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TRIAL IN ABSENTIA

A Special NIA Court in Jammu issued a non-bailable warrant against Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba chief Hafiz Saeed in connection with the Pahalgam terror attack case.

- The NIA may seek his trial in absentia under Section 356 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.



About Trial in Absentia:

What It Is?

- Trial in absentia refers to a criminal trial conducted in the absence of the accused.
- Under Section 356 of the BNSS, a court may conduct the inquiry, trial and pronounce judgment against a proclaimed offender who has deliberately absconded to evade trial and has no immediate prospect of arrest.

Origin and Legal Background:

- Under the earlier Code of Criminal Procedure (**CrPC**), **1973**, provisions existed to deal with absconding accused, but they did not generally permit a complete trial culminating in judgment in their absence.
- **Section 82(4) of CrPC** provided for declaring certain absconding accused as proclaimed offenders, while **Section 299** allowed recording evidence in the absence of an absconding accused when there was no immediate prospect of arrest.
- **Section 317 of CrPC** permitted proceedings in the accused's absence in specified circumstances where personal attendance was considered unnecessary or the accused persistently disturbed court proceedings.
- The **BNSS introduced Section 356**, creating a specific framework for conducting a full-fledged trial and pronouncing judgment in the absence of a proclaimed offender.

Key Features of Trial in Absentia under BNSS:

- **Limited to Proclaimed Offenders:** It does not apply to every absent accused. The person must first be declared a proclaimed offender under Section 84(4) of the BNSS.
- **Applicable to Serious Offences:** The accused must face an offence punishable with at least 10 years' imprisonment, life imprisonment or death under the BNS or any other law.
- **Deliberate Absconding Required:** The court must be satisfied that the proclaimed offender has absconded to evade trial and that there is no immediate prospect of arrest.
- **Absence Treated as Waiver:** After recording reasons in writing, the court may treat deliberate absence as a waiver of the right to be present and proceed with the inquiry, trial and judgment.
- **Two Consecutive Arrest Warrants:** Before commencing the trial, two consecutive warrants of arrest must be issued at an interval of at least 30 days.
- **Mandatory Public Notice:** A notice giving the accused 30 days to appear must be published in a local or national newspaper and displayed at the accused's last known residence.
- **90-Day Waiting Period:** The trial cannot begin until 90 days have elapsed from the date of framing of charges, providing sufficient opportunity for the accused to appear.
- **Audiovisual Recording of Evidence:** Witness examination and depositions should, as far as practicable, be recorded through audio-visual electronic means and preserved, promoting transparency and facilitating subsequent judicial review.

INDIA'S FIRST HYDROGEN-POWERED PASSENGER TRAIN

Prime Minister of India will flag off India's first hydrogen-powered passenger train in Jind, Haryana, on July 17, 2026.



India's First Hydrogen Train

About India's First Hydrogen Train:

What It Is?

- The train is a state-of-the-art, zero-emission **Hydrogen-Electric Multiple Unit (HEMU)**. It was engineered by retrofitting old Diesel Electric Multiple Unit (DEMU) rakes with an advanced, clean hydrogen fuel cell and lithium battery propulsion architecture, eliminating the need for traditional overhead electrical wires or fossil fuels.

Developed By:

- The ₹136-crore pilot project was executed by Northern Railway, equipment supplied by the Hyderabad-based engineering firm Medha Servo Drives.
- The specialized onboard hydrogen fuel cells were imported from the industry-leading Canadian firm, Ballard Power Systems.

Objective: The objective is to pioneer self-sufficient, green mass transit corridors across non-electrified or short-haul railway tracks.

How It Works?

- **Chemical Generation:** The onboard fuel cells pull compressed hydrogen from storage tanks and mix it with oxygen drawn from the outside air. An electrochemical reaction separates the electrons, creating electricity while releasing only pure water vapor and heat as byproducts.
- **Hybrid Power Splitting:** The fuel cell produces a steady, non-fluctuating electrical output. When the train starts or accelerates and needs a power boost, the integrated Lithium Ferro Phosphate (LFP) battery automatically kicks in to supply extra energy alongside the fuel cell.
- **Regenerative Balancing:** When the train runs at low speeds or brakes to slow down for a station, the surplus electricity produced by the fuel cell is automatically diverted to recharge the LFP battery, leaving the battery roughly 80% charged by the end of the line.

Key Operational and Technical Features:

- **Massive Trainset Scale:** It stands as one of the world's longest and most powerful hydrogen trainsets, consisting of eight passenger coaches and two driving power cars that deliver a combined output of 2400 kW (3200 hp).
- **Corridor Performance Metrics:** Programmed to operate along the **89-km Jind-Sonipat section** in Haryana, carrying up to 682 passengers per trip.
 - It will complete two round trips daily at a maximum operational speed of **75 km/h** while consuming about 300 kg of hydrogen.
- **High-Capacity Onboard Storage:** Each driving power car carries a reinforced storage rack holding **440 kg of hydrogen** compressed under immense pressures of 200 to 500 bar.
- **The Jind Fueling Infrastructure:** To handle refueling needs, the railways built a dedicated **3,000-kg capacity** hydrogen fueling station at Jind.
 - This installation features an advanced chiller plant that cools the gas down to -15 degree C, transforming it into a dense liquid state to ensure fast and safe trackside dispensing.

THUKKACHI TEMPLE

The 12th-century Abathsahayeswarar Temple at Thukkachi received global recognition after being conferred the prestigious UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award of Distinction (2024) for outstanding heritage conservation.



The Thukkachi Temple

About The Thukkachi Temple:

What It Is?

- The Abathsahayeswarar Temple is a historic 12th-century Hindu shrine that stands as a remarkable testament to the architectural brilliance of the later Chola period. It is designated as a living historic temple, meaning it continues to function as an active house of worship while being preserved as a protected heritage monument.

Location: Situated in the **Thanjavur district** of Tamil Nadu, India.

History:

- **Royal Foundations:** The temple is closely associated with the later Chola emperors **Kulottunga I** and his son **Vikrama Chola**. Kulottunga I initially endowed the shrine specifically for the daily recitation of sacred Thevaram hymns.
- **The Vikrama Chola Connection:** It holds unique historical significance as perhaps the only major temple built entirely during the reign of Vikrama Chola, who expanded and renovated the earlier structure.
- **Epigraphical Epithalamium:** Historical inscriptions found on the temple walls refer to Thukkachi as Thenthirukalathi or Vikramacholeeswaram.

