

DAILY **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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Edition: International Table of Contents

Page 01 Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity	Maharashtra scraps three-language policy
Page 01 Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity	Ahead of Census, States asked to lock boundary changes before Dec. 31
Page 07 Syllabus : GS 3 : Science & Technology	Noble rot, the alchemist of wines, is setting fungal biology abuzz
Page 07 Syllabus : GS 3 : Science & Technology	Synthetic genome: DNA from scratch
Page 14 Syllabus : GS 2 : International Relations	PM Carney has a pragmatic approach, wants reset in India ties, says ex-envoy
Page 08 : Editorial Analysis: Syllabus :GS 3 : Internal Security	Revisit digital search powers under the I-T Bill 2025

The Maharashtra government has withdrawn its earlier decision to implement a three-language policy for Classes 1 to 5 in state government schools, following strong resistance from political parties, academics, and civil society. However, a committee has been formed to deliberate on the policy's future.

Maharashtra scraps three-language policy

Committee formed to decide future of the policy and from which grade it should be implemented | Decision a victory of Marathi people, say Opposition and experts; express doubts about the panel's role | Thackeray cousins announce that protest planned for July 5 would now be turned into a victory rally

Vinaya Vilas Deshpande
MUMBAI

Maharashtra scrapped the introduction of the three-language policy for Classes 1 to 5 in State government schools on Sunday, after two months of sustained opposition by academics, activists, and political parties, including the Nationalist Congress Party, which is part of the ruling coalition in the State.

To decide the future of the policy, the government set up an expert committee to be headed by economist, educationist, and former Rajya Sabha member Narendra Jadhav. "The committee will look into the three-language policy, from which grade it should be implemented. It will

study the recommendations of the Mashelkar Committee report. It will also hear those who have a different opinion. The government will accept the Narendra Jadhav committee report," Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis told presspersons in Mumbai.

Two government orders introducing the policy for primary education, issued on April 16 and June 17, have been cancelled.

"The government has put the three-language formula on hold at present. The committee has sought three months," a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

This policy will impact nearly 80 lakh primary students in the State Board's Marathi and English medium schools. The three-language formula is currently



Word troubles: Shiv Sena (UBT) workers protest against the proposed three-language policy in Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, on Sunday. PTI

implemented in secondary classes.

Opposition parties, which had burnt copies of the government orders across the State just hours earlier on Sunday, cautiously welcomed the deci-

sion, but were sceptical about the panel's role.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray and his cousin Raj Thackeray of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena declared it the victory of the unity of the

Marathi people.

The Thackeray cousins announced that a massive protest planned for July 5 would now be turned into a victory rally.

However, Mr. Uddhav Thackeray also said that

the BJP was trying to draw a wedge between Marathis and non-Marathis in the State, while Mr. Raj Thackeray expressed reservations about the Narendra Jadhav-led committee. "We are assuming that the three-language policy for primary education has been scrapped. If the government tries to create any mess due to the committee report, we will not let this committee function in Maharashtra," he said in a post on Facebook.

'Pushing RSS agenda'

Experts who had campaigned against the government orders also reacted with scepticism about the government's intentions.

"While we are very happy and the credit goes to the unity of Marathi people

who stood behind us, it is likely that the government is still trying to push this decision. What was the need of a committee? They should have just announced the scrapping of the decision," said Laxmikant Deshmukh, who heads the Maharashtra government's own language consultation committee. "To me, it seems like the government is trying to push through the RSS agenda of 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan' We need to be cautious," he told *The Hindu*.

Marathi Abhyas Kendra president Deepak Pawar, a prominent voice against the policy, also raised concerns about Dr. Jadhav's expertise.

EDITORIAL
» PAGE 8

Key Issues and Background:

1. Original Policy Objective:

- The proposed policy intended to introduce a three-language formula at the primary level.
- The languages were expected to include Marathi, English, and a third language (likely Hindi).

2. Government's Action:

- Two government resolutions issued in April and June 2025 were cancelled.
- A committee, chaired by economist and former MP Narendra Jadhav, was set up to study the policy's future and the Mashelkar Committee's recommendations.

3. Scale of Impact:

- Nearly 80 lakh students in Marathi and English medium schools under the State Board were to be affected.
- Currently, the three-language formula is implemented only at the secondary level.

Political and Social Reactions:

1. Opposition and Public Sentiment:

- Political parties including Shiv Sena (UBT), MNS, and NCP opposed the move, branding it as undermining regional linguistic identity.
- The policy was seen as a step towards promoting Hindi at the cost of Marathi, interpreted by critics as an imposition of the "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" agenda associated with the RSS.

