

# **DAILY** **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**SPECIAL FOR UPSC & GPSC EXAMINATION**

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## The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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## Page 01 : GS 2 : International Relations

The United States has imposed an additional 25% tariff on Indian imports, raising the total tariff burden to nearly 50% on several categories of goods. This move, linked partly to India's purchase of Russian oil, significantly threatens bilateral trade. With more than 55% of India's U.S.-bound shipments (\$47–48 billion) now facing severe pricing disadvantages, the development poses a major challenge to India's export competitiveness, foreign trade policy, and overall economic growth trajectory.

# India braces for impact of 50% U.S. tariffs from today

No comment from Ministry of External Affairs on any govt. plans for counter-tariffs against the U.S.

India has been pushing the Swadeshi mantra and the PM has called on citizens to buy local

55% of U.S.-bound shipments, worth \$47-48 billion, are at a disadvantage of 30% to 35%

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

The United States government is getting ready to implement the 25% additional tariffs imposed on India by U.S. President Donald Trump, which come into effect on Wednesday. On Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) uploaded a notification of the new tariffs to be published in the official register the following day.

The Indian government is pushing a Swadeshi mantra to reduce the economy's reliance on exports, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday calling upon Indians to be "vocal for local" and buy Indian goods. Indian exporters, however, are bracing themselves for a sharp

fall in business to the U.S., with early estimates predicting that more than \$47 billion worth of goods will face the 50% tariff rate. This includes the 25% tariff that Indian imports have attracted since August 7 plus an additional 25% tariff imposed as a penalty for India's import of oil from Russia.

### Exemptions given

This additional tariff will not apply to iron, steel, or aluminium products; passenger vehicles such as sedans, sport utility vehicles, crossover utility vehicles, minivans, cargo vans, and light trucks; semi-finished copper, and intensive copper derivative products, among others.

The Ministry of External Affairs did not comment on whether India is planning any counter-measures

### Tariff travails

While the Indian government is now pushing a Swadeshi mantra to reduce the economy's reliance on exports, Indian exporters are bracing themselves for a sharp fall in business with the United States of America



**Market loss:** 55% of Indian exports rendered uncompetitive compared to neighbouring countries, warns FIEO

**Sectors to be hit:** Apparel, textiles, gems

and jewellery, shrimp, carpets, and furniture

**Extent of impact:** Imports from these sectors could plunge 70%

■ India stands by its statement that these tariffs are 'unreasonable'

■ PM Narendra Modi to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping on August 30

or counter-tariffs against the United States, though a senior official said that India stands by the MEA's earlier statement calling the sanctions "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable".

The U.S. DHS notification detailed the implementation of Mr. Trump's executive order.

"To effectuate the President's Executive Order

14329 of August 6, 2025... which imposed a specified rate of duty on imports of articles that are products of India, the Secretary of Homeland Security has determined that appropriate action is needed to modify the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States (HTSUS) as set out in the Annex to this notice," the notice said.

"The duties set out in

the Annex to this document are effective with respect to products of India that are entered for consumption, or withdrawn from warehouse for consumption, on or after 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on August 27, 2025," it added.

The MEA did not comment on whether the additional tariffs will be on the agenda when Prime Minis-

ter Modi meets Chinese President Xi Jinping in Tianjin on August 30. Last week, the Chinese Ambassador to India had referred to the U.S. as a "bully", saying the Chinese government opposes the tariffs and "firmly stands with India" on the issue.

Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra, too, said the central bank "would not be found wanting" in supporting those sectors that will be adversely affected by the tariffs.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is all set to meet on September 3 to 4 to decide on a slew of rate cuts and rationalisation measures suggested by the Union government to not only ease the overall tax rate borne by consumers, but also simplify the indirect tax regime.

This consumption boost

is expected to mitigate some of the slowdown in economic growth that higher tariffs could cause.

### Worried exporters

Indian exporter bodies and trade experts, however, are projecting a substantial hit to India's exports.

According to the Federation of Indian Export Organisations president S.C. Ralhan, the development could "severely impact" India's exports to the U.S., "with approximately 55% of India's U.S.-bound shipments (worth \$47-48 billion) now exposed to pricing disadvantages of 30% to 35%, rendering them uncompetitive in comparison to competitors from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, and other South-east and South Asian countries".

## Key Analysis

### 1. Context of the Tariffs

- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has notified the new tariffs effective August 27, 2025, following President Trump's Executive Order.
- While some sectors like steel, aluminium, copper, and passenger vehicles are exempt, India's labor-intensive export segments (textiles, gems and jewellery, leather goods, chemicals, machinery, etc.) are directly impacted.
- The sanctions are partly punitive in nature, linked to India's continued oil imports from Russia despite U.S. pressure.

## 2. Implications for India

- **Trade Impact:** About 55% of India's exports to the U.S. face a 30–35% pricing disadvantage, weakening competitiveness against exporters from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines.
- **Economic Slowdown Risk:** The hit to exports could dent GDP growth and worsen India's current account deficit.
- **Employment Concerns:** Labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and leather, which employ millions, could face job losses.
- **Strategic Strain:** Adds a new stress point in India–U.S. ties, complicating strategic cooperation in defence, technology, and Indo-Pacific security.

