

SC Seeks ECI Reply on CEC's Powers

Plea challenges CEC Gyanesh Kumar's exercise of poll panel powers

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): The Supreme Court on Monday issued notice to the Centre and the Election Commission of India (ECI) on a plea challenging the manner in which the powers of the poll panel are being exercised and questioning whether Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar can individually exercise or represent powers vested in the multi-member poll body.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Joy-malya Bagchi and V. Mohana also sought responses from the three Election Commissioners after senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for the petitioner, submitted that the credibility of the ECI had been undermined and that the CEC was acting contrary to the statutory framework governing the poll body.

Vikas Singh contended that some interim measures were required, arguing that the present functioning of the ECI had left citizens feeling unsafe. "Today, the very CEC as a constitutional authority is acting in a manner which is completely con-



trary to the statute under which he is appointed," the senior counsel submitted. However, the CJI Kant-led Bench said that the top court would first require authenticated information on the allegations, stating that it could annul any decision if it is subsequently found to be unlawful.

"Let's first have authenticated information on that (the allegations). We can always annul any decision,"

the Supreme Court said. Singh alternatively urged the apex court to direct that, until the next date of hearing, decisions of the ECI should be taken only unanimously. However, the CJI Kant-led Bench said that the Commissioners were expected to take unanimous decisions and, in the absence of unanimity, the matter was required to be decided by majority. It also cautioned that the petitioner

was relying on a news report and said that it would like to hear the ECI's response. "News reports may be fully or partially correct. We will like their response," the apex court said, adding that it would seek responses from the concerned respondents and examine whether the law had been followed.

As per the case status reflected on the official website of the apex court, the matter is tentatively listed for hearing on October 26. The plea seeks enforcement of the collective decision-making framework governing the ECI and a writ in the nature of quo warranto concerning the authority under which the CEC has reportedly acted in the name of the poll panel. It contends that Article 324 of the Constitution vests the superintendence, direction and control of elections in the "Commission" and not in an individual CEC, while relying on Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, which provides for collective decision-making.

India, Switzerland sign pacts to boost ties



New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): India and Switzerland on Monday signed several MoUs to deepen their co-operation across sectors, including sustainable infrastructure development, exchange of young professionals, innovation, technology transfer, and entrepreneurship.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Swiss President Guy Parmelin held a meeting at Hyderabad House here to review the entire spectrum of bilateral ties.

among other provisions," the statement noted. The MoU on the 'Promotion and Collaboration on Transportation Technologies' aims to promote collaboration in sustainable infrastructure development, with a focus on transportation and mobility systems by advancing technologies and infrastructure in areas such as electric vehicles, ropeways, circular economy, tunnels, and other transport sectors. Moreover, a Letter of In-

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According to an MEA statement, the agreement on the Exchange of Young Professionals (YPS) aims to govern the exchange of young professionals taking up temporary employment in the other country to enhance their professional and language skills within their field. "YPS incorporates an exchange of 300 persons annually per country, which may increase to 500, and a timeline of 30/90 days for verification of nationality/residency status,

tent (LoI) between the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) aims to promote long-term cooperation between the Indian and Swiss research communities by supporting exploratory scientific collaboration, building partnerships for future joint research, and establishing a broader framework to sustain long-term initiatives across mutually agreed priority areas. Notably, the Implemen-

and space. We also welcome the agreement reached with the University of Zurich to build the capacity of India's science startups." On October 7, India is organising a "Prosperity Summit" with business leaders from India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). "This summit will serve as a significant platform to transform the promise of our trade and investment partnership into concrete outcomes," said the Prime Minister.

India-US Trade Pact Will Give Big Boost To Economy: Jaishankar

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday said that the proposed India-US bilateral trade agreement is a "big step with great possibilities", as it could provide a significant boost to the country's economy by expanding market access in one of the world's largest and most lucrative markets. Speaking at the Kautilya Economic Conclave here with the theme: "India and the World: Adaptive by Design", Jaishankar said that Washington cannot be blamed for all the problems in the global trade system, as several market distortions have emerged from sources other than the US and need to be assessed objectively.

The minister said that the US is India's major economic, trade, and defence partner and that recently concluded trade pacts with the European Union, the UK, and the European Free Trade Association would help bring greater balance to India's trade relationships.

Jaishankar further stated that India's earlier free trade agreements had largely focused on ASEAN countries, Japan, and South Korea, making it important for New Delhi to diversify towards economies with



more transparent and mature markets and greater purchasing power.

He also observed that India has strengthened or improved ties with China, Russia, and the Gulf as part of a "multi-alignment" approach that seeks to advance multiple relationships based on the opportunities and challenges involved.

The minister said that every relationship is net-net a plus for India and progress with one partner can make it easier for the country to advance its interests on other fronts.

The External Affairs Minister further stated that India regards attacks on civilian shipping as "completely unacceptable", whether in the Black Sea, the Red Sea or the Gulf, and that dialogue and diplomacy remain the way forward to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

ECI Debunks Rahul Gandhi's Claims On Bihar SIR, Form 6

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): The ECI on Monday reiterated that the order for SIR in Bihar given on June 24, 2025, was issued with the unanimous approval of the Commission, dismissing claims made on social media by Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi. In a clarification issued along with Gandhi's social media post, the Election Commission of India (ECI) said, "The order for SIR in Bihar issued on 24 June 2025 was issued with the unanimous approval of the Commission. This order has been upheld by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in its judgment dated 27 May 2026."

