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SPECIAL FOR UPSC & GPSC EXAMINATION

DATE : 15-07-25



The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Tuesday, 15 July, 2025

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Retail and wholesale inflation in India showed a significant downward trend in June 2025, driven primarily by a sustained decline in food prices and falling global crude oil rates. This reflects macroeconomic stability and effective supply-side management.

Inflation continues to cool as food prices, crude rates dip

Retail inflation at a 77-month low of 2.1% in June as food inflation falls for the eighth consecutive month; wholesale inflation eases after 20 months aided by drop in crude oil prices; food inflation likely to remain contained going forward, says expert

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

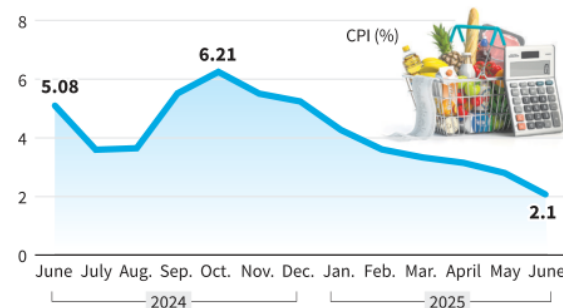
Inflation continued to cool in June with retail inflation coming in at a 77-month low of 2.1% and wholesale inflation registering a contraction after 20 months. In both cases, easing food prices were a major driver of falling inflation, while the drop in crude oil prices further pushed wholesale inflation down.

According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for June released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Monday, the last time the growth in the index was lower was in January 2019.

The -0.13% reading in the Wholesale Price Index

Downward trend

Retail inflation eased to 2.1% in June, down from 2.82% in May. This is also the lowest year-on-year inflation since January 2019



(WPI), released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, was last lower in October 2023.

Within the CPI, the food and beverages category was the only main one to have seen a contraction, of 0.2%, in June. This is com-

pared with inflation of 8.4% in June 2024. This is the eighth consecutive month of easing food inflation.

Looking ahead

"In the food basket, there was deflation in key items

such as vegetables, pulses, spices, and meat," Rajani Sinha, Chief Economist at CareEdge Ratings, said.

"Looking ahead, food inflation is likely to remain contained, supported by healthy agricultural activity and a favourable base," Ms. Sinha said.

In the fuel and light category of the CPI, inflation eased to a three-month low of 2.55% in June, down from 2.8% in May. What further emphasises the slow growth in retail fuel prices is that the relatively low inflation rate in June came on the back of an even lower base of -3.6% in June 2024.

While inflation in the *paan*, tobacco, and intoxicants category remained flat at 2.4%, inflation in the housing segment inched

up to 3.24% in June from 3.16% the previous month.

Dropping crude rates

In the WPI, the food articles category saw prices contract by 3.75% in June 2025, down from 11.1% inflation in June last year. The overall food group in the WPI, which looks at food in the primary articles category as well as in the manufactured products category, contracted 0.3% in June.

The other category that witnessed a significant easing in wholesale prices was the crude petroleum and natural gas category. Prices contracted 12.3% in June, the 10th consecutive month of contractions, of which the last three have been double-digit contractions.

Key Data Points:

- **Retail inflation (CPI):** Fell to 2.1%, a 77-month low
- **Wholesale inflation (WPI):** Contracted by 0.13%, the first negative reading in 20 months
- **Food Inflation (CPI):** Declined for eighth consecutive month, with deflation in vegetables, pulses, spices, and meat
- **WPI Food Articles:** Prices contracted by 3.75%, down from 11.1% a year ago
- **Crude Petroleum & Natural Gas (WPI):** Prices fell by 12.3%, tenth month of decline

Key Analysis:

1. Macroeconomic Significance:

- The easing of both CPI and WPI indicates improved price stability, enhancing purchasing power and aiding monetary policy flexibility.
- A sustained moderation in inflation supports economic growth, particularly for lower-income households who are most affected by high food prices.