## 3. India's Policy Response

- **Domestic push:** The government is reviving the "Vocal for Local" campaign, urging citizens to prefer Indian products.
- **GST Relief Measures:** The GST Council is scheduled to meet (Sept 3–4) to explore rate rationalisation and cuts to boost consumption and cushion exporters.
- **Monetary Support:** The RBI has assured policy support for affected sectors.
- **Diplomatic Balancing:** While MEA has termed the sanctions "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable," India is yet to announce counter-tariffs. Talks with China (Aug 30) may feature a coordinated stance against U.S. unilateralism.

## 4. Broader Implications

- **Geopolitical realignment:** China has openly criticised U.S. "bullying" and extended support to India, hinting at shifting alignments amid trade wars.
- **Global Trade Order:** These tariffs underscore rising protectionism and weakening of multilateral trade institutions like the WTO.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Push:** Could accelerate India's move towards self-reliance, diversification of export markets, and reduced overdependence on the U.S. market.

## Conclusion

The imposition of steep U.S. tariffs marks a significant setback for Indian exporters, especially in labour-intensive sectors. While domestic policy adjustments (GST rationalisation, RBI support) and the "Vocal for Local" campaign may cushion the blow, the development highlights the vulnerability of India's external sector to global trade politics. Strategically, India must both diversify export destinations and deepen multilateral alliances to resist unilateral trade sanctions. In the long run, building resilient domestic industries under the Atmanirbhar Bharat framework will be key to reducing external economic shocks and safeguarding India's growth trajectory.

**UPSC Prelims Practice Question**

**Ques:** Consider the following statements regarding recent U.S. tariffs on India:

1. The U.S. has imposed an additional 25% tariff on certain Indian goods, taking the total tariff to nearly 50%.
2. Iron, steel, aluminium, and passenger vehicles are exempted from this additional tariff.
3. The tariff imposition is partly linked to India's oil imports from Russia.

**Which of the above statements are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Ans: (d)**

**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

**Ques:** "Rising protectionism in global trade poses a serious challenge to India's growth strategy." Discuss in the context of recent U.S. tariffs on Indian goods. **(250 Words)**

The 80th Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS), through its Comprehensive Modular Survey (Education), has highlighted the critical role of government schools in India's education system. The survey underscores key trends in enrolment, household expenditure, rural-urban disparities, and the rising dependence on private coaching. These findings offer insights into both the successes and persistent challenges in achieving universal and equitable access to education, a major pillar of the Right to Education Act (2009) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

# Govt. schools account for 55.9% of total enrolments, says survey

66% of students are in public institutions in rural areas as against 30.1% in urban; private unaided schools account for 31.9% of enrolment; nearly a third of all students get private coaching, says study undertaken as part of National Sample Survey

**Maitri Porecha**  
NEW DELHI

**S**tudents enrolled in private or non-government schools across India end up paying nearly nine times more in school fees than those enrolled in government schools.

A third of all students across education Boards opt for private coaching in addition to classes in school, data collected by the Comprehensive Modular Survey (Education) for April-June 2025 as part of the 80th round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) revealed.

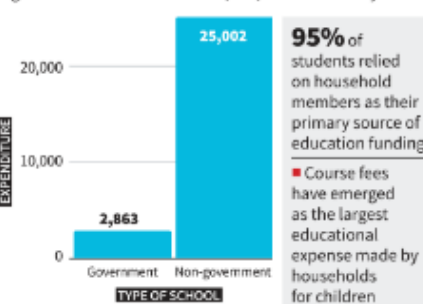
The average per-student expenditure made by households on school education during the current academic year (2025-26) in government schools is estimated at ₹2,863, while it was significantly higher at ₹25,002 in non-government schools.

Nearly a third of all students (27%) were taking or had taken private coaching during the current academic year. This trend was more common in urban areas (30.7%) than in rural



## The price of education

Households spent an average of ₹2,863 per student in government schools, while the expenditure for non-government schools was ₹25,002, this academic year



areas (25.5%).

The data focused specifically on household expenditure for currently enrolled students in school education. Data were collected from 52,085 households and 57,742 students across India through computer-assisted personal interviews.

The survey says government schools play a key role in providing education across India, accounting for 55.9% of total enrolments.

It is higher in rural areas, where two-thirds (66%) of students are en-

rolled as against 30.1% in urban areas. Private unaided (recognised) schools account for 31.9% of enrolment nationwide.

## Education expenses

Among the students who paid for school education, 95% reported that the first major source of their funding was from other household members. This trend is consistent across both rural (95.3%) and urban (94.4%) areas.

On the other hand, 1.2% of the students reported that government scholarships were their first major

source of funding for school education.

Course fees have emerged as the largest educational expense made by households for children's education.

Across all types of schools at the all-India level, the highest average expenditure per student during the current academic year was on course fees – ₹7,111 – followed by textbooks and stationery – ₹2,002.

## Rural-urban differences

Urban households pay significantly more for educa-

tion and related expenses across all categories.