Key Architectural and Structural Characteristics:

- **Unique Chariot Design (Kara Kovil):** The temple is structurally conceived and designed as a Kara Kovil—a rare architectural style in Tamil history where the temple sanctuary is built in the physical shape of a processional chariot.
- **Oldest Lord Sarabeshwarar Depiction:** The complex houses a highly revered idol of Lord Sarabeshwarar, which is widely considered by historians to be one of the absolute oldest stone iconographic representations of this specific deity in existence.
- **Precision Digital Anastylis:** The restoration used drone surveys and digital mapping to catalog the structure. Every single shifting granite block was individually numbered before being dismantled and later reassembled into its precise, original position.
- **Interdisciplinary Sthapatya Veda Framework:** The conservation combined traditional temple-building knowledge (Sthapatya Veda) and Agama Shastra rules with modern conservation engineering, utilizing traditional sthapatthis alongside contemporary structural engineers.

Significance:

- The ₹5-crore Thukkachi restoration became a successful pilot, with its conservation methods incorporated into Tamil Nadu's official Manual for Temple Restoration and Conservation.
- Local residents contributed funds and received conservation training, creating a sustainable model of community ownership and long-term heritage guardianship recognised by UNESCO.

LEGAL RECOGNITION TO WOMEN FARMERS

Context: Maharashtra has become the first Indian state to enact the Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Act, 2026, a landmark law recognizing and protecting the rights of women farmers.

- The Act was introduced during the UN-observed International Year of the Woman Farmer, promoting inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems.



Maharashtra Gives Legal Recognition to Women Farmers

About Maharashtra Gives Legal Recognition to Women Farmers:

What it is?

- The Act represents a massive socio-economic shift designed to address deeply entrenched gender inequalities regarding access to land, water, credit, and other vital natural resources. Historically, government agricultural benefits, extension services, and formal bank loans have been legally tied to land ownership, which is overwhelmingly held by men.

Key Data and Statistics on Women in Agriculture:

- **National Female Baseline Comparison:** Across India, an average of **73% of the rural female workforce** is anchored in agriculture, compared to 47% of rural men.
- **The Legislative Milestones Pipeline:** The groundwork for the Act builds directly upon the targets of Maharashtra's **Fourth Policy for Women (2024)**, which mandated enhancing the role of women in agricultural income and asset ownership.
- **Wide Foundational Framework:** The new law covers a broad spectrum of primary production sectors, aligning with India's *National Policy for Farmers (2007)*.

Core Legal Features and Institutional Mechanisms:

- **Broad Inclusivity of "Farmer" Status:** In line with the National Policy for Farmers (2007), the Act formally includes any woman engaged in crop husbandry, animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, agro-forestry, vermiculture, mushroom cultivation, or primary processing, working either as an owner or a laborer.
- **The Woman Farmer Certificate (WFC):** Eligible women can apply for a formal WFC through their local *Gram Sabha* or *Nagar Panchayat*. This certificate serves as official proof of their occupation, successfully removing the requirement of holding a land title to access state benefits.
- **A Unified Digital Registry and Fund:** The Act mandates the creation of a centralized digital registry to track certified women farmers, backed by a dedicated state-level empowerment fund to bankroll targeted welfare schemes.
- **Two-Tier Administrative Oversight Structure:** Implementation will be managed by a **State-Level Monitoring Committee** headed by the Chief Secretary to facilitate multi-department coordination, while a supreme **Governing Council** led by the Chief Minister will oversee long-term policy guidance.

Significance and Strategic Opportunities:

- **Unlocking Formal Financial Credit:** Issuing the WFC helps women farmers clear rigid banking checks, allowing them to secure formal crop insurance and low-interest institutional loans without pledging land as collateral.
- **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Demographics:** The centralized digital registry allows the state to design gender-responsive skill development programs tailored specifically to single, widowed, or marginalized women farmers.
- **Fostering Climate Change Resilience:** Because global studies show that women are among the strongest drivers of ecological adaptation, giving them legal status helps scale up sustainable practices like vermiculture and agro-forestry.
- **Institutionalizing Social Reform Legacies:** This law advances the historic social justice legacy of Maharashtra, carrying forward the foundational work of pathbreakers like **Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule**, who championed women's rights and education.
- **Securing Household Decision-Making Power:** Legally recognizing women's labor gives them greater control over agricultural income, translating directly into better healthcare, nutrition, and education outcomes for rural families.

Key Challenges in Implementation:

- **Overcoming Entrenched Social Resistance:** Changing deep-seated patriarchal norms around land inheritance and structural family hierarchies requires continuous legal awareness campaigns at the village level.
- **Preventing Institutional Bottlenecks at the Local Level:** Bureaucratic delays within *Gram Sabhas* or *Nagar Panchayats* could stall the early verification and smooth rollout of the Woman Farmer Certificates.
- **Bridging the Local Digital Divide:** Rural women often face limited access to smartphones and digital literacy, which could slow down their enrollment in the state's new digital registry.
- **Reaching Displaced Contract Laborers:** Extending the Act's benefits to highly mobile, seasonal, and landless migrant female laborers presents a difficult tracking challenge for district enforcement cells.
- **Ensuring Inter-Departmental Coordination:** Blending new financial allocations across separate state ministries—including Agriculture, Finance, and Women & Child Development—requires constant administrative monitoring.

Way Forward:

- **Deploying Mobile WFC Enrollment Camps:** Launch localized registration drives at the panchayat level, using frontline officers to help illiterate and single women farmers fill out certificate applications easily.
- **Mandating Gender Quotas in Banking Schemes:** Coordinate with regional rural banks and NABARD to recognize the Woman Farmer Certificate as a valid document for zero-collateral agricultural credit.
- **Establishing the Mining and Agri-Tech Training Matrix:** Link the new state empowerment fund with vocational institutes to deliver advanced training in food safety, post-harvest processing, and smart micro-irrigation.
- **Enforcing Strict Audits on Scheme Deliveries:** Direct the State-Level Monitoring Committee to conduct annual audits, ensuring that at least 30% of all state agricultural subsidies are routed directly to WFC holders.
- **Launching Vernacular Legal Awareness Campaigns:** Roll out community radio programs and village theater productions to educate rural households on women's equal rights to land, water, and economic assets.

By replacing rigid land-ownership requirements with the flexible Woman Farmer Certificate, the law provides a scalable model for recognizing the vital labor of rural women. Ultimately, as climate change and male migration place greater pressure on the countryside, ensuring the smooth execution of this law will be essential to protect national food security and build a fairer, more inclusive rural economy.

DRAFT NATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH POLICY, 2026

The Centre's Department of Health Research has officially released the Draft National Health Research Policy, 2026, for public feedback until July 27.



