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Compiled by **Sapna Chauhan**

Cannot penalise refusal to sing National Song, says SC

Cannot penalise refusal to sing National Song, says SC

Top court seeks response from the Union government on a plea by renowned Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna challenging the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday observed that while a democratically elected government may give shape to the scope and length of the National Song, it cannot violate individual and collective religious freedoms or subject conscientious objectors, who refuse to sing one or all the stanzas of the *Vande Mataram*, to penal consequences.

"What is the National Song is not in dispute... It is for the democratically-elected state to decide and give aspiration as to what the National Song is, whether it should be two stanzas or four stanzas. But nobody can infract Article 25 and 26 [religious freedom] or subject a conscientious objector to pe-



nal consequences... It is for the conscientious objector to recite one or all stanzas of the National Song without subjecting himself to criminal prosecution," Justice Joymalya Bagchi, part of a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, observed. He said the 1986 Supreme Court precedent in *Bijoe Emmanuel versus State of Kerala*, upholding the right to religious free-

dom, constitutional tolerance, and silent objection, still holds true.

The court sought a response from the Union government on a petition filed by renowned Carnatic vocalist and author T.M. Krishna challenging the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026, read with the administrative directions issued by the Union Home Ministry in January

and a subsequent circular in July.

Mr. Krishna, represented by senior advocate S. Muralidhar and advocate Prasanna S., said the amended law and executive orders compel the playing and mass singing of the entire six stanzas of *Vande Mataram* ahead of the National Anthem at public functions. Non-compliance would risk three years' imprisonment or fine or both.

Stanzas three to six of *Vande Mataram* were "expressly devotional, deity-invoking, and non-secular", and the scheme violated fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution and offended the basic feature of secularism, the petitioner said.

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Why in News

- A three-judge Bench headed by **CJI Surya Kant** (with **Justice Joymalya Bagchi**) observed that a democratically elected government may shape the scope and length of the National Song, but **cannot violate individual and collective religious freedoms** or subject **conscientious objectors** who refuse to sing one or all stanzas of *Vande Mataram* to penal consequences.
- The court sought the Union's response on a petition by Carnatic vocalist **T.M. Krishna** challenging the **Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026**, read with Home Ministry directions (January) and a circular (July).
- The petitioner argued that the law compels playing and mass singing of **all six stanzas** before the National Anthem at public functions, with non-compliance risking **up to three years' imprisonment, fine, or both**.
- He contended that stanzas three to six are "expressly devotional, deity-invoking and non-secular", violating fundamental rights and the **basic feature of secularism**.
- The Bench said the **1986 precedent in Bijoe Emmanuel vs State of Kerala** — upholding religious freedom, constitutional tolerance and silent objection — still holds true.

Constitutional Provisions Involved

- **Article 19(1)(a)** – freedom of speech & expression; includes the **right to remain silent** (Bijoe Emmanuel).
- **Article 25** – freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion; **Article 26** – freedom to manage religious affairs.
- **Article 51A(a)** – Fundamental Duty to respect the Constitution, its ideals and institutions, the **National Flag and the National Anthem** (the National Song is not named).
- **Secularism** – part of the Basic Structure (S.R. Bommai, 1994; Kesavananda Bharati, 1973).

Bijoe Emmanuel vs State of Kerala (1986) – Know the Case

- Three children of the **Jehovah's Witnesses** faith were expelled from school for not singing the **National Anthem**, though they **stood up respectfully** while it was sung.
- The SC held that standing in respectful silence is not disrespect; no law compelled singing, and the expulsion violated **Articles 19(1)(a) and 25**.
- Famous line: "Our tradition teaches tolerance; our philosophy preaches tolerance; our Constitution practises tolerance; let us not dilute it."

Vande Mataram – Background

- Meaning "**Mother, I Bow to Thee**"; composed by **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay** in Sanskritised Bengali; first published in **Bangadarshan on 7 November 1875**; later included in the novel **Anandamath (1882)**.
- Set to music by **Rabindranath Tagore**; the **first two stanzas** were adopted by the **Congress Working Committee in 1937**.
- On **24 January 1950**, Dr. Rajendra Prasad (in the Constituent Assembly) declared that it shall be honoured **equally with Jana Gana Mana**.
- **Constitutional position**: the Constitution does not explicitly recognise a National Song.

Role in the Freedom Struggle

- Rallying cry of the **Swadeshi Movement**; the British frequently banned its public singing and arrested those who chanted it.
- **Tagore** first sang it at the **1896 Calcutta Session** of the INC.
- First used as a political slogan on **7 August 1905** (anti-Partition of Bengal); nearly **40,000 people** sang it at Calcutta Town Hall in protest.
- **Bande Mataram Sampradaya** (1905); English daily **Bande Mataram (1906)** led by **Bipin Chandra Pal and Sri Aurobindo**.
- **Hyderabad-Karnataka "Vande Mataram Movement" (1938)**: students defied restrictions, faced arrests and expulsions.

