber space at another, to establish its dominance and eclipse India's influence across this region. India's needs to be wary and it is increasingly becoming evident that as the U.S.'s influence wanes across much of the world and is steadily being eclipsed in large parts of Asia, a new China-led order is emerging in East and Southeast Asia.

This article, hence, should be seen as a wakeup call. Reiteration of the old adage that 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty' is important. India's future is assured, but it also depends on how much effort is made to protect its brand of civilisation. It is quite distinct and different from that of China, the West, the Persian/Arab variety and other forms of democracy that had held sway over the years.

GS Paper Mapping:

- **GS Paper 2 – International Relations (India's Foreign Policy, Neighbourhood Policy, Strategic Autonomy)**
- **GS Paper 3 – Security and Geo-Politics (Regional & Global Security Environment, Challenges to India's Interests)**
- **Essay / Ethics (Global Leadership & India's Role in a Changing World)**

English Summary:

The article analyses India's **foreign policy challenges** in an increasingly **polarised and friendless global environment**.

The author argues that **India's foreign policy establishment appears outdated**, rooted in mid-20th century frameworks, and is struggling to adapt to rapidly evolving realities of global power politics.

Key Points:

1. **Decline of Multilateralism:**
   - With the rise of leaders like Donald Trump and the weakening of multilateral institutions, global diplomacy has become transactional.
   - India has been slow to adjust its strategy to this new "zero-sum" world order.
2. **Perception of Isolation:**
   - Despite India's economic rise, it is increasingly being viewed as an *"outlier"* in world affairs.
   - The frequent shifting of diplomatic positions and lack of consistency have created confusion among global observers.
3. **Neighbourhood Concerns:**
   - India's influence in South Asia appears to be receding.
   - The **Afghanistan–Pakistan conflict** threatens to spill over, while India remains a bystander.
   - Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Türkiye are emerging as new regional power hubs, reducing India's strategic centrality.
4. **China Factor:**
   - India–China relations remain uneasy despite attempts at dialogue.
   - Post-Galwan (2020), the "Tianjin reset" of 2025 is viewed as superficial.
   - China's growing economic and political dominance contrasts with India's cautious diplomacy.
5. **Middle East Realignment:**
   - Türkiye's growing clout in West Asia and Saudi–Pakistan defence cooperation show India's waning presence in the region.
   - The author calls it "a friendless scenario" — India is neither leading the Global South effectively nor aligning strongly with any bloc.
6. **Policy Critique:**
   - India's strategy of "strategic autonomy" must evolve into **"strategic adaptability"**.
   - Mere economic power is insufficient; diplomatic innovation and flexible multilateral engagement are vital.

Conclusion:
India must reimagine its global posture with a *nimble, interest-based, and regionally grounded diplomacy*, prioritising neighbourhood influence and pragmatic partnerships.

हिंदी सारांश:
लेख में भारत की **विदेश नीति की चुनौतियों** पर चर्चा की गई है, जहाँ दुनिया तेजी से **ध्रुवीकृत और मित्रहीन** होती जा रही है।
लेखक एम.के. नारायणन का मत है कि भारत की नीति-निर्माण व्यवस्था अभी भी **बीसवीं सदी की सोच में फँसी हुई** है और बदलते वैश्विक परिदृश्य के अनुरूप खुद को ढाल नहीं पा रही।
मुख्य बिंदु:
1. **बहुपक्षवाद का क्षरण:**
   - ट्रंप युग के बाद विश्व-राजनीति लेनदेन आधारित और कठोर हो गई है।
   - भारत ने इस नए यथार्थ के अनुरूप पर्याप्त लचीलापन नहीं दिखाया है।
2. **अंतरराष्ट्रीय अलगाव:**
   - आर्थिक रूप से सशक्त होने के बावजूद भारत को अंतरराष्ट्रीय राजनीति में *"आउटलायर"* माना जा रहा है।
   - नीति की निरंतरता की कमी ने भारत की विश्वसनीयता को प्रभावित किया है।
3. **पड़ोसी देशों में प्रभाव की कमी:**
   - अफगानिस्तान-पाकिस्तान संकट के समय भारत मात्र दर्शक बना हुआ है।
   - बांग्लादेश, इंडोनेशिया और तुर्की क्षेत्रीय शक्ति के रूप में उभर रहे हैं।
4. **चीन कारक:**
   - 2020 के गलवान संघर्ष के बाद भी चीन से संबंध तनावपूर्ण बने हुए हैं।
   - 2025 की *"तियानजिन वार्ता"* सतही मानी जा रही है।
5. **मध्य एशिया और पश्चिम एशिया में गिरता प्रभाव:**
   - सऊदी–पाकिस्तान रक्षा समझौता और तुर्की की सक्रियता भारत की कमजोर उपस्थिति को दर्शाते हैं।

6. **नीतिगत सुझाव:**
    - भारत को अपनी *"रणनीतिक स्वायत्तता"* को *"रणनीतिक अनुकूलन"* में बदलना चाहिए।
    - केवल आर्थिक शक्ति पर्याप्त नहीं है; लचीली और सक्रिय कूटनीति आवश्यक है।

निष्कर्ष:
भारत को अपनी विदेश नीति को अधिक व्यावहारिक, क्षेत्रीय रूप से केंद्रित और वैश्विक हितों के अनुरूप बनाना होगा ताकि वह बदलते अंतरराष्ट्रीय समीकरणों में फिर से नेतृत्वकारी भूमिका निभा सके।

Electoral roll revamp: the case for digital transformation

The Election Commission has initiated a Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, starting in Bihar. However, outdated verification methods and lack of digital tools, stress the need for technology-driven reforms

Rajeev Kumar

After two decades of silence on one of India's most critical democratic processes, the Election Commission (EC) has finally revived the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls – beginning with Bihar, followed by West Bengal, and later the rest of the country.