2. **Victory for Regional Identity:**

- The cancellation was hailed as a "victory of Marathi people" by leaders like Uddhav and Raj Thackeray.
- A planned protest on July 5 has now been converted into a victory rally.

3. **Skepticism on Committee:**

- Many view the committee as a delay tactic rather than a genuine review.
- Experts such as Laxmikant Deshmukh and Deepak Pawar questioned the need for a committee if the decision was truly reversed.

Larger Implications for Governance and Policy:

1. **Federalism and Linguistic Autonomy:**

- The controversy highlights ongoing tensions between regional aspirations and centralizing tendencies in language policy.
- Education, being in the concurrent list, often becomes a ground for centre-state friction, especially concerning language imposition.

2. **Language and Identity Politics:**

- The debate reflects the deep intertwining of language with identity in Indian politics.
- Policies that appear to favour one linguistic group over another can quickly mobilize political opposition and social unrest.

3. **Public Participation in Policy-Making:**

- The reversal of the policy underscores the role of civil society and mass mobilization in influencing governance.
- It also signals the importance of community consultation in formulating culturally sensitive education policies.

Conclusion:

The Maharashtra government's withdrawal of the three-language policy following widespread protest reflects both the power of democratic dissent and the complexities of linguistic politics in India. While the appointment of a review committee shows procedural caution, it has also drawn skepticism regarding the state's intent. Going forward, any policy shift in language and education must ensure inclusivity, regional sensitivity, and transparent stakeholder engagement to maintain social harmony and uphold the spirit of cooperative federalism.

UPSCMainsPractice Question

Ques : Language policy formulation can challenge the spirit of Indian federalism." Examine this statement in light of the recent three-language policy controversy in Maharashtra.(250 Words)

Page 01: GS 2 : Indian Polity

The Office of the Registrar General of India (RGI) has begun groundwork for the Population Census 2027, with the first phase (House Listing and Housing Schedule) tentatively set to begin on April 1, 2026. States have been directed to freeze all administrative boundaries (districts, tehsils, police stations) by December 31, 2025.

Ahead of Census, States asked to lock boundary changes before Dec. 31

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI


The Registrar-General of India (RGI) has informed the States that the first phase of the Population Census 2027 – House Listing and Housing Schedule (HLO) – will tentatively begin on April 1, 2026 and preparations need to be made accordingly.

The RGI has also informed the States that the administrative boundaries will be frozen by December 31 and if any changes are to be made to the limits of police stations, tehsils, and districts, it should be done before the said date.

A senior government official told *The Hindu* that the dates and questions to be asked in the first phase

Last call

Around 24 lakh enumeration blocks finalised for the 2021 Census are likely to be used for the 2027 count



- The Census can be conducted only three months after the freezing of boundary limits of administrative units
- Houselisting Operation to begin on April 1, 2026, while the population count is set to begin on February 1, 2027
- Any changes in the existing boundaries must be intimated by December 31, 2025
- Boundaries of administrative units are not changed once enumeration blocks are finalised

will be notified in the Gazette later. Nearly 34 lakh enumerators and supervisors, mainly officials working with the State governments, and 1.3 lakh Census functionaries are expected to be deployed for the exer-

cise, which will be done digitally for the first time.

Around 24 lakh enumeration blocks (EB) finalised for the 2021 Census are likely to be used for the 2027 Census.

Each EB usually com-

prises 150-180 houses or 650-800 people.

The exercise covers all States phase-wise and usually follows the April-September period, when the enumerator assigns a distinct number to each house, building or public space.

For Census 2021, which could not take off initially due to the COVID-19 pandemic and will now be known as Population Census-2027, the notification published on January 9, 2020 said that the first phase will begin on April 1, 2020 and end on September 30 the same year. For the 2021 Census, the Centre had notified 31 questions for the first phase related to household details.

Key Developments:

1. Boundary Freeze Deadline:

- States must finalize any changes in administrative boundaries before December 31, 2025 to ensure consistency during the enumeration.

- This is crucial for avoiding confusion in jurisdiction during the large-scale census operation.

2. Digital Census:

- For the first time, the Census will be conducted in a digital format, replacing the traditional paper-based methods.
- Approx. 34 lakh enumerators and supervisors will be involved in this tech-driven exercise.

3. Enumeration Blocks (EB):

- Around 24 lakh EBs, earlier finalized for the delayed 2021 Census, will be reused.
- Each EB typically covers 150–180 households or 650–800 persons.