- **Global: Madam Bhikaji Cama** unfurled a tricolour bearing "Vande Mataram" at **Stuttgart (1907)**; **Madan Lal Dhingra** reportedly uttered "Bande Mataram" before execution (1909); nationalist publications of the same name circulated from Geneva.

Protocol for the National Song (as per official guidelines)

- **Order:** when both are performed, **Vande Mataram precedes Jana Gana Mana**.
- Stand to attention during the official rendition (**about 3 min 10 sec**); not required when played in films, documentaries or newsreels.
- Played at Presidential/Gubernatorial functions, Presidential broadcasts, National Flag ceremonies and official cultural events; a band performance is preceded by a **roll of drums**.
- Schools are encouraged to begin the day with community singing.

Arguments for Mandating

- Fosters national unity and pride; honours freedom-struggle heritage.
- State has legitimate power to prescribe protocol for national symbols.
- 150 years of Vande Mataram (7 Nov 2025) gives a commemorative context.

Concerns

- Compelled speech violates Art. 19(1) (a); criminal penalty is disproportionate.
- Later stanzas invoke deities — conflicts with Art. 25 and secularism.
- Patriotism through coercion is hollow; chilling effect on minorities and dissenters.

Way Forward

Respect for national symbols should be **encouraged, not criminalised**. A calibrated protocol (first two stanzas as adopted in 1937), exemption for conscientious objectors who stand in respectful silence, and adherence to the **proportionality test** (Modern Dental College, 2016; K.S. Puttaswamy, 2017) would reconcile national honour with constitutional liberty.

UPSC PYQ (Prelims 2021)

Q. Who among the following is associated with 'Songs from Prison', a translation of ancient Indian religious lyrics in English?

- (a) Bal Gangadhar Tilak (b) Jawaharlal Nehru (c) Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (d) Sarojini Naidu

Answer: (c) – Gandhiji translated hymns and lyrics during his imprisonment at Yerwada; they were published in English as Songs from Prison.

Exercise Nomadic Elephant – 18th Edition



Key Facts

- The **18th edition** of the India–Mongolia Joint Military Exercise **NOMADIC ELEPHANT** commenced at the **Foreign Training Node, Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand)**.
- An **annual, platoon-level bilateral** exercise between the Indian Army and the Mongolian Armed Forces, held **alternately in India and Mongolia**.
- Previous (17th) edition: **Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (2025)**. Host 2026: **India**.

Parameter	Detail
Participants	India and Mongolia (bilateral)
Edition / Year	18th / 2026
Venue	Foreign Training Node, Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand
Other India–Mongolia link	Khaan Quest – a <u>multinational</u> peacekeeping exercise hosted by Mongolia (do not confuse)

India–Mongolia: Value Addition

- Relationship upgraded to a **Strategic Partnership in 2015**; India calls Mongolia a "spiritual neighbour" owing to shared Buddhist heritage.
- Mongolia is landlocked between **Russia and China**; its "**Third Neighbour**" policy seeks partners like India, Japan and the US.
- India is supporting Mongolia's first oil refinery near Sainshand through a Line of Credit.
- **Pithoragarh** borders **Nepal** (Kali river) and **China (Tibet)**; gateway to the Kailash–Mansarovar route via Lipulekh.

03 • GS 3 – INDIAN ECONOMY / MONETARY POLICY

Open Market Operations (OMO)



Why in News

- The **RBI** conducted an **OMO sale auction**, offloading **₹25,000 crore** of Government of India securities (G-Secs) to **drain durable surplus rupee liquidity** from the banking system.

Concept

- **OMO** = buying and selling of government bonds by the RBI in the open market; a **quantitative tool** to smoothen liquidity and limit its impact on interest rates and inflation.
- **OMO Purchase** → RBI pays banks → reserves rise → **money supply increases** (injection).
- **OMO Sale** → buyers pay RBI → reserves fall → **money supply decreases** (absorption).
- **Operation Twist** – simultaneous purchase of **long-term** G-Secs and sale of an equal amount of **short-term** G-Secs; liquidity-neutral, flattens the yield curve (first used by RBI in Dec 2019).

Instrument	Maturity	Issued by
Treasury Bills (91, 182, 364 days)	Less than one year	Central Government only
Dated Securities / Government Bonds	One year or more	Centre
State Development Loans (SDLs)	Dated	State Governments

Monetary Policy Tools at a Glance

Quantitative: OMO, CRR, SLR, Repo / Reverse Repo (LAF), Standing Deposit Facility (SDF), Marginal Standing Facility (MSF), Market Stabilisation Scheme (MSS), Bank Rate.