The Commission also highlighted its September 26 Press Note's section which said, "The declaration attached to Form 6 for SIR has been upheld by the Supreme Court. For non-SIR period, the Forms applicable as per Rules (the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960) will be used."

The ECI's clarification came close to Gandhi's social media post, which said, "It is now established beyond doubt that Gyanesh Kumar changed Form 6 illegally and unilaterally. This is just one more proof of him abusing his position to help the BJP. He and everyone else involved in this



criminal assault on our democracy will be held accountable."

The Press Information Bureau (PIB) also issued a Fact Check on Monday stating that the ECI has not pulled down the September 26 press note, through which it modified certain terms related to Form 6 for the non-SIR period, from its website.

In a Fact Check and "fake news alert", the PIB shared the ECI website's link to the September 26 press note, refuting claims made by the Cockroach Janta Party's Ashutosh Ranka on social media.

The government advisory asked people, including those active on social media, to guard against rumours. "Do not share unverified videos or claims. Check information against credible, independently verifiable sources before accepting or sharing it."

Tejashwi Yadav announces Bihar-wide protest against CEC, Centre

Patna, Oct 5 (GNS): Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Bihar Assembly Tejashwi Yadav has announced a series of protests across Bihar as part of the INDIA alliance's campaign against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar and the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Central government. Yadav said Bihar, which he described as the birthplace of the INDIA alliance and a "cradle of democracy", would once again become the centre of a major political movement.

Referring to the 2025 Special Intensive Revision (SIR), Yadav said: "It was from Bihar that the dismantling of democracy began."

He added that, as citizens of Bihar who believe in democracy and the Constitution, "we will not allow democracy to be destroyed at any cost". Yadav said opposition parties had jointly



decided their future course of action. According to him, INDIA alliance constituents will organise protest marches across all blocks of Bihar on October 7, targeting CEC Gyanesh Kumar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He said the opposition parties would subsequently intensify the agitation on October 8, when Mahagathbandhan constituents would stage sit-ins at district headquarters across the state. A separate march to the Governor's House has

also been planned in Patna on the same day.

"I will be present in Patna myself, alongside MLAs, MLCs and MPs. We will raise our voices against the way votes were looted; this amounts to the murder of democracy, which will not be tolerated under any circumstances," Yadav said. The INDIA bloc has been campaigning against the Election Commission over its handling of electoral roll revision and has demanded action against CEC Gyanesh Kumar.

Next-Gen GST reforms to focus on simpler compliance

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said that the next phase of Goods and Services Tax (GST) reforms will focus on making compliance simpler to advance Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Viksit Bharat'.

Sharing an article on LinkedIn, FM Sitharaman said the Next-Gen GST reforms were aimed at providing relief to taxpayers while giving greater momentum to the economy. She said the rate changes introduced on September 22, 2025 were the first part of the reforms, while the next phase of process-related changes will come before the GST Council. "The next phase of process reforms will come before the GST Council shortly," FM Sitharaman said. She said the reforms were designed to give households relief, provide businesses with greater certainty and make it easier for taxpayers to fulfil their obligations.

The minister also highlighted that the value of reported taxable supplies grew 25.8 per cent between October 2025 and July 2026 from a year earlier. Moreover,



Gross GST collections rose 11.6 per cent to Rs 12.46 lakh crore during April-September 2026. GST collections recorded double-digit annual growth in every month from June through September, with collections during the four-month period rising nearly 15 per cent, according to her. Meanwhile, Net GST collections (after refunds) grew 10.4 per cent during the first half of the financial year, she added.

Reported consumer sales or B2C supplies increased 26.7 per cent in the post-reform period, while GST registrations stood at about 1.71 crore at the end of August, up nearly 15 per cent from a year earlier.

CEC's Resignation, SIR Rollback, Ballot Papers: Kharge

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): Congress National President, Mallikarjun Kharge, on Monday listed the party's "non-negotiable" demands over the recent controversy surrounding the Election Commission of India (ECI), which also include the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar.

INDIA Bloc-led protests are being staged across various states to demand the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar over alleged irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. Taking to X, Kharge said, "The Congress Party's 3 demands are non-negotiable. First, the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar; Second, the cancellation of SIR; Third, conducting elections on Ballot Paper."

"Across the country, Congress workers and INDIA Bloc partners are on the streets over these three issues. Whichever Civil Society Members and Youth Organisations are struggling on these issues in various places across the country, we stand with them," he said.

Referring to the incident of harassment of female journalists in



Delhi during the anti-CEC protests, the Congress chief said, "On the other hand, the BJP has harassed female journalists in Delhi, which is highly condemnable. The dictator is extremely panicked; get ready for another chapter in the distraction tactics."

Three women journalists have filed complaints against Delhi Police personnel, alleging sexual misconduct while being detained during the protests at Jantar Mantar, on Saturday.

The police, on Sunday, stated that the complaints have been transferred to the Crime Branch for an "impartial" enquiry.

Meanwhile, the Raj Thackeray-Uddhav Thackeray-led Opposition organised 'Garjana Morcha' in Mumbai against the ECI.