Notably, the average expenditure on course fees in urban areas is estimated at ₹15,143, whereas it is ₹3,979 in rural areas.

"This trend of higher expenditure in urban areas is evident for other types of education-related expenses such as transportation, uniforms, and textbooks," the survey states.

Only 26.7% of students enrolled in government schools reported paying course fees, in contrast to 95.7% of students in non-government schools. Among different types of non-government schools, 98% students reported paying course fees in private unaided schools in urban areas. In rural areas, 25.3% of students reported paying course fees in government schools.

The primary objective of the survey was to generate national-level estimates of average expenditure on school education and private coaching during the current academic year, a press statement released by the Ministry of Statistics said.



## Key Analysis

### 1. Enrolment Trends

- Government Schools: Account for 55.9% of total enrolments nationwide.
- Rural–Urban Divide:
  - 66% of students in rural areas enrolled in government schools.
  - Only 30.1% in urban areas rely on government schools.
- Private Schools: Private unaided schools represent 31.9% of enrolments, showing a rising preference among middle-class households.

### 2. Household Expenditure

- **Government vs. Private:**
  - Govt. school expenditure per student: ₹2,863.
  - Non-government schools: ₹25,002 — nearly 9 times higher.
- Major Cost Heads: Course fees (₹7,111), textbooks & stationery (₹2,002).
- Funding Sources:
  - 95% of school expenses are borne by household members.
  - Only 1.2% students reported government scholarships as their primary source.

### 3. Private Coaching Dependence

- 27% of students (nearly one-third) take private coaching.
- Urban prevalence: 30.7%, Rural: 25.5%.
- Reflects concerns over the quality of classroom teaching and pressure of competitive exams.

### 4. Rural–Urban Disparities

- Urban households spend significantly more:
  - Course fees – Urban: ₹15,143 vs Rural: ₹3,979.
  - Similar gaps in transport, uniforms, and books.
- Indicates educational inequality between regions, raising concerns of affordability and access.

### 5. Policy Implications

- Positive Role of Government Schools: Still the backbone of education, especially in rural India.
- **Challenges:**
  - Poor quality leading to demand for private schools/coaching.
  - High private school fees increasing household financial burden.
  - Limited scholarship coverage (only 1.2% relying on it as primary source).

- **Way Forward:**

- Strengthen government schools (infrastructure, teacher quality, digital learning).
- Expand scholarships and targeted subsidies for vulnerable households.
- Regulate private coaching and ensure equitable quality in school education.
- Implement NEP 2020's vision for reducing dependence on external coaching and ensuring holistic education.

## Conclusion

The NSS data reaffirms that government schools remain central to India's education landscape, especially in rural areas. However, the stark cost disparity between government and private schools and the growing reliance on private coaching point to systemic challenges in the quality and inclusivity of education. Bridging these gaps requires a two-pronged approach: investment in public education quality and regulatory oversight of private education expenses. Only then can India move towards achieving the SDG-4 goal of inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

### UPSC Prelims Practice Question

**Ques:** According to NSS (2025), what is the approximate percentage of students enrolled in government schools in rural areas?

- (a) 30.1%
- (b) 25.5%
- (c) 66%
- (d) 55.9%

**Ans: (c)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques :** Government schools remain the backbone of education in India, but rising private costs and dependence on coaching reflect systemic challenges." Discuss in the context of recent NSSO data.



The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has launched the Adi Karmayogi initiative under the Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyaan to build a cadre of 20 lakh change leaders across tribal villages. The programme aims to address the persistent backwardness of tribal regions not by creating new schemes, but by improving implementation motivation, participatory problem-solving, and local vision-setting.

## Adi Karmayogi initiative to put tribal 'change leaders' through their paces at village level

**Abhinav Lakshman**  
NEW DELHI

Lighting candles, role-play, cognitive group tasks, and "knot-tying" and "fish-bowl" exercises – at the core of efforts to create a "cadre" of 20 lakh "change leaders" for tribal villages under the Adi Karmayogi initiative of the Tribal Affairs Ministry is a training programme that conducts such activities for State, district, and block officials.

The programme will be extended to the village level in the coming months.

Government officials told *The Hindu* that the idea was to adopt a "participatory" approach to problem-solving.

This involves driving home messages such as "the solution comes from within", "not dwelling on problems", "initiating action", and "creating opportunity from challenges", according to the Ministry's



**Ground work:** The first phase involves holding training sessions down to the village level across 324 districts. X@TRIBALAFFAIRSIN

concept note for the initiative, which is being run under the Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyaan programme for last-mile scheme delivery.

The Adi Karmayogi initiative was conceived of earlier this year after a two-day national workshop, where, at a brainstorming session, it was concluded that the reason tribal areas continued to face backwardness was not a lack of schemes for them but a "lack of motivation"

in those implementing them.

### 'Village vision'

The government, through the training activities mentioned above, intends to create 240 State-level master trainers, 2,750 district-level trainers, and over 15,000 block-level trainers, who will be responsible for taking the training down to 20 lakh village-level officials, volunteers, and community leaders.