Qualitative: Moral suasion, margin requirements, selective credit control, direct action.

04 • THE HINDU PAGE 6 • GS 1 (MODERN HISTORY) & GS 2 (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)

Haifa — a century-old battle, the politics of memory

Haifa — a century-old battle, the politics of memory

The September 23, 1918 Battle of Haifa occupies a curious place in the intertwined histories of India, Israel, and Palestine. What was, in military terms, a small but tactically significant cavalry action in the final phase of the First World War has, over the past century, become a site of layered remembrance, celebrated, contested, reclaimed, and reinterpreted by different communities for different purposes. Remembering Haifa today requires navigating not only the battlefield itself but also the shifting terrain of postcolonial identity, diplomatic symbolism, and the moral ambiguities of imperial history.

For India, Haifa is often invoked as a symbol of the extraordinary global footprint of Indian soldiers during the First World War. More than a million Indians served overseas, from Flanders to Mesopotamia, and over 74,000 died in a war not of their own making. The cavalry charge at Haifa, executed by the Jodhpur, Mysore, and Hyderabad Lancers, stands out as one of the most dramatic episodes of Indian valour abroad. Contemporary British war diaries describe the action as decisive in securing the port city and enabling the Allied advance northwards to Damascus. It was also, for military buffs, one of the last great cavalry charges, and featured the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade which overcame principally Ottoman forces. The complication is that the Indian forces were under British command – and many Palestinian Arabs were on the side of the Ottomans.

Reclaiming military history
In the decades since Independence, Haifa has become part of a broader effort to reclaim India's military history from the shadow of the empire. The soldiers who fought there were colonial subjects, but their courage and sacrifice belong to India's national story. Commemorating Haifa thus becomes an act of historical recovery: an assertion that Indian agency existed even within the constraints of imperial command.

The Haifa narrative also illustrates how postcolonial nations reinterpret their pasts to assert dignity and continuity. For India, celebrating the battle (and renaming a First World War memorial as "Teen Murti Haifa Chowk") is a way of acknowledging that its soldiers shaped world events long before the country became a sovereign republic. For Israel, the memory of Indian cavalry "liberating" Haifa has been woven into a narrative of gratitude and friendship, symbolised by memorials and annual ceremonies. These commemorations serve diplomatic purposes, but they also reflect a genuine historical connection.

Yet, this reclamation of agency is complicated by the fact that the soldiers themselves had no say in the political consequences of their actions.



Shashi Tharoor
Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including 'An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India'

They fought bravely, but they fought under a flag not their own, in a war whose outcomes would reshape West Asia in ways that continue to reverberate.

This is where the moral ambiguity of Haifa becomes unavoidable. The Indian cavalry's victory helped secure British control over Palestine, enabling the implementation of the Balfour Declaration and the subsequent political transformations that led to the creation of Israel. For many Palestinians, this is not a story of liberation but of dispossession. When Palestinian representatives say to Indians celebrating the Battle of Haifa, "We did not ask you to liberate us," they are not questioning the bravery of Indian soldiers but the imperial project in which that bravery was embedded.

This tension highlights a broader challenge in remembering colonial-era military history. Acts of courage can coexist with outcomes that later generations view with discomfort or regret. The soldiers who charged up the slopes of Mount Carmel did not choose the geopolitical consequences of their victory. Yet, those consequences shape how different communities remember the battle today.

As a diplomatic bridge
In recent decades, Haifa has acquired new significance as a symbol of India-Israel friendship. Indian leaders have visited the Haifa memorial; Israeli officials have spoken warmly of the Indian role in the city's history. These gestures reflect the deepening strategic partnership between the two countries, but they also demonstrate how historical memory can be mobilised to strengthen contemporary ties.

At the same time, this diplomatic embrace has sparked debate among historians. Some Israeli scholars argue that the Indian role has been overstated, and that the real credit should go to the British and Australian soldiers, a view that partially reflects their discomfort at "owing" much to colonised brown-skinned cavalymen. Meanwhile, Indian military historians point to British war records that clearly credit the Indian cavalry with the decisive breakthrough. These disagreements are not merely academic; they reflect the politics of national pride and the desire to shape historical narratives in ways that reinforce present-day identities.

The Palestinian critique of the Haifa narrative adds another layer of complexity. For Palestinians, the 1918 campaign is part of a longer story of foreign domination and displacement. From their perspective, the Indian cavalry's victory facilitated British rule and the subsequent transformations that reshaped their homeland. This view does not diminish the bravery of Indian soldiers, but it challenges celebratory narratives that ignore the lived experience of those who were "liberated". To many Palestinians, Indians

should not be celebrating their role in a colonial project that eventually led to the "naqba" that displaced so many and uprooted them from their homeland.