Indian–Oman Trade: The First Wave of Globalisation in Ancient History

Ashwin Parijat Anshu

A sea may seem to represent a vast distance between two frontiers. But when civilisations come close to a sea, it is transformed into a bridge for people and culture to move. Such has been the case between India and Oman, where the Indian Ocean maritime network turned the Arabian Sea into one of the most vital and dynamic zones of interaction in human history.

More than the much-hyped Silk Roads, it is this sea-borne enterprise of people, commerce, and ideas that has been of great significance in the advancement of human civilisation. It is this maritime network that has turned India and Oman relations into one of the most enduring partnerships in the history of international relations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the Sultanate of Oman on 17-18 December, accompanied by a high-level delegation, offers a good opportunity to look at India-Oman relations in a long historical perspective.

The history of this partnership dates back to the Harappan times when ships from western ports like Lothal, Dholavira and Balakot sailed toward the land of Magan (ancient name for the Oman region in Mesopotamian sources) carrying beads, pottery, ivory objects, cotton – both raw and textile and even rice. Archaeological discoveries in ancient Oman ports like Sohar and Sumhuram/ Khora Rori and other sites have furnished evidence of a flourishing trade since the third millennium BCE.

In return, Oman traders brought copper, frankincense (used for aromatic oils and sticks), certain



kinds of stones, and dates, which were an Arabian staple product. Omani ports also served as exchange centres for trans-shipping Indus Valley products to Mesopotamia and further west, greatly expanding the markets for goods from the Indian subcontinent. Stamp seals found in Omani ports, along with weights and measures and button seals found in Indus sites, illustrate the systematic nature of trade between ancient Oman and the Indus Valley civilisation.

By the early Christian centuries, Omani seafarers had developed great expertise in shipbuilding (innovations like fast-moving ships called dhows) and sea navigation, having acquired the knowledge of monsoon winds and navigation using stars and simple instruments like the Kamal.

The entire Indian trade with the Roman world, which figures prominently in Roman sources like Natural History by Pliny the Elder and the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, was forged with Arabian-Omani traders acting as intermediaries for both the Indians

and the Romans. It was this trade that made Indian spices an item of daily use in both the Roman and the Arabian worlds. One can refer to this classical epoch as constituting one of the first globalisation in human history that had such far-reaching consequences in the progress of human civilisation.

Ports like Sohar and Muscat in Oman, Aden in Yemen and Bharuch (Gujarat), Muziris (Pattanam), Nelynda (Kerala), Sopara (Maharashtra) and Arikamedu (near Puducherry) became ancient cosmopolises having significant Greek, Roman, Omani, and Syrian presence.

The rise of Islam and the bringing of a large Eurasian region under the Caliphate added new layers to the relationship between Oman and India. By now, Gujarati merchants—Hindus, Jains, Muslim Bohras and Khojas—had a sizeable presence in Oman. These traders were formally welcomed and recognised by rulers in Oman.

On the Indian side, there developed an equally sizeable presence of Omani Muslim traders in India, the greatest being on the

Malabar coast. Arab Historian al-Masudi, writing in the 10th century, mentions that 10,000 Arab Muslims, including those from Oman, were residing on the western coast of India. Omani traders were the biggest sources of Arabian horses coveted by Indian rulers, while spices, textiles, sandalwood, teak, Indigo, Sugar, rice and other products reached Sohar and Muscat, which had emerged as international hubs in this period. In the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal period, the Hajj pilgrimage to Arabia also contributed to the constant movement of people between the two realms.

The stories of Sindbad, the sailor in the Arabian Nights, highlight the cultural linkages that centuries of relations with the Arab world had forged. Aply, the fictional home of Sindbad was Sohar, one of the most important coastal cities in Oman. Indian mathematics and science travelled to the Western world through the highway represented by the Indian Ocean maritime network. The Arabs greatly enriched this knowledge and passed it on to the Western world,

contributing to the rise of the modern world. This wouldn’t have been possible without the dynamism provided by India-Oman linkages.

The establishment of European dominance across the Indian Ocean network from the 17th century onwards brought the Indian and Omani commercial enterprise into closer alliance to resist European dominance.

Thus, Omani rulers, like Imam Ahmad Bin Said, collaborated with Indian powers (Marathas, Mysore’s Tipu Sultan) to counter Portuguese influence, forming military and political pacts. King Zamorin of Calicut, too, had sought the help of Omani merchants to find alternatives to the Portuguese stranglehold on maritime commerce.

When the Omani rulers succeeded in overthrowing Portuguese dominance and expanding ties with East Africa, Gujarati traders were active participants in rebuilding the trade networks, especially in spices, ivory, and textiles, offering capital, credit and logistical support to Omani efforts. Not surprisingly, Oman has the most sizeable presence of Arabs of Indian origin.

India-Oman relations can proudly look back on millennia of tried and tested partnership. Sultan Qaboos’s visit in 1975 and the development of cooperation in many areas were an acknowledgement of this unique partnership between two ancient nations. As Prime Minister Modi visits Oman for the second time since February 2018, it will be a truly fitting moment in India’s engagement with the Arab world, reinforcing ties with India’s oldest strategic partner in the Indian Ocean arena.

Elevation Bias: Why District Courts Remain Excluded from Judicial Reform

Gokul Sunoj
Siddarth Raman
A recent analysis in The Print on judicial composition underscored how slow career progression and systemic barriers prevent members of the subordinate judiciary from meaningfully entering the higher courts. A bench led by Justice BR Gavai, which flagged this concern, even floated the idea of quotas for district judges. Our analysis of data from major high courts reveals that roughly three quarters of judges are elevated directly from the Bar. The highest percentage composition for service elevated judges is at the High Court of Sikkim. Deceptively at a 50-50 split, the court has just two judges as of 14 December — one of whom has been inducted from service and the other from the Bar. There is not a single case wherein the percentages switch the other way round.

