

Daily News Updates

7th Sept 2025

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Where Everyday Is Exam Day



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PM skips UN trip; Jaishankar to address General Assembly

Modi was scheduled to speak on September 26; Trump will address world leaders on Sept. 23; theme for session is 'Better together: 80 years and more for peace, development, human rights'

Press Trust of India
UNITED NATIONS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not address the General Debate at the annual high-level session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) later this month, according to a revised provisional list of speakers issued in United Nations.

The 80th session of the U.N. General Assembly will open on September 9. The General Debate will run from September 23-29, with Brazil as the traditional first speaker of the session, followed by the U.S.

U.S. President Donald Trump will address world leaders on September 23, his first address to the UN session in his second term in the White House.

According to a revised provisional list of speakers released on Friday, India will be represented by a 'Minister'. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will address the session on September 27.



Global stage: Narendra Modi addresses the Summit of the Future at the 79th UNGA session in New York in September 2024. ANI

According to a previous list issued in July, Mr. Modi was scheduled to address on September 26. The heads of government of Israel, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh were scheduled to address the UNGA General Debate on the same date.

Mr. Modi had travelled to the U.S. in February for a bilateral meeting with Mr. Trump at the White House. Mr. Trump has imposed tariffs totalling 50% on India,

including 25% for Delhi's purchases of Russian oil.

The UNGA list of speakers for the General Debate is provisional and there is always possibility of changes in schedules and speakers. The list will continue to be updated accordingly.

The session this year comes amid the continued Israel-Hamas war as well as the Ukraine conflict. The theme for the 80th session is 'Better together: 80 years and more for peace,

development and human rights'.

The session will open with a meeting to 'Commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the United Nations' on September 22.

Modi-Macron talks

Prime Minister Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday held a phone conversation in which Mr. Modi reiterated New Delhi's support for a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine conflict even as the two leaders "positively" assessed initiatives to boost India-France ties.

In a social media post, the French president said "India and France share the same determination to achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine."

"Had a very good conversation with President Macron. Exchanged views on efforts to bring an early end to the Ukraine conflict. The India-France strategic partnership will continue to play a key role in fostering global peace and stability," Mr. Modi said on X.

- The **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)**, established in 1945, is the primary policy-making body of the UN with equal representation for all states.
- It meets annually to address global issues such as peace, climate change, and human rights. Key achievements include the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)** and the **Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030)**.
- However, challenges like non-binding resolutions, geopolitical tensions, and resource constraints hinder its effectiveness. India, a founding member, advocates for reforms, equitable representation, climate justice, and counterterrorism while actively contributing to peacekeeping and global governance.

Will NAA get fresh lease of life with GST overhaul, asks Cong.

The Congress on Saturday asked if the National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) will now get a fresh lease of life with the overhaul of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime. In a post on X, Congress general secretary (communication) Jairam Ramesh said the NAA had been made under the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017, to monitor whether GST rate cuts resulted in the reduction of consumer prices. "On September 30, 2024, the Modi government issued a notification virtually abolishing the NAA with effect from April 1, 2025. Will the NAA now have a fresh lease of life? How will it be ensured that the rate cuts do not benefit only a favoured few," he said. This comes just ahead of rate cuts on several items of mass consumption, which comes into force from September 22.

GST 2.0 and Anti-Profiteering Measures

The government is considering reactivating anti-profiteering regulations for two years during the transition to GST 2.0. This aims to ensure businesses pass tax cuts to consumers instead of absorbing the benefits.

National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA)

- The NAA was established under **Section 171 of the Central GST Act** when **GST** was introduced in July 2017.
- It aimed to prevent companies from retaining gains from GST rationalization, focusing initially on maximum retail prices and later expanding across sectors like FMCG and real estate.

Reason for Dissolution

- In December 2022, the NAA was dissolved, and its functions were transferred to the **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** to enhance administrative efficiency.
- However, CCI faced challenges due to its **primary focus on market practices** rather than tax compliance, leading to inefficiencies in handling profiteering disputes.

GI tag push for traditional items reshapes Bodoland poll narrative

The registration of 21 items, including local textiles and traditional alcoholic beverages, has enthused 26 communities of the Bodoland Territorial Region to have their cultural artefacts GI-tagged; a youth-led initiative helped in gaining GI registration

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

Assam's poll-bound Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) has the usual issues. It also has a new topic of discussion – Geographical Indication or GI tags for its traditional products, crafts, and agricultural items.

Elections in the 8,970-sq. km BTR, governed by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), are scheduled for September 22. The council has 40 constituencies across five districts bordering Bhutan.