The Draft National Health Research Policy

About The Draft National Health Research Policy, 2026:

What It Is?

- The policy is India's first unified national framework designed to span biomedical science, clinical medicine, public health, epidemiology, digital health, health systems, behavioral sciences, and emerging technologies. It treats health research as a national problem-solving architecture rather than a collection of isolated academic studies.

Aim: The policy aims to address long-standing issues in India's scientific ecosystem, including fragmented research efforts, wide regional disparities in institutional capacity, and slow translation of scientific findings into government policy or last-mile healthcare delivery.

Key Features of the Draft Policy:

- **Targeted GDP Investment Boost:** Proposes a six-fold increase in government spending on health research, raising it from the current **0.024% of GDP to 0.072% by 2037, and reaching 0.15% by 2047.**
- **Three-Tier Governance Structure:** Establishes a clear division of labor: a National Health Research Stewardship Committee for strategic alignment, the Department of Health Research as the nodal implementation agency, and the ICMR providing scientific and technical leadership.
- **Dynamic Research Agenda:** Replaces disjointed research models with a National Health Research Agenda to identify priorities based on disease burden, equity, and pandemic preparedness, focusing on targets like tuberculosis, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), cancer, and child malnutrition.
- **Impact-Based Scientist Evaluation:** Shifts the focus of scientific evaluation away from conventional paper counts and journal metrics to the **ICMR Impact of Research and Innovation Scale (ICMR-IRIS)**, which grades researchers on clinical translation and policy influence.
- **Institutional Decentralization:** Aims to expand research capacity out of a few elite states and institutions by mandating state governments to compile local agendas based on regional disease patterns.
- **Simplified Ethics and Administration:** Proposes streamlining ethical approvals for multi-center clinical trials, establishing a **National Research Integrity Office (NRIO)** to curb misconduct, and ensuring shared access to public labs and biobanks.
- **Core Technological and Data Standards:** Places rigorous data governance, cybersecurity, community engagement, and the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in medical diagnostics at the absolute center of the research framework.

Significance:

- The ICMR-IRIS framework directs public research towards real-world health needs, promoting affordable indigenous technologies, vaccines, and diagnostics.
- State-level research empowers regional institutions to study local health challenges and strengthen early-warning systems for future outbreaks, supporting Viksit Bharat 2047.

NATIONAL INNOVATION CHALLENGE FOR DRONE APPLICATION AND RESEARCH

The MeitY, in partnership with the Drone Federation of India (DFI), officially launched the second edition of the National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research (NIDAR 2.0, 2026-27).



NIDAR 2.0

About National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research (NIDAR 2.0):
What It Is?

- NIDAR 2.0 is a premier national-level innovation hackathon designed to challenge engineering students to design, prototype, and build advanced autonomous drone software and hardware components. Moving away from basic pre-built airframes, this edition focuses on indigenous avionics, secure drone operating intelligence, and microchip integration.

Part Of: NIDAR 2.0 operates as the flagship national innovation platform under MeitY's broader **SwaYaam Capacity Building initiative**.

Aim: The objective of NIDAR 2.0 is to establish a self-reliant domestic drone industry by moving from simple drone assembly to manufacturing the drone's brain inside India.

Key Operational Features:

- **Track 1: Drone Innovation (System Level):** Tasks students with solving complex operational problems through autonomous systems:
 - **Disaster Zone Swarms:** Building fully autonomous swarm drones that can locate survivors and deliver medical supplies without relying on any external communication or cellular network.
 - **GPS-Denied Navigation:** Developing drones that can navigate confined, dark indoor spaces without GPS for complex industrial inspections.
- **Track 2: Component Innovation (Hardware Level):** Challenges teams to build an indigenous flight controller and autopilot system using domestic electronic components. The hardware must be built around the open-standard **VEGA microprocessor**, designed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC).
- **Hardware Bootstrapping Support:** Following initial technical evaluations, the top 100 selected teams will each receive **two free VEGA processor development kits** from the government to test, program, and integrate into their prototypes.
- **Expanded Incubation and Financial Rewards:** Features an increased total prize pool of **over ₹65 lakh**.

About the SwaYaan Initiative:

What It Is?

- SwaYaan is a comprehensive, multi-year capacity-building program launched by the central government. It is designed to create a highly skilled workforce, support advanced research, and establish academic specializations in Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and allied drone technologies across India.

Approval Date: Formally approved by MeitY in July 2022.

Aim: The objective of SwaYaan is to train a large pool of engineers, technicians, and researchers to fulfill the workforce needs of the expanding Indian drone sector.

Key Institutional Features:

- **The Hub-and-Spoke Model:** Operates through a coordinated network of **30 premier academic and research institutions** across India—including the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), various Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), IIITs, NITs, C-DAC, and NIELIT nodes.
- **Five Core Technical Themes:** The initiative organizes its training curriculum and laboratory research under five essential work themes:
 1. Aeromechanics (Structural design, materials, and aerodynamics)
 2. Drone Electronics (Power boards, speed controllers, and sensor arrays)
 3. Guidance, Navigation, and Control (GNC) Algorithms and Simulation
 4. Drone Applications (Agriculture, mapping, and logistics software)
 5. Allied UAS Technologies (Counter-drone systems and communication encryption)
- **Massive Training Milestones:** The program has successfully trained **more than 51,000 individuals** across various skill levels.

SULPHUR DIOXIDE (SO₂) EMISSIONS

According to a new analysis, nearly 81 per cent of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions from coal plants within a 300-km radius of Delhi-NCR originate from facilities exempted from installing pollution control systems.



Sulphur dioxide (SO₂)

About Sulphur dioxide (SO₂):

What It Is?

- Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) is a heavy, colorless, toxic gas characterized by a pungent, suffocating odor. It is a highly reactive inorganic compound and acts as one of the primary air pollutants regulated globally under ambient air quality standards.

Major Sources:

- **Coal-Fired Power Plants:** The combustion of sulphur-bearing fossil fuels—predominantly coal in thermal power generation—stands as the single largest industrial driver of (SO₂) emissions.
- **Petroleum Refining & Metal Smelting:** Industrial extraction processes, oil refining, and the smelting of sulphur-rich mineral ores (such as copper, zinc, and iron) release high volumes of the gas.
- **Natural Sources:** Volcanic eruptions, geothermal hot springs, and the biological decomposition of organic matter in wetlands contribute to background atmospheric levels.