The piece went on to note that judges from the subordinate judiciary were elevated to high courts much later in their careers. We dived into the data to find the claim to be true. As Table 2 shows, judges elevated from service, in most major courts, lag behind their peers from the Bar by about half a decade (Madras being an exception). This has material effects on their seniority thereafter as elaborated below.

The inevitable downstream consequence is that rarely does a judge of any high court elevated from judicial services ever stand a chance at appointment to the Supreme Court. Far too few have had this trajectory. The current apex court composition bears witness to this observation. Of the



current 33 judges, 31 were first elevated from the Bar to high courts and then to the Supreme Court, and two handpicked directly onto the Supreme Court bench without even serving as high court judges.

This composition might seem benign. It reflects a classical risk-reward trade-off. Those who venture into the space of private practice with greater risks and show immense potential are presented with opportunities of elevation sooner. This divide strikes at the root of the institutional legitimacy of the judicial system for three reasons.

High court judges oversee the entire district judiciary in their role as ‘administrative judges’. In Uttar Pradesh, for example, 67 judicial districts fall under the administrative supervi-

sion of high court judges. Yet nearly 85 per cent of the administrative judges have little experience of the system they oversee.

While some of these members elevated from the Bar have experience practicing in trial courts, it is unrealistic to expect that these judges have had sustained engagement with the district courts that they now oversee. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court advised high courts to consider trial court lawyers for senior designation. It suggested reaching out to district court judges and officers presiding over tribunals to seek recommendations. The same applies to elevations as well. As the situation stands, to gain visibility for elevation, lawyers must have substantial practice in the high court or

Supreme Court, not careers rooted in district courts. Those who supervise and exercise inordinate control over the district judiciary today do so without the institutional memory or lived experience that is essential for meaningful reform. Diktats from the upper judiciary demanding “expeditious disposal” or “strict timelines” often ring hollow precisely for this reason. A system that rewards star-studded lawyers creates a corrosive imbalance between the Bar and the bench. The symbolic architecture of judicial authority presumes the primacy of a judge within a courtroom. Within its four walls, even the grandest of lawyers bow before the might of the judicial office. In practice, things are far messier. As high court judges are drawn predominantly from the Bar, their professional and social networks remain lawyer-centric. These are the very lawyers who enjoy the greatest visibility, wield disproportionate influence, and frequently appear before those elevated from their own circles.

For members of the subordinate judiciary, this dynamic produces difficult pressures. This is not to say that these judges aren’t independent or steadfast in their commitment to their oath of office. They certainly are. But that — issuing adverse orders against powerful senior lawyers may carry unspoken risks for their career progression, particularly when their own pathways to the high court are already narrow — puts them in a precarious spot.

This divide is only set to increase with the minimum practice requirements that

have recently kicked in. A person is required to practice for three years before attempting the judicial services exam.

This has two implications for the composition of the higher courts’ benches. First, it excludes those who can’t afford to practice before district courts. Second, it reduces the chances of district bench members to “make it” to the high court at an earlier age.

Ex-judge Bharat Chugh had raised concerns that such mandates have an exclusionary effect. With guaranteed salaries and largely stable work profiles, judicial services traditionally attracted more first-generation lawyers, students from regional law schools, and candidates who cannot afford the risk profile of private practice. The mandatory practice policy pushes out those who cannot afford the risks of private litigation from the lower judiciary altogether.

Making matters worse, those who do manage to enter judicial services despite these obstacles encounter a near-total glass ceiling when it comes to elevation to the Supreme Court. It offers far too little to the bright and the ambitious. The prestige hierarchy between the two streams becomes even more entrenched. This double exclusion — first at the point of entry and later at the stage of elevation — erodes not just individual aspirations but the social legitimacy of the judicial system itself.

It is known that the system is structured through layers of self-selection that consistently privilege those already proximate while filtering out those from underprivileged backgrounds.

16th Finance Commission: Big Revenue Blow to Himachal

FOR nearly seven decades, the Indian Republic has recognised a foundational truth of federal governance: not all states are born with equal economic capacity, and some, especially mountain and border states, carry structural disadvantages. The revenue deficit grant (RDG) emerged from this understanding. It was an instrument meant to balance geography, history and national priorities. The 16th Finance Commission’s decision to withdraw the RDG from Himachal Pradesh marks a rupture in India’s federal compact — one that threatens to push the state towards fiscal subordination and political marginalisation.

Himachal Pradesh was never carved out on the assumption that it would be a revenue-surplus state. It was carved out because the Indian State believed that political integration, border security, ecological stewardship and social development in the Himalayas were national responsibilities. Since the time of the earliest finance commissions, revenue deficit support recognised that governing a mountainous, sparsely populated, fragile region costs more and yields less by conventional revenue logic. The 16th Finance Commission’s approach dismantles this legacy. Over the next five years, Himachal is set to lose around Rs 50,000 crore. Last year, the state’s revenue receipts stood at roughly Rs 42,000 crore. Even a Rs 10,000-crore annual shortfall — the scale of RDG withdrawal — amounts to 25% of the state’s revenue base. This will hit pensions, salaries, healthcare, education and basic service delivery. A state government cannot absorb a quarter of its revenue without severe social and political consequences. At this scale, fiscal autonomy collapses into fiscal survival. The question, therefore, is: Can a state continue to function as a state under such conditions?