4. History of Delay:

- The original Census 2021 was postponed due to COVID-19 and is now being renamed as Census 2027.

Governance and Administrative Significance:

- **Planning and Policy Making:** Census data is critical for resource allocation, infrastructure planning, and policy formulation at both central and state levels.
- **Federal Coordination:** This exercise involves a high degree of Centre–State cooperation, showcasing the cooperative federalism model in action.
- **Technological Transition:** The move to a digital Census reflects a shift toward e-governance, enhancing accuracy and data efficiency, but also poses challenges in digital training, infrastructure, and data privacy.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques:What are the governance challenges and opportunities in conducting India's first digital population census? Suggest steps to ensure its smooth implementation. **(250 words)**

In a breakthrough discovery published in Science, researchers from Sichuan University and the University of British Columbia have found that the *Botrytis cinerea* fungus (also called "noble rot") and its relative *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* exhibit a highly unusual cellular phenomenon -no single nucleus within their cells contains a complete set of chromosomes. Instead, chromosomes are distributed across multiple nuclei, challenging established principles of genetics and cloning.\

Noble rot, the alchemist of wines, is setting fungal biology abuzz

In a startling discovery, researchers from Sichuan University and the University of British Columbia have found that *botrytis* fungi cannot be cloned. In these fungi, no single nucleus contains a complete set of chromosomes. Instead, the chromosome set is distributed across two or more nuclei, and any one nucleus contains only a subset

D.P. Kasbekar

In wine-making circles, "noble rot" is an exalted name for the *botrytis* fungus (*Botrytis cinerea*). It infects grapes, penetrates the skin, causes the berries to lose water by evaporation and shrivel up, and thus concentrates the sugars and flavours in them. Since only a small percentage of grapes in a vineyard are infected, they must be picked by hand.

This makes the picking process labour-intensive and drives up the cost. The crushed grape juice from rotted grapes is used to make high-quality sweet wines like the Sauternes of Bordeaux, the Trockenbeerenauslese of Germany and Austria, and the Tokaji Aszú of Hungary. They are also very expensive.

Befitting its exalted status, the *botrytis* fungus was also found recently to exhibit an unusual idiosyncrasy. In all animals, plants, and fungi, the nucleus of a cell contains one or more sets of all of the chromosomes of the organism. This property of nuclei allows us to clone animals. Scientists can transfer such a nucleus, which contains all the DNA instructions, into an egg cell whose own nucleus has been removed and, in the right conditions, prompt it to develop into a new organism.

But because of the idiosyncrasy, *botrytis* fungus cannot be cloned – nor can another fungus called *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*.

A team of researchers from Sichuan University in China and the University of British Columbia in Canada have made a startling discovery: In these fungi, no single nucleus contains a complete set of chromosomes. Instead, the chromosome set is distributed across two or more nuclei, and any one nucleus contains only a subset.

These unexpected findings were reported in *Science*.

Ascomycetes, asci, ascospores

Botrytis and *Sclerotinia* are ascomycetes fungi. The first cell of a baby fungus born following a mating between two ascomycetes fungi is called the ascospore. All the subsequent other cells of the individual are derived from it. This is the defining feature of ascomycetes fungi. The ascospores are produced in a sac-like cell called the ascus (plural asci). An ascus, produced when two parental strains mate, contains two complete sets of chromosomes.

In many well-studied ascomycetes fungi, eight ascospores are made in each ascus. All the nuclei of an individual ascospore are genetically identical. That is, they all have the same set of chromosomes. *B. cinerea* and *S.*



A grape vineyard in Moldova, 2017. *Botrytis* fungi infects grapes with the effect of concentrating the sugars and flavours in them. USAID

sclerotiorum also make asci with eight spores. The researchers had no reason to suspect them to be any different.

How are discoveries made?

People are often curious to know how scientists make their discoveries. Most discoveries originate in experiments that did not work in the way they were meant to. Sadly, the converse is not true.

The most common explanation for experiments that don't work the way were meant to is some kind of "operator error" – i.e. a silly mistake of some kind: a growth medium was not properly made, the incubator was not set to the right temperature, the wrong strain was used, etc. Silly mistakes are more common than serendipitous leads.

Not surprisingly, scientists get mad with experiments that don't work. But once in a while, this type of experiment is a harbinger of an unexpected discovery. This is the scientist's dilemma.