A team of Bodo youth undertook an initiative that helped the BTR government get GI registration for 21 items, including local textiles and traditional alcoholic beverages. Awareness about the inherent benefits of such tagging virtually triggered a race among 26 indigenous communities to register their cultural artefacts.

The core members of the team are biotechnologist Ling Narzihary, artist Swapna Muchahary, social worker Kansai Brahma,



Vibrant wear: Bodo textiles with their woven motifs have been recognised with GI tags. PTI

and entrepreneurs Nachani Brahma, Pulak Basumata, and Ranjila Mohilary.

“A GI tag fuels economic growth through higher market value and export potential, legal protection against unauthorised use and imitation, cultural preservation, and enhanced consumer trust by assuring quality and authenticity. It also fosters rural development,” Mr. Narzihary said.

The team began collecting data in 2021 and identified more than 50 items that qualified for GI tagging. The registration for 21 of these was secured between November 2023 and

May 2024. A few months ago, the BTR government launched a special drive to secure the GI tag for the remaining and more traditional items of all 26 communities living in the BTR. Apart from the dominant Bodos, the communities include Adivasis, Gurkhas, Koch-Rajbongshis, Hajongs, Kurukhs, Madahi Kacharis, Hiras, and Patnis.

Recently, the Delhi-based Gandhi Hindustani Sahitya Sabha was roped in to provide expert guidance through a series of workshops, and help various community scholars and

leaders to identify and document their respective cultural items for filing GI tag applications.

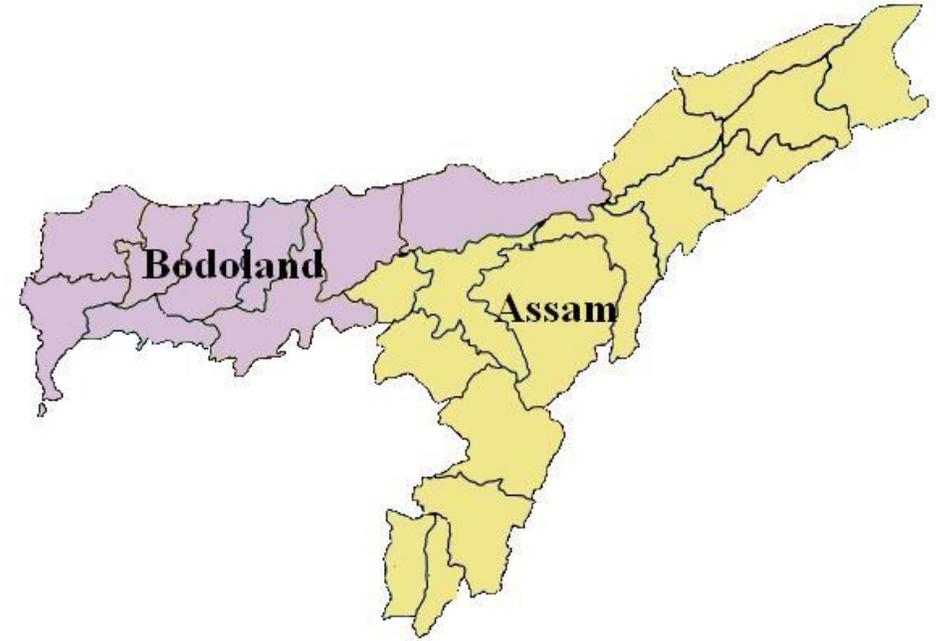
The goal is to create “GI villages”, where clusters of artisans and farmers will be supported with training, infrastructure, and direct market linkages.

ABSU resolution

About a decade ago, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) adopted a resolution to seek GI tags for items unique to the BTR. The union was then headed by Pramo Boro, one of the key architects of the Bodo Peace Accord in January

2020. The push for GI tagging came after Mr. Boro, who left the ABSU to join the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), became the Chief Executive Member of the BTC in December 2020. The UPPL rules the BTR in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the regional Gana Suraksha Party. The UPPL and the BJP are locked in a three-cornered contest along with the Bodoland People's Front.

One of the priorities of the BTR government, headed by Mr. Boro, was to ensure the recognition and protection of indigenous heritage. The government's objective was similar to that of the team headed by Mr. Narzihary, leading to their collaboration. Among 21 items that received the GI tag are Aro-nai, Dokhona, and Zwmggra (motif-rich textiles); Kham, Serza, and Siphung (musical instruments); Maibra Zwu Bidwi and Zwu Gisi (alcoholic beverages); Gwkha Gwkhwu and Napham (cuisine) and Gongar Dundia and Khera Daphini (rare medicinal plants).