Electoral rolls require continuous updating – removing those who have died or surrendered citizenship and transferring entries for individuals who shift residence to another constituency. A person must be an Indian citizen of at least 18 years of age and ordinarily resident in India to be included in the roll. However, concerns persist about including ineligible persons, especially those who may have entered from neighbouring countries, underscoring the need for transparent verification.

Although this long-awaited SIR aims to update the voter database, it became controversial due to procedural ambiguities and reliance on outdated and cumbersome Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) instead of modern digital tools.

Outdated methods: Door-to-door distribution of enumeration forms and collection of filled forms under the SIR in Nawada, Bihar on July 13. ANI

Reliance on outdated methods

The last full-fledged SIR of electoral rolls in most Indian States was conducted between 2002 and 2004, when voter data was entirely paper-based, fragmented, and manually verified. Two decades later, despite India's sweeping digital transformation – from Aadhaar integration to the Digital India mission – the SIR 2025 framework remains rooted in outdated, paper-era procedures.

To mirror the 2002-04 model, 11 documents were mandated for voter verification, including birth certificate, passport, driving licence, domicile, caste certificate, and family register. However, the list excluded Aadhaar, India's most widely used and digitally verifiable ID. The justification that Aadhaar is not fool-proof and can be manipulated is only partly valid, as the same limitations apply to most other accepted documents. More reliable documents such as passports and government service IDs cover only a small section of the population.

Relying on limited and often inaccessible proofs contradicts the spirit of Digital India – turning what was meant to be a modern transparency reform into a bureaucratic bottleneck. The exclusion of Aadhaar made verification cumbersome and eroded public trust, particularly among migrants, first-time voters, and marginalised groups. The deeper issue lies in the failure to adopt interoperable, technology-based systems. Most approved databases remain isolated and inaccessible, preventing real-time verification and automated consistency checks. As a result, the SIR of 2025 repeated the old cycle of manual errors, delays, and inconsistencies.

A credible and trustworthy SIR requires a nationally unified, technology-driven framework that ensures accuracy, accountability, and transparency across India's billion-plus voters – not replicating the early 2000's outdated methods in 2025's digital era.

Aadhaar: a national digital ID

After extensive hearings and deliberation, Aadhaar was upheld as a valid and legitimate digital ID for electoral governance processes. Despite earlier concerns about privacy and misuse, the decision confirmed Aadhaar's operational legitimacy, establishing it as the backbone of India's digital ecosystem.

India has no comparable identity system. Aadhaar uniquely combines personalised details with biometric data, enabling reliable individual verification. It is the only centralised identity database accessible to multiple government and private agencies for authentication. Over time, Aadhaar verification has become routinely used for attendance systems, scholarship disbursement, welfare distribution, financial transactions, life certification, and educational institutions. In practice, it has emerged as India's de facto national digital identity register.

Therefore, rather than sidelining it, India's technical leadership must make the Aadhaar ecosystem more robust, tamper-proof, and transparent. It can securely integrate birth, death, and migration records with appropriate safeguards, ensuring that electoral rolls remain dynamically updated without compromising privacy. Integrating verified Aadhaar data into electoral roll management under strict data protection norms could eliminate duplication, automatically remove deceased voters, update residential shifts, and prevent fake or multiple registrations. Every addition, deletion, or correction would carry a digitally signed authorisation, create an unbroken digital audit trail, and ensure a transparent, verifiable, and accountable electoral database.

Data anomalies

The revised electoral roll of Bihar revealed significant inconsistencies, including deleting 3.66 lakh names without adequate clarity or traceable communication to those affected. The total number of electors was around 80 lakh (nearly 10%) lower than the estimated adult population of the State, with no verification trail explaining the reasons for such deletions or confirming that due notice had been given.

Further scrutiny exposed several irregularities such as centenarians being listed as new voters, and names re-included without supporting documents to maintain overall voter counts. There were also gross variations in demographic statistics, such as a decline in the gender ratio from 934 in September 2025 to 892 in the final roll, a statistically implausible shift, inconsistent with population trends. These anomalies suggest data entry errors or unverified mass revisions, raising serious questions about the integrity of the database.

Moreover, data transparency remained the primary concern. The lists of additions and deletions were not published in machine-readable formats, preventing independent audit or public scrutiny.

Collectively, these anomalies – from demographic distortions and manual errors to opaque data handling – expose the fragility of electoral roll management and underscore the urgent need for technology-driven verification and transparent data governance in revisions.

On ECI-Net

ECI-Net is among the world's largest and most dynamic digital databases, housing records of nearly one billion voters. Continuously updated through additions, address changes, and profile modifications, it is searchable by Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) ID and voter-name and administered by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune, India's premier computing R&D institution. Globally, few systems match the scale, functionality, and democratic significance of this mission-critical database.

By design, ECI-Net can detect duplicates, flag inconsistencies, and facilitate corrections through authorised verification. Its architecture can instantly produce real-time demographic and statistical reports transparently and accurately. With the integration of data analytic APIs, the system can automatically identify and resolve most anomalies and demographic inconsistencies identified during recent revisions.

However, the lack of disclosure and system-level analytics raises serious concerns. If automated audit and analytical tools already exist – as expected in a database of this scale – they could have easily detected duplication, demographic distortions, and data irregularities without large-scale manual intervention. The failure to utilise these digital capabilities suggests institutional inertia or deliberate avoidance of technology-based transparency. Such practices weaken confidence in the integrity of existing SoPs. Despite strong technical expertise within its leadership, the reliance on manual verification over verifiable, software-driven protocols remains inexplicable. Until data-driven audits and system-level transparency are prioritised, claims of purification of electoral rolls will continue to invite public scepticism and institutional introspection.

The way ahead

Today, India has one of the world's most advanced digital ecosystems – from Aadhaar-linked databases and UPI to data analytics and e-governance. Yet, the procedures guiding SIR 2025 show little reflection of this progress. The weaknesses are not merely administrative but structural, stemming from the absence of traceability, and database integration. Reforming the SoPs is therefore not optional; it is vital for safeguarding democratic credibility.

The electoral roll must be recognised as a living, dynamic national asset rather than a static, state-bound record. Its accuracy directly shapes the integrity of elections and public confidence in electoral governance.