2. Drivers of Cooling Inflation:

- Supply-side factors: Good agricultural output, deflation in key food categories
- Global factors: Fall in crude oil prices, reducing cost pressures on manufacturing and transport
- Statistical base effect: A high inflation base from the previous year helps exaggerate current declines

3. Implications for Policy:

- May allow the RBI to maintain or adopt a more accommodative monetary stance
- Government can focus on growth-oriented spending without worrying about overheating the economy
- Highlights importance of buffer stock management, logistics, and import policy in food inflation control

Conclusion:

The consistent fall in inflation, especially driven by food and fuel, marks a positive turn for India's macroeconomic environment. However, vigilance is needed as future risks (like climate shocks or geopolitical instability) could reverse these gains. Policy should remain data-driven and responsive to both domestic and global cues.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Retail and wholesale inflation rates have reached multi-year lows due to easing food and crude oil prices. Discuss the factors contributing to this trend and its implications for the Indian economy. **(250 words)**

Kaziranga National Park, renowned for its one-horned rhinoceroses, has now gained recognition for hosting a high diversity of grassland bird species. A first-of-its-kind bird survey recorded 43 grassland species, including several threatened ones, marking a new milestone in avian conservation.

Famous for its rhinos, Kaziranga records high diversity of grassland birds in survey

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Researchers have found a great diversity of grassland bird species in the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

In the first such survey of avians conducted between March 18 and May 25, a team of forest officials, bird experts, scientists, and conservationists recorded 43 grassland species across Kaziranga's three wildlife divisions. The survey report was released on Monday, marking a milestone in the documentation and protection of grassland-dependent bird species in the Brahmaputra floodplains.

They included the critically endangered Bengal florican, the endangered Finn's weaver, and the



A colony of Finn's weaver in the Kohora Range of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

swamp grass babbler. Among the remaining 40 species, six were in the vulnerable category – the black-breasted parrotbill, marsh babbler, swamp francolin, Jerdon's babbler, slender-billed babbler, and bristled grassbird.

"A highlight of this survey is that the Finn's weaver,

locally known as *tukura chorai*, is breeding successfully. This remarkable bird, a master nest-builder atop trees, is a vital indicator of grassland health," Assam's Environment Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said while releasing the report. The 1,174 sq. km Kaziranga is a mix of grasslands,

forestlands, and wetlands.

"The study is significant because wet grasslands are not very well surveyed in India. Kaziranga's grassland bird diversity can, thus, be compared in terms of species richness with the dry grasslands of Gujarat and Rajasthan," the national park's director, Sonali Ghosh, said.

New recording tool

A key highlight of the study was the deployment of passive acoustic recorders, enabling non-invasive and continuous monitoring even in inaccessible or high-risk areas. This approach significantly improved species detection, especially of shy and cryptic birds, enhancing the overall accuracy and depth of the findings.

Key Findings:

- 43 grassland bird species recorded between March 18 and May 25
- **Critically endangered species:** Bengal florican
- **Endangered species:** Finn's weaver (successfully breeding)
- **Vulnerable species (6):** Black-breasted parrotbill, marsh babbler, swamp francolin, Jerdon's babbler, slender-billed babbler, bristled grassbird
- Habitat: Kaziranga's mosaic of grasslands, wetlands, and forests (1,174 sq. km)

Significance for Mains

1. Biodiversity Conservation:

- Highlights the ecological richness of Kaziranga beyond flagship species like the rhino and tiger
- Emphasises importance of wet grasslands, which are understudied compared to dry grasslands

2. Conservation of Threatened Species:

- Presence of critically endangered and vulnerable birds makes Kaziranga crucial for their survival
- Finn's weaver's successful breeding indicates healthy habitat conditions

3. Use of Technology in Conservation:

- Use of passive acoustic recorders for non-invasive, continuous monitoring
- Helps detect shy and cryptic species, improving the accuracy of surveys

4. Policy and Management Implications:

- Supports the need for integrated landscape management that includes lesser-known ecosystems
- Calls for replicating such surveys in other grassland-rich regions of India (e.g., Terai, Chambal, Gujarat)

Conclusion:

Kaziranga's emergence as a hotspot for grassland birds reaffirms the ecological importance of India's wet grassland ecosystems. Systematic documentation, use of modern tools, and local conservation initiatives must be scaled up to ensure the survival of these avian species and their habitats.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Kaziranga National Park, known for its megafauna, has now emerged as a vital habitat for threatened grassland bird species. Discuss the ecological significance of such findings and the role of modern tools in biodiversity conservation. **(250 Words)**

The Supreme Court has expressed concern over the rising misuse of the right to free speech, particularly on social media platforms. The court underlined the importance of reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2) and emphasized self-restraint by citizens to preserve constitutional values like fraternity and secularism.