Atmospheric Presence and Transformation:

Once released, (SO₂) can travel hundreds of kilometers across regional airsheds. In the atmosphere, it undergoes chemical reactions with water vapor, oxygen, and other compounds to form secondary pollutants:

- **Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}):** It oxidizes to form acidic sulfate aerosols, which are a major component of dangerous fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) pollution.
- **Acid Rain:** It dissolves easily in water droplets within clouds, converting into sulphuric acid (H₂SO₄) and falling as acid rain, which damages forests, soils, and aquatic ecosystems.

Public Health and Environmental Impacts:

- **Respiratory Illnesses:** SO₂ irritates airways, causing coughing and breathing difficulty while worsening asthma, bronchitis, and other chronic respiratory diseases.
- **Cardiovascular Risks:** By forming PM_{2.5}, SO₂ indirectly increases inflammation, cardiovascular diseases, strokes, and the risk of premature death
- **Ecosystem and Crop Damage:** High SO₂ concentrations damage plant tissues and photosynthesis, while acid rain depletes soil nutrients and harms aquatic life.

Key Solutions and Regulatory Measures

- **Mandatory Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD):** Installing FGD systems in thermal plants can remove up to 95% of SO₂ emissions using lime or limestone-based scrubbers.
- **Public Continuous Emission Monitoring Systems (CEMS):** Real-time public disclosure of emissions data can improve transparency, prevent manipulation, and strengthen industrial compliance.
- **Phasing Out Category C Exemptions:** SO₂ can travel hundreds of kilometres; therefore, exemptions based merely on a plant's distance from urban areas should be reconsidered.
- **Transition to Cleaner Energy:** Expanding solar, wind, and battery storage can reduce dependence on coal and consequently lower India's overall SO₂ emissions.

SEMICON 2.0

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister, officially approved **Semicon 2.0** with a massive budgetary outlay of ₹1,27,500 crore to accelerate India's semiconductor design and manufacturing ecosystem.



About The Semicon 2.0:

What It Is?

- Semicon 2.0 is a comprehensive, macro-level national policy framework designed to provide sustained, long-term financial and infrastructure support to the semiconductor sector. It transitions India's technology ecosystem from basic chip assembly toward complete self-reliance in advanced fabrication, tool chain design, and raw material processing.

Part Of: The scheme is a core component of the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)**.

Aim: The overarching objective of Semicon 2.0 is to place India permanently on the semiconductor map of the world.

Key Features of Semicon 2.0:

- **Massive Fiscal Outlay:** Backed by an expanded, dedicated government budget of ₹1,27,500 crore.
- **Deepening the Design Ecosystem (Pillar 1):** Focuses on turning India into a primary semiconductor chip design IP hub, moving past the initial success of its 105 chip-design startups to engineer proprietary IPs, commercial system blocks, and unique architectures.
- **Incentivizing Machines and Materials (Pillar 2):** Provides financial incentives to firms manufacturing the heavy machinery, precision tools, specialized chemicals, and high-purity gases essential for running semiconductor fabs, creating a local precision manufacturing base.
- **Expanding Global Fabrication Units (Pillar 3):** Focuses on attracting global manufacturers to build commercial plants, including silicon fabs, compound semiconductor fabs, discrete component fabs, and display fabs (with India's first commercial silicon fab scheduled to be commissioned in 2028).
- **Strengthening Advanced Packaging (Pillar 4):** Actively encourages the setup of high-tech Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging (ATMP) and Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) units, positioning India as the main global alternative for electronic component packaging.
- **Advanced Node R&D (Pillar 5):** Transitions from the initial baseline nodes of 28nm–110nm to develop much more advanced sub-28nm nodes and frontier technologies in collaboration with leading local and international research centers.
- **Deepening Talent Development (Pillar 6):** Builds on the 68,000 students already trained across 315 universities using industry-standard Electronic Design Automation (EDA) tools, expanding programs to include practical training in cleanroom operations, fab construction engineering, and facility management.

Significance:

- Domestic chip manufacturing secures defence, satellites, telecom and critical infrastructure by reducing dependence on foreign semiconductor supply chains.
- Local chip production supports consumer electronics, telecom, industrial automation and EVs while lowering import dependence and improving global competitiveness.

AI GOVERNANCE BEYOND CONVENTIONAL REGULATION

Why does conventional legislation structurally fail to govern AI, and what are the democratic consequences of this gap?



- **The asymmetry of speed:** AI develops at the pace of start-up culture and mathematical discovery. Parliament governs conduct, not theorems. No legislature can prohibit a mathematical equation from being derived, making ex ante prohibition of AI capabilities structurally impossible.
- **Legislation always arrives late:** The EU Artificial Intelligence Act and the UK Online Safety Act were passed after the specific harms they targeted had already mutated. Each legislative cycle produces rules calibrated to yesterday's technology.

- **Epistemic collapse as a democratic threat:** Democratic governance depends on a shared factual foundation from which public debate, policy, and electoral choice proceed. AI-generated deepfakes and synthetic media have advanced to a fidelity where human perception can no longer reliably distinguish forgery from reality.
- **Electoral manipulation at scale:** Convincing audio-visual duplications of political leaders are deployed during electoral cycles to fabricate scandals, depress voter turnout, and destroy institutional trust. This is not a future risk, it is the present condition in multiple democracies.
- **Platform business model as the amplifier:** Big Tech platforms are engineered to maximise engagement. Because outrage and fear generate the highest click-through rates, recommendation algorithms systematically amplify hyper-partisan content, driving radicalisation and social fragmentation a structurally predictable outcome of the current commercial architecture.

How does algorithmic polarisation convert into a direct threat to national sovereignty and democratic integrity?

- **The polarisation-to-vulnerability chain:** Societies fractured by algorithmic echo chambers lose the shared epistemic baseline required for democratic deliberation. A deeply polarised society is structurally easier to manipulate through foreign information operations.
- **Information warfare has professionalised:** Foreign information manipulation operations are no longer bot-driven spam campaigns. They are AI-driven psychological operations that target pre-existing religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic fault lines with precision.
- **Covert amplification of domestic division:** Adversarial state and non-state actors do not need to introduce new conflicts. They fund and amplify narratives that already exist, turning a democracy's internal pluralism into a weapon against its own cohesion.
- **India's specific exposure:** As the world's largest democracy with rapid digital adoption outpacing structural digital literacy, India combines high platform penetration with low systemic resistance to synthetic media manipulation, a uniquely high risk configuration.
- **The sovereignty framing:** Algorithmic manipulation of the information environment is equivalent to unilateral disarmament. The code governing the public square is as critical to national security as physical border infrastructure.

What do international regulatory efforts reveal about the limits of a purely technical or statutory approach to AI governance?