Recent judicial observations have underscored the need to learn from the Bihar experience as preparations begin for a nationwide revision. Future SIR exercises must demonstrate procedural correctness, visible fairness, transparency, and accountability. The focus should shift to software-driven verification, digital audit trails, and real-time corrections. The ECI-Net should be made more user-friendly, technical glitches should be fixed promptly, and an efficient and quick grievance redressal mechanism should be incorporated.

The 2025 SIR must not become another verification ritual; it must transform into a trust revolution powered by technology based on transparency, verification, and integrity.

Rajeev Kumar is a former Professor of Computer Science & Engineering at IIT Kharagpur, IIT Kanpur, BITS Pilani, and JNU, and a former scientist at DRDO and DST.

GS Paper Mapping:

- **GS Paper 2 – Polity and Governance** (Election Commission, Electoral Reforms, e-Governance)
- **GS Paper 3 – Science & Technology in Governance / Data Security & Digital Infrastructure**
- **Essay Paper – Electoral Integrity & Democracy in the Digital Age**

English Summary:

The Election Commission (EC) has initiated a **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls after nearly two decades, starting from **Bihar**, followed by **West Bengal** and other states. The move aims to clean up outdated rolls and include legitimate voters, but highlights persistent **administrative, procedural, and digital challenges**.

Key Points:

1. **Need for the Revision:**
    - The SIR seeks to remove deceased voters, correct duplication, and update entries.
    - It also addresses migration-related deletions and transfers between constituencies.
2. **Persistent Problems:**
    - The process still relies on **outdated paper-based verification** instead of digital validation.
    - **Enumerators visit door-to-door manually**, leaving room for errors and manipulation.
    - Ambiguities in *Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)* and lack of digital transparency continue to erode public trust.
3. **Aadhaar and Digital Identity:**
    - Aadhaar, India's most used ID, was reaffirmed as a legitimate document for voter verification under the 2025 framework, despite earlier controversies.
    - However, Aadhaar's limitations (not foolproof, susceptible to data misuse) mean it cannot replace physical verification.
    - Other IDs like passport, driving licence, and government service IDs remain necessary.
4. **Data and Technological Concerns:**
    - Despite possessing the world's largest electoral database (ECI-Net), **data analytics tools remain underutilised**.
    - Lack of integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and real-time analytics hinders automatic detection of anomalies.
    - **Bihar's revised roll** showed anomalies—3.66 lakh names missing or duplicated, nearly 10% mismatch from population estimates.
5. **Systemic Weaknesses:**
    - Outdated manual verification, poor database coordination, and absence of a **data governance framework** reduce efficiency.
    - Digital transformation could prevent duplication, fake voters, and ensure accurate inclusions/exclusions.
6. **Way Forward:**
    - Adopt **AI-driven, transparent, and verifiable** digital audit systems.
    - Institutionalise **data integrity standards** and **independent electoral audits**.
    - Integrate *Aadhaar-linked databases, UPI data trails,* and *gov-tech innovations* for greater transparency.
    - Electoral roll management should evolve from a bureaucratic process to a **trust-based, citizen-centric digital platform**.

Conclusion:

To restore faith in electoral democracy, **India must modernise its electoral roll verification** through secure, automated, and transparent digital governance tools. The 2025 SIR should become a **model for technology-driven electoral reforms** ensuring inclusion, accountability, and public confidence.

हिंदी सारांश:

भारत निर्वाचन आयोग (ECI) ने लगभग **20 वर्षों बाद मतदाता सूची के विशेष गहन पुनरीक्षण (SIR)** की शुरुआत की है — पहले बिहार से, फिर पश्चिम बंगाल और अन्य राज्यों में।

इस पहल का उद्देश्य मृत मतदाताओं को हटाना, प्रवासियों के पते अपडेट करना और डुप्लीकेट नामों को साफ़ करना है।

मुख्य बिंदु:

1. **पुनरीक्षण की आवश्यकता:**
    - पुरानी और त्रुटिपूर्ण मतदाता सूची लोकतंत्र की विश्वसनीयता को प्रभावित करती है।
    - हर साल मतदाताओं के स्थानांतरण, मृत्यु और नागरिकता परिवर्तन को अद्यतन करना आवश्यक है।
2. **वर्तमान समस्याएँ:**
    - प्रक्रिया अब भी **कागज़ आधारित और मैनुअल** है।
    - गिनतीकर्ताओं द्वारा घर-घर जाकर सत्यापन करने से त्रुटियों और हेराफेरी की संभावना रहती है।
    - डिजिटल सत्यापन प्रणाली का अभाव पारदर्शिता को प्रभावित करता है।
3. **आधार की भूमिका:**
    - आधार को फिर से वैध दस्तावेज़ माना गया है, परंतु यह *त्रुटिहीन नहीं* है।
    - डेटा सुरक्षा और निजता की चिंता बनी हुई है।
    - अन्य दस्तावेज़ जैसे पासपोर्ट, ड्राइविंग लाइसेंस आदि अभी भी आवश्यक हैं।
4. **तकनीकी चुनौतियाँ:**
    - चुनाव आयोग के पास विश्व की सबसे बड़ी डिजिटल मतदाता डाटाबेस (ECI-Net) है, परंतु **डेटा एनालिटिक्स और AI का उपयोग सीमित** है।
    - बिहार में हालिया मतदाता सूची में 3.66 लाख से अधिक नामों में त्रुटियाँ पाई गईं।
5. **संरचनात्मक कमजोरियाँ:**
    - मैनुअल सत्यापन, डेटा समन्वय की कमी और डिजिटल पारदर्शिता का अभाव प्रमुख समस्याएँ हैं।
    - डिजिटल परिवर्तन से फर्जी मतदाताओं को रोका जा सकता है और वास्तविक पात्रों को शामिल किया जा सकता है।
6. **आगे का रास्ता:**
    - कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता (AI) आधारित पारदर्शी प्रणाली लागू की जाए।
    - डेटा सत्यनिष्ठा (data integrity) के मानक स्थापित किए जाएँ।
    - *आधार, यूपीआई और ई-गवर्नेंस डाटा* को एकीकृत कर चुनावी प्रक्रिया को अधिक विश्वसनीय बनाया जाए।