"For Palestinians," says their Ambassador to India, Abdullah Mohammed Abu Shawesh, "history is ... a tool for affirming roots and shaping the future, particularly in the face of an ongoing campaign against the Palestinian narrative led by the Zionist movement. ... It is therefore natural that we, as Palestinians, are highly sensitive to any attempt to manipulate history, as such attempts directly affect our right to exist and to determine our future." In a letter to this writer, he sees "a clear Israeli effort to link contemporary India with the history of the establishment of Israel", and questions India's embrace of the "Israeli narrative", arguing that the Indian soldiers were not heroes or valorous "martyrs" but "victims" of British colonial exploitation.

Indians, too, have their own ambivalence. Many feel pride in the courage of the soldiers but discomfort at the idea that Indian blood was shed in service of an imperial project that contributed to the dispossession of another people. This tension reflects a broader challenge in postcolonial memory: how to honour the sacrifices of those who served without endorsing the political aims of the empire they served under.

A site of contested memory
The challenge is that remembering Haifa today requires holding multiple truths at once. There is no denying that Indian soldiers fought with extraordinary courage. But they fought under colonial command, without agency over the political consequences, and their bravery had nothing to do with any Indian national ambitions. Their victory is celebrated in Israel and resented in parts of Palestine.

The battle of Haifa is a symbol of India's global military legacy, but also a reminder of the moral ambiguities of the empire. It is a diplomatic bridge between India and Israel, but its role in India's relations with the Palestinian people is morally ambiguous. Haifa, in other words, is many things, but it is above all a site of contested memory.

A mature historical consciousness does not demand choosing one narrative over another. It requires acknowledging the full complexity of the past: the bravery and the burden, the pride and the pain, the honour of the soldiers and the ambivalence of the outcomes. Haifa endures not because it offers a transcendent story, but because it forces us to confront the layered realities of history: that courage can serve causes not chosen by those who display it, that memory can unite and divide, and that the past can illuminate the present only when we are willing to face it in all its complexity.

Key Points

- The **Battle of Haifa (23 September 1918)**, in the final phase of World War I, was a small but tactically significant cavalry action against **Ottoman forces**; it secured the port city and enabled the Allied advance to Damascus.

- The charge was executed by the **Jodhpur and Mysore Lancers** (with Hyderabad Lancers in the **15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade**) — among the last great cavalry charges in history.
- Over **a million Indians** served overseas in WWI (Flanders to Mesopotamia); **over 74,000 died** in a war not of their own making.
- India renamed the Teen Murti memorial in Delhi as **"Teen Murti Haifa Chowk"** (2018); Israel commemorates the Indian "liberation" of Haifa with memorials and annual ceremonies.

The Contested Memory

- The Indian victory helped secure **British control over Palestine**, enabling the implementation of the **Balfour Declaration (1917)** and, eventually, the creation of Israel.
- For many **Palestinians**, it is a story of dispossession — the prelude to the **"Nakba"**; their representatives question celebrating soldiers of "British colonial exploitation".
- Some Israeli scholars argue the Indian role is overstated; Indian military historians cite British records crediting the Indian cavalry.
- Indian soldiers fought with extraordinary courage but under **colonial command**, without agency over political outcomes.

Haifa as a Diplomatic Bridge

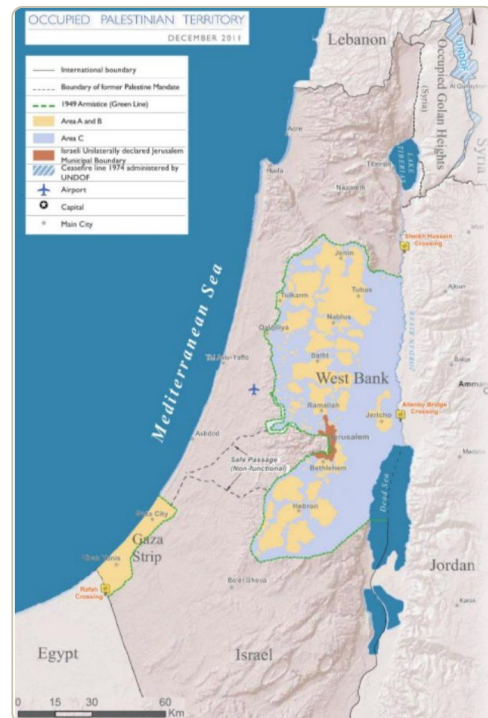
- Symbol of India–Israel friendship; leaders visit the Haifa War Cemetery.
- **Haifa Port** acquired by an **Adani-led consortium (2023)**.
- Haifa is a key node of the proposed **IMEC** corridor.