- **EU Artificial Intelligence Act:** The EU adopted a risk-tiered regulatory framework categorising AI applications by potential harm. Its limitation is chronological by the time the Act was finalised, the threat models it addressed had evolved beyond the statute's definitions.
- **UK Online Safety Act:** The UK established platform liability for user safety harms. The Act illustrates the structural ceiling of statutory regulation: it can impose duties of care but cannot mandate algorithmic architecture changes in real time as capabilities shift.
- **Silicon Valley self-regulation:** Voluntary commitments by technology firms content moderation pledges, ethics boards, and responsible AI charters have uniformly failed to produce structural accountability. Commercial incentives are architecturally opposed to the public interest outcomes these commitments claim to pursue.
- **The common lesson:** No existing framework treats AI governance as a constitutional or rights based obligation. All existing approaches treat it as a regulatory or technical management problem a categorisation error that produces systematically inadequate responses.

Can free speech protections and binding AI regulation coexist, or does effective governance of algorithmic manipulation require curtailing political expression?

- **The core tension:** Any state power to define and combat disinformation carries the inherent risk of becoming a tool for censorship and the suppression of legitimate political dissent. This is the central civil liberties objection to content-based AI regulation.
- **The structural resolution:** Regulation must target platform mechanics automated bot networks, deepfake originators, recommendation algorithm amplification rather than the content of individual ideological speech. The distinction is between regulating the infrastructure of manipulation and regulating the expression of opinion.
- **Transparency as a non-censorial tool:** Requiring independent audits of recommendation engines and imposing systemic liability for algorithmic amplification that produces real-world violence does not restrict speech. It imposes accountability on the distribution architecture.
- **Safe harbour reform:** Technology platforms currently benefit from immunity provisions that insulate them from liability for third-party content. These immunities were designed for passive intermediaries. They are structurally misapplied to platforms that actively curate, rank, and amplify content through proprietary algorithms.
- **Democratic legitimacy requirement:** Rules governing the digital public square must be produced through open parliamentary debate and public participation not negotiated privately between platform executives and the executive branch. Process legitimacy is inseparable from substantive legitimacy here.

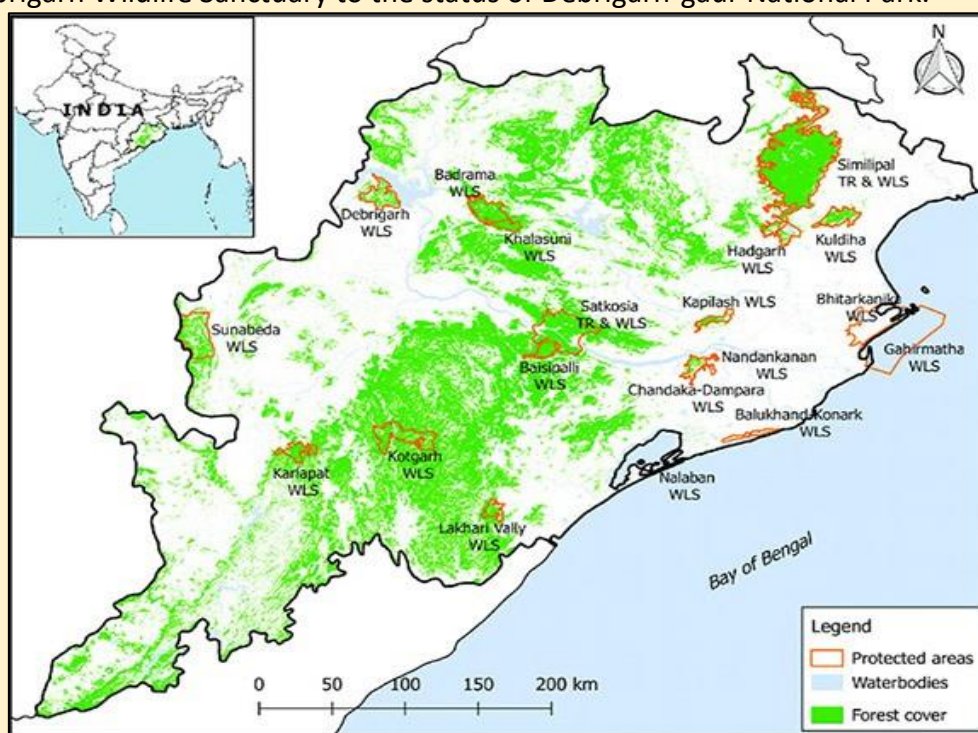
What constitutional and institutional architecture does India require to elevate AI governance beyond conventional regulation?

- **Rights-based framework:** AI governance must ground individual data rights, consent protocols, and protections against algorithmic discrimination in employment, credit, and healthcare as enforceable constitutional or statutory rights, not voluntary platform commitments.
- **Human accountability mandate:** Wherever an automated system makes decisions affecting life, livelihood, or liberty loan approvals, employment screening, medical prioritisation a human being must remain legally accountable for the outcome. Algorithmic delegation of such decisions without human oversight violates the right to life and dignity.
- **The right to an unmanipulated information ecosystem:** The capacity to distinguish reality from fabrication is a precondition for exercising the rights to free expression and democratic participation. This right must be recognised as an extension of Article 19 and Article 21 of the Constitution.
- **Early-warning infrastructure:** India requires cross-sector, real-time detection systems for coordinated information operations integrating state security agencies, independent fact checking networks, and technical security researchers capable of identifying foreign influence campaigns before they achieve viral distribution velocity.
- **Digital literacy as a state obligation:** Cognitive resilience within the population is a non-substitutable complement to structural regulation. A state-backed media literacy curriculum integrated across schools, universities, and rural community centres is a security investment, not an educational add-on.

AI governance cannot rely on corporate fixes or limited laws. Deepfakes, algorithmic manipulation, and foreign information warfare threaten the information ecosystem that underpins democracy. For India, AI governance is a constitutional, democratic, and sovereignty issue. It must go beyond regulation and become a constitutional obligation to hold platforms accountable, protect citizens, and safeguard informed democratic choice.

DEBRIGARH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Odisha's Forest Minister announced that a formal proposal will be sent to the Central Government to elevate the Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary to the status of Debrigarh-gaur National Park.



Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary

About Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary:

What It Is?

- Debrigarh is a vital, ecologically rich wildlife sanctuary spread over 353 square kilometers (with a core area of 290.65 sq km proposed for the national park). It stands out for its high density of large herbivores, absolute lack of internal human settlements, and international importance due to its significant populations of leopards, bisons, and endangered antelopes.