निष्कर्ष:
भारत की चुनावी विश्वसनीयता को मज़बूत करने के लिए मतदाता सूची के सत्यापन और अद्यतन में **तकनीक आधारित पारदर्शिता** को प्राथमिकता देना आवश्यक है। *2025 का SIR* एक ऐसे डिजिटल लोकतांत्रिक सुधार का प्रारंभिक मॉडल होना चाहिए जो *विश्वास, पारदर्शिता और दक्षता* को केंद्र में रखे।

Exam Relevance:
- **UPSC GS Paper 2:** Electoral reforms, role of ECI, governance and transparency.
- **GS Paper 3:** Use of ICT, AI, and data analytics in governance.
- **BPSC/JPSC Mains:** Electoral transparency, E-Governance initiatives in Bihar and India.
- **Essay:** “Technology as an enabler of democratic integrity in India.”

India ‘must counter China’s plaint at WTO on EV car sop, battery PLI plan’

Amiti Sen
NEW DELHI

New Delhi needs to counter Bejing's complaint against India's incentive scheme for EV passenger cars and production linked incentive (PLI) schemes for new-generation batteries and automobiles, experts have said. China officially submitted its complaint on Monday arguing that these schemes discriminate against foreign producers.

However, the overwhelming view in India is that the idea behind these schemes is not to discriminate against foreign players but to develop domestic manufacturing in new technology areas.

"Domestic incentive continues to be a grey area at the WTO and New Delhi must not give in to pressure from Beijing. Developing countries must have the policy space to develop their manufacturing, especially in new technology areas," said a Delhi-based representative of an international non-profit trade organisation.

In its request for consultations with India submitted to the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body, China singled out three schemes – the PLI ACC battery storage scheme, the PLI auto scheme and the EV passenger cars scheme – for being allegedly violative of WTO rules. It said the schemes were contingent upon the use of local, over imported goods or were otherwise discriminating against goods of Chinese origin.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

GS Paper Mapping:
- **GS Paper 2 – International Relations (India–China Trade Relations, WTO Dispute Settlement)**
- **GS Paper 3 – Economy (Industrial Policy, Make in India, PLI Schemes, Technology & Manufacturing Sector)**

English Summary:
Context:
China has filed a complaint at the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** against India’s **Production Linked Incentive (PLI)** schemes for **Electric Vehicles (EVs)**, **Automobiles**, and **Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) battery manufacturing**, alleging that these discriminate against foreign products and

violate WTO norms.

Key Points:

1. **China's Allegation:**
   - India's **PLI schemes** favour domestic producers by making incentives **contingent on using locally made goods** rather than imports.
   - China argues that this is **discriminatory and protectionist**, contrary to WTO's **Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM)**.
2. **India's Defence:**
   - Experts assert that the **PLI schemes are not discriminatory**, but aimed at **developing domestic capacity** in new-technology areas.
   - India maintains that developing nations must have **policy space** for promoting industrialisation and innovation.
3. **Strategic Implications:**
   - India's EV and battery policies are part of its **climate commitments** and **energy transition goals**.
   - Accepting China's claim could weaken India's **industrial policy autonomy** and impact its **Make in India** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** missions.
4. **Broader Economic Context:**
   - India has rolled out **PLI incentives worth ₹2 lakh crore** across sectors like EVs, semiconductors, and solar manufacturing to boost self-reliance.
   - This case reflects the **increasing friction between industrial policy and global trade norms** at the WTO.
5. **Expert View:**
   - Analysts advise New Delhi to **strongly defend its policy space** at the WTO, arguing that such incentives are **developmental tools** for emerging economies.
   - They warn that succumbing to pressure from Beijing could set a precedent affecting other PLI-linked sectors.

Conclusion:

India must diplomatically and legally defend its **PLI-based industrial policy framework** within WTO rules by invoking the **special and differential treatment clause** available to developing countries, asserting that these incentives are designed for **technological advancement**, not trade discrimination.

हिंदी सारांश:

प्रसंग:

चीन ने भारत की **प्रोडक्शन लिंक्ड इंसेंटिव (PLI)** योजनाओं — विशेष रूप से **ईवी (इलेक्ट्रिक वाहन)**, **ऑटोमोबाइल्स** और **एडवांस केमिस्ट्री सेल (ACC)** बैटरी निर्माण योजनाओं — के खिलाफ **विश्व व्यापार संगठन (WTO)** में शिकायत दर्ज की है।

मुख्य बिंदु:

1. **चीन का आरोप:**
   - भारत की PLI योजनाएँ **घरेलू उत्पादकों को प्राथमिकता** देती हैं और विदेशी सामानों के साथ भेदभाव करती हैं।
   - चीन का दावा है कि ये योजनाएँ WTO के **सब्सिडी और काउंटरवेलिंग मेजर्स समझौते** का उल्लंघन करती हैं।
2. **भारत का पक्ष:**
   - भारत का कहना है कि इन योजनाओं का उद्देश्य किसी देश को नुकसान पहुँचाना नहीं बल्कि **नई प्रौद्योगिकी में घरेलू विनिर्माण को प्रोत्साहित करना** है।
   - विकासशील देशों को अपनी **औद्योगिक नीति और नवाचार** के लिए नीति-निर्धारण की स्वतंत्रता होनी चाहिए।
3. **रणनीतिक महत्व:**
   - ये योजनाएँ भारत की **ऊर्जा परिवर्तन (energy transition)** और **जलवायु प्रतिबद्धताओं** से जुड़ी हैं।
   - चीन की शिकायत स्वीकार करना भारत की "**मेक इन इंडिया**" और "**आत्मनिर्भर भारत**" नीतियों को कमजोर कर सकता है।