Abuse of right to free speech increasing on social media, says SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday said the right to free speech was increasingly being abused, especially on social media, and called for self-restraint and regulation.

A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and K.V. Viswanathan said the right to freedom of speech and expression carried with it reasonable restrictions. Using free speech to instigate divisive tendencies, at least on social media, needed to be curbed.

Calls for framework

The court mulled framing guidelines to regulate abusive and divisive social media posts. "We are not speaking about censorship. But in the interest of fraternity, secularism and dignity of individuals... We will have to go into this beyond this petition," the Bench said.

The court was hearing a petition filed by Kolkata resident Wazahat Khan seeking the consolidation of the FIRs registered in different States over his social media posts. The FIRs against Mr. Khan were registered soon after his complaint led to the arrest of social media influencer Sharmistha Pannoli over her social media posts.



The top court also mulled framing guidelines to regulate abusive content. FILE PHOTO

Expressing concern about vitriolic social media engagements, Justice Viswanathan said only greater fraternity among citizens would reduce mutual hatred.

"If citizens want to enjoy the fundamental right of speech and expression, it should be with reasonable restrictions. There must be self-restraint and regulation," Justice Nagarathna said.

The Bench said the State had its own limitations in curbing free speech to avoid disharmony. "Why can't citizens regulate themselves? Citizens must know the value of freedom of speech and expression.... If they don't, the State will have to step in...nobody wants the State to step in," Justice Nagarathna remarked.

The court posted the case after four weeks.

Key Issues Raised by the Supreme Court:

- Increasing abusive and divisive content on social media
- Right to freedom of speech (Article 19(1)(a)) is not absolute and is subject to reasonable restrictions

- Fraternity and dignity of individuals are being compromised in the name of free speech
- Concern about mutual hatred being spread through online platforms
- Court is considering framing guidelines to regulate such misuse (not censorship)

Case Background:

- Petition by Wazahat Khan seeking clubbing of FIRs filed in multiple states for his social media posts
- His complaint had led to the arrest of influencer Sharmistha Panoli, triggering retaliatory FIRs

Relevance for UPSC

1. Constitutional Balance:

- Article 19(1)(a): Guarantees freedom of speech and expression
- Article 19(2): Allows reasonable restrictions in the interest of sovereignty, public order, decency, morality, etc.
- The case reflects the ongoing tension between liberty and responsibility

2. Role of Judiciary:

- Court acting as a guardian of constitutional morality
- Open to creating a framework or guidelines for content regulation without veering into censorship

3. Governance Challenge in Digital Age:

- Need for digital ethics, self-regulation, and platform accountability
- Rise of hate speech, fake news, and trolling has challenged democratic discourse

4. Civic Responsibility:

- Emphasis on citizen awareness and self-discipline in using online platforms
- Reinforces importance of constitutional values such as fraternity and dignity

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's observations mark a critical juncture in India's debate on free speech in the digital age. While upholding fundamental rights, the judiciary is also mindful of their potential misuse. A balanced approach, rooted in self-regulation, civic responsibility, and constitutional safeguards, is the need of the hour.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The right to free speech is not absolute." In light of recent Supreme Court observations, critically examine the need for reasonable restrictions on freedom of speech in the digital age. **(250 words)**

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has defended its latest decision to exempt most coal-based thermal power plants from installing flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) units, citing scientific rationale, declining sulphur dioxide (SO₂) levels, and economic efficiency.

Centre defends new coal plant rules, calls them cost-effective

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Environment and Forests said in a note on Monday that its recent decision to exempt a majority of thermal power plants from installing flue gas desulphurisation (FGD) units was a “scientifically justified shift towards more targeted, cost-effective and climate-coherent regulation” and not a rollback of environmental safeguards.

FGD units are used to cut sulphur dioxide emissions from coal plants and in 2015, the Ministry had made the systems mandatory for all thermal plants. However, only 8% of India’s roughly 180 coal plants have done so. The other plants have received multiple extensions from the Ministry for reasons such as limited availability of these units and high cost. The latest order, ho-



Revised norms: Under the new rules, only about 11% of India’s 600 thermal power units have to install FGD systems. R.V. MOORTHY

wever, says only a minority of plants – 22% – located in major cities with a history of poor air quality need to install these units.

The revised policy, its note says, reflects India’s “...declining ambient sulphur dioxide levels, the limited role of sulphur dioxide levels in driving PM2.5 health impacts and... the disproportionate resource and environmental costs of indiscriminate FGD man-

dates”. The Ministry’s note was in response to “media reports”.