Location:

- Geographic Placement:** Situated in the **Bargarh district** of western Odisha, India.
- Landscape Boundaries:** It is flanked by the massive Hirakud Dam **and Reservoir**, creating a picturesque peninsula-like setting where the water body wraps around the protected forest ecosystem.

Historical Connection:

- The sanctuary holds deep historical value tied to India's freedom struggle. During his armed rebellion against the British East India Company, the noted freedom fighter **Veer Surendra Sai** made his strategic guerrilla base at a location named **Barapathara** nestled deep inside the sanctuary's rugged hills.

Key Ecological Features:

- Dry Deciduous Canopy:** Dominated by tropical dry deciduous forests and extensive hillside grasslands, providing rich feeding grounds for large herbivores and other wildlife.
- Hydrological Framing:** Surrounded by the Hirakud Reservoir, the landscape contains valleys, rocky ridges, and seasonal waterfalls that provide crucial water sources during dry periods.
- Settlement-Free Core Zone:** The proposed **65 sq km national park area** is free from villages, encroachments, and livestock, creating an undisturbed habitat for wildlife.

Biological Significance:

- Debrigarh hosts Odisha's highest density of Indian gaur, with **848 individuals**, making it a crucial breeding habitat and genetic reservoir for the species.
- Its dry deciduous forests provide secure habitat for the rare **four-horned antelope (Chousingha)** and diverse mammal, reptile, and amphibian species.
- Located beside Hirakud Reservoir, Debrigarh supports **234 bird species** and attracts thousands of migratory waterbirds, strengthening its conservation and ecotourism value.

PRADHAN MANTRI FORMALISATION OF MICRO FOOD PROCESSING ENTERPRISES (PMFME) SCHEME

Union Minister for Food Processing Industries, presided over a special national ceremony in New Delhi to celebrate the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme crossing a historic milestone of two lakh credit-linked beneficiaries.



The Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises

About The Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme:

What It Is?

- The PMFME Scheme is a comprehensive, all-inclusive, centrally sponsored national program designed to formalize, upgrade, and scale up the heavily unorganized micro food processing sector in India.
- It acts as a primary operational buffer, moving small-scale local food operators into the formal banking and regulatory economy by providing them with credit-linked capital subsidies, shared machinery platforms, and professional branding packages.

Launched In: Formally introduced on **June 29, 2020**, under the national *Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* (Self-Reliant India Campaign).

Implementing Organization: The scheme is conceptualized, funded, and managed directly by the Union Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI).

Aim: The core objective of PMFME is to bring the estimated 25 lakh informal, unorganized micro-scale food processors into the mainstream formal economy.

Key Features:

- **35% Credit-Linked Capital Subsidy:** Micro food-processing units receive a 35% subsidy, capped at ₹10 lakh, for upgrading machinery, technology, and packaging facilities.
- **One District One Product (ODOP) Strategy:** Each district focuses on a signature food product to achieve economies of scale in procurement, processing, branding, and marketing.
- **Group Infrastructure Grants:** FPOs, cooperatives, and SHG federations receive a 35% grant, up to ₹3 crore, for shared processing, storage, testing, and packaging facilities.
- **Grassroots Seed Capital:** Each eligible SHG member receives ₹40,000 as seed capital for working capital and purchasing small food-processing equipment.
- **Branding and Marketing Support:** FPOs and cooperatives receive 50% financial assistance for packaging, branding, digital presence, and access to organised retail markets.
- **District Resource Persons (DRPs):** DRPs assist rural entrepreneurs with applications, project reports, formal registration, documentation, and access to bank loans.
- **Financial Sharing Pattern:**
 - **General States and UTs with Legislatures:** Centre and States share costs in a 60:40 ratio.
 - **North-Eastern and Himalayan States:** Funding follows a 90:10 Centre-State ratio.
 - **UTs without Legislatures:** The Central Government provides 100% funding.

Significance:

- PMFME helps informal food processors access bank credit, GST, FSSAI and Udyam registration, reducing dependence on informal lenders.
- With women forming a major share of beneficiaries and trainees, the scheme strengthens entrepreneurship, incomes, and economic empowerment at the grassroots.

GANDAK RIVER

Due to heavy rainfall in Nepal's catchment area, the Gandak River has crossed the danger mark by 2 centimeters in the Gopalganj district of Bihar.



About The Gandak River:

What It Is?

- The Gandak River—also known as the **Gandaki**, **Sapt Gandaki**, and the **Narayani**—is an ancient, major transboundary river in South Asia. It functions as one of the largest left-bank tributaries of the Ganges River in India.

Primary Source: The river originates at the border with Tibet at an elevation of 6,268 meters at the **Nhubine Himal Glacier** in the Mustang region of Nepal.

Course of the Gandak River:

- **Nepal:** Originates as the Kali Gandaki, flows through deep gorges, and becomes the Narayani near Devghat before entering India.
- **India:** Enters near Triveni, forms the UP–Bihar boundary briefly, then flows through West Champaran, Gopalganj, East Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Siwan, Saran, and Vaishali before joining the Ganga at Hajipur.

Key Hydro-Geological Features:

- **Large Drainage Basin:** Covers about 46,300 sq km with a river length of nearly 640 km.
- **Kali Gandaki Gorge:** Flows through one of the world's deepest gorges, between Dhaulagiri and Annapurna peaks.
- **Extensive Megafan:** Deposited sediments have formed a vast megafan across eastern Uttar Pradesh and northwestern Bihar.
- **Glacial Lake Risks:** Upper basin contains moraine-dammed glacial lakes, including Thulagi Lake, posing GLOF risks.

Significance:

- Connects Chitwan National Park (Nepal) with Valmiki Tiger Reserve (India), supporting rhinos, tigers, gaurs, and leopards.
- Supplies irrigation through the Valmikinagar Barrage canal system, supporting cultivation of rice, wheat, and pulses across Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

India secured major advancements at the 49th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC49) held in Geneva, Switzerland, where the commission officially adopted seven food standards and guidelines developed under Indian leadership.



The Codex Alimentarius Commission

About The Codex Alimentarius Commission:

What It Is?

- The Codex Alimentarius (Latin for Food Code) is a comprehensive collection of internationally recognized and adopted food standards, guidelines, codes of practice, and related recommendations. Rather than operating as an independent, legally binding regulation, it serves as a scientifically backed international reference guide to help countries harmonize their sovereign food laws.

Established In: The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) was established in early **November 1961** by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with the World Health Organization (WHO) joining in **June 1962**.

Primary Aim:

The foundational goals of the Codex system are threefold:

- Protecting the health of consumers worldwide.
- Ensuring fair and ethical practices in the international food trade.
- Facilitating transparent global trade by removing unnecessary technical barriers.