Apart from this, the pro-

gramme intends to help residents to draw up their own "Village Vision" documents for 2030 for each of the one lakh target villages across over 550 districts, which are to be depicted as "public murals" and will become "aspirational blueprints" for the State machinery to follow.

Under the programme, the Ministry said it will also set up one lakh Adi Seva Kendras – meant to act as a single-point interface for villagers trying to access the gamut of welfare schemes meant for them so that 100% saturation can be achieved.

The first phase of the initiative involves holding these training sessions at the village level across 324 districts. Currently, regional training sessions are conducted where State-level master trainers are trained.

Most of the State-level sessions are also conduct-

ed for training district-level trainers, following which block-level and village-level training will take place, according to officials. Once the sessions reach the village level, each session will have 15 volunteers to participate in them.

### Prescribed activities

At these training sessions, the "prescribed" activities include a "lighting the candle" exercise to encourage participants not to "curse darkness" but "bring the light".

A "fish bowl exercise" asks participants to imagine themselves as fish in a bowl and get to know each other.

The "village scenario role play" exercise involves imagining a village of animal rearers trying to solve water scarcity after the state machinery fails to act and the Deputy Commissioner's staff is rushed to find a solution.

## Key Analysis

### 1. Rationale Behind the Initiative

- Despite numerous welfare schemes, tribal regions remain developmentally lagging.
- A national workshop earlier this year concluded that the core challenge is not policy deficit but lack of motivation and participatory engagement at the grassroots.
- Hence, the initiative shifts focus to human resource development and behavioural change among officials and community leaders.

### 2. Structure of the Programme

- Training Cascade Model:
  - 240 State-level master trainers→2,750 district-level trainers→15,000+ block-level trainers→20 lakh village-level officials, volunteers, and leaders.
- Participatory Exercises: Activities like lighting candles, fish-bowl discussions, role-play, and group cognitive tasks encourage positive thinking, teamwork, and local problem-solving.
- Village Vision 2030: Each of the 1 lakh target villages across 550+ districts will prepare a vision document, to be displayed as public murals — creating accountability and an aspirational blueprint.
- Adi Seva Kendras: One lakh service centres will act as single-point access hubs for welfare schemes, aiming at 100% saturation of government benefits.

### 3. Significance for Tribal Development

- Empowerment from Within: Promotes self-reliance and community-led solutions rather than top-down imposition.
- Capacity Building: Creates a skilled and motivated cadre of trainers and leaders at multiple levels.
- Administrative Efficiency: Improves last-mile delivery by making local officials and volunteers more responsive.
- Social Cohesion: Exercises like role-play and vision documents foster collective ownership of development goals.

### 4. Challenges Ahead

- Ensuring sustainability of motivation once training ends.
- Avoiding bureaucratic tokenism, where exercises may become ritualistic without follow-up.
- Integrating Village Vision 2030 with state planning and budgeting.
- Monitoring outcomes beyond training numbers — focusing on real changes in service delivery.

### Conclusion

The Adi Karmayogi initiative is a novel experiment in governance reform, shifting the focus from merely designing welfare schemes to energising the people and officials who implement them. By fostering participatory governance, behavioural change, and local vision-setting, the programme has the potential to transform tribal development into a community-driven, aspirational movement. However, its success will depend on sustained training quality, genuine integration with administrative processes, and continuous monitoring of ground-level impact.

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques :** The Adi Karmayogi initiative seeks to transform tribal development through participatory problem-solving rather than policy additions. Critically examine its potential and challenges. **(250 words)**

## Page 08 : GS 2 : Indian Polity

The Supreme Court recently urged the Union government to frame guidelines for regulating speech on social media in response to derogatory remarks against disabled persons. While the intent appears to protect dignity, the move risks expanding executive control over speech. This editorial warns that such judicial directions may contribute to over-criminalisation of expression, undermining the constitutional guarantee of free speech under Article 19(1)(a).

### Key Analysis

#### 1. Constitutional Position

- Article 19(1)(a): Guarantees freedom of speech and expression.
- Article 19(2): Reasonable restrictions on grounds such as sovereignty, public order, decency, morality, etc.
- Judiciary's role: To uphold liberties by strictly interpreting restrictions, not to widen the scope for executive overreach.

#### 2. Concerns Raised by the Editorial

- Judiciary enabling executive overreach: By urging new guidelines, SC risks granting excessive power to an executive already accused of weaponising restrictions.
- Slippery slope of censorship: Distasteful humour or offensive speech, if criminalised, may open the door to suppression of political dissent, art, journalism, and satire.
- Chilling effect: Citizens may self-censor, filmmakers may avoid social themes, and journalists may face FIRs—weakening democratic discourse.
- Existing safeguards: Hate speech and incitement to violence are already punishable under IPC and IT Act provisions. Further rules may be redundant and misused.

#### 3. Context of Online Regulation

- IT Rules, 2021 and their amendments already empower the government to direct platforms to remove flagged content.
- Multiple petitions challenging these Rules are pending in the SC itself.
- Expanding these powers risks transforming India into a state-controlled digital space, contrary to democratic ideals.