According to the Ministry, India’s annual sulphur dioxide concentration standard of 50 microgram/cubic metre is more stringent than Japan (66), European Union (52.4) and Australia (66). A 2023 measurement in 492 cities, the Ministry said, found that all but two – Dehradun and Kolar – were com-

pliant. Indian coal was naturally low in sulphur (0.5% of weight) but had high ash content and therefore led to low sulphur dioxide concentrations. Studies had shown that cities with thermal power plants that have FGD technology and those without FGD technology didn’t show any “significant difference” in sulphur dioxide concentrations, it said.

“Eliminating all sulphur dioxide emissions would only result in a marginal improvement of particulate matter concentrations... At ₹1.2 crore per MW, the capital expense of installing FGD would be ₹2.54 lakh crore and would only bring about a marginal benefit,” it said.

Under new rules, only about 11% of India’s 600 thermal power units – a single plant can have multiple units – have to mandatorily install FGD systems.

Key Highlights:

- **FGD units:** Devices that reduce sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions, mandated since 2015

- **Revised rule:** Only 11% of 600 thermal units are now required to install FGD — primarily those in high-pollution urban areas
- **Previous status:** Only 8% of India's 180 thermal plants had FGD installed after repeated delays
- **Cost burden:** ₹1.2 crore per MW → Total cost = ₹2.54 lakh crore for all plants
- **Scientific rationale:**
 - Indian coal has low sulphur (0.5%), high ash
 - SO₂ levels declining nationwide
 - FGD installation found to have limited impact on PM_{2.5} reduction
- SO₂ standards in India (50 µg/m³) are stricter than Japan (66), EU (52.4), and Australia (66)
- **2023 survey:** Out of 492 cities, only Dehradun and Kolar breached SO₂ norms

Relevance for UPSC

1. Environment vs Economy Debate:

- Balancing air quality norms with economic costs of compliance
- Highlights regulatory pragmatism vs environmental purism
- Case study of cost-benefit analysis in environmental policymaking

2. Targeted Regulation:

- Reflects a shift from blanket mandates to region-specific strategies
- Emphasis on scientific evidence-based regulation
- Prioritising critical urban areas with poor air quality

3. Technological and Financial Feasibility:

- FGD units are expensive, capital-intensive
- Limited domestic capacity for quick-scale deployment
- Raises concerns on just transition and green investment planning

4. Long-term Concerns:

- Potential health risks due to continued SO₂ emissions
- May contradict India's climate and air pollution goals, including those under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)
- Could draw criticism from environmentalists and global observers

Conclusion:

While the Centre's move seeks to be economically rational and targeted, it risks being seen as a relaxation of environmental safeguards. Going forward, India must strive for a balanced energy transition, investing in cleaner technologies while ensuring public health and environmental integrity are not compromised.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Despite a 2015 mandate, only a small percentage of India's coal plants have installed FGD units. Discuss the challenges in implementing environmental norms in India's thermal power sector. (250 Words)

Page 09:GS 2 : Social Justice

Despite being illegal under the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) and punishable under Section 304B of IPC, dowry-related deaths continue to persist across India. The recent spate of cases has again exposed the alarming scale of the issue and the systemic inefficiencies in ensuring justice for the victims.

Dowry deaths in India: Long investigations, rare convictions

A spate of dowry-related deaths in the last two months has put the spotlight back on the illegal practice

DATA POINT

Devyanshi Bihani
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

In the last three months, a string of dowry-related deaths have been reported from across India. In Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh, a woman died after a hot iron was pressed against parts of her body. Her family claimed that she had been regularly assaulted for dowry. Another woman from Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit was burned alive allegedly after she and her family did not meet the repeated demands of her husband and his family for dowry. In Chandigarh, a young bride died by suicide allegedly due to dowry harassment. In Tamil Nadu, near Ponneri, a woman died by suicide just four days after her wedding, allegedly due to harassment from her in-laws for dowry. Another woman from Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, took her life within two months of marriage for the same reason.

These cases show that the illegal practice of seeking dowry continues to thrive in India. Every year, in the 2017-2022 period, an average of 7,000 cases of dowry deaths were reported across the country, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. It is important to note that these were only reported cases. As several more go unreported, the NCRB data only gives us a conservative estimate.