Himachal Pradesh is a border state, supported by the Centre as a strategic necessity. The withdrawal of revenue support signals a dangerous shift — from shared responsibility to abandonment. This move reflects a mindset of over-centralisation, where the Union consolidates fiscal power while states are reduced to implementation agencies. Federalism, in this vision, is no longer a partnership of equals but a hierarchy of dependence.

When states are stripped of predictable revenue flows, they are forced into debt, compliance and political acquiescence. One is compelled to ask whether this fiscal strangulation reflects a reimagination of states as administrative extensions of the Centre. Is Himachal being virtually nudged towards the status of a union territory? This fiscal assault must be read alongside Himachal’s experience with extractive development. Hydropower is a glaring example. For decades, the state has borne the ecological, social and infrastructural costs of dam construction: displacement, destabilised mountains, altered river systems and irreversible ecological stress. Yet the financial returns barely touch the state. The royalty — at around 12% of generated power, misleadingly termed “free power” or “distress cost” — is negligible. There is no equity participation for the state, except in a few cases. Revenues flow overwhelmingly to Central utilities and private corporations. The resource is local. The land is local. The risks are local. The profits are not.

This is extractive capitalism: the periphery supplies resources, the centre accumulates surplus and the state absorbs the damage. When revenue deficit support is simultaneously withdrawn, the cycle of extraction is completed.

The injustice deepens when one considers forest governance. Following forest nationalisation and regulatory tightening after the 1980s, states like Himachal were left with a vast green cover but no meaningful fiscal instruments to derive revenue from it. Forests in Himachal are ecological shields, contributing to climate stability, water security and biodiversity for the entire country. Yet the costs of protection, conservation, disaster management and opportunity loss are borne almost entirely by the state.

No economic activity, no sustainable extraction, no revenue innovation is permitted — rightly, in ecological terms — but with no compensatory fiscal mechanism. In this context, the revenue deficit grant is a legitimate constitutional compensation for providing national ecological services. To withdraw it is to penalise environmental responsibility. Perhaps the most perverse feature of the 16th Finance Commission’s logic is its disregard for what Himachal has achieved despite constraints. The state has emerged second only to Kerala on key human development indicators. It was the result of decades of investment in education, healthcare, nutrition and social welfare. The very expenditures that built this success now appear to be treated as fiscal inefficiencies. Instead of rewarding social investment, the Finance Commission’s approach effectively punishes it.

Beyond numbers and balance sheets lies a deeper moral question. Himachal has given more than resources — it has given lives. Visit villages in Kangra, Hamirpur, Una and adjoining regions. Attend gram sabha meetings. In many villages, you will find women assembling in overwhelming numbers because generations of men have been lost — to wars, border conflicts and military deployments. Himachal has one of the highest per capita representations in the armed forces. Its people have guarded borders, served in hostile terrain and paid a disproportionate price for national security.

The fiscal hollowing is compounded by the steady erosion of the state’s legitimate claims over Bhakra-Beas revenues and land-based income linked to water flows. Water flows on land. Land is a state subject. Any serious federal arrangement would recognise land revenue as a legitimate income stream. The systematic denial of these rights leaves the state with responsibility but no resources — a model guaranteed to fail.

All this unfolds amid rising unemployment, youth anxiety and social stress. Fiscal contraction under such conditions is destabilising. When the Centre withdraws support without building alternative revenue pathways, it pushes the state towards alienation and political resentment. History teaches us that such alienation does not remain silent for long.

The question must be clearly asked: Does the Centre intend to reduce Himachal Pradesh to a fiscally dependent adjunct or will it honour the constitutional promise that held the Union together for 70 years? The present may choose to ignore this warning. The future will not.

The issue also raises wider questions about the future of cooperative federalism and the manner in which fiscal responsibilities are distributed between the Union and the states. States with difficult terrain, ecological constraints and strategic responsibilities require a fiscal framework that recognises their distinct circumstances rather than judging them solely through conventional revenue-generation parameters. A uniform approach risks deepening disparities between regions instead of addressing them.

Himachal Pradesh therefore needs a sustainable fiscal arrangement that combines predictable central support with greater opportunities to generate its own resources. Compensation for ecological services, a fairer share from hydropower and water resources, and stronger support for disaster resilience could help the state meet its obligations without excessive dependence on borrowing. Such measures would also acknowledge the national benefits derived from the state’s forests, rivers and strategic location. Ultimately, the debate is not merely about one grant or one state. It is about what Indian federalism should mean in practice and how national priorities are financed. A durable federal compact must ensure that states carrying disproportionate environmental, social and security responsibilities are not left financially weakened. The concerns raised by Himachal Pradesh merit a transparent and constitutional dialogue between the Centre and the states.