### False righteousness

Courts must protect rights of citizens, not allow the state untrammelled power

In urging the Union government to work on guidelines to regulate speech on social media, the Supreme Court of India is seeking to empower an executive that is already weaponising the legal limits on freedom of expression. In response to a petition by a non-profit assailing derogatory remarks by online figures against disabled persons, the Court issued instructions that further a problematic trend of the judiciary egging on the state to encroach on legal grey areas with statutory restrictions that undermine constitutionally guaranteed rights. To regard distasteful humour, however disturbing it might be, as a problem to be solved through the courts and by executive rulemaking, is to fall into a deceptive trap of imagined righteousness that progressive democracies should avoid. There are always unpleasant consequences in expanding powers to police speech: partisans wield their powers to ferociously monitor what is or is not appropriate, instrumentalising agencies of the state to suppress art and political speech they do not like; citizens find themselves constantly looking over their shoulder before expressing themselves. Under the overbearing atmosphere of censored expression, truths and ideas that must be reckoned with for a functioning democracy are stifled. People should not have to constantly look against asterisks that set terms and conditions for fundamental liberties. Film producers and directors have been pushed away from exploring subject matters that would help India progress socially, and journalists have been dealing with first information reports for carrying out their professional duties.

In recent years, the Union government has, formally and informally, expanded its control of online speech, with the problematic Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, and an amendment to those Rules that would allow social media companies to be proceeded against for content posted by users that has been flagged by the government. Monday's instructions seem set to expand those ambitions, which are themselves under challenge with the Supreme Court. Hate speech and speech inciting violence against minorities are criminalised in India, giving disadvantaged groups powerful avenues of recourse when they are legitimately wronged. Handing an executive, which already has a record of mala fide weaponisation of media and speech regulations, more powers would be dangerous in the extreme. At a fundamental level, such judicial pronouncements, which cite "misuse of freedom of speech" as a ground, seem to misperceive the framework of their institutional role: that of a protector of rights under a clear constitutional framework, and not of an unchallenged lord in a feudal society.

#### 4. Broader Democratic Implications

- Free speech as the lifeblood of democracy: Suppressing uncomfortable truths weakens accountability and progress.
- Judiciary's institutional role: As a guardian of rights, courts must protect liberties, not align with executive control.
- Excessive focus on "misuse" of freedoms reflects a feudal rather than constitutional mindset.

#### Conclusion

The Supreme Court's guidance to regulate social media speech reflects a dangerous trend of judicial overreach that risks eroding fundamental freedoms. In a democracy, the task of the judiciary is to act as a check on executive excess, not to amplify it. While offensive and derogatory speech must be socially condemned and legally addressed within existing provisions, empowering the state with new censorship tools will only weaken democracy, artistic expression, and media independence. Upholding free speech—even when unpleasant—is essential for India's constitutional order.

#### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** Freedom of speech is the cornerstone of democracy, yet it faces growing restrictions in the digital era. Critically analyse the role of judiciary in balancing free expression and regulation of online speech. (150 Words)



Recent controversies surrounding alleged voter list manipulations in Bangalore and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar have placed the Election Commission of India (ECI) at the center of a political and constitutional debate. While Article 324 vests the ECI with wide powers to ensure free and fair elections — part of the basic structure of the Constitution — its recent actions and responses raise questions about the limits of its powers and its constitutional obligations.

## The ECI's ring fence is the Constitution and the law

**T**wo major press conferences held in recent weeks have attracted a good deal of national attention. The first was held by the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on August 7, 2025, in New Delhi, where he highlighted specific instances of manipulation of the voter list in the Mahadevapura Assembly segment of the Bangalore central parliamentary constituency during the 2024 general election. His disclosures included the fact that a large number of voters were enrolled in the voters list having the same address. In some cases, the 'father's name' was given as 'xyz' and the house number as '0'. According to Mr. Gandhi, these facts were unearthed by his team after painstaking research of the Election Commission of India (ECI) documents over six months. These disclosures by Mr. Gandhi have created consternation among the citizens of India — if these are true, the entire electoral system in India would lose its credibility and India's democracy will cease to be a genuine democracy.



**P.D.T. Achary**

is former Secretary  
General Lok Sabha

### The ECI's stand is unusual

The second press conference, also in New Delhi, was held by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and his colleagues on August 17. It was expected that the CEC would clarify the issues raised by the LoP. However, the statements made by the CEC were a kind of a pushback against what the LoP had said in his press conference. As a matter of fact, the press conference by the CEC left citizens none the wiser as many basic questions were just ignored. The press conference ended with the CEC issuing an ultimatum to the LoP — to either submit the details of his disclosures with a sworn affidavit or apologise to the nation. This unusual stand of the ECI shows that it too has joined the political slugfest. This is a stand that will continue to rattle political parties for a long time.

The ECI is a high constitutional body that is entrusted with the task of superintending, directing and controlling the preparation of electoral rolls and conducting elections to Parliament, State legislatures and to the offices of the President and the Vice President of India. Article 324 of the Constitution vests enormous powers in the ECI to perform this task. It is mandated to conduct elections in a free and fair manner, which is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. The Supreme Court of India has held that Article 324 is a reservoir of powers which the ECI can draw from in order to ensure that the elections are free and fair. However, it has to function within the Constitution and law.