The numbers are alarming. And when we look closely at the data, we find that investigations into these deaths were slow and convictions were few and far between.

Of the 7,000 dowry deaths reported every year on average, only around 4,500 were charge-sheeted by the police. The rest were either stuck at various stages of investigation or disposed off for various reasons including 'case true but insufficient evidence', 'false case', and 'complaint was based on a misunderstanding or incor-

rect information'. Some cases were stuck in the investigation stage for more than six months. Of the nearly 3,000 dowry death cases pending investigation at the end of 2022, 67% were stuck in that stage for over six months (Chart 1).

There were also inordinate delays in filing the charge-sheet. Of the more than 6,000 dowry death cases for which charge-sheets were filed in 2022, 70% were filed following investigations that lasted for over two months (Chart 2).

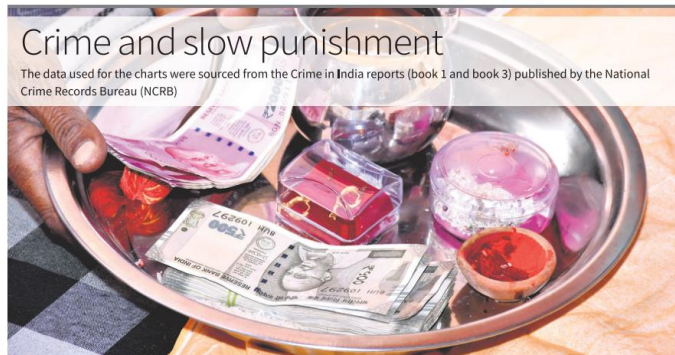
Even when investigations were done, charge-sheets were filed, and cases reached the court, only a few resulted in convictions. The rest got stuck in court procedures or were disposed off by the courts because they were withdrawn, or compromised, or ended in a plea bargain. In some cases, the accused were acquitted due to lack of evidence.

Of the average of 6,500 cases sent for trial every year, only around 100 resulted in convictions. Over 90% of the rest remained pending in court at various stages. If we look at the rest, some ended in acquittals, some cases were discharged before trial, and some were quashed.

Dowry was the main motive behind over 6,100 murders across India in the 2017-2022 period. Over 60% of these murders were recorded in West Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar. Cases from these three States and Jharkhand, and those in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Rajasthan constituted 80% of all the dowry death cases filed in the 2017-2022 period (Map 3).

Among the 19 cities in India for which data was available, 30% of all the dowry deaths cases were filed in Delhi in that period, the highest for any city (Chart 4). Delhi was followed by Kanpur, Bengaluru, Lucknow, and Patna.

With inputs from Milan Cijo who is interning with The Hindu Data Team



Crime and slow punishment

The data used for the charts was sourced from the Crime in India reports (book 1 and book 3) published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

Chart 1: The share of dowry death cases pending investigation by the end of 2022, by duration

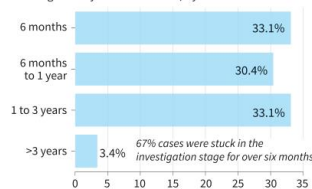


Chart 2: The time taken to file charge-sheets for the share of dowry death cases for which charge-sheets were filed in 2022



Map 3: The State-wise share of dowry death cases filed in the 2017-2022 period

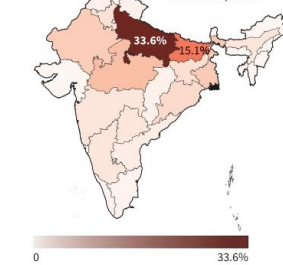
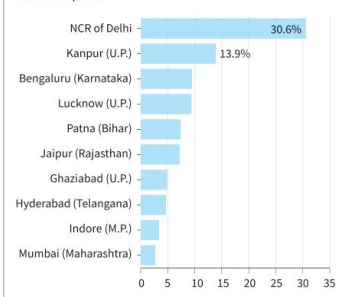


Chart 4: The city-wise share of dowry death cases filed in the 2017-2022 period



Key Data Highlights (NCRB 2017–2022):

- **Average Dowry Deaths Reported Per Year:** ~7,000
- **Charge-sheeting Rate:** ~4,500 per year → ~35% not charge-sheeted
- **Delayed Investigations:**
 - 67% pending for over 6 months
 - 70% of charge-sheets filed after 2 months
- **Convictions:**
 - Only ~100 convictions per year out of ~6,500 trials
 - <2% conviction rate
- **Geographic Trends:**
 - **Top states:** UP, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, MP, Rajasthan, Haryana
 - **Top city:** Delhi (30% of urban cases)

Issues Highlighted

1. Deep-rooted Social Evil:

- Despite criminalisation, social acceptance and normalization of dowry demands continue, especially post-marriage.
- Reflects gender-based structural violence and failure of societal reform.