Know the Hero

- **Major Dalpat Singh Shekhawat** (Jodhpur Lancers) – **"Hero of Haifa"**, killed in the charge; awarded the Military Cross.
- The Indian Army observes **23 September as Haifa Day**.

Analysis / Way Forward

A mature historical consciousness does not demand choosing one narrative. India can honour the **sacrifice of its soldiers** while acknowledging the **moral ambiguities of empire** — consistent with its balanced West Asia policy: strategic partnership with Israel alongside support for a **two-state solution** and the Palestinian people.



Map study: Haifa, Mediterranean coast, West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, Dead Sea, Sea of Galilee; Areas A, B & C (Oslo Accords)

05 • THE HINDU PAGE 6 (EDITORIAL) • GS 1 (RESOURCES) & GS 3 (AGRICULTURE)

Water Wealth – Groundwater exploitation in Punjab disincentivises small farmers

Water wealth

Groundwater exploitation in Punjab disincentivises small farmers

That Punjab is over-extracting groundwater is not news. According to the 2025-26 Dynamic Groundwater Assessment, its groundwater extraction rate was 152%. While interventions reduced the number of 'over-exploited' blocks by five over the last two assessments, 72% of its 153 blocks are in the 'red zone', the highest among States. The principal consumer is irrigation for rice and wheat, amounting to nearly 25 billion cubic metres a year in the latest estimate. Data also show that the fraction of observation wells with water below 40 metres in the post-monsoon period grew by two percentage points between 2022 and 2025. What began as a strategy to improve food security eventually yielded a concentrated rice-wheat cropping system, in which assured procurement, subsidised electricity and access to groundwater made high-yield varieties, intensive irrigation and fertilizer use and mechanisation less risky than alternative modes of cultivation. In the same vein, the reluctance of the region's farmers to pursue other crops due to uncertainties in storage options, prices, processing infrastructure, and supply chains has gone relatively unaddressed. But as the water crisis persists, the wealth gap among farmers is also widening. A recent study in the *Economic and Political Weekly* noted that while farmers with marginal landholdings use water more efficiently, wealthier farmers are better equipped to access lower water tables as well as

draw higher volumes. So, as the water table drops, those unable to afford the requisite tube wells are forced to buy water, transferring their wealth to larger landowners and creating unregulated dependencies. A different study by two members of the same team, published in *Discover Sustainability*, reported that in Sangrur and Barnala, larger farms earned higher returns but recorded lower groundwater productivity *vis-à-vis* paddy, than smaller farms. Effectively, groundwater depletion raises the capital required for irrigation, which systematically privileges those farmers with better access to finance.

State governments continue to attempt to address the demand pressure in multiple ways even as the scale continues to overwhelm the resulting gains in efficiency. At this juncture, together with those efforts, the State should also endeavour to protect farmers' incomes and access to irrigation while rendering the cost of additional extraction prohibitive. The '*Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao*' scheme, in which farmers are entitled to cash for every unused kilowatt-hour (for pumping) under a threshold, is already promising, albeit with low enrolment. Broadly, the State should use part of the electricity subsidy bill to directly support smallholder farmers, help collectivise irrigation infrastructure, and/or support farmers' transition to other crops. When benefits follow the cultivator, including tenants, rather than owners of the land or pumps, welfare can subsidise access to water rather than groundwater extraction.

Key Data

Indicator (Dynamic Groundwater Assessment 2025-26)	Punjab
Stage of groundwater extraction	152%
Blocks in the 'red zone'	72% of 153 blocks – highest among States
Change in 'over-exploited' blocks	Reduced by five over the last two assessments
Irrigation use for rice & wheat	~25 billion cubic metres a year
Wells with water below 40 m (post-monsoon)	Up by two percentage points (2022–2025)

Causes

- A food-security strategy (Green Revolution) produced a concentrated **rice–wheat cycle** backed by **assured procurement (MSP)**, **subsidised/free electricity** and easy groundwater access.
- Farmers are reluctant to diversify due to uncertainty in **storage, prices, processing and supply chains**.

The Equity Dimension – Widening Wealth Gap

- An Economic and Political Weekly study: marginal farmers use water **more efficiently**, but wealthier farmers can reach **deeper water tables** and draw higher volumes.
- As the table drops, those unable to afford deeper tube wells **buy water** from larger landowners — a transfer of wealth and **unregulated dependency**.
- A Discover Sustainability study (Sangrur & Barnala): larger farms earned higher returns but had **lower groundwater productivity** vis-à-vis paddy. Depletion raises the **capital needed for irrigation**, privileging those with access to finance.