Issuing an ultimatum to the LoP is not a part of

the exercise of power under Article 324 or the election statutes. It is also not a part of the exercise of the powers of the ECI to join the adversarial political discourse in India.

The episode in Bangalore clearly points to the possibility of electoral lists being tampered with at some level. It is true that Mr. Gandhi's disclosures months after the general election do not fit into the procedural mould created by the Representation of The People Act, 1950. This Act and the rules made thereunder contain a just, fair and transparent procedural framework which provides for multiple layers of scrutiny and public inspection and a just procedure for resolution of disputes. Further, the election statutes assume that there is a finality about elections. Therefore, these statutes cannot deal with the issues which Mr. Gandhi has raised.

The question is how to deal with it. Attempts to counter it with senseless technicalities and a demand for sworn affidavits are non-productive. Article 324 confers enormous powers on the ECI so that it would prepare the rolls and conduct elections in a fair manner. Article 324 implies responsibilities and obligations to exercise that power judiciously. So, when a citizen makes a complaint or a disclosure highlighting serious irregularities in the preparation of the electoral rolls, it is the constitutional obligation of the ECI to examine this carefully and fix the faults in the system. How could 80 voters be registered under the same address when it is clear that they cannot be ordinarily resident there? They voted because their names were on the roll. Who enrolled them and under whose directions are serious questions which need an answer. A person can be registered in a voters' list only if he is ordinarily resident there. This term has been defined as permanent stay at a place. Are all these 80 people residing at one address permanently?

The Representation of The People Act 1950 provides for the revision of the electoral rolls. These rolls can be revised before every election or every year on the direction of the ECI or a special revision in a few constituencies or part thereof for which the ECI needs to record the reasons (Section 21 of The Representation of The People Act, 1950). Rule 25 of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 shows that the revision done annually can either be summary revision or intensive revision (intensively or summarily or partly intensively and partly summarily).

### The Bihar SIR

The ECI is presently engaged in a special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, a State where Assembly elections are due later this year. Actually, neither the Act nor the Rules

contain any term such as special intensive revision.

There are separate provisions for intensive revision and special revision. This writer is of the view that the SIR suffers from certain legal infirmities. Intensive revision can be done only in January which is the qualifying date whereas a special revision can be done at any time; but this will be limited to certain constituencies or parts thereof.

The Bihar SIR has the qualifying date as July 1, which is in violation of Section 14(b) in The Representation of The People Act, 1950, which says that the 1st day of January shall be the qualifying date. Qualifying date is the date on which the revision or preparation of the roll begins.

There are a number of media reports on the chaotic conditions in Bihar as a result of the SIR. Intensive revision within a month is a contradiction in terms. Rule 25(2) of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, says that intensive revision means rolls have to be prepared afresh and Rule 8 says that the registration officer shall have to visit every dwelling house in the constituency to prepare the roll. It is anybody's guess whether the registration officers would be able to visit every dwelling house in the whole State within one month and complete the enumeration formalities in accordance with the procedure. This has sparked off a huge political agitation in the State.

The ECI claims that the enumeration process has been completed and 65 lakh voters have been deleted from the roll. Much against the wishes of the ECI, the Supreme Court, in an interim order, directed the ECI to publish the names and the reasons for their deletion. This order of the Court has been welcomed by all.

### Prescient words

The ECI is a powerful constitutional authority. But the ECI does not have unfettered powers. The Constitution has not given anybody or any authority it created untrammelled powers which may be misused to the detriment of democracy.

In *A.C. Jose vs Sivan Pillai and Ors.* (1984), Justice S. Murtaza Fazal Ali said, "If the Commission is armed with such unlimited and arbitrary powers and if it ever happens that the persons manning the commission shares or is wedded to a particular ideology, he could by giving odd directions cause a political havoc or bring about a constitutional crisis, setting at naught the integrity and independence of electoral process, so important and indispensable to the democratic system." These are prophetic words.

The Election Commission of India has a constitutional obligation to carefully examine a complaint or a disclosure highlighting serious irregularities in electoral rolls

## Key Analysis

### 1. Context: Recent Events

- Rahul Gandhi's disclosures (Aug 7, 2025): Alleged large-scale irregularities in Bengaluru's electoral rolls (same addresses, fictitious details).
- ECI's press conference (Aug 17, 2025): Rather than addressing concerns, it issued an ultimatum demanding a sworn affidavit from the LoP — signalling a politicised response.
- Bihar SIR controversy:
  - ECI undertook a special intensive revision with July 1 as the qualifying date, contrary to Section 14(b), RPA 1950, which mandates January 1.
  - Resulted in deletion of 65 lakh voters.
  - Supreme Court intervened, directing publication of names and reasons for deletion — welcomed as a step for transparency.

### 2. Legal & Constitutional Framework

- Article 324: Grants ECI powers to “superintend, direct and control” elections. SC has described it as a reservoir of powers to ensure free and fair polls.
- But not unlimited: Powers must align with Constitution and law; ECI cannot assume extra-legal authority.
- RPA 1950 & Rules, 1960: Provide clear procedures for preparation, revision, and correction of rolls — ensuring transparency and finality.
- A.C. Jose vs Sivan Pillai (1984): SC cautioned against arbitrary powers, warning they could cause political havoc if misused.