Bhutani Highlights Cooperative-Led Growth, Calls for PAN Integration of Societies

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): The Secretary, Ministry of Cooperation, Dr. Ashish Kumar Bhutani, addressed the inaugural session of the two-day National Level Review Meeting in Shillong, Meghalaya. The Review meeting, held on 10-11 April 2025, discussed initiatives and formulation of strategies to further strengthen and modernise the Cooperative Sector across the country.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Dr. Ashish Kumar Bhutani said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and the guidance of Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Shri Amit Shah the Ministry is committed to promoting cooperative-led economic growth with robust inter-state cooperation to realize the vision of “Sahakar Se Samriddhi.” He stressed on collating the PAN numbers of all cooperative societies of the country to enable more accurate representation of the cooperative sector in the national GDP. Dr. Bhutani reaffirmed the Government's unwavering commitment to strengthening and advancing the co-operative ecosystem in the country.

The Secretary, Ministry of Cooperation said that White Revolution 2.0 is one of the flagship initiatives, aimed at rural upliftment through the dairy sector. He said that the dairy sector has shining examples of how dairy can empower women and improve child nutrition. He said that we are partnering with institutions like Amul and NDDB to support states

Assam, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and other states in expanding dairy infrastructure. The economic potential of animal husbandry now exceeds that of traditional crop cultivation.

Dr. Ashish Kumar Bhutani said that passing of the bill to establish India's first Tribhuvan Sahkari University is a historic move. This university will standardise cooperative education across states and uplift over 250 existing cooperative institutions. Secretary, Ministry of Cooperation, and Chief Secretary, Govt. of Meghalaya, along with senior officials, took part in a tree plantation drive under the initiative “Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam” initiative in International Year of Cooperatives. The meeting brought together key stakeholders including representatives from States and Union Territories, officials from cooperative federations, financial institutions, and policymakers, fostering a collaborative platform for knowledge exchange and strategic alignment.

The States Review Session spotlighted the pivotal role of national-level cooperative institutions such as NCEL, NCOL, BBSSL, NCCE, and NAFED in enhancing the cooperative ecosystem and driving innovation and inclusivity. Director of IRMA, Anand (Gujarat), outlined the vision of Tribhuvan Sahkari University, the strategic objectives, and proposed institutional structure. The session reflected the Ministry's long-term commitment to developing world-class co-

operative education and research infrastructure.

A dedicated workshop on the International Year of Cooperatives 2025, focusing on strategic priorities such as benchmarking cooperative societies, impact assessment, and the formulation of a Business Reform Action Plan for the upcoming fiscal year. Delegations from Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Uttarakhand shared best practices and innovations in cooperative development.

The focus areas of the two-day sessions were on expansion of banking services for cooperative societies and ensure doorstep banking services via micro-ATMs along with provision of zero-interest loans through RuPay Kisan Credit Cards to members of Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS), Dairy Cooperative Societies and other Cooperative institutions, and strengthening of Rural Cooperative Banking. Expansion of time-bound establishment of Multi-Purpose Agriculture Cooperative Societies (MPACS), Dairy and fishery cooperatives, Grain Storage Plan, digital transformation of PACS and Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (ARD-Bs) with an aim to improve transparency, operational efficiency, and service accessibility was also discussed. An analytical discussion was also held on the impact of NCDC's schemes and the realignment of its strategic direction with broader national development priorities.

Mansukh Mandaviya Urges Doctors to Lead Fit India, Serve Rural Areas

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): Union Minister of Labour & Employment, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya presided over the 2nd graduation ceremony of ESIC Medical College & Hospital, Faridabad, held at Bharat Ratna C. Subramaniam Auditorium in New Delhi today. A total of 447 students including 100 students each of 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 batch and first batch of 47 post-graduate students graduated today. Addressing the graduating medical students, Dr. Mandaviya highlighted the significance of the ceremony and emphasized on the importance of healthcare professionals in the nation's development. His inspiring address to the graduates stressed on the need for dedication, ethical practice, and service to the community, urging them to continue their journey with passion and integrity.

Dr. Mandaviya underscored that a healthy citizen is the foundation of a healthy society, and hence, a healthy nation. In this context, he said doctors are the torchbearers of the Fit India Movement, playing

a critical role in promoting wellness, preventive care, and healthy habits among the population. Congratulating the graduates, he reminded them that medals are only milestones, but the true reward lies in the lives they will touch. “Even in moments where you don't 'win,' learning itself becomes a form of victory,” he remarked. He also urged the new doctors to serve in rural and underserved areas, understand ground realities, and ensure healthcare remains accessible, affordable, and ethical.

Union Minister reminded the gathering of the national vision laid out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi — a Viksit Bharat by 2047. “This vision is not just the Prime Minister's dream, it is the shared duty of 140 crore Indians,” he said, highlighting the central role doctors will play in this transformation. Every consultation and every life saved, he noted, contributes to national productivity and progress. In closing, Dr. Mandaviya offered a powerful motto to the graduating batch, “Desh kaise swasth rahe

Delhi LG Reviews Campus Security, Directs Stronger Safety Measures For Students

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): Delhi Lt Governor (LG) Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Monday chaired a high-level review meeting on institutional safety, with a focus on strengthening security across university campuses and ensuring the safety of students, particularly females. The meeting brought together Vice-Chancellors and Directors of universities administered by the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD), along with senior officials from the Delhi Police, Public Works Department (PWD), Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), and Transport Department.

Taking to X after the meeting, LG Sandhu said that ensuring the safety of students was a “non-negotiable” priority and outlined a series of measures aimed at improving security on campuses as well as along routes used by students.