'Declining Central allocation for MGNREGS affects rural women'

Sobhana K. Nair

NEW DELHI

There is a direct correlation between declining Central allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and the reduced income of rural women, activists of the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, said at a press conference in Delhi to mark the 20th anniversary of the governing law.

Ram Beti, NREGA Sangharsh Morcha activist from Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh, said that prior to the implementation of the rural em-



Women constitute more than 50% of the workforce for MGNREGS projects.

ployment guarantee scheme, men used to be paid double that of women for agricultural work and blue collar jobs. "With MGNREGS, for the first time, we got the same pay for the same work as men," she said. While the number of workers have in-

creased, the budget for the programme has remained the same, she said, slowly starving the welfare programme.

"We are back to the pre-2006 situation since the work under the scheme is no longer available due to a fund shortage," she said.

Women constitute more than 50% of the workforce for MGNREGS projects. This year, out of the total person-days (defined under MGNREGS as the total number of work days by a person registered under the scheme in a financial year), 56% was completed by women.

•MGNREGA is **one of the largest work guarantee programmes** in the world **launched in 2005** by the **Ministry of Rural development**.

- The primary objective of the scheme is to **guarantee 100 days of employment** in every financial year to **adult members of any rural household** willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work.
- As of 2022-23, there are **15.4 crore active workers under the MGNREGA**.

•**Legal Right to Work:** Unlike earlier employment guarantee schemes, the act **aims at addressing the causes of chronic poverty** through a rights-based framework.

- At least **one-third of beneficiaries have to be women**.
- Wages must be paid according to the statutory minimum wages specified for agricultural labourers in the state under the **Minimum Wages Act, 1948**.

•**Demand-Driven Scheme:** The most important part of MGNREGA's design is its **legally-backed guarantee for any rural adult to get work within 15 days of demanding it**, failing which an 'unemployment allowance' must be given.

Malappuram delivers in its fight against home births

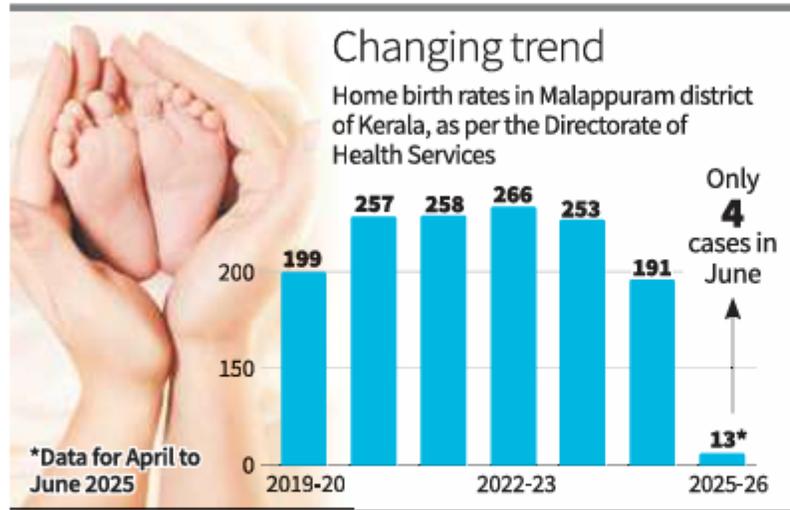
Abdul Latheef Naha

MALAPPURAM

Home birth rates in Malappuram district of Kerala have come down drastically following interventions by the State health authorities.

Home births in the district dropped from 253 in 2023-24 to 191 in 2024-25. Only four cases were reported in June. District Medical Officer R. Renuka described the decline as remarkable, attributing it to targeted interventions.

It was the death of a 35-year-old woman during home birth at Padapparamba, near Malappuram, in



April that prompted a series of interventions from the State health authorities, with the support of the district administration and the police. Religious and socio-

cultural leaders were also roped in.

Health officials said the practice of home births is not restricted to any religion or community. The

trend is largely influenced by certain naturopathy and acupuncture groups, and driven by a desire to avoid medical procedures such as epidurals or pain medication, labour induction or delivery assisted with forceps or other instruments.

“We have had good support from all communities and religious groups in spreading awareness of the risks of home births,” Dr. Renuka said. She said the media’s proactive coverage after the death of the woman in April has been a game-changer.

Apart from spreading awareness, the health auth-

orities moved legally too against those involved in the home birth that led to the woman’s death. “We have registered cases against the victim’s husband and the woman who assisted in the childbirth,” Dr. Renuka said.

Efforts by health officials have led to a substantial decline in home births among the tribespeople in the district’s remote areas of Nilambur, where such cases were once common.

“Home births have a higher risk of infant or maternal death and other complications than hospital births,” Dr. Renuka said.