### 3. Issues Highlighted

- Credibility at stake: Allegations of manipulation, if unchecked, erode public trust in democracy.
- Procedural infirmities: Bihar's SIR not consistent with law — “intensive revision” within a month is impractical and possibly illegal.
- Partisanship fears: By entering into a direct confrontation with the LoP, ECI risks being seen as politically aligned.
- Transparency deficit: Deletion of lakhs of names without adequate explanation or procedural safeguards undermines voter confidence.

### 4. Way Forward

- Strengthen transparency: Publish reasons for additions/deletions; open scrutiny to political parties and citizens.

- Legal adherence: ECI must strictly follow RPA provisions and Rules — no extra-legal innovations (like “special intensive revision”).
- Judicial oversight: SC’s intervention in Bihar shows judiciary remains the ultimate check when constitutional authorities overstep.
- Reinforcing independence: Appointment process reforms (as per Anoop Baranwal case, 2023) need full implementation to insulate ECI from political influence.
- Institutional restraint: ECI must avoid political posturing and maintain credibility as a neutral constitutional umpire.

## Conclusion

The ECI is among the most powerful constitutional authorities, entrusted with safeguarding the integrity of Indian democracy. But its powers are not unfettered; they are ring-fenced by the Constitution and law. The controversies in Bengaluru and Bihar highlight the need for the ECI to act with transparency, legality, and impartiality. As Justice Fazal Ali warned in 1984, unchecked powers could destabilise democracy itself. Upholding the faith of citizens requires the ECI to function as a neutral, law-bound guardian of free and fair elections, not as a participant in political tussles.

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** Article 324 gives the Election Commission of India vast powers to ensure free and fair elections, but these powers are not unlimited. Discuss in light of recent controversies over electoral rolls. **(250 words)**



## Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

# The gender angle to India's economic vulnerabilities

India's economic ascent, which is now valued at \$4.19 trillion, has earned it a firm place in the global growth story. The country is poised to become the world's third-largest economy. Yet, this momentum now faces a formidable disruption – the proposed 50% tariffs by the United States President Donald Trump on Indian exports. Targeting \$40 billion in trade, these tariffs could shave off nearly 1% from India's GDP striking labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, gems, and leather and footwear which are critical industries that disproportionately employ women.

Unlike China, which has weathered U.S. tariffs through its manufacturing scale and diversified exports, India remains vulnerable. The U.S. accounts for 18% of India's exports; an increase in tariff could lead to 30%-35% cost disadvantage against competitors such as Vietnam leaving Indian exporters exposed. In this moment of crisis, these words appear prescient: "The strength of a nation lies in the strength of its women." India's failure to economically empower half its population is not just a social concern. It is now a strategic liability.

The tariffs threaten to destabilise employment for millions of Indian women. The textiles, gems, leather and footwear sectors, which employ nearly 50 million people, face a projected export decline of up to 50%. Additionally, India's existing low female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) has remained stuck between 37% and 41.7% far below the global average and China's 60%. According to the International Monetary Fund, closing the gender gap could boost India's GDP by 27% in the long term. Yet, this is a promise that is stifled by cultural constraints, policy inertia and systemic barriers to employment.

### The ticking clock

India is inching closer to its peak of its demographic dividend – a period where the working-age population vastly outnumbers dependents. This window, which could close by 2045, once fuelled growth in China, Japan, and the U.S. – economies now past their prime



**Anurodh Lalit Jain**

is Vice-Chairman, All India Congress Committee (Minority Department) and a Social Economic Analyst

The imposition of U.S. tariffs that threatens to impact millions of Indian women in labour-intensive sectors is a wake-up call – women need empowerment as economic agents

demographic advantage, with flattening growth curves. India must act to convert this fleeting dividend into sustained prosperity, and this means fully integrating women into the workforce.

Labour participation by rural women has inched up, but mostly in unpaid and low-productivity family work. In urban India, female workforce participation has stagnated. Safety concerns, unreliable public transport, lack of sanitation, and the crushing burden of unpaid care work continue to push women out of schools and jobs.

India risks the fate of Southern European economies such as Italy and Greece, where low FLFPR has placed a long-term drag on growth. The urgency is clear as it is a now-or-never moment.

### Lessons from abroad, solutions at home

Global superpowers offer a road map. The U.S. leveraged women's labour during the Second World War with equal pay and childcare. China's post-1978 reforms drove 60% FLFPR through state-backed care and education. Japan raised its FLFPR from 63% to 70%, boosting GDP per capita by 4%. The Netherlands' part-time work model, with equal benefits, suits India, where women prefer such roles. These nations invested in legal protections, care infrastructure, and skills training, which are areas where India lags. Instead of short-term populism or blanket cash transfers, India needs structural reforms that empower women as economic agents.

Karnataka's Shakti scheme, which offers free public bus travel to women, is one such intervention. Since its launch in 2023, female ridership has surged by over 40%. The scheme has enhanced women's mobility for work, education, and enterprise – especially in rural and peri-urban areas. This has enabled more women to gain improved access to job markets, decrease their dependence on male family members, and achieve greater autonomy.