He said the meeting focused on strengthening coordination among various agencies and improv-

ing security infrastructure and arrangements around educational institutions. “Directed strengthened multi-agency coordination covering enhanced police patrolling, elimination of dark spots, CCTV integration along approach roads, improved last-mile transport connectivity and comprehensive safety audits of student accommodations,” he said.

“We must ensure that every young person – especially our daughters – can pursue education in Delhi with confidence, dignity and a sense of security. A safe, vibrant and dignified environment for our youth is foundational to our vision of a Viksit Dilli,” the LG added. The meeting comes days after students of Delhi University intensified their protests over rising incidents of crime against women in the national capital. The students took to the streets carrying posters and placards, questioning restrictions imposed on women and demanding accountability over incidents of sexual violence.

Better Infrastructure, Better Technology, Better Trains Indian Railways Set to boost better services in Mumbai suburban network

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): In a media interaction on the theme Themed “Better Infrastructure, Better Technology, Better Trains” held today in Mumbai, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Devendra Fadnavis and the Union Minister of Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics and IT, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw jointly addressed the press to highlight the transformative progress in railway infrastructure across Maharashtra. Indian Railways' commitment to modernization, improved commuter experience, and enhanced regional connectivity, with a special focus on the Mumbai Suburban Railway Network.

Union Minister Shri Vaishnaw emphasized that infrastructure development is the cornerstone for increasing suburban services. Projects worth nearly 17,000 crore, covering more than 300 kilometers of new lines, are currently underway at a rapid pace. These initiatives aim to decongest existing lines, improve service frequency, and cater to the ever-growing demand of Mumbai's suburban commuters.

Shri Vaishnaw announced the upcoming launch of Kavach 5.0, a state-of-the-art safety and signaling system tailored for the suburban section. Kavach 5.0 is expected to significantly reduce the inter-train headway, enabling more trains to run safely and efficiently. In a major upgrade to passenger comfort, the Union Minister revealed that 238 new Air-Conditioned suburban rakes will soon be introduced. These rakes have been uniquely designed keeping in mind the needs of Mumbai's commuters, promising a more comfortable and reliable travel experience.

Maharashtra CM Shri Fadnavis also elaborated that Mumbai One Card, will soon be launched, which is a single and all integrated card set to transform public transport across MMR region for passengers traveling in suburban trains, metro rails, mono-rail, BEST buses, etc. Together this infrastructure, technology, and rolling stock advancements are expected to increase the number of suburban services, dramatically improving daily transit for millions of Mumbai-kars. First Indian Institute of Creative Technology, an institute of National Importance in creative sphere will come up at Mumbai and this will be transformative for Indian Creative industry to make it a world class infrastructure hub. A major announcement during the interaction was the doubling of the Gondia-Ballarshah railway line, a 240 km strategic corridor with an investment of 4,819 crore. This key project connects Vidarbha and Marathwada, easing congestion and enabling faster passenger and freight movement. It will also strengthen Maharashtra's rail links with Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, boosting regional trade and integration.

his major infrastructure push was announced on April 7, 2025, when the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, had approved four projects of Ministry of Railways with total cost of Rs. 18,658 crore (approx.).

Vaishnaw stated today that this transformative project is set to play a pivotal role in enhancing passenger and freight connectivity between northern and southern India. The

approved project encompasses comprehensive upgrades along the 240 km of existing track, including modernization of 29 railway stations, construction of 36 major bridges, 338 minor bridges, and 67 Road under-bridges (RUBs) to streamline operations and enhance safety.

“With this doubling, connectivity between North and South India will be vastly improved. Aspirational districts in the region will witness rapid development”, stated Shri Vaishnaw. The Union Minister further stated that this will be a game-changer for both passenger commuters and industries dependent on rail logistics. He also said that this upgradation will boost regional economy and tourism.- Other notable railway projects include:

In addition, 132 stations across Maharashtra are being redeveloped under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Of the 1,300 stations nationwide under this initiative, many are nearing completion, with significant progress reported at many others.

These ambitious undertakings—alongside the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bul-

let Train, Dedicated Freight Corridors, and large-scale station redevelopment works—are set to revolutionize transportation in Maharashtra.

The Indian Railways has committed an unprecedented 1,73,804 crore of investment in the state, underscoring Maharashtra's strategic importance in the national rail network and its future growth trajectory.

Maharashtra CM underlined the importance of WAVES (World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES) preparations in view of inauguration by Hon'ble PM in the month of May this year, importance of a record budget allocation by Indian Railways to Maharashtra, benefits to the region by doubling of railway line between Gondia - Ballarshah stations. He also announced running of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and the Glorious Maratha Tour train by IRCTC soon. A special curated tour to showcase the glorious history and the grand heritage of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj along with other cultural and pilgrimage destinations of Maharashtra in 10 days journey by Bharat Gaurav Tourist train was also stated by the Maharashtra CM.

Indo-Italian programme to include 10 research initiatives and 10 collaborative initiatives

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): In a significant move to enhance bilateral scientific cooperation, Italy's Minister of University and Research, Ms. Anna Maria Bernini, currently on India visit, called on Dr. Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology, Earth Sciences, and Minister of State for PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions, Dept. of Space, Dept. of Atomic Energy met with Italy's Minister of University and Research, Ms. Anna Maria Bernini, for a high-level meeting at North Block here.

The hallmark of the meeting was the signing of an MoU of cooperation by the two Ministers. The discussions between the two dignitaries centered on advancing joint initiatives in quantum technologies, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and other emerging sectors.