Foreign portfolio investors extend selling streak

Anupama Ghosh

MUMBAI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) extended selling streak in Indian markets, withdrawing a net ₹10,486.85 crore (\$1,202.82 million) over four trading days from September 1-4, as per data from National Securities Depository Ltd..

The sustained outflow reflects mounting global uncertainties and valuation concerns that have kept foreign investors cautious about Indian equities. The heaviest single-day outflow occurred on September 1 when the FPIs pulled out ₹7,715.43 crore (\$878.25 million), marking the most significant withdrawal during the period.



Equity markets bore the brunt of foreign selling, with FPIs withdrawing ₹11,256.93 crore.

This was followed by net outflows of ₹2,621.77 crore (\$297.06 million) on September 2 and ₹445.76 crore (\$50.59 million) on September 4. September 3 provided the only respite with net inflows of ₹1,277.06 crore (\$145.08

million).

Equity markets bore the brunt of foreign selling, with FPIs withdrawing ₹11,256.93 crore across the four trading sessions. The equity segment saw consistent outflows on three of the four days, with September 1 recording highest single-day equity withdrawal of ₹8,982.89 crore.

“Multiple factors contributed to this risk-off sentiment – a stronger dollar, renewed U.S. tariff threats and continuing geopolitical tensions added to global uncertainty,” Himanshu Srivastava, associate director - manager research, Morningstar Investment, said.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) refers to investments made by foreign entities in financial assets such as stocks, bonds, and other securities of a country. It is distinct from Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), as it does not involve acquiring control over a business.

Key Characteristics of FPI Passive investment: Investors do not participate in the management of the company.

Short-term focus: Aims for capital appreciation rather than long-term strategic interests.

Enhances market liquidity: Provides capital flow into financial markets, increasing efficiency and investment potential.

Sensitive to market sentiments: FPI is highly volatile, as investors can quickly withdraw funds in response to economic or political instability.

On the move with green hydrogen



**SPEAKING OF
SCIENCE**

D. Balasubramanian

The Indian Railways recently announced that a hydrogen-powered train, developed at the Integral Coach Factory in Chennai, has successfully completed all tests. This is a welcome sign of progress for the National Green Hydrogen Mission, which aims to produce at least five million metric tonnes of green hydrogen per year by the year 2030, a milestone on the way to achieving nationwide net zero emissions by 2070.

The train will soon be carrying passengers between Jind and Sonapat on an 89-km route in Haryana. This project will rely on hydrogen produced in Jind by a 1-MW polymer

electrolyte membrane electrolyser that produces 430 kg of hydrogen every day. The hydrogen will refill fuel tanks on the train, where fuel cells will convert the hydrogen to electricity that runs the train's electric motors.

The principle is quite simple. An electrolyser splits a water molecule into oxygen, protons, and electrons. In an electrochemical reaction at the negative electrode (called the anode), molecular oxygen is released, and the electrons liberated are conducted to the cathode via an external circuit. The polymer electrolyte membrane between the cathode and the anode is selective and only allows protons to pass through to the cathode, where they unite with the electrons to form hydrogen molecules. These rise as a gas and are collected, compressed, and stored. The mem-



A facility in Jind will soon produce green hydrogen to be used as fuel for a locomotive. MIGUEL BAIXALI/UNSPLASH

brane, typically a fluoropolymer such as Nafion (related to Teflon) is an excellent insulator, and electrons will not pass. The hydrogen and oxygen formed are clearly separated.

In the locomotive, as in a hydrogen-powered automobile, the above reaction is reversed in the hydrogen fuel cell. Hydrogen is brought to the anode, where each molecule is ca-

talytically split into two protons and two electrons. The protons pass through the membrane to the cathode, where they meet oxygen in air and the electrons that are brought through an external circuit from the anode. Water is formed. The electrons flowing through the external circuit constitute the electric current that powers the locomotive.

There is a key difference

between the chemical reactions in the fuel cell and in the electrolyser. The chemistry between hydrogen and oxygen is spontaneous, a reaction waiting to happen. Water, however, will not split into the two elements by itself. Electrical current must be supplied to provide the energy for this electrochemical reaction.

To produce green hydrogen, the electricity for the electrolysers has to come from renewable sources, such as solar panels or wind turbines. New sources of renewable energy will be needed to meet the goals of the National Green Hydrogen Mission. Also under way are exciting attempts to produce hydrogen in microbial electrolytic cells, where electrochemically active microbes grow on anodes and oxidize organic matter – agricultural residues, even wastewater – and

pass the electrons generated to the anode (*Current Science*, vol. 128, p. 133, 2025).