Way Forward

- Expand '**Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao**' – cash for every unused kilowatt-hour of pumping under a threshold (promising, but low enrolment).
- Redirect part of the **electricity subsidy** to directly support smallholders, collectivise irrigation infrastructure and aid **crop diversification**.
- Target benefits to the **cultivator, including tenants**, rather than owners of land or pumps — subsidise **access to water, not extraction**.
- Promote Direct Seeded Rice (DSR), micro-irrigation, MSP/procurement for pulses, maize and millets.

Static Link

CGWB categories: Safe ($\leq 70\%$), Semi-critical (70–90%), Critical (90–100%), Over-exploited ($>100\%$) of annual extractable resource. **Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009** – bars early paddy transplanting. **Atal Bhujal Yojana** – community-led groundwater management (7 States; Punjab not included).

06 • THE HINDU PAGE 7 • GS 3 – DISASTER MANAGEMENT / GS 2 GOVERNANCE

Breakdown of Civic Infrastructure in India

Breakdown of civic infra in India

The breakdown of civic infrastructure is killing ordinary and unassuming citizens every day. Lives are now lost in India due to abject governance failure rather than to natural or traditional causes. Further, citizens' growing apathy towards governance failure is also concerning.

The age-old practice of blaming the Central and State governments is getting tiresome as it is clear that these incidents are fundamentally caused due to systemic failures, bureaucratic greed, absence of strict enforcement, and brazen entitlement of the general public.

Be it an illegal billboard in Mumbai that killed ordinary bystanders, or illegally constructed buildings that are constantly collapsing in Delhi, the same storyline follows – the police arrest the accused, suspend a few officials, a compensation is awarded (read: blood money) to the next of kin, and a vague promise to carry out a strict investigation is given. A few days later, it fades from public memory until the next tragedy occurs and conversations around civic responsibility and governance failure are reignited. One thing that is absolutely clear from these series of events is that administrative officials are privy to illegal activities, and it is their connivance that fuels the public's brazenness to break regulations.

Another common feature is that the accused responsible for the mishap usually has prior criminal offences registered against them. Despite this, they continue engaging in illegal activities because the message from the system is



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loud and clear – that there is no accountability for individual actions and as long as corruption is fuelling the system, officials will turn a blind eye. Officials who fail in their responsibility of upholding civic order should be held liable. An official who clears or knowingly ignores an unauthorised structure should face the same consequences as the owners who built it. It is only then that one can work towards trying to enforce regulations.

Poor urban planning

While India's population size is an administrative hurdle that is unique to India, poor urban planning has exacerbated the problems caused by population pressure. A case in point are unauthorised colonies in Delhi that mushroom rapidly. The fact that these colonies are exempt from urban planning regulations gives building owners a free pass to build structures without any approval; a form of sanctioned impunity.

The entitlement of building owners is also significant. Be it in an upscale residential area or in an unauthorised colony in Delhi, building owners encroaching upon public land for their private use is a common occurrence in India. The reason for the brazenness is simple – no collective municipal drive has thoroughly addressed and deterred private encroachment.

One routinely reads about symbolic anti-encroachment drives; but most such drives are targeted at the marginalised groups of society who cannot retaliate. Selective enforcement is not enforcement, and in fact condones certain classes of encroachment. Civic action must target all private

encroachment with equal scrutiny in order to ensure compliance with norms.

In 2025, a fire broke out in a bar in Goa when fireworks were used indoors during a performance. The limited escape routes and crowding led to several people dying in the fire. While this particular outlet is permanently closed and the owners were arrested, what is upsetting is that consumers continue to patronise other establishments owned by the same owners.

In the U.S., established food and coffee chains have reported a slowdown in sales because of consumer boycott movements due to the political stance of these chains. If consumer boycott movements can lead to a slowdown of global conglomerates, then Indian consumers should also boycott establishments that have brazenly violated rules that have led to loss of life.

However, for an ordinary citizen who may not remember the incident, lack of access to compliance information such as publicly displayed compliance certificates in establishments and a public registry of violation norms, makes it harder for them to make an informed choice. Lack of access to this information is a governance failure, and access to it may be a step towards strengthening compliance with regulatory norms.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, establishments across India were under strict operating guidelines. Any deviation resulted in their immediate closure. The same enforcement must continue to be applied, and all buildings must be monitored to ensure compliance with guidelines.