Improbable versus true

The research team set out to obtain mutants of *S. sclerotiorum*. For this they exposed the ascospores to ultraviolet light. Each *S. sclerotiorum* ascospore contains two nuclei. Both nuclei were assumed to carry the same set of chromosomes. UV-induced mutations occur at random. Therefore, it was highly unlikely the same gene would become inactivated in both nuclei of an ascospore.

Consequently, a colony containing mutant cells was also expected to include a sector with non-mutant cells. The

***Botrytis cinerea* also called noble rot infects grapes, penetrates the skin, causes the berries to lose water by evaporation and shrivel up, and thus concentrates the sugars and flavours in them**

non-mutant cells would have nuclei descended from the ascospore nucleus with the non-mutant gene.

But in the experiment, of the more than 100 mutant colonies the researchers examined, all contained only mutant cells. None of them had a non-mutant sector. This was most unexpected. Why weren't any non-mutant cells seen in these colonies?

This observation set the researchers up for their Sherlock Holmes moment: "When you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

Could the two nuclei between them contain only one set of chromosomes?

Closer examination

The researchers wrote in their paper: "Because this prediction challenges established principles of chromosome biology, we conducted a closer examination of the ascospores' nuclei and chromosomes."

They used molecular probes that bind specifically to individual chromosomes, allowing them to say whether or not a nucleus contains the chromosome. When the probes were used individually, they lit up exclusively one nucleus per

ascospore. The probe never lit up both nuclei.

This meant the two nuclei harboured distinct chromosome sets. When both probes were used together, in some ascospores the signals showed up in only one nucleus and in other ascospores the signals were seen in both nuclei. This meant the distribution of chromosomes in the nuclei differed between ascospores.

Further tests revealed that each nucleus of a *S. sclerotiorum* or *B. cinerea* ascospore contained only three to eight chromosomes.

New questions

The findings have already spawned many questions in the research community. What is the mechanism by which chromosomes are allocated to the different nuclei? How is genetic integrity preserved during cell division? What restores a complete set of chromosomes when the fungus mates, and with its mating partner forms new asci? Which genes and mechanisms are involved in chromosome sorting and regulation? What advantage does chromosome distribution confer to *Botrytis* and *Sclerotinia*?

The questions have generated a new buzz in fungal biology. Right now, scientists doing research with fruit flies, nematodes, zebrafish, mice, and other model organisms might be envying those working with rot fungi – noble or otherwise.

(D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist. kasbekardp@yahoo.co.in)

THE GIST

Botrytis and *Sclerotinia* are ascomycetes fungi. The first cell of a baby fungus born following a mating between ascomycetes is called an ascospore. These are produced in a cell called the ascus, which contains two sets of chromosomes

Researchers used molecular probes that bind to individual chromosomes. When the probes were used individually, they lit up exclusively one nucleus per ascospore. This meant the two nuclei harboured distinct chromosome sets

The findings have spawned many questions. What is the mechanism by which chromosomes are allocated? How is genetic integrity preserved? What advantage does chromosome distribution confer to *Botrytis* and *Sclerotinia*?

What is Noble Rot and its Relevance?

- Botrytis cinerea, known as “noble rot,” is a fungus used in wine-making for producing some of the world's most premium sweet wines such as Sauternes and Tokaji Aszú.
- The fungus dehydrates grapes, concentrating sugars and enhancing flavour — but only affects a small fraction of the vineyard, requiring hand-picking and making the process labour-intensive and expensive.

The Scientific Discovery:

- Traditionally, in animals, plants, and fungi, the nucleus contains a complete set of chromosomes, enabling cloning by transferring the nucleus to an egg cell.
- However, in Botrytis and Sclerotinia, no single nucleus contains the full genome; rather, the chromosome set is split between two or more nuclei.
- This makes cloning impossible, and reveals an entirely new model of cellular organization in fungi.

How the Discovery Was Made:

- While trying to create mutants of Sclerotinia via UV radiation, researchers expected mixed colonies (some mutant, some normal).
- Surprisingly, all resulting colonies were entirely mutant, suggesting that both nuclei did not carry duplicate genomes.
- Using chromosome-specific molecular probes, it was found that each nucleus carries only part of the genome - typically 3 to 8 chromosomes.
- The distribution of chromosomes varied across ascospores, indicating a non-uniform partitioning during reproduction.

Implications of the Discovery:

Scientific and Genetic Implications:

- Challenges the central dogma of nuclear biology — that a nucleus contains a full genetic blueprint.
- Opens questions on how genetic stability is maintained during cell division and reproduction.
- Suggests novel mechanisms of genome regulation, sorting, and inheritance previously unknown.