The catalysis steps require expensive materials such as platinum, iridium, etc. Ongoing research is aimed at replacing these with inexpensive nickel, cobalt, or even iron. In early work towards cheap hydrogen generation, the group of C.N.R. Rao at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research designed nickel-nickel hydroxide-graphite electrodes with a water-splitting capability comparable to platinum electrodes (*Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci., USA*, vol. 114, 2017). Combining such developments with solar and microbe-driven processes can produce a fuel that is both green and inexpensive.

(The article was written in collaboration with Sushil Chandani)

How RNA, amino acids may have linked up on early earth

By showing amino acids latch directly onto RNA without enzymes, researchers have provided striking evidence that life's essential partnership between genes and proteins might have begun in ordinary ponds or frozen pools billions of years ago

Anirban Mukhopadhyay

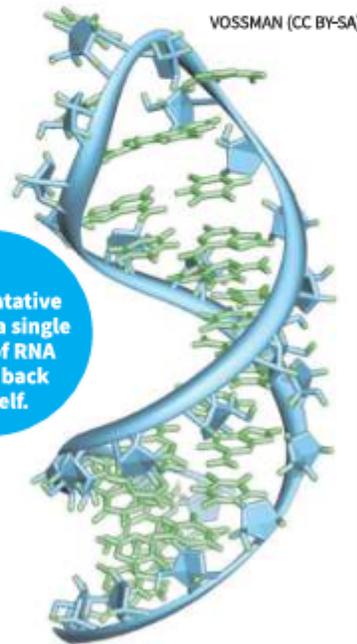
Life depends on a partnership between RNA, which stores instructions, and proteins, which do the work of building and running cells. But how this partnership began has long puzzled scientists. To make a protein, constituent amino acids must be linked in the order encoded by RNA. Today, a complex biological machine called the ribosome handles this task – but only after each amino acid is first “loaded” onto an RNA adapter. The catch is that the enzymes responsible for this loading are themselves proteins, creating a chicken-and-egg puzzle that has intrigued

Surprise chemistry

Chemistry reveals RNA and amino acids linked directly at life's dawn

- Scientists remain intrigued by how RNA and proteins first partnered to enable life's first cellular processes
- Researchers at University College London have found aminoacyl-thiols can link amino acids to RNA without involving enzymes
- Laboratory experiments showed amino acids attaching directly to RNA in water, resembling plausible early earth conditions
- This chemistry revealed astonishing selectivity, consistently favouring RNA over more reactive molecules, surprising many chemists
- A chemical switch separated RNA-charging from peptide-linking, mimicking distinct sequential stages of modern protein synthesis
- The findings suggest such reactions occurred in primordial ponds or frozen pools, initiating primitive coded peptide synthesis

Representative image of a single strand of RNA folding back on itself.



those same molecules are converted into thioacids, the chemistry flips, favouring the formation of peptide bonds instead. That means the two steps of protein building – RNA-charging and peptide-linking – can be carried out in the same solution but under distinct chemical modes of activation.

The team did not stop there. They also explored where these aminoacyl-thiols might have come from.

Their experiments suggested they could form from simple precursors such as nitriles and thiols, even under frigid conditions that concentrated the ingredients and sped up reactions. This implies the chemistry

lectivity that has astonished chemists.

“It's remarkable that

of years ago.

“Previous research often looked at either how

Powner said the reactivity was the heart of the discovery: “If I had to pick on-

Blood moon

Why is a blood moon called so?

Sky gazers in India and in other parts of the world will be able to witness a blood moon on September 7 during a total lunar eclipse. The moon will take on a dark red-copper hue. This is the result of a physical effect called Rayleigh scattering. During a total lunar eclipse, the earth comes between the sun and the moon, blocking direct sunlight from striking the lunar surface. However, not all sunlight is blocked. Only the bluer light is filtered out; the redder light is scattered by the earth's atmosphere, giving the moon its striking

colour. This phenomenon is called Rayleigh scattering. When light interacts with particles smaller than its wavelength, the intensity of the scattered light is inversely proportional to its wavelength. This is why earthsky appears blue: it has the shortest wavelength in visible light. During a blood moon, however, the bluer light is absorbed by the earth's atmosphere while the redder light is refracted towards the moon. The precise hue depends on dust and smoke levels in the atmosphere.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

Will the GST rate cuts boost the economy?

Which sectors will benefit from the sweeping changes? Which sectors are disgruntled about the change? How long has the rationalisation process been going on? Did the imposition of 50% U.S. tariffs weigh on the decision? What about revenue implications? What lies ahead?