4. **वृहद आर्थिक संदर्भ:**
    - भारत ने अब तक लगभग **₹2 लाख करोड़** के PLI प्रोत्साहन विभिन्न क्षेत्रों (ईवी, सौर, सेमीकंडक्टर आदि) के लिए घोषित किए हैं।
    - यह विवाद वैश्विक व्यापार नियमों और औद्योगिक नीति के बीच बढ़ते तनाव को दर्शाता है।
5. **विशेषज्ञ राय:**
    - भारत को WTO में अपना पक्ष मजबूती से रखना चाहिए, यह बताते हुए कि ये योजनाएँ **विकासशील देशों के लिए विकासात्मक उपकरण** हैं।
    - बीजिंग के दबाव में आने से अन्य PLI क्षेत्रों के लिए भी नकारात्मक उदाहरण स्थापित होगा।

निष्कर्ष:

भारत को WTO में यह तर्क देना चाहिए कि उसकी PLI योजनाएँ **व्यापारिक भेदभाव नहीं बल्कि तकनीकी स्वावलंबन और औद्योगिक विकास** की दिशा में हैं।
यह विवाद विकासशील देशों के लिए **औद्योगिक नीति की स्वतंत्रता बनाम वैश्विक व्यापार अनुशासन** की एक बड़ी परीक्षा है।

Exam Relevance:

- **UPSC GS Paper 2:** WTO Dispute Mechanism, India–China Economic Relations, Trade Diplomacy.
- **GS Paper 3:** Industrial Policy, PLI Scheme, Make in India, Technology Sovereignty.
- **BPSC/JPSC Mains:** Economic Reforms in India; Globalization and WTO; India’s Trade Policy.
- **Essay:** “Industrial Policy and Global Trade Rules – Balancing Self-Reliance with Global Commitments.”

'India's H2FY26 tech hiring outlook not so promising'

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

India's tech hiring outlook for the second half of FY26 seems "not so promising" with new signs of clear uncertainties emerging on the ground (including 'No Kings' protest) and the existing government shutdown, which could hamper economic growth and create more uncertainty, in the sector's largest customer market, the U.S., say industry observers.

The newer protests are happening even as the real impact of tariffs are expected to hit the market hard in the coming quarters. Overall economic conditions are not promising with a potential rise in debt, inflation and negative consumer sentiments amid trade tensions and geopolitical issues. All these are likely to lead to further cuts in customer budgets and that will eventually impact jobs in India, they cautioned.

"The U.S. administration has opened up a bundle of uncertainties for citizens, entrepreneurs, and Indian tech providers. Uncertainties are only increasing month after month. Now, with 'No Kings' protests, a clear and without doubt, uncertainty has emerged on the ground with over seven

Firms accelerated investments in AI-driven transformation.

million citizens trying to push back Mr. Trump's reforms, including tariffs," observed B.S. Murthy, CEO, Leadership Capital, a CXO advisory firm.

New disruptions

This citizen anger may lead to newer disruptions and all these may adversely hit end-customer sentiments and economic growth in the U.S and then impact IT budgets of enterprises and therefore, Indian tech jobs, Mr. Murthy said.

Avinash Vashistha, Global Chairman & CEO and also formerly chairman & MD of Accenture India told *The Hindu*, "U.S. macroeconomic headwinds, including tariff and debt uncertainties, etc already has the potential to shrink discretionary IT budgets in H2 FY26, impacting tech hiring in India.''

According to Equirus Securities, a financial services firm that also tracks the IT sector, the demand commentary, for the upcoming quarters, may stay cautious (unless some certainty relating to tariff related issues emerges).

Mild uptick

The Q2 of FY26 saw a mild uptick in hiring by Infosys, Wipro and HCLTech. TechM said it added 5,817 people (YoY) in the Business Process Services (BPS) segment. However, the quarter witnessed, TCS, the tech bellwether, cutting close to 20,000 jobs.

In the second quarter, on a YoY basis, despite a rise in attrition rates, 3 out of the 5 Tier 1 service firms still recorded a YoY net headcount addition, noted Kamal Karanth, co-founder, Xpheno, a people solutions firm.

He added that an increase in attrition along with net headcount growth, indicates active hiring and a headcount optimisation process."

However, Sachin Alug, CEO, NLB Services, a U.S-based HR provider, opined, "Hiring during Q2 FY26 indicated a renewed wave of confidence across the IT sector, with firms accelerating investments in AI-driven transformation and digital innovation."

GS Paper Mapping:

- **GS Paper 3 – Indian Economy (Employment, Industrial Growth, IT Sector, Global Economic Trends)**
- **GS Paper 2 – International Relations (Impact of Global Events on Indian Economy)**
- **Essay Paper – "Future of Work and Technology in India"**

English Summary:

Context:

India's technology sector, a major driver of exports and employment, is expected to face **slower hiring** in the **second half of FY26 (H2FY26)** due to **rising global uncertainties**, especially in the **U.S. market**, its largest client base.

Key Points:

1. **Economic Uncertainty in the U.S.:**
    - The article cites the **"No Kings" protest** and **U.S. government shutdown** as indicators of political and economic instability.
    - These have created **tariff-related and debt-related uncertainties**, potentially reducing U.S. corporate IT spending — directly affecting Indian tech companies.
2. **Impact on Indian IT Hiring:**
    - Hiring outlook in **Tier-I IT companies (TCS, Infosys, Wipro, HCLTech, Tech Mahindra)** is weak.
    - Some firms have seen **net job cuts**, particularly in **Business Process Services (BPS)** segments.
    - TCS reportedly cut nearly **20,000 jobs** in the last quarter, while only Tech Mahindra added ~5,800 jobs YoY.
3. **Global Macro Factors:**
    - **Tariffs, inflation, rising debt, and consumer pessimism** in the U.S. are likely to further contract enterprise IT budgets.
    - U.S. companies may **reduce discretionary IT spending** and delay digital projects, directly impacting India's **software export revenue**.
4. **AI and Digital Transformation:**
    - Despite a slowdown in traditional IT hiring, there is still momentum in **AI-driven transformation and digital innovation**.
    - Companies are investing in **automation and productivity tools**, which reduce manpower needs but increase efficiency.
5. **Expert Opinions:**
    - **B.S. Murthy (Leadership Capital):** Protests and tariffs will hit market confidence, reducing demand for IT outsourcing.
    - **Avinash Vashistha (Accenture India, former):** Tariff and debt-related headwinds may **shrink IT budgets** in H2FY26.
    - **Sachin Alug (NLB Services):** Some firms show **confidence recovery** and hiring in niche digital areas, though large-scale recruitment remains muted.