Biotechnological and Agricultural Relevance:

- Botrytis is both economically important and agriculturally destructive — it's used in winemaking but also causes crop rot.
- Understanding its genetics could help improve fungal resistance or enhance its controlled application in viticulture.

Impact on Cloning and Model Organism Research:

- Since the fungus cannot be cloned using standard nuclear transfer, it challenges the universality of cloning techniques.
- May inspire alternative methods of genetic engineering or fungal reproduction studies.

Conclusion:

This discovery is a striking reminder that biology still holds deep mysteries, and that even well-studied organisms like fungi can defy scientific assumptions. The unique chromosome distribution in *Botrytis* and *Sclerotinia* not only disrupts traditional genetic theories but also opens up exciting new avenues in fungal biology, biotechnology, and evolutionary research.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The discovery of partial nuclear genomes in *Botrytis cinerea* challenges the classical understanding of cell biology. Discuss the implications of this discovery for cloning and genetic research. (250 Words)

Page 07 : GS 3 : Science & Technology

Following the landmark Human Genome Project (HGP) that read and mapped the human genome, the UK has now launched the Synthetic Human Genome Project (SynHG) which aims to write segments of the human genome from scratch. This marks a major leap from genome reading to genome writing, raising both scientific hopes and ethical concerns.

WHAT IS IT?

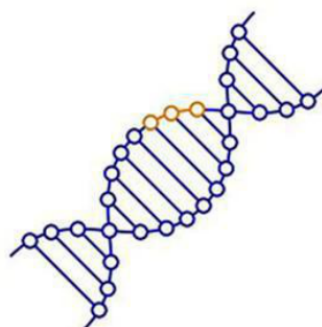
Synthetic genome: DNA from scratch

Vasudevan Mukunth

Between 1990 and 2003, more than 2,800 scientists around the world sequenced almost the entire human genome. This was the Human Genome Project (HGP), which, at a cost of \$2.7 billion, aimed to identify every human gene and make the data freely accessible to accelerate biology and medicine. By 2003, the team had produced the first reference human genome, covering 92% of the 3.1 billion bases.

The effort led to better genome sequencing technologies, anticipated policy decisions on genomic discrimination and IP rights, and paved the way for genome-wide association studies.

Now, researchers in the UK have launched the Synthetic HGP (SynHG). Whereas HGP “read” the human genome, SynHG will attempt to “write” it. Over the next five years, scientists from four institutions, including the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, will try to build large pieces of human DNA from scratch, developing the necessary knowledge and technologies along the way. For starters, they will be supported by a GBP 10 million grant from the Wellcome Trust.



A new scientific project has become controversial over the risk of scientists being able to create ‘designer babies.’
GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Prof. Robin Lovell-Badge of the Francis Crick Institute said he was “very enthusiastic” about SynHG and added, “It is critical when developing new technology to understand not just issues of potential utility, but also those concerned with safety and risk and, very importantly, the societal values on which it may impinge.”

The project has already become controversial over the risk of scientists being able to create “designer babies” — a concept unnervingly close to eugenics — and engineered microbes that might escape into the wild and damage fragile ecosystems.

For feedback and suggestions

for ‘Science’, please write to
science@thehindu.co.in
with the subject ‘Daily page’

What is SynHG?

- A five-year UK-led initiative involving institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, funded initially by the Wellcome Trust (GBP 10 million).
- Its goal: to build large sequences of human DNA synthetically (without using natural DNA as a template).

- It is part of a larger global movement in synthetic biology aimed at constructing genomes to understand function, repair genetic diseases, and engineer cells for medical or industrial use.

Scientific Significance:

1. Technological Advancement:

- Enables precise control over genetic design, unlike natural genome editing.
- May lead to innovations in gene therapy, personalized medicine, and drug discovery.

2. Fundamental Understanding:

- Synthetic genomes can help reveal how genes interact, regulate one another, and influence development.

3. Applied Benefits:

- Potential to design disease-resistant human cells, model complex genetic disorders, and understand evolutionary pathways.

Ethical and Social Concerns:

1. Designer Babies and Eugenics:

- Possibility of engineering human embryos with preferred traits (IQ, appearance, immunity) raises the specter of modern-day eugenics and genetic inequality.

2. Biosecurity and Dual-use Risk:

- Engineered microbes or genomes, if mishandled or weaponized, could harm ecosystems or be misused in bioterrorism.

3. Consent and Autonomy:

- Who decides which traits are desirable? Future generations affected by such modifications cannot consent.