Key Functions of the Codex System:

- **Science-Based Operational Limits:** Sets maximum permissible levels for food additives, contaminants, toxins, pesticide residues and veterinary drug residues.
- **Independent Risk Assessment:** Uses scientific evidence from expert bodies such as JECFA to develop objective, science-based food safety standards.
- **Standardised Labelling and Hygiene:** Develops globally harmonised standards for food labelling, processing, packaging and hygiene practices.
- **Global Trade Reference:** Serves as the WTO-SPS reference for food safety; stricter national measures generally require scientific justification.

Recent Outcomes of the 49th Session:

- **Adoption of India-Led Commodity Standards:** The Commission formally adopted standalone international quality benchmarks for **Dried Coriander Seeds** and **Fresh Curry Leaves** developed under India's chairmanship, facilitating smoother export channels for South Asian spices. It also adopted unified standards for **Vanilla** and Large Cardamom developed under India's co-chairmanship.
- **Launch of New Cashew Kernels Standard:** The CAC49 approved India's targeted proposal to formulate a brand-new international Codex Standard for Cashew Kernels under the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (CCPFV), aiming to reduce technical trade friction for global tree nuts.
- **Election to New Food Technology Groups:** India was elected Co-Chair of the newly established Electronic Working Group on **New Food Sources and Production Systems (NFPS)**, putting the nation at the center of evaluating risk analysis principles for future global food technologies.
- **Broader Global Safety Revisions:** The 49th Session adopted revised global control guidelines to reduce severe foodborne illnesses, specifically targeting the control of *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat products and *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* in poultry.

INDIAN GREY HORNBILL

More than 60 years after disappearing from Gujarat's Gir forests, the **Indian Grey Hornbill** has successfully established its presence again following a landmark reintroduction program by the Gujarat Forest Department.



The Indian Grey Hornbill

About The Indian Grey Hornbill:

What It Is?

- The Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) is a medium-sized, highly adaptive arboreal bird belonging to the hornbill family (Bucerotidae). It is one of the most common hornbill species native to the Indian subcontinent, widely recognized for its distinct cascading calls and unique nesting rituals.

Habitat and Distribution:

- **Geographical Range:** Endemic to the Indian subcontinent, found extensively across India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
- **Ecological Niche:** Unlike its deep-forest relatives, it thrives in open deciduous forests, thorn scrublands, riparian woodlands, rural fields, and even urban parks or old avenue plantations containing mature, hollow fruit-bearing trees.

IUCN Red List Status: Least Concern (LC)

Key characters:

- **Distinctive Appearance:** About 24 inches long, with silvery-grey and brownish plumage, a pale eyebrow line, and a long tail tipped with white.
- **Casque and Bill:** Has a large curved bill topped by a prominent pointed casque, which is smaller and more pointed in females.
- **Mud-Sealing Nesting Ritual:** The female seals herself inside a tree cavity using mud, faeces, and fruit pulp, leaving only a narrow slit for receiving food.
- **Total Dietary Dependence:** While nesting, moulting, and raising chicks, the enclosed female depends entirely on the male for food.
- **Social Behaviour:** Monogamous and usually seen in pairs or family groups, it flies with alternating flaps and glides while producing loud squealing calls.

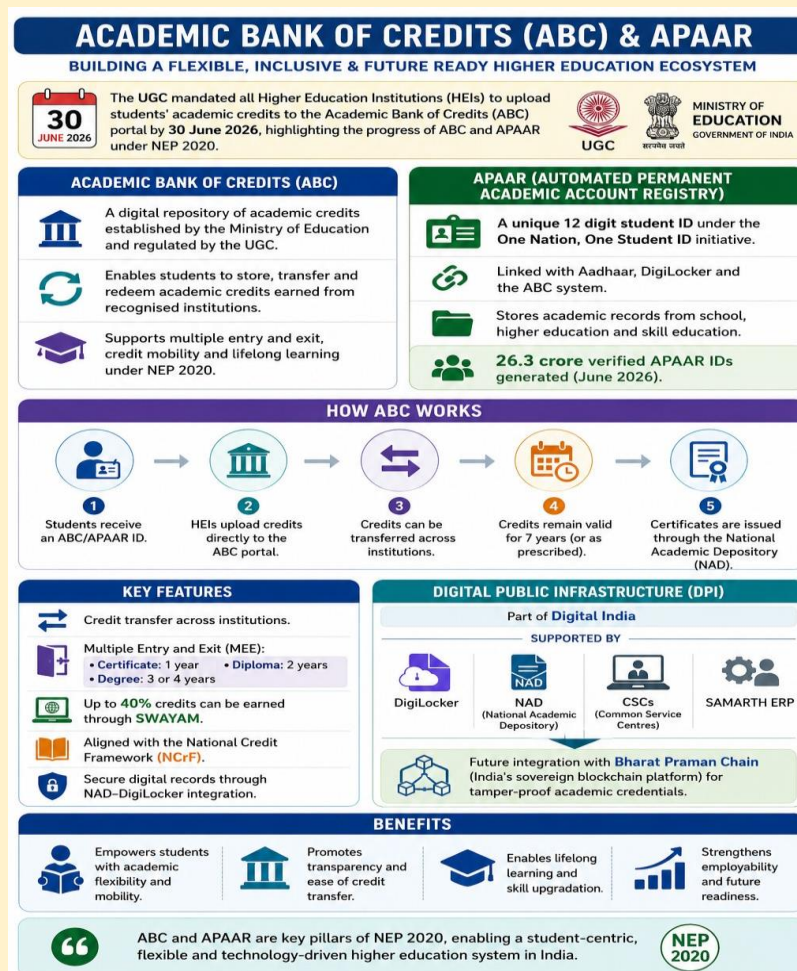
Significance:

- **Farmers of the Forest:** By consuming fruits and dispersing intact seeds over long distances, Indian Grey Hornbills promote forest regeneration and plant diversity.
- **Natural Pest Controllers:** By feeding on insects, lizards, scorpions, and other small animals, they help control pest populations in forests and nearby agricultural areas.

ACADEMIC BANK OF CREDITS (ABC) AND APAAR (AUTOMATED PERMANENT ACADEMIC ACCOUNT REGISTRY)

Why is it in the news?

Recently, the University Grants Commission (UGC) directed all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to upload students' academic credits to the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) portal by 30 June 2026. This marks an important step in implementing the education reforms envisioned under the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020).



The directive also highlights the growing implementation of two important digital initiatives in higher education—the **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)** and **APAAR (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry)**—which together aim to make education more flexible, student-centric, and digitally integrated.