Conclusion:

While India's IT industry continues to invest in AI, cloud, and digital transformation, **macroeconomic headwinds in the U.S.** threaten to slow overall job growth. The hiring sentiment remains **cautious**, with focus shifting from **volume hiring to high-skill optimisation**.

हिंदी सारांश:

प्रसंग:

भारत का आईटी क्षेत्र, जो निर्यात और रोजगार का प्रमुख स्रोत है, **वित्त वर्ष 2025–26 की दूसरी छमाही (H2FY26)** में **कमज़ोर भर्ती संभावनाओं** का सामना कर रहा है। इसका मुख्य कारण **अमेरिका में बढ़ती आर्थिक और राजनीतिक अनिश्चितताएँ** हैं, जो भारत का सबसे बड़ा ग्राहक बाज़ार है।

मुख्य बिंदु:

1. **अमेरिका की अनिश्चित स्थिति:**

- ○ "नो किंग्स" आंदोलन और सरकारी शटडाउन से **आर्थिक अस्थिरता** बढ़ी है।
- ○ इससे **टैरिफ़ (आयात शुल्क)** और **ऋण संकट** जैसी समस्याएँ बढ़ी हैं, जो अमेरिकी कंपनियों के **आईटी बजट** को प्रभावित कर रही हैं।

2. **भारत की आईटी भर्ती पर असर:**
    - ○ **टीसीएस, इन्फोसिस, विप्रो, एचसीएलटेक और टेक महिंद्रा** जैसी शीर्ष कंपनियों की भर्ती गति धीमी हुई है।
    - ○ **बीपीएस (बिज़नेस प्रोसेस सर्विसेज)** क्षेत्र में नौकरियाँ घट रही हैं।
    - ○ केवल टेक महिंद्रा ने लगभग **5,800 नई भर्तियाँ** कीं, जबकि टीसीएस ने करीब **20,000 कर्मचारियों** में कटौती की।
3. **वैश्विक आर्थिक कारक:**
    - ○ **मुद्रास्फीति, कर्ज, व्यापारिक तनाव और उपभोक्ता विश्वास में गिरावट** से अमेरिका में निवेश घटा है।
    - ○ इसका सीधा असर भारत की **सॉफ़्टवेयर निर्यात आय** पर पड़ेगा।
4. **कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता (AI) और डिजिटल क्षेत्र:**
    - ○ पारंपरिक आईटी सेवाओं में मंदी के बावजूद कंपनियाँ **AI, ऑटोमेशन और डिजिटल नवाचार** में निवेश बढ़ा रही हैं।
    - ○ इससे उत्पादकता बढ़ेगी परंतु **भर्ती की आवश्यकता घटेगी**।
5. **विशेषज्ञों की राय:**
    - ○ **बी.एस. मूर्ति:** अमेरिकी उपभोक्ता असंतोष और टैरिफ़ से आईटी सेवाओं की मांग कम होगी।
    - ○ **अविनाश वशिष्ठ:** अमेरिकी आर्थिक मंदी से भारत की आईटी कंपनियों के बजट सिकुड़ेंगे।
    - ○ **सचिन अलुग:** कुछ कंपनियाँ अब भी डिजिटल क्षेत्रों में भर्ती बढ़ा रही हैं, परंतु व्यापक स्तर पर स्थिति "सावधानीपूर्ण" है।

निष्कर्ष:
भारत के आईटी क्षेत्र में **वृहद पैमाने पर भर्ती घटेगी**, परंतु **AI और डिजिटल तकनीक** आधारित कौशल की मांग बढ़ेगी। कुल मिलाकर, FY26 की दूसरी छमाही में आईटी क्षेत्र **संरक्षणवादी और अनिश्चित वैश्विक परिस्थितियों** के कारण दबाव में रहेगा।

Exam Relevance:

- **UPSC GS Paper 3:** Employment trends, IT sector, globalization and Indian economy.
- **GS Paper 2:** Impact of U.S. policies on India's economic sectors.
- **Essay:** *"AI, Automation, and the Future of Employment in India."*
- **BPSC/JPSC Mains:** Effects of global slowdown on India's services sector and job creation.

U.S-.Australia rare earths deal won't shake China dominance

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
SYDNEY

Donald Trump's backing of Australia's critical minerals will bring much-needed financial support to the industry, but experts say the U.S. President willhave to wait longer to shift the supply chain away from China and weaken its market dominance.

In a wide-ranging agreement signed on Monday, U.S. and Australia committed a combined $3 billion to mining and processing projects, and to a price floor for critical minerals,a step long sought by Western miners. The countries will also sign off on financing that includes offtake rights. The White House said U.S. investments into Australia would unlock deposits of critical minerals worth $53 billion, without offering many details.

Mr. Trump said in a year they would have "so much critical mineral and rare earths that you won't know what to do with them."

"They will be worth about $2," Mr. Trump told reporters later. Global mining industry experts gathered at a conference inSydney on Tuesday welcomed the news, which they said would open up investment opportunities, but they were sceptical of Mr. Trump's time horizon.

"The time frame for various projects to be ready even for2027 would be heroic, and unachievable in the case of many projects," Barrenjoey analyst Dan Morgan told Reuters.