4. Access and Equity:

- Synthetic genome technologies may benefit only the privileged, worsening global healthcare inequality.

Policy and Regulatory Dimensions:

- Projects like SynHG need robust international bioethical frameworks, involving:
 - Public participation
 - Transparent scientific regulation
 - Ethical review boards
- India too, under its National Biotechnology Development Strategy, must prepare for such developments by enhancing bioethics governance and updating laws related to genetic engineering, reproduction, and privacy.

Conclusion:

While synthetic genome research like SynHG holds promise to transform medicine and biology, it also challenges core ethical principles around human dignity, equity, and responsibility. For policymakers, especially in a democratic society like India, the challenge is to enable scientific innovation without compromising ethical boundaries or public trust.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Synthetic genome research represents the next frontier in biotechnology, but not without ethical hazards. Discuss in the context of the Synthetic Human Genome Project. **(250 Words)**

Page : 14: GS 2 : International Relations

Following the diplomatic strain caused by the 2023 Hardeep Singh Nijjar killing case and Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's public accusations against India, the recent meeting between PM Narendra Modi and newly elected Canadian PM Mark Carney during the G7 summit signals a possible reset in bilateral ties.

Stewart Beck, former Canadian High Commissioner to India, has observed that PM Carney's pragmatic approach could help stabilize the relationship.

PM Carney has a pragmatic approach, wants reset in India ties, says ex-envoy

Varghese K. George
OTTAWA

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has a pragmatic approach to global and domestic affairs which makes him vastly different from his predecessor Justin Trudeau and this could help a reset in the country's ties with India, according to Stewart Beck, former Canadian High Commissioner to India and former President and CEO of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada.

Talking to *The Hindu* on Canada-India relations, and what to expect after the recent meeting between Mr. Carney and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Beck noted that both countries have a complicated relationship that needs careful management. "The relationship has gone through some highs and lows. In the 1970s, the first nuclear explosion by India had used Canadian technology too, which raised concerns on our side. Then in the 1980s, the bombing of Air India aircraft Kanishka, India's second nuclear explo-



Stewart Beck

sion in the 1990s... There have been very positive developments, also some irritants ... the Khalistani separatism is an irritant that persists. It is a very complicated one and not easy for either side to understand fully," he said.

Mr. Beck, who has spent four decades as a Canadian diplomat in various positions, thinks the recent meeting between Mr. Carney and Mr. Modi during the G-7 summit in Canada was "a clear indication" that the relationship has turned the corner after the controversy around the 2023 killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Khalistani separatist in Canada. Mr. Trudeau had blamed India

for the killing.

"Mr. Carney has a perspective different. He approaches relations with India quite positively, and he used the occasion of G-7 to put the ties on a positive track. And we need to do that, considering what is going on globally. India is a global player and we need to figure out the best way to manage the relationship. I think PM Carney is prepared to do that," Mr. Beck said. "There was an argument that he was inviting Mr. Modi too early to Canada. But he took the position that it was not about Canadian PM inviting Indian PM to Canada, but about Indian PM being invited to G-7 in Canada. India is one of the biggest economies of the world and it had to be there at G-7. He then used that opportunity for a bilateral meeting too. The message that came out from that meeting is that we need to have a reset."

The diplomat thinks the uncertainties around the Nijjar case and likely new revelations might cause fresh tensions. "Building more trust is the key. It

takes more time, mutual familiarity and interaction. Whatever happened with the Nijjar assassination, we have to deal with it. It happened, there are accusations that remain, and we have to deal with that reality. We have not got all the facts. In Canada, we will have to deal with how far do we allow people to go. From my own perspective, having a float in a parade with the glorification of the assassination of Mr. Gandhi is a step too far. These sensitivities need to be addressed. In the Nijjar case, it is allegations at the moment and there is uncertainty about what will happen now. If these allegations are established as true, we have to have a mechanism to cope with it."

Mr. Beck is optimistic that regardless of the Nijjar case outcome, there are several reasons for better India-Canada ties. "Canadian pension funds have a significant role in financing infrastructure in India. We have interesting technologies in AI, biotechnology, climate change and we have things to offer," he said.

Key Highlights from the Former Envoy's Perspective:

1. Pragmatism over populism:

- PM Carney is said to differ significantly from Trudeau by taking a realist, interest-driven view of international relations, especially with a global player like India.

2. Use of G-7 Summit as Opportunity:

- Instead of formal bilateral posturing, Carney smartly used India's presence at the G-7 as an informal engagement opportunity, emphasizing India's role as a top global economy.