Key Arguments

- Lives are being lost to **abject governance failure**, not natural causes; citizens' growing **apathy** is equally concerning.
- Root causes: **systemic failure, bureaucratic greed, weak enforcement** and the public's brazen entitlement.
- Familiar cycle: arrest, suspensions, compensation, promise of inquiry — then forgotten until the next tragedy.
- Accused often have **prior criminal cases**, signalling no accountability.
- Officials who clear or ignore unauthorised structures should face the **same consequences as the owners**.

Poor Urban Planning

- **Unauthorised colonies** in Delhi are exempt from planning regulations — a form of "sanctioned impunity".
- Encroachment of public land is routine; anti-encroachment drives are **selective**, targeting the marginalised.
- The **2025 Goa bar fire** (fireworks used indoors, limited escape routes) killed several people.

Suggestions

- **Consumer boycott** of establishments that violate safety rules.
- Publicly displayed **compliance certificates** and a **public registry of violations**.
- COVID-era style **strict enforcement** — immediate closure on deviation.

Recent Examples

- Ghatkopar billboard collapse, Mumbai (2024)
- Rajkot game-zone fire (2024)
- Delhi coaching-centre basement flooding (2024)
- Goa bar fire (2025)

Static Link

74th Constitutional Amendment (1992) – Twelfth Schedule (18 subjects) includes **urban planning, regulation of land use and construction of buildings, and fire services**. **National Building Code of India, 2016 (BIS)** – fire and life-safety norms. **Disaster Management Act, 2005**.

Practice Zone

MAINS • PRELIMS • RECAP • TRAP-SETTERS • PLACES & PERSONS

Mains Practice

Q1. "Compelled expressions of patriotism sit uneasily with constitutional guarantees of free speech and religious freedom." Discuss in the light of the recent challenge to the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026. (GS 2 | 15 marks | 250 words)

प्रश्न 1. "देशभक्ति की बाध्यकारी अभिव्यक्ति, अभिव्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता और धार्मिक स्वतंत्रता की संवैधानिक गारंटियों के साथ सहज नहीं बैठती।" राष्ट्रीय सम्मान अपमान निवारण (संशोधन) अधिनियम, 2026 को दी गई हालिया चुनौती के आलोक में चर्चा कीजिए। (सामान्य अध्ययन 2 | 15 अंक | 250 शब्द)

Approach: Intro – SC's observation on conscientious objectors and the T.M. Krishna petition.

Body – (i) State's power to prescribe protocol for national symbols; Art. 51A(a); (ii) Art. 19(1)(a) incl. right to silence, Arts. 25–26, secularism as basic structure; (iii) Bijoe Emmanuel (1986), Shyam Narayan Chouksey (2016/2018); (iv) proportionality of criminal penalties. **Conclusion** – patriotism is nurtured through persuasion, not prosecution; suggest exemption for respectful silence.

Q2. Groundwater depletion in Punjab is not merely an ecological crisis but also a question of equity among farmers. Examine and suggest measures. (GS 3 | 15 marks | 250 words)

प्रश्न 2. पंजाब में भूजल का हास केवल एक पारिस्थितिक संकट नहीं, बल्कि किसानों के बीच समता का प्रश्न भी है। परीक्षण कीजिए तथा उपाय सुझाइए। (सामान्य अध्ययन 3 | 15 अंक | 250 शब्द)

Approach: Intro – 152% extraction; 72% of 153 blocks in the red zone. **Body** – (i) causes: rice-wheat cycle, MSP, free power; (ii) equity: deeper wells for the rich, water markets, capital barrier for small farmers (EPW, Discover Sustainability studies); (iii) measures: Pani Bachao Paisa Kamao, DSR, crop diversification, redirecting power subsidy, tenant-focused benefits. **Conclusion** – subsidise access to water, not extraction.

Prelims MCQs

1. Consider the following statements about Vande Mataram:

1. It was first published in the journal Bangadarshan in 1875.
2. It was later included in the novel Anandamath.
3. Article 51A of the Constitution explicitly mentions it.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

2. The case *Bijoe Emmanuel vs State of Kerala* (1986) is related to:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| (a) Right to privacy | (b) Refusal to sing the National Anthem |
| (c) Entry of women into temples | (d) Minority educational institutions |

3. Under Article 51A(a), citizens have a duty to respect which of the following?

1. National Flag 2. National Anthem 3. National Song 4. Ideals of the Constitution

Select the correct answer:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| (a) 1 and 2 only | (b) 1, 2 and 4 only |
| (c) 2, 3 and 4 only | (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4 |

4. With reference to Exercise Nomadic Elephant, consider:

1. It is a bilateral exercise between India and Mongolia.
2. Its 2026 edition is being held at Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand.
3. It is a multinational peacekeeping exercise hosted every year by Mongolia.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