What is the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)?

The **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)** is a **digital repository or virtual academic bank** where students can securely store the academic credits they earn during their education.

It was established by the **Ministry of Education** and is regulated by the **University Grants Commission**.

Just as a commercial bank stores money, the Academic Bank of Credits stores **academic credits** earned by students from recognised higher educational institutions. These credits can later be accumulated, transferred, or redeemed for obtaining certificates, diplomas, or degrees.

The system ensures that a student's learning achievements are permanently recorded in a secure digital format, irrespective of where they study.

Why was ABC introduced?

Traditionally, Indian higher education followed a rigid structure.

If a student discontinued education due to financial difficulties, illness, employment, or personal reasons, the credits earned were often lost. Students also found it difficult to transfer between universities because institutions followed different academic systems.

The Academic Bank of Credits was introduced to overcome these limitations.

Its primary objective is to create a **flexible education system** where students can pause their education, resume it later, change institutions, or even study courses from different universities without losing their previous academic achievements.

Thus, ABC shifts higher education from an institution-centric model to a learner-centric model.

What are Academic Credits?

Academic credits are numerical values assigned to courses based on the amount of learning involved.

For example, after successfully completing a semester or a subject, a student earns a specified number of credits.

Instead of remaining permanently with the institution, these credits are now digitally stored in the student's Academic Bank of Credits account.

Over time, students accumulate sufficient credits to become eligible for certificates, diplomas, or degrees.

How does ABC work?

The functioning of ABC follows a simple digital process.

Step 1: Student Registration

Every student receives a unique **ABC ID**, which is now integrated with the **APAAR ID**.

This ID functions as the student's lifelong academic identity.

Step 2: Credit Upload

After a student successfully completes a course or semester, the Higher Education Institution uploads the earned credits directly to the ABC portal.

The student does not need to upload documents manually.

Step 3: Credit Storage

The credits remain safely stored in the student's digital account.

Unlike physical mark sheets, these digital records cannot easily be misplaced or damaged.

Step 4: Credit Transfer

If a student changes universities or joins another recognised institution, the accumulated credits can be transferred to the new institution, subject to its academic regulations.

This promotes student mobility across institutions.

Step 5: Award of Qualification

Once the required number of credits is accumulated, the student becomes eligible to receive the corresponding certificate, diploma, or degree.

Academic qualifications are issued through the **National Academic Depository (NAD)**, ensuring secure and authentic digital credentials.

What is APAAR?

APAAR stands for **Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry**.

It is a **unique 12-digit lifelong student identification number** introduced under the "One Nation, One Student ID" initiative.

Unlike the ABC, which stores academic credits, APAAR serves as the student's permanent academic identity throughout life.

It records a student's educational journey beginning from school education and continuing through higher education, skill development, and lifelong learning.

By June 2026, more than **26.3 crore verified APAAR IDs** had been generated, indicating large-scale adoption.

How is APAAR linked with other platforms?

APAAR is integrated with several components of India's Digital Public Infrastructure.

It is linked with:

- **Aadhaar** for identity verification.
- **DigiLocker** for secure storage of academic documents.
- **Academic Bank of Credits** for maintaining academic credits.
- **National Academic Depository (NAD)** for issuing verified digital certificates.

This integration allows a student's complete academic history to be securely maintained on a single digital platform.

Multiple Entry and Multiple Exit (MEE)

One of the most important reforms supported by ABC is the **Multiple Entry and Multiple Exit (MEE)** system introduced under NEP 2020.

Earlier, if a student dropped out before completing a degree, the years already studied often had little formal value.

Under the new system:

- After completing **one year**, a student can receive a **Certificate**.
- After **two years**, the student becomes eligible for a **Diploma**.
- After **three or four years**, the student earns a **Bachelor's Degree**, depending on the programme.

If the student later wishes to continue education, the previously earned credits remain available in the Academic Bank of Credits and can be used toward completing the degree.

This significantly reduces educational discontinuity.

Credit Transfer and Lifelong Learning

Another major feature of ABC is **credit mobility**.

Students are no longer confined to learning only from a single university.

Credits earned from recognised institutions can be transferred and combined, subject to institutional regulations.

Additionally, students can earn **up to 40% of their credits** through online courses offered on **SWAYAM**, promoting flexible and lifelong learning.

Credits generally remain valid for **seven years**, although the duration may vary depending on regulations governing specific programmes.

National Credit Framework (NCrF)

The Academic Bank of Credits is aligned with the **National Credit Framework (NCrF)**.

The framework standardises credits across:

- School education
- Higher education
- Vocational education
- Skill development

This integration enables students to move more easily between academic and vocational pathways, recognising learning irrespective of where it takes place.

Role in Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

ABC and APAAR form an important component of India's **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** under the **Digital India Programme**.

The ecosystem is supported by several digital platforms:

- **DigiLocker** for document storage.
- **National Academic Depository (NAD)** for digital certificates.
- **Common Service Centres (CSCs)** for citizen access.
- **SAMARTH ERP**, which helps educational institutions manage academic administration.

The government also plans future integration with **Bharat Praman Chain**, India's sovereign blockchain platform. Blockchain technology will make academic credentials tamper-proof, secure, and easily verifiable, reducing certificate fraud.

Significance of ABC and APAAR

The introduction of ABC and APAAR represents a fundamental shift in India's higher education system.

They make education more flexible by allowing students to move across institutions without losing credits. They recognise learning acquired through multiple modes, including online education, thereby supporting lifelong learning.

Digital storage of academic records eliminates dependence on physical certificates and simplifies verification for universities and employers. The reforms also enhance transparency, reduce document fraud, and improve administrative efficiency.

Most importantly, these initiatives place students at the centre of the education system, allowing them greater freedom to customise their educational journeys according to their personal and professional needs.

Challenges

Despite their potential, several challenges remain.

Many educational institutions still lack adequate digital infrastructure and trained personnel. Concerns have also been raised regarding data privacy, Aadhaar linkage, and the security of large-scale student databases.

Differences in curriculum and academic standards across universities may complicate smooth credit transfer. Awareness among students and institutions regarding the functioning of ABC is also still evolving.

The **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)** and **APAAR** are among the most transformative reforms introduced under the **National Education Policy 2020**.

By creating a secure digital ecosystem for storing academic records and enabling flexible learning pathways, they shift Indian higher education from a rigid, institution-based model to a **student-centric, technology-enabled, and lifelong learning system**. As digital infrastructure improves and institutional adoption expands, these initiatives have the potential to make India's higher education system more inclusive, flexible, transparent, and globally competitive.

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