2. Policing & Investigation Challenges:

- Delays in charge-sheets and pending investigations weaken the evidence trail.
- Lack of sensitivity among police, poor training in handling domestic violence and gender-based crimes.

3. Judicial Backlog & Procedural Delays:

- Over 90% cases remain pending in courts for years.
- Low conviction rate due to acquittals, plea bargains, and weak evidence.

4. Underreporting & Social Pressure:

- Many deaths labeled as accidents or suicides rather than dowry-related.
- Victims' families often face threats, stigma, or compromise pressure from the in-laws.

Policy & Reform Suggestions:

1. Police & Judicial Reforms:

- Fast-track courts for dowry and domestic violence cases
- Time-bound investigation and charge-sheeting protocol

2. Social Awareness Campaigns:

- Community-level mobilization, especially in rural belts
- School-level education on gender equality and women's rights

3. Victim Protection & Compensation Schemes:

- Strengthen witness protection programs
- Provide legal aid, psychological counselling, and financial support to survivors and families

4. Digital Case Monitoring:

- Use technology for real-time tracking of dowry-related FIRs and court proceedings

Conclusion:

The grim reality of dowry deaths in 21st-century India reveals both a societal failure to eliminate a regressive practice and institutional apathy in delivering justice. Effective legal implementation must be accompanied by deep-rooted social change, starting with education, empowerment, and accountability.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The low conviction rate in dowry death cases reflects systemic failure in India's criminal justice system. Examine the institutional challenges in dealing with crimes against women and suggest judicial and policing reforms. **(250 words)**

Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

Women, STEM careers and a more receptive industry

Every year on July 15, as we observe World Youth Skills Day, we are reminded that skills development is fundamental to reducing unemployment and promoting decent work. India faces a critical paradox: 43% of India's STEM graduates are women, the highest proportion among major economies globally. Yet, women represent only 27% of the STEM workforce, limiting women's access to career opportunities offered by the STEM sector.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24, India's overall female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) has risen to 41.7%, a meaningful jump after years of stagnation. However, the increase is sharper for rural women (47.6%) than in urban areas (25.4%), reflecting barriers in formal employment, workplace safety, and societal expectations. In STEM, the paradox is more pronounced. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2021), only 31.5% of researchers worldwide are women. This education-employment gap reflects systemic barriers that industry is uniquely positioned to address. The economic stakes are clear. According to estimates by the McKinsey Global Institute, enabling 68 million more women to participate in India's workforce could boost India's GDP by up to \$700 billion by 2025. Similarly, the World Bank suggests that achieving a 50% female workforce participation rate could elevate GDP growth by 1%.

Government vision and STEM skilling

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 paved the way for higher retention and opportunities in the fields of STEM. The nodal Ministry of Education (MoE) has integrated education with skills development and life skills training. The Government's renewed focus on revitalising Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and expanding



Kanta Singh

is the Country Representative, a.i. at UN Women India and is a part of Team UN in India



Antara Lahiri

is the Director, Micron Foundation, Asia and Europe. Micron Technology and the Micron Foundation focus on expanding access to STEM education and pathways to high-tech careers of the future

World Youth Skills Day is a reminder that industry is losing out by not investing in STEM careers for India's women

vocational skilling is bringing high-quality technical education and training closer to villages and small towns, ensuring broader access for youth across rural India.

This progress aligns with the Prime Minister's vision of Viksit Bharat (or developed India), where women's economic mobility forms the cornerstone of inclusive development. The share of the gender budget in the total national Budget has increased from 6.8% in 2024-25 to 8.8% in 2025-26 with ₹4.49 lakh crore in allocation toward gender-specific programmes.

Further, the Union Budget 2025-26 introduced term loans for women entrepreneurs, new National Skill Training Institutes, and investments in technology-driven skilling. India's policy framework, from Skill India to Digital India, and from 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' to PM Vishwakarma Yojana, has the right intent. However, government policy alone cannot bridge the education-employment gap. Industry must transform from passive recruiter to active enabler of women's career transitions.