Redirecting spending from broad welfare schemes to targeted programmes such as tax

incentives for female entrepreneurs, digital inclusion drives, and gender-focused skilling platforms can yield more sustainable gains. Formalising gig and part-time work through updated labour codes and social protections would bring millions of women into the formal economy.

Urban Company, a leading gig platform, has onboarded over 15,000 women service providers. These workers earn ₹18,000-₹25,000 in a month, along with access to accident insurance, maternity benefits, and skill development. The platform's emphasis on safety, training and transparent pay highlights how gig work can be empowering particularly for semi-skilled urban women.

On the public side, Rajasthan's Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme has created over four crore person-days of work, with nearly 65% of jobs going to women. Its flexible, neighbourhood-based jobs in sanitation, greening and care work have enabled many first-time workers – especially those restricted by domestic duties – to enter the workforce. These cases show that when the state recognises and supports non-traditional work, it can unlock massive economic value.

### A moment of reckoning

The looming U.S. tariff shock should serve as a wake-up call. India's economic vulnerabilities are not just due to external threats. They also stem from internal neglect, especially in tapping the potential of working-age women.

Empowering women is not a social gesture. It is a growth imperative. It is the linchpin of demographic dividend utilisation, export competitiveness and equitable development. If India seeks to become a true global powerhouse, its progress must be built on the shoulders of both its men and women. India stands at a crossroads. It can rise by investing in its women. Or it can falter by ignoring them. One path leads to resilience and inclusive growth. The other path leads to missed opportunities and economic fragility.

## GS. Paper 02 Social Justice

**UPSC Mains Practice Question:** "Women's economic participation is not merely a matter of social justice but an economic necessity." Discuss. (150 words)



## Context :

India today stands at a crucial juncture in its growth story. With a \$4.19 trillion economy and aspirations to become the world's third-largest economy, the country's resilience is being tested by both external shocks — such as proposed U.S. tariffs — and internal challenges. Among these, the underutilisation of women's economic potential is a structural weakness. Low female labour force participation (FLFPR), concentrated in vulnerable sectors like textiles, gems, and leather, not only worsens the impact of global disruptions but also threatens the sustainability of India's demographic dividend.

## Key Analysis

### 1. The External Trigger — U.S. Tariffs

- The proposed 50% tariff by the U.S. on Indian exports could erode nearly 1% of GDP.
- Labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, footwear, and gems — which employ millions of women — are the worst hit.
- With 18% of exports going to the U.S., India faces a cost disadvantage of 30–35% vis-à-vis competitors like Vietnam.
- This exposes a deeper truth: India's gender imbalance in economic participation has magnified its vulnerability.

### 2. The Internal Challenge — Low FLFPR

- India's FLFPR stagnates at 37–41.7%, far below China (60%) and global averages.
- IMF estimates suggest closing the gender gap can boost GDP by 27% in the long run.
- Factors pulling women out of the workforce:
  - Safety concerns, poor transport, lack of childcare and sanitation.
  - Burden of unpaid care work.
  - Cultural and policy inertia.

### 3. Demographic Dividend at Risk

- India's working-age population is peaking and will start shrinking post-2045.
- Failure to integrate women into the workforce risks a "lost dividend", akin to Italy and Greece, where low female participation dragged long-term growth.

### 4. Learning from Global Models

- U.S. (WWII): Equal pay + childcare boosted women's work participation.
- China (post-1978 reforms): State-backed care + education ensured 60% FLFPR.
- Japan: From 63% to 70% FLFPR, adding 4% to per capita GDP.

- Netherlands: Flexible part-time model with equal benefits — suitable for India's social fabric.

## 5. Indian Initiatives — Mixed Progress

- Karnataka's Shakti scheme: Free bus travel, 40% rise in female mobility → better access to jobs.
- Urban Company gig platform: 15,000+ women earn ₹18k–25k/month with insurance and maternity benefits.
- Rajasthan's Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme: 65% jobs to women, enabling first-time participation.

These show that when the state and private sector invest in targeted, enabling policies, women's economic agency expands rapidly.

## 6. Way Forward

- Redirect welfare spending → targeted skilling, digital inclusion, and entrepreneurial incentives for women.
- Invest in care infrastructure (childcare centres, safe transport, sanitation).
- Recognise gig and part-time work in labour codes with social protections.
- Encourage public-private partnerships in women's skilling and job creation.
- Shift narrative: Women's empowerment is not welfare; it is an economic growth strategy.

## Conclusion

India's economic vulnerabilities are not solely the result of global shocks such as U.S. tariffs, but of internal structural neglect in mobilising half its population. Empowering women is not just a matter of social justice — it is the foundation of resilience, export competitiveness, and demographic dividend utilisation. The nation today stands at a crossroads:

- One path, where women are fully integrated into the economy, leads to resilience and inclusive growth.
- The other, where they remain underutilised, risks fragility and missed opportunities.

If India aspires to be a true global powerhouse, its rise must rest equally on the shoulders of both men and women.