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

On September 3, the GST Council authorised a new paradigm in the indirect tax regime. There will be fewer rates, and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on most items have been reduced. While this has been welcomed by most sectors, there are some which are somewhat disgruntled. There are also concerns over the revenue implications.

What prompted these changes?

The rationalisation of the multiple rates in GST has been on the anvil for a long time. The Council had in September 2021 constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) to look into rate rationalisation. This GoM began its work, but seemingly little progress was made. The GoM was composed entirely of representatives from the States, with no representative from the Centre. So, in order to nudge it in the direction it wanted, the Union government had to make a proposal to the GoM. The Ministry of Finance on August 15, 2025, announced that it had submitted its proposal to the GoM. Earlier that same day, in his Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that these “next-generation” GST reforms would be a Deepavali gift to the nation.

By August 21, 2025, the GoM – following a briefing by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman – had accepted the proposals and

The States will have to look for their own sources of revenue to make up any losses

even when considering only the main ones. The main rates comprise 0%, 5%, 12%, 18%, 28%, and a compensation cess over and above the 28% slab. This has been reduced to main slabs of 0%, 5%, 18% and 40%. The compensation cess for most items has been removed. It is still levied on tobacco products, but even that will be removed by the end of this calendar year, when the Centre pays back the loan it took to compensate States during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Apart from this, many items have been moved to lower tax slabs. According to an analysis by the State Bank of India’s economics research wing, of the 453 items that saw a change in their GST rate, 413 (or a little more than 91%) saw rates being cut, while 40 items saw rates increasing. The bulk of the rate reductions – 257 items, mostly common use products – were from the 12% to the 5% slab. Out of the 40 items that saw their rates increase, 17 were moved from the 28% slab to 40%. Here, it is important to note that the actual tax incidence might not have increased. For example, once the compensation cess is added, the effective tax rate on luxury cars and SUVs is 45-50%. That will go down to 40%.

Why were they necessary?

There are several reasons why the GST rate cuts make sense now. The first is that the legal period for the GST compensation cess will likely be coming to an end this calendar year. It can be levied up to March 31, 2026 or till when the Centre pays off its loans, whichever is earlier.

the changes, saying the decision to reduce GST in the sector from 12% to 5% on a wide range of medical products would directly benefit patients. The renewable energy sector, too, praised the decision to reduce taxes on renewable energy components from 12% to 5%, saying this was a progressive step towards accelerating India’s clean energy transition. Consumer appliance makers were also upbeat about the cuts, saying it would boost demand, especially in the run-up to the festive season.

The real estate sector said that bringing down the GST rate on cement from 28% to 18%, and on other building materials such as granite slabs, would reduce costs for the sector and be a big boost. Auto manufacturers said the reduction of GST on cars and non-luxury bikes from 28% to 18% would spur demand.

Which sectors voiced reservations?

The textile industry welcomed the downward revision of GST rates for both man-made fibre and cotton sectors to 5%, but also voiced its disappointment over the 18% duty for garments priced above ₹2,500 each. They said that woollens, wedding apparel, and traditional Indian wear would become more expensive.

While auto manufacturers welcomed the rate rationalisation, dealers voiced some worries about consumers postponing their purchases until September 22, when the new rates come into force. They also called for greater clarity on what happens to the cess on vehicles they have bought from manufacturers but not yet sold.

The insurance sector will likely also see a mixed picture from the GST rate cuts. The exemption of personal life and health insurance from GST will increase insurance penetration, but the simultaneous removal of input tax credits might increase costs for insurers, thereby



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How much is spent on children's education in India?

What does a recent report by the National Sample Survey show? Why is there a divide between girls and boys?

Priscilla Jebaraj

The story so far:

Despite a recent drop in the World Economic Forum's gender gap rankings, partly due to the education category, India has made steady progress in recent years in terms of enrolling more girls in school, with government data showing that girls now make up 48% of the school population. In higher education, in fact, the gross enrolment ratio for women is slightly higher than that of men. However, data collected as part of the National Sample Survey earlier this summer show a more insidious gender gap that remains in education – the differing amounts of money that families spend on their sons as opposed to their daughters for their education.

What are the differences in expenditure?

The recent report on the Comprehensive Modular Survey on education, which collected nationwide data between April and June as part of the 80th round of the NSS, shows that the per-student expenditure on girls is lower than on boys during all stages of school education, from pre-primary to higher secondary, as well as across the rural-urban divide. The survey covered 52,085 households in 2,384 villages and 1,982 urban blocks across the country, with education-related information collected for 57,742 students currently enrolled in school.