5. Consider the following statements:

1. An OMO sale by the RBI absorbs liquidity from the banking system.
2. 'Operation Twist' involves buying long-term and selling short-term G-Secs simultaneously.
3. Treasury Bills are issued by both the Central and State Governments.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

6. Which of the following are quantitative tools of monetary policy?

1. Open Market Operations
2. Cash Reserve Ratio
3. Moral suasion
4. Marginal Standing Facility

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| (a) 1 and 2 only | (b) 1, 2 and 4 only |
| (c) 2, 3 and 4 only | (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4 |

7. Consider the following statements about the Battle of Haifa:

1. It was fought on 23 September 1918 against Ottoman forces.
2. The Jodhpur and Mysore Lancers took part in it.
3. It took place before the Balfour Declaration was issued.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

8. As per the groundwater assessment methodology, an assessment unit is categorised as 'Over-exploited' when the stage of extraction is:

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| (a) Above 70% | (b) Between 90% and 100% |
| (c) Above 100% | (d) Above 150% |

9. The 'Pani Bachao, Paisa Kamao' scheme, seen in the news, provides:

- | | |
|--|--|
| (a) Subsidy on drip irrigation sets | (b) Cash for unused electricity units of pumping below a threshold |
| (c) Free borewells to marginal farmers | (d) Insurance against drought |

10. Which of the following find place in the Twelfth Schedule of the Constitution?

1. Urban planning including town planning
2. Regulation of land use and construction of buildings
3. Fire services

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

Answer Key & Rationale

- 1 - **(b)** The Constitution does not name the National Song; 51A(a) mentions only the Flag and Anthem.
- 2 - **(b)** Jehovah's Witness children stood respectfully but did not sing; SC upheld Arts. 19(1)(a) and 25.
- 3 - **(b)** National Song is not mentioned in Art. 51A(a).
- 4 - **(a)** Statement 3 describes Khaan Quest; Nomadic Elephant is bilateral, held alternately in India and Mongolia.
- 5 - **(a)** T-Bills are issued only by the Central Government; States issue SDLs.
- 6 - **(b)** Moral suasion is a qualitative tool.
- 7 - **(b)** The Balfour Declaration was issued in November 1917, before the battle.
- 8 - **(c)** Safe $\leq 70\%$, Semi-critical 70–90%, Critical 90–100%, Over-exploited $>100\%$.
- 9 - **(b)** Punjab's scheme pays farmers for every unused kWh below a threshold.
- 10 - **(d)** All three are among the 18 subjects of the Twelfth Schedule (74th Amendment).

Quick Revision Recap

Topic	One-line Takeaway
National Song case	SC: State may shape the National Song, but cannot penalise conscientious objectors; Bijoe Emmanuel still holds.
Vande Mataram	Bankim Chandra; Bangadarshan 1875; Anandamath 1882; first two stanzas adopted 1937; equal honour 24 Jan 1950.
Nomadic Elephant	18th edition; India–Mongolia; Pithoragarh; previous at Ulaanbaatar (2025).
OMO	RBI sold ₹25,000 crore G-Secs to drain surplus liquidity; sale = absorb, purchase = inject.
Battle of Haifa	23 Sept 1918; Indian cavalry vs Ottomans; celebrated in Israel, contested by Palestinians.
Punjab groundwater	152% extraction; 72% blocks red; depletion widens the gap between large and small farmers.
Civic infrastructure	Governance failure kills; hold officials accountable; public registry of violations.

Trap-Setters

- The Constitution **does not** mention a National Song; Art. 51A(a) covers only the **Flag and Anthem**.
- Bijoe Emmanuel concerned the **National Anthem**, not Vande Mataram.
- Only the **first two stanzas** were adopted in 1937 — the controversy is over all **six**.
- **Nomadic Elephant** (bilateral) ≠ **Khaan Quest** (multinational, hosted by Mongolia).
- OMO **sale** reduces money supply; Operation Twist is **liquidity-neutral**.
- T-Bills are issued **only by the Centre**.
- Haifa was fought against the **Ottomans**, **after** the Balfour Declaration (1917).

Places & Persons in News

Place	Context	Person	Context
Pithoragarh	Nomadic Elephant venue; borders Nepal & China	Justice Joymalya Bagchi	SC judge on the National Song Bench
Ulaanbaatar	Capital of Mongolia; 2025 edition venue	CJI Surya Kant	Heads the three-judge Bench
Haifa	Israeli port city; 1918 battle	T.M. Krishna	Carnatic vocalist; petitioner
Sangrur & Barnala	Punjab districts in groundwater study	Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay	Composer of Vande Mataram
Goa	2025 bar fire	Maj. Dalpat Singh Shekhawat	"Hero of Haifa"