Treasure hunt: Lynas Rare Earths Ltd.'s rare earths mine located at Mount Weld in Western Australia. AFP

"In general in the rare earths industry nothing can happen quickly. I don't think we are going to be swamped with supply-growth and there's no way we will be swamped in a year. We might have supply growth in 5-7 years," he said. China accounts for 90% of the world's refining capacity forrare earths which have crucial uses in sectors such as clean energy, defence and automobiles. In a note on Monday flagging risks of supply disruptions, Goldman Sachs noted China also controls 69% of global rare earth mining, and 98% of magnet manufacturing.

While rare earths are common in the Earth's crust, China has mastered the technically difficult and environmentally-harmful refining process, comparatively cheaply. With trade tensions and security concerns rising, theU.S. and its Western allies have been looking to loosen China's grip. In April and May, Beijing squeezed global automakers with export curbs on a range of rare earths items and related magnets, and earlier this month expanded its export controls.

Benchmark prices in China for the most popular type of processed rare earths, NdPr oxide rallied by 40%to $88 a kilogram in August, after several years of weakness. They have since tailed back to $71, but western world developers are calling for governments to support a higher floor price that will enable them to build production.

No further price drop

It's unrealistic to expect prices to drop further and the market to be swamped with supply in the short term, said DylanKelly, head analyst at fund Terra Capital. "Prices right now aren't necessarily reflective of a market dynamic that can see prices fall any further," Kelly said,adding that Monday's announcement had increased the investment allure of Australian projects.

"There's lot out there to sink our teeth into that could really shift the gear on a number of different projects for us."

Boost to miners

However, there were some clear winners from the announcement.

The U.S. Export-Import Bank (EXIM) sent seven Letters of Interest (LOIs) totalling more than $2.2 billion to miners in Australia, including Arafura Rare Earths. Arafura CEO Daryl Cuzzubbo said earlier this month it needs $800 million in equity funding to develop its Nolansproject in Western Australia, and he expected about 60% of that would come from cornerstone investors by the end of the year.

"It's good for us, and it's good for our industry counterparts," said Arafura CFO Peter Sherrington.

GS Paper Mapping:

- **GS Paper 2 – International Relations (Geopolitics of Critical Minerals, U.S.–China Rivalry, Indo-Pacific Strategy)**
- **GS Paper 3 – Economy / Science & Technology (Strategic Minerals, Supply Chain Security,**

Energy Transition)
- **Essay Paper – "Geopolitics of Resources in a Multipolar World"**

English Summary:
Context:
The United States and Australia have signed a **$3 billion critical minerals partnership** to diversify global supply chains and reduce dependence on **China**, which currently dominates the global **rare earth and magnet market**.
Key Points:
1. **The Agreement:**
    - Signed on **Monday**, the pact includes **$3 billion** in joint funding for **mining, processing, and financing** of critical minerals projects.
    - The U.S. will invest to unlock deposits worth **$53 billion** in Australia.
    - The deal also involves **price floor support** for critical minerals to stabilize the market and encourage investment.
2. **Objective:**
    - Reduce Western dependence on **China**, which currently controls **69% of global rare earth mining** and **98% of magnet manufacturing capacity**.
    - Support global clean energy, defense, and high-tech manufacturing sectors.
3. **Challenges & Limitations:**
    - Experts argue that **China's dominance cannot be challenged quickly** — its mastery of the **refining process** (complex, costly, and environmentally hazardous) gives it a strong lead.
    - Supply chain shifts may take **5–7 years** to show results.
    - Mining experts remain skeptical about immediate market impacts, citing **long project timelines and funding delays**.
4. **Market Impact:**
    - Despite the announcement, **rare earth prices remain volatile**.
    - **China's export restrictions** earlier this year tightened global supply, driving up NdPr oxide prices by 40%.
    - The new U.S.–Australia pact may prevent further price drops but is **unlikely to disrupt China's dominance soon**.
5. **Boost to Australian Miners:**
    - The **U.S. Export-Import (EXIM) Bank** issued **Letters of Interest (LOIs)** worth **$2.2 billion** to Australian miners, including **Arafura Rare Earths Ltd.**
    - These funds will support projects like **Nolans Project in Western Australia**, crucial for supplying materials for **EV batteries, defense, and renewable energy technologies**.

Conclusion:
While the U.S.–Australia critical minerals partnership is a **strategic move to counter China's resource monopoly**, experts note that **China's entrenched refining capabilities and market control** will persist in the short term. The deal is a step toward **building resilient supply chains**, but **decoupling from China will take years**.

हिंदी सारांश:
प्रसंग:
संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका और ऑस्ट्रेलिया ने **$3 बिलियन के समझौते** पर हस्ताक्षर किए हैं ताकि **दुर्लभ खनिजों (Rare Earths)** की वैश्विक आपूर्ति श्रृंखला को **चीन पर निर्भरता से मुक्त** किया जा सके। यह समझौता स्वच्छ ऊर्जा और रक्षा उद्योगों के लिए अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण माना जा रहा है।
मुख्य बिंदु:
1. **समझौते के प्रमुख तत्व:**
    - अमेरिका और ऑस्ट्रेलिया **खनन, प्रसंस्करण और वित्तपोषण परियोजनाओं** में $3 बिलियन का निवेश करेंगे।
    - इससे ऑस्ट्रेलिया में लगभग **$53 बिलियन मूल्य के खनिज भंडार** को खोला जाएगा।
    - इसमें **कीमत का न्यूनतम स्तर (Price Floor)** तय करने का प्रस्ताव भी है ताकि निवेशक सुरक्षित रहें।