3. Historical Complexity in India-Canada Relations:

- Relations have seen highs (strategic cooperation, trade, education) and lows (India's nuclear tests, 1985 Kanishka bombing, Khalistan issue).
- The Khalistani separatism issue remains a core irritant, particularly regarding the perception of Canada's permissiveness toward extremist elements.

4. Trust Deficit and Nijjar Case Fallout:

- The Nijjar case created a deep diplomatic rift, with Canada alleging India's involvement.
- Beck notes that while uncertainty remains, both sides must build mutual trust and institutional mechanisms to handle such issues if proven true.

5. Economic Interdependence as a Path Forward:

- Canada's pension funds are major investors in India's infrastructure sector.
- Bilateral collaboration in AI, biotech, and climate change technologies offers mutual benefits.

Broader Geopolitical and Strategic Significance:

- India is increasingly seen as a strategic economic and geopolitical partner in the West.
- Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy, diaspora ties, and economic interests make stable India ties strategically imperative.
- Any escalation in tensions affects not just bilateral diplomacy but also people-to-people ties, student exchange, and trade.

Conclusion:

The emerging shift under PM Carney, if sustained, could mark a mature phase in India-Canada relations, driven by shared interests, mutual respect, and pragmatic engagement. While irritants like Khalistani extremism require firm resolution, long-term gains lie in economic cooperation, technological collaboration, and geopolitical alignment. Resetting trust will be key.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India-Canada relations are marked by shared economic interests but recurring political irritants. Critically examine the factors responsible for this complex bilateral relationship. **(250 words)**

Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

Revisit digital search powers under the I-T Bill 2025

The Finance Minister recently introduced a proposal in Parliament to allow tax authorities to access, under the Income-Tax Bill, 2025, an individual's "virtual digital space" during search and seizure operations. The justification is straightforward: as financial activity moves online, so must enforcement. However, this glosses over the far-reaching implications of such a shift, which raises significant concerns about privacy, overreach, and surveillance.



Mahwash Fatima

is a Manager, Public Policy at TQH Consulting's technology practice in Delhi

A blurring, open-ended

Currently, India's tax law already provides for search and seizure under Section 132 of the Income-Tax Act, 1961. But those powers are limited to physical space such as a house, office, and locker. Since such operations are based on suspicion of undisclosed income or assets, there is a connection between the objective, which is finding undisclosed income and getting access to physical assets.

The new Bill, however, blurs this link by including an individual's digital presence which is not only vast but often contains much more than what is relevant to a tax investigation. Without clear limits, such access can lead to disproportionate intrusion. For example, under the existing regime, what could be searched was what concerned only the individual under investigation. In contrast, digital spaces involve multiple stakeholders. Accessing a social media account also exposes friends, family, and professional contacts, through photographs and posts.

The proposed definition of 'virtual digital space' includes access to emails, personal cloud drives, social media accounts, digital application platforms, and more. Crucially, the phrase "any other space of similar nature" makes the list open-ended, potentially covering a wide range of digital platforms. Additionally, the proposed provision empowers tax authorities to override access codes to gain entry into electronic devices or virtual digital spaces. It still remains unclear

The proposal to access an individual's 'virtual digital space' raises significant concerns about privacy, overreach, and surveillance

though how this power will be operationalised in practice particularly in cases involving encrypted messaging apps such as WhatsApp, as explicitly cited by the Finance Minister in Parliament.

The problem becomes even more of a concern when the individual involved is a professional whose work requires confidentiality. For instance, journalists whose devices and emails hold sensitive information, including confidential sources, unpublished material, and protected communications. If a search is conducted on flimsy or overly broad grounds, it not only violates their privacy but also endangers their ability to undertake reporting. Recognising the risks, the Supreme Court of India, in 2023, circulated interim guidelines on the seizure of digital devices and directed the Union Government to contemplate formulating necessary protocols. Moreover, the judicial interpretation of "reason to believe" emphasises the need for tangible material beyond mere suspicion. Even under existing law, courts have construed that the provision ought to be exercised strictly, acknowledging that search and seizure is a serious invasion of privacy.

A violation of transparency, accountability

Yet, the proposed provision goes against these principles and is devoid of guardrails, judicial oversight, and has a lack of understanding of the stakes. It fails to acknowledge, let alone address, the sheer breadth and layered sensitivity of information stored on electronic devices. In line with the current law, the proposed provision prohibits disclosure of the "reason to believe" clearly violating principles of transparency and accountability.