Industry as the missing link

Industry plays a critical role in bridging the gap between skilling and employment, especially for women. Persistent social norms, such as the belief that "mechanical means masculine" or that "coding isn't for girls", continue to create invisible barriers for skilled women entering technical fields. These stereotypes are well-documented in multiple studies, including those by the World Bank and UNESCO, which highlight how gendered perceptions limit women's participation in STEM and technical trades. Evidence also shows that women do not leave STEM fields due to a lack of ability, but instead because workplaces are often unwelcoming, families lack awareness of career

opportunities, and roles remain deeply gendered. Addressing these perceptions, alongside ensuring workplace safety, equitable pay, and support for career transitions related to marriage, childbirth, and caregiving, is key to unlocking the full potential of the workforce.

India's private sector is increasingly stepping up, with many companies championing structured mentoring programmes, industry-linked training initiatives and partnerships with educational institutions to create direct pathways from classrooms to careers. One such initiative is the UN Women's WeSTEM programme, being implemented in collaboration with the Governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, and supported by the Micron Foundation. This programme provides access to skills and bridges the talent gap. By engaging families and community leaders, conducting workplace safety sessions, and introducing women role models in classrooms, the programme recognises that skill-building requires a shift in mindsets to be effective.

A blueprint for industry leadership

Industry partnerships with educational institutions, mentorship networks linking professionals with students, and workplace policies that accommodate life transitions and ensure safety, can bridge the education-employment gap. The question is not whether India can afford to invest in women's STEM careers. It is whether industry can afford not to. By equipping women and girls with the skills and training needed to succeed in STEM fields, we can create a more inclusive and robust society. When a woman earns, her voice and impact echoes across dinner tables, shop floors, policy rooms and entire industries. And in that voice lies the blueprint of a future ready India.

Paper 02 Social Justice

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Despite being global leaders in STEM education, Indian women remain underrepresented in the STEM workforce." Examine the reasons for this paradox. What policy and societal interventions are needed to address this gap? (250 words)

Context :

Despite India having the highest proportion of women STEM graduates (43%) among major economies, only 27% are part of the STEM workforce. This reflects a paradox where educational achievement does not translate into employment opportunity for women, underlining the urgent need for industry involvement and mindset shifts.

Key Data Highlights:

- **Female STEM Graduates (India):** 43%
- **Women in STEM Workforce (India):** 27%
- **Global female researchers (UNESCO, 2021):** 31.5%
- **Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR, PLFS 2023-24):**
 - **Rural:** 47.6%
 - **Urban:** 25.4%
 - **Overall:** 41.7% (a significant rise)
- **Potential economic gain:**
 - **McKinsey:** \$700 billion GDP boost by adding 68 million women workers
 - **World Bank:** 1% GDP growth increase by achieving 50% female workforce

Mains Relevance

1. Systemic Barriers in STEM Careers:

- Gender stereotypes: "Mechanical means masculine", "Coding isn't for girls"
- Workplace hostility, lack of career support during transitions (e.g., marriage, motherhood)
- Family and societal biases against women in tech-intensive roles

2. Role of Government Policy:

- **NEP 2020:** Integrated skilling and education
- **Increased Gender Budget:** From 6.8% (2024-25) to 8.8% (2025-26)
- **Schemes like:**
 - *Skill India, Digital India, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, PM Vishwakarma Yojana*
 - New Skill Training Institutes and term loans for women entrepreneurs in Budget 2025–26

3. Industry as a Change-Maker:

- Need to transition from passive recruiters to active enablers
- **Successful initiatives:**
 - UN Women's WeSTEM (in MP and Gujarat): Skilling + family & community engagement

- **Effective strategies:**

- Structured mentorship, industry-education partnerships
- Gender-sensitive HR policies, life-stage accommodations, workplace safety

4. Way Forward – A Blueprint for Industry:

- Public-private partnerships in skilling
- Create visible female role models in classrooms and companies
- Shift societal mindsets through community engagement
- Build inclusive workplaces with fair pay and supportive career policies

Conclusion:

India stands at a transformative juncture where bridging the STEM gender gap is not only a social justice issue but a strategic economic opportunity. Industry must rise to the challenge — not just for equity, but for India's innovation potential and global competitiveness. As the article rightly notes, when women earn, the economy listens.
