

Success
starts
with
Self Belief

Important Issues of the Day

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- **No end to suffering – Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **Fire and more fire – Page No.6 , GS 3**
- **Demographic challenges – Page No. 7, GS 1**
- **Question Hour – Page No.10 , GS 2**
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- **Child mortality – Page No.12 , Prelims**
- **Port of Fujairah – Prelims**

Speaker irked by Minister's absence in Question Hour

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Wednesday expressed displeasure over the absence of a senior Minister during the Question Hour when questions about his Ministry were being asked.

Though the Speaker did not name anyone, the question was regarding the Postal Department which comes under Communication Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia.

“Where has the Minister gone,” Mr. Birla asked when the question was being fielded by Minister of State for Communication Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani.

When the Minister of State replied that the senior Minister had gone for an “important meeting”, Mr. Birla said, “The Question Hour is important, not meeting.”

Earlier, the Lok Sabha Speaker had urged members not to speak among themselves when the House takes up obituary references.

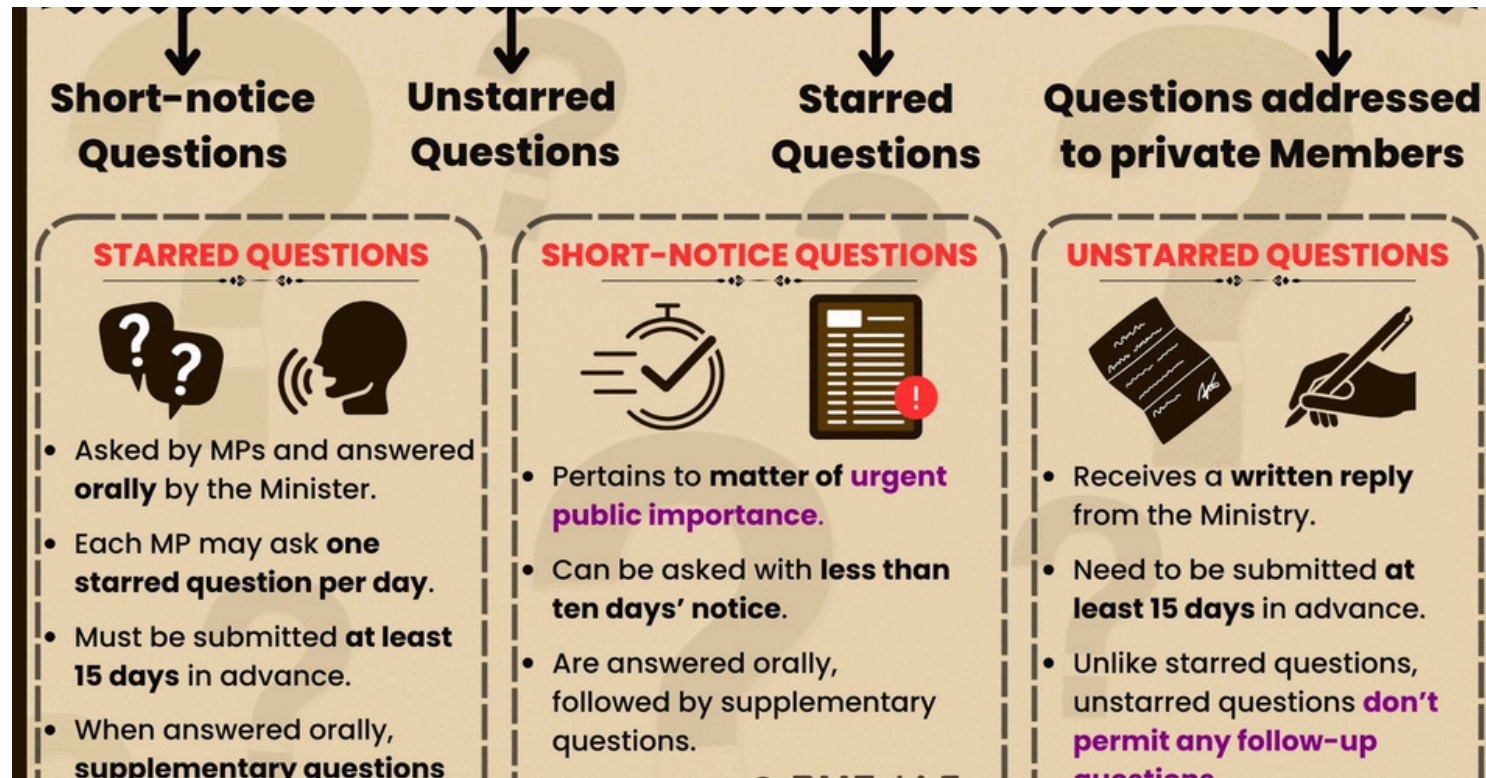
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- It is a one-hour time period provided to MPs to ask questions to the minister and hold them accountable for the functioning of their ministries.
- When in session, Lok Sabha generally starts with Question Hour.
- In Rajya Sabha it is held from 11 am to 12 noon (since 2014).
- Prior to Independence, the first question asked of government was in 1893.
- MPs can submit their question notices in two ways:
 - Through online 'Member's Portal,' using their ID and password.
 - Fill out printed forms obtainable from the Parliamentary Notice Office.