Globally, privacy and transparency standards in search and seizure, especially where digital devices are involved, are grounded in statutory protections and procedural safeguards. In Canada, Section 8 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the right to be secure against "unreasonable search or seizure". It is designed to prevent unjustified searches and sets

a three-part default standard: prior authorisation; approval by a neutral and impartial judicial authority; and reasonable and probable grounds. In the United States, the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, adopted by the Internal Revenue Service, affirms that taxpayers have the right to expect that any inquiry or enforcement action will be legally compliant and will not be more intrusive than necessary following due process rights, including search and seizure protections. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Riley vs California* also necessitated a warrant before accessing digital data, given the deeply personal nature of information stored on phones and devices.

Contradiction of proportionality test

In contrast, India's proposed Income Tax provision grants sweeping access to digital personal data without warrants, relevance thresholds, or any distinction between financial and non-financial information. This directly contradicts the proportionality test upheld by the Supreme Court in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs Union Of India*. The Court has held that any restriction to an individual's privacy must meet a four-fold test, of which proportionality was key, requiring state action to pursue a legitimate aim, satisfy necessity and adopt the least intrusive means available. Allowing unfettered access to personal digital data, in the absence of judicial oversight or safeguards, fails this standard.

The way forward is not to abandon digital enforcement altogether. Rather, it is to root it firmly in principles of proportionality, legality, and transparency. The right to privacy cannot and must not be eroded under the garb of regulatory action. Unchecked surveillance in the name of compliance is not governance but overreach. There is hope that the Select Committee which is currently reviewing the Bill narrows the definition of 'virtual digital space', and mandates prior judicial warrants and disclosure of reasons for such access to digital content in addition to establishing mechanisms of redress for aggrieved individuals.

Paper 03 Internal Security

UPSC Mains Practice Question: With increasing dependence on digital infrastructure, how should the State balance national security, tax enforcement, and individual digital privacy? Discuss in light of recent policy proposals. (250 words)

Context :

The Income-Tax Bill, 2025, introduced by the Finance Minister, proposes to expand the scope of search and seizure to include an individual's "virtual digital space" — such as cloud drives, emails, social media accounts, and even encrypted applications. While this aims to modernize tax enforcement, it raises deep concerns over privacy, proportionality, and lack of judicial safeguards.

Key Issues Raised:

1. Expansion of Search Powers:

- Currently, search and seizure powers under Section 132 of the Income-Tax Act, 1961 apply to physical assets.
- The new Bill proposes inclusion of digital content — from emails to cloud drives — with an open-ended definition via the phrase "any other space of similar nature".
- It also allows officials to override access codes to gain entry into devices.

2. Privacy and Overreach:

- Digital spaces are vast, layered, and sensitive, often holding data far beyond financial relevance — including personal, professional, and third-party information.
- In cases of journalists, lawyers, doctors, etc., such access may compromise confidential sources and ethical duties.

3. Lack of Procedural Safeguards:

- The Bill does not require prior judicial approval or even disclosure of "reason to believe" for digital searches.
- This violates established legal norms on transparency and accountability, especially in light of the Supreme Court's 2023 interim guidelines on digital seizures.

Constitutional and Legal Concerns:

- The Right to Privacy, upheld in the landmark Justice K.S. Puttaswamy case (2017), mandates that any infringement must meet the four-fold test:
 1. Legality,
 2. Legitimate aim,
 3. Necessity,
 4. Proportionality.
- The current provision fails the proportionality test by allowing blanket access without tailoring it to financial relevance or ensuring minimal intrusion.

International Best Practices:

- Canada: Section 8 of its Charter of Rights protects against unreasonable searches, requiring prior authorisation by an impartial judge.
- USA: Riley vs California (2014) judgment mandates warrants for accessing digital data on phones.
- The IRS Taxpayer Bill of Rights affirms that investigations must follow due process and not exceed what is necessary.

India, by contrast, lacks such explicit digital safeguards in the proposed provision.

Implications for Governance and Ethics:

- Unchecked surveillance powers could undermine citizen trust, invite misuse, and violate ethical norms of proportionality and accountability.
- It risks setting a precedent for executive overreach, where privacy becomes a casualty in the name of compliance.

Conclusion:

While tax enforcement must evolve in the digital age, it cannot come at the cost of constitutional rights and ethical governance. The proposal under the I-T Bill, 2025, must be revised to include judicial oversight, narrow the scope of digital access, and introduce procedural safeguards in line with global standards and the Indian Constitution.

The Select Committee's review offers a crucial opportunity to strike the right balance between state interest and individual liberty in an increasingly digital world.