In rural India,

In States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, boys and girls go to government and private schools in almost equal ratios

India, the per-student expenditure on girls was ₹2,791 less than on boys. In urban India, by the time students are in higher secondary school, there is almost 30% more being spent on education for boys than girls. When course fees alone are considered, the gap widens, with families paying on average 21.5% more on fees for boys than for girls across the country.

This prioritising of boys' education is also clear in the type of schools that Indian families choose for their children. About 58.4% of girls are enrolled in government schools, which are usually free of cost in terms of course fees, with only 29.5% of them having access to more expensive private school education. However, 34% of boys are enrolled in private unaided schools. The gap goes beyond the school classroom, and extends to private tuitions that many families consider essential for a quality education. Tuition classes now supplement school teaching at all stages of education, and overall, 26% of girls and 27.8% of boys are enrolled in such classes. When it comes to expenditure, however, the gap widens, especially in higher classes. By the higher secondary level, families are spending on average 22% more in terms of tuition fees on their boys in comparison to girls.

career

in rural India, families spent ₹1,373 or 18% more on boys than girls in terms of course fees, textbooks, and stationery, uniforms, and transportation to school.

CIVIL SERVICE

How does this vary by State?

States differ widely in terms of the gender gap in education. When it comes to enrolment of girls and boys in government schools versus private schools for instance, the biggest gaps can be seen in States/UTs such as Delhi, where almost 54% of boys go to government schools, compared to more than 65% of girls. On the other hand, almost 38.8% of boys go to more expensive private schools, compared to 26.6% of girls. Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Punjab also have gender gaps of more than 10 percentage points. In Gujarat, the gender gap is striking in urban areas, but narrower in rural areas. In States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, boys and girls go to government and private schools in almost equal ratios, while several northeastern States have flipped the script, sending more girls to private schools.

Expenditures are more nuanced, especially in the higher classes. In higher secondary education, for instance, families in Telangana, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal spend vastly more on boys than girls, though they spent more on girls at the secondary level. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, the average education expenditure on girls at the secondary level is ₹23,796 compared to ₹22,593 on boys. In higher secondary, however, the expenditure on boys in the State has shot up to ₹35,973, compared to just ₹19,412 for girls. Part of this can be attributed to girls dropping out at that stage, though subsidies for girl students could also account for some of the difference. States like Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Kerala also spend more on higher secondary girls, especially in urban India, where data shows that transport costs become a major factor, with parents intent on safety of the girl.

Expenditure on private coaching also varied by State, especially at the higher secondary level. In Himachal Pradesh, for instance, there was a stark gap between the ₹9,813 spent per boy student in higher secondary school enrolled for private tuition in comparison to the ₹1,550 spent per girl. Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu were among other States which showed significant gender gaps in this regard.

ner.in



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Is a shift underway in India's foreign policy?

How productive was the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit? Did a meeting between China, Russia and India at Tianjin signal a change in relations? Did U.S. moves on tariffs and sanctions prompt this? What are the leaders saying?

Suhasini Haidar

The story so far:

P rime Minister Narendra Modi began the week in Tianjin, with a show of camaraderie with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit on September 1. A photograph of the three leaders together made headlines around the world. It also seemingly irked U.S. President Donald Trump, prompting a series of sarcastic statements, even as the U.S. doubled down on 50% tariffs, sanctions on India's import of Russian oil, and asking the European Union to do the same. By the end of the week, however, Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump appeared conciliatory.

What happened in Tianjin?

The week saw a series of high-level summits seen as a projection of power by China, beginning with the 10-nation SCO summit in Tianjin, where several other leaders including from Turkey, Nepal, Maldives, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Indonesia and Malaysia were invited. From there, the action moved to Beijing, where Mr. Xi led Mr. Putin and dozens of other leaders including North Korea's Kim Jong Un to a

India-U.S. relations have been impacted by months of tension, but official exchanges and military exercises have not stopped

massive military parade commemorating 80 years since the end of the Second World War. The statements released included a number of counter-West elements, with Mr. Xi promoting a "Global Governance Initiative" and Mr. Modi pitching for a "civilisational dialogue" between SCO countries. The SCO declaration criticised "coercive, unilateral" economic measures, believed to be aimed at U.S. tariffs and European sanctions. During a photo-shoot for the SCO meet, Prime Minister Modi was seen purposefully leading President Putin down the red carpet to where President Xi was standing. A day before that, Mr. Xi and Mr. Modi held bilateral talks that had been cordial and possibly paved the way for the tri-leader photo.

What happened at the bilateral meeting?