- Presiding officers of the two houses are the final authority with respect to the conduct of Question Hour.

It is governed by:

- Rules 32 to 54 of the “Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in LS”
- Directions 10 to 18 of the “Directions by the Speaker, LS”
- To ask a question, an MP has to give a notice to the Secretary-General of LS.
- Usually questions must usually be notified at least 15 days in advance.



The Parliament of India exercises control over the functions of the Council of Ministers through

1. Adjournment motion

2. Question hour

3. Supplementary questions

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Mains Question

“Question Hour is considered the most effective mechanism for ensuring executive accountability in a parliamentary democracy.” Critically examine its significance and the challenges affecting its functioning in India.

"प्रश्नकाल को संसदीय लोकतंत्र में कार्यपालिका की जवाबदेही सुनिश्चित करने का सबसे प्रभावी माध्यम माना जाता है। भारत में इसके महत्व एवं इसके संसदीय सत्रों में आने वाली मुद्दों का समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए।"

Lok Sabha applies 'guillotine' to pass Demands for Grants of ₹53 lakh cr. for Ministries

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha passed the Demands for Grants of various Ministries for 2026-27 on Wednesday. The House approved an expenditure of over ₹53 lakh crore by applying the guillotine, passing the Demands for Grants for various Ministries without a discussion. Earlier, it had discussed Demands for Grants for two Ministries – Agriculture and Railways.

Replying to the debate on agriculture, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the Centre is committed to transform society and shaping the future of the nation. He said the Opposition presented half-truths in the name of farmers' welfare. He said during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, out of 140 major irrigation projects, 99 remained stalled.



Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan speaking in the Lok Sabha during the second part of the Budget Session of Parliament. PTI

“The [Narendra] Modi government brought these projects under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana and placed them on priority. As a result, work is moving rapidly to ensure irrigation coverage for nearly 2.7 million hectares of additional agricultural land,” he said.

Maintaining that the new Pesticide and Seed Bills will soon be implemented, he said they were

aimed at guaranteeing quality seeds, standard and reliable fertilizers, as well as safe and effective pesticides for farmers.

Earlier, initiating the debate for the Agriculture Ministry, Congress MP Amrinder Singh Raja Warring said 750 farmers died in Punjab during the agitation against the now-repealed farm laws and sought compensation for their families.

- **The term guillotine originally referred to an apparatus designed for executions by beheading.**
- **It was introduced in France during the French Revolution to make capital punishment more reliable and less painful.**
- **In legislative parlance, guillotine means to bunch together and fast-track the passage of financial business. It is a fairly common procedural exercise in Lok Sabha during the Budget Session.**
- **Once the guillotine is applied, any remaining demands for grants are put to vote without further discussion.**
- **This ensures that the budget is passed within the allocated time, and the government can continue its work without any delay.**

India showing steady progress in reducing child deaths amid slowing global gains: report

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

An estimated 4.9 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2024 worldwide, including 2.3 million newborns, according to the latest estimates released by a UN report on child mortality. The report, released on Wednesday, said that most of these deaths were preventable with proven, low-cost interventions, and access to quality healthcare.

The report titled “Levels and Trends in Child Mortality” added that under-five deaths globally have fallen by more than half since 2000. However, since 2015, this pace has slowed by more than 60%.

However, India is among the countries demonstrating steady progress in reducing child

mortality through sustained public health efforts. The latest United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UNIGME) Report, 2025 states that the status of neonatal mortality rate reduction in India has shown progress.

The Union Health Ministry added that India, over the past two decades, has played a pivotal role in reducing child mortality in the South Asia region.

The Ministry, in its release, said that the Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) recorded a decline since 1990. In 1990, India had an NMR of 57 per 1,000 live births, which fell to 17 in 2024.

Also, the Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) witnessed a sharp fall – in 1990, the U5MR stood at 127 per 1,000 live births,



Under-5 deaths dropped from 127 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 27 in 2024.

while in 2024, it declined to 27.

“This sharp reduction is due to targeted public health interventions, improved institutional delivery systems, and expanded immunisation coverage,” the Ministry said.

The UN report found that an estimated 2.1 million children, adolescents,

and youth - in the age group of 5-24 - died in 2024. Infectious diseases and injuries remain leading causes among younger children, while self-harm is the leading cause among girls aged 15 to 19, and road traffic injuries among boys.

“This year’s report for the first time estimates deaths directly caused by severe acute malnutrition. It found more than 1,00,000 children aged 1-59 months – or 5% – died from it in 2024. The toll is far greater when indirect effects are considered, as malnutrition weakens children’s immunity and increases their