Dr. Jitendra Singh recalled the bilateral discussions between Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni

held on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Brazil, which culminated in the announcement of a Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-2029. The plan outlines a shared vision for collaborative innovation in science and technology.

As part of this vision, both nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation in the field of scientific research and agreed to implement the 2025-2027 Executive Programme for Scientific and Technological Cooperation, aimed at fostering collaboration in critical technologies like AI and digitalization. Reaffirming India's commitment to bilateral research, Dr. Jitendra Singh announced the signing of the Indo-Italian Executive Programme of Cooperation (EPOC) for 2025-2027 on 10th April 2025 during the Joint Science & Technology Committee Meeting. Under the EPOC framework, both countries have successfully implemented over 150 joint research projects to date.

The current programme includes joint funding for 10

research mobility proposals and 10 significant collaborative research initiatives across a wide range of scientific disciplines.

Dr. Jitendra Singh highlighted India's robust progress in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), High-Performance Computing (HPC), Big Data, and biotechnology. He noted that India's strategic investments and policies are steering the nation toward becoming a global hub of emerging technologies.

Sharing key achievements, Dr. Jitendra Singh mentioned about India's pioneering development of a DNA-based COVID-19 vaccine, which was later gifted to many countries in need. The development and launch of the HPV vaccine and Nafithromycin, an indigenous antibiotic for respiratory infections. The country's first-ever gene therapy trial, which has been a success. The creation of a national genome data bank to support personalized medicine and public health research. Dr. Jitendra Singh proudly referenced India's

vibrant startup ecosystem, now the third largest globally, with significant contributions from agro-biotech startups. Initiatives such as the Aroma Mission (also known as the Purple Revolution) exemplify innovation in agriculture and floriculture.

He also highlighted the impact of technology-driven schemes like the Soil Health Card and Swamitva Yojana, which have revolutionized agriculture through drone technology. Reflecting India's commitment to preserving ancient wisdom through modern science, Dr. Singh spoke of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) — a unique initiative that digitizes and protects traditional Indian knowledge using cutting-edge technology. Dr. Jitendra Singh, also the Minister of Earth Sciences, briefed the delegation about India's ambitious Deep Ocean Mission, which aims to send an Indian submersible 6,000 meters deep into the ocean. The trial dive up to 500 meters is set to commence next year.

India's Automotive ambition: USD 145 Billion auto component production by 2030

New Delhi, Oct 5 (GNS): NITI Aayog has released an insightful report titled "Automotive Industry: Powering India's Participation in Global Value Chains". The report was launched by Shri Suman Bery, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog in presence of Dr. V.K. Saraswat, Member, NITI Aayog, Dr. Arvind Virmani, Member, NITI Aayog and Shri BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO, NITI Aayog. This report offers an extensive analysis of India's automotive sector, highlighting both opportunities and challenges, and outlining a pathway for positioning India as a key player in global automotive markets.

In 2023, global automobile production reached approximately 94 million units. The global automotive components market was valued at USD 2 trillion, with the export share reaching approximately USD 700 billion. India has emerged as the fourth-largest global producer after China, USA and Japan, with an annual production of nearly 6 million vehicles. The Indian automotive sector has

gained a strong domestic and export market presence, particularly in the small car and utility vehicle segments. Supported by initiatives like 'Make in India' and its cost-competitive workforce, India is positioning itself as a hub for automotive manufacturing and exports.

The automotive industry is undergoing a transformative shift towards electric vehicles (EVs), driven by rising consumer demand for sustainable mobility, regulatory pressures to reduce carbon emissions, and advancements in battery technology. EV sales have surged globally, reshaping the automotive manufacturing landscape.

Battery manufacturing hubs are emerging in regions like Europe and the U.S., spurring investments in industries related to lithium and cobalt mining, essential for EV production. These developments are altering traditional supply chains and creating new opportunities for collaboration and competition. In parallel, the rise of Industry 4.0 is trans-

forming automotive manufacturing. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Internet of Things (IoT), and robotics are enhancing production processes, improving productivity, reducing costs, and enabling greater flexibility. These digital advancements are not only optimizing manufacturing but also fostering new business models centered around smart factories and connected vehicles.

Despite being the fourth-largest automobile producer globally, India has a modest share (around 3%) in the global automotive component trade, which amounts to approximately \$20 billion. The bulk of global trade in automotive components is driven by engine components, drive transmission, and steering systems, but India's share in these high-precision segments remains low at just 2-4%. India's automotive sector faces challenges on account of operational cost, infrastructural gaps, moderate GVC integration,

inadequate R&D expenditure etc. that hinder its competitiveness in the global value chain (GVC). NITI Aayog's report outlines several strategic fiscal and non-fiscal interventions aimed at enhancing India's global competitiveness in the automotive sector. The interventions are structured across four categories of automotive components based on their complexity and manufacturing maturity i.e. Emerging & Complex, Conventional & Complex, Conventional & Simple and Emerging & Simple.

Operational Expenditure (Opex) Support: To scale up manufacturing capabilities, with a focus on capital expenditure (Capex) for tooling, dies, and infrastructure.

Skill Development: Initiatives to build a talent pipeline critical for sustaining growth. R&D, Government facilitated IP transfer and Branding: Providing incentives for research, development, international branding to improve product differentiation and empowering MSMEs through IP transfers.