2. **उद्देश्य:**
    - पश्चिमी देशों की चीन पर निर्भरता को कम करना।
    - **चीन वर्तमान में 69% वैश्विक खनन** और **98% मैग्नेट उत्पादन** पर नियंत्रण रखता है।
    - स्वच्छ ऊर्जा, रक्षा, इलेक्ट्रॉनिक्स और ऑटोमोबाइल उद्योगों के लिए आवश्यक खनिजों की वैकल्पिक आपूर्ति सुनिश्चित करना।
3. **चुनौतियाँ:**
    - विशेषज्ञों का कहना है कि चीन को जल्द चुनौती देना संभव नहीं है क्योंकि उसने **रेयर अर्थ रिफाइनिंग तकनीक** में दशकों की बढ़त हासिल कर ली है।
    - उत्पादन बढ़ाने में **5 से 7 वर्ष** लग सकते हैं।
    - बाजार में स्थिरता आने में समय लगेगा क्योंकि चीन की **एक्सपोर्ट नीति और दाम नियंत्रण** अभी भी प्रभावी हैं।
4. **बाजार प्रभाव:**
    - चीन के निर्यात प्रतिबंधों के कारण **NdPr ऑक्साइड की कीमतें 40% बढ़ीं**।
    - अमेरिका-ऑस्ट्रेलिया समझौता अल्पकाल में **कीमतों में गिरावट रोकने** में मदद कर सकता है, लेकिन **चीन की पकड़ कमजोर नहीं होगी**।
5. **ऑस्ट्रेलियाई कंपनियों को लाभ:**
    - **U.S. Export-Import Bank (EXIM)** ने **$2.2 बिलियन के निवेश प्रस्ताव** जारी किए हैं।
    - यह धनराशि **Arafura Rare Earths** जैसी कंपनियों को दी जाएगी, जो **Western Australia के Nolans Project** पर काम कर रही हैं।
    - इन परियोजनाओं का उपयोग **ईवी बैटरियों, रक्षा और नवीकरणीय ऊर्जा तकनीकों** में होगा।

निष्कर्ष:
यह समझौता **चीन की खनिज प्रभुत्व नीति के खिलाफ एक रणनीतिक कदम** है, परंतु विशेषज्ञों का मानना है कि **चीन की रिफाइनिंग और बाज़ार क्षमता** के कारण उसका प्रभुत्व निकट भविष्य में समाप्त नहीं होगा।
यह पहल **दीर्घकालीन आपूर्ति श्रृंखला सुरक्षा** की दिशा में एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रयास है।

Exam Relevance:
- **UPSC GS Paper 2:** India and global trade systems, U.S.–China rivalry, mineral diplomacy.
- **GS Paper 3:** Rare Earths, Strategic Minerals, Clean Energy Transition, Supply Chain Resilience.
- **Essay Paper:** *“Critical Minerals: The New Oil of 21st Century Geopolitics.”*
- **BPSC/JPSC:** Global resource politics and India’s strategic mineral dependency.

Modi congratulates new Japan PM, says ties vital to promote Indo-Pacific peace

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Ties between India and Japan are "vital" for regional and global peace, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, congratulating Japan's newly elected Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Tuesday. Officials said the two leaders are expected to speak over the telephone in the next few days, and are likely to meet as early as this weekend, on the sidelines of the upcoming Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

Mr. Modi is expected to travel for the summits, although the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has not made an announcement yet.

In a message on social media, Mr. Modi said he looked forward to working closely with Ms. Takaichi to further strengthen the India-Japan 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership'.

"Our deepening ties are vital for peace, stability, and prosperity across the Indo-Pacific and beyond," Mr. Modi added.

New horizons: Sanae Takaichi, centre, arrives at the Prime Minister's office in Tokyo on Tuesday. AP

Agreements inked

The change in government in Japan comes just weeks after Mr. Modi visited Tokyo to hold the 15th India-Japan summit with then-Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on August 29. The two sides had signed a number of agreements including an Economic Security Partnership, including cooperation on building critical mineral industry capacity, and an upgraded Strategic Partnership. Experts say Ms. Takaichi is expected to continue the upward trend in India-Japan ties, and strengthen them further.

"Ms. Takaichi is a protegee of former PM Shinzo Abe, whose tenure in office (2012-2020) is seen as the golden period for India-Japan ties," former Ambassador to Japan Deepa Wadhwa told *The Hindu*. "As a result, she will likely continue to focus on the Indo-Pacific as Mr. Abe did, and we can expect her to be more proactive about the Quad engagement as well," Ms. Wadhwa added.

GS Paper: *GS II – International Relations / Indo-Pacific*
English:
PM Modi called Indo-Japan ties vital for Indo-Pacific peace; both sides to deepen Strategic & Global Partnership. Ms Takaichi, a protégé of Shinzo Abe, is expected to continue strong India-Japan cooperation in QUAD and critical minerals.
हिंदी:
पीएम मोदी ने जापान की नई प्रधानमंत्री साने ताकाइची को बधाई दी और कहा कि भारत-जापान संबंध इंडो-पैसिफिक शांति के लिए महत्वपूर्ण हैं।

Tamil Nadu govt. seeks to amend rules to allow women in 'dangerous' factory jobs

Dennis S. Jesudasan
CHENNAI

The State government has proposed to amend the Tamil Nadu Factories Rules, 1950, to allow women in about 20 operations listed as 'dangerous' and from which they were prohibited from being employed so far.

The government also proposes to amend rules to obtain written consent from women workers who are interested to work night shifts.

A notification of the draft amendments to the Tamil Nadu Factories Rules was issued by the Labour Welfare and Skill Development Department last month.

More opportunities: The works in which women will be allowed include electrolytic process, glass manufacture, and manufacture and treatment of lead and certain compounds of lead. FILE PHOTO

Objections, if any, should be sent to the government within 45 days of the notification, which was issued on September 9 this year.

However, the State government seeks to amend the rules to prohibit pregnant women workers in the works/processes listed under 'dangerous operations'. The operations in which women will be allowed include electrolytic process, glass manufacture, and manufacture and treatment of lead and certain compounds of lead.

GS Paper: *GS II – Social Justice / Labour Reforms*

English:
Draft amendments to the Factories Rules will permit women in 20 hazardous operations like electrolytic and glass processes, with written consent for night shifts but prohibition for pregnant women.
हिंदी:
तमिलनाडु सरकार अब महिलाओं को 'खतरनाक' कारखानों में काम करने की अनुमति देगी। गर्भवती महिलाओं को रोक होगी, रात्रि शिफ्ट के लिए लिखित सहमति लेनी होगी।