This was Mr. Modi's first visit to China since 2018, and his first meeting with President Xi not in a third country since the military standoff and Galwan clashes in 2020, where both sides agreed to normalise ties. China appeared conciliatory, with Mr. Xi referring to India and China as "partners not rivals", while India appears to have climbed down from an insistence that the LAC situation be normalised before a resumption of ties in other spheres. They agreed to let the border situation be

India as a democracy was getting closer to Russia and China. There were a number of other comments criticising the Modi government, including calling the Ukraine conflict "Modi's war", which the Ministry of External Affairs rejected as "inaccurate and misleading". India will also participate in a BRICS online summit chaired by Brazil on September 8 to discuss a common response to the U.S. tariffs, which may send up more red flags.

Delhi-Washington ties have been fraught over many issues, including visa, immigration and trade policies, and Mr. Trump's repeated assertions of mediating the ceasefire in Operation Sindoor. But amid the tension, came yet another turnaround. Mr. Trump on Friday said that India and the U.S. have a "special relationship" and that he would "always be great friends with PM Modi". Mr. Modi, who had not responded to any of the statements thus far, welcomed them and said he shared Mr. Trump's "positive assessment" of the partnership.

What lies ahead?

While many foreign policy observers may have faced whiplash from the perception that Indian policy had shifted from the "west to the east" and possibly back to the west, the shifts are less perceptible if you consider India's decades-old policy of strategic autonomy and balance. The visit to China for the SCO had been expected for months, after the Xi-Modi meeting in Kazan on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in October 2024 had restarted ties. While India had put SCO on the backburner for the past two years and

A flashpoint in the Palk Strait

Katchatheevu

Half a century since New Delhi gave up its claim to the barren island and recognised Sri Lanka's sovereignty over it, politicians in India periodically rake up the issue, triggering tensions in ties between the friendly countries

Meera Srinivasan

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's recent visit to Katchatheevu, said to be the first by a head of state, drew attention on both sides of the Palk Strait.

Attired in smart casuals – his trademark double-pocket shirt – the 56-year-old leftist leader, elected to office a year ago, is seen on a naval boat, flanked by Fisheries Minister and Jaffna MP Ramalingam Chandrasekar and other officials. He smiles gently before setting foot on the tiny, uninhabited island, 33 nautical miles off the Jaffna peninsula, on September 1. Seated in the shade of palm trees, Mr. Dissanayake listens intently while a Naval officer describes the 1.15 sq. km outcrop, pointing to a map.

Walking around briskly with officials in tow, Mr. Dissanayake pays respects at the St. Anthony's Catholic Shrine, the only permanent structure there, before returning to Jaffna, where at a public meeting earlier that day he pledged to safeguard Sri Lankan territory, resisting any "external force". The symbolism of the visit, with the accompanying visuals and messaging played well in Sri Lanka, comes days after Tamil actor-politician



Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, centre, in Katchatheevu on September 1. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

for its rich resources.

Katchatheevu is a barren island, with no drinking water or sanitation. Every March, Sri Lanka waives visa controls to allow fishermen from India

has offered political ammunition to their rivals, especially on the eve of State polls next year. Ahead of general elections last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the Congress

M.K. Stalin said the island's retrieval was "the only permanent solution" to the issues faced by the fishermen in the State.

Everyone calling for the island's



northern Sri Lanka rely heavily on the resource-rich Palk Strait. However, with Tamil Nadu fishermen relentlessly resorting to bottom-trawling, a destructive fishing method that scoops out the seabed to maximise the catch and profits, this has severely affected the marine ecosystem. With the catch on the Indian side of the International Maritime Boundary Line diminishing over time, the Tamil Nadu fishing boats ventured into the Sri Lankan side, targeting a heavier net. Daily wage fishermen, working for wealthy boat owners in Tamil Nadu, periodically court arrest by the Sri Lankan Navy – over 230 arrests so far this year – a risk they take to secure their day's earnings.

Bottom-trawling

Tamil fishermen in northern Sri Lanka, still reeling from the impact of the civil war that ended 16 years ago, contend they have no real chance of rebuilding their destroyed livelihoods, unless their counterparts across the Palk Strait give up bottom-trawling – a practice banned in Sri Lanka.

In bilateral talks with fisher leaders through the years, or petitions to politicians in India and Sri Lanka, all they have been asking their fellow, Tamil-speaking brothers is that they

THE GIST

▼ The competing claims made from India [Madras Presidency, specifically] and Ceylon to Katchatheevu date back to the 1920s, during British colonial times

▼ The neighbours settled the matter some five decades later, through two bilateral agreements signed in 1974 and 1976, delineating an International Maritime Boundary Line, whereby Katchatheevu is firmly on the Sri Lankan side

▼ In return, New Delhi got sovereign rights over Wadge Bank, located near Kanniya Kumari, known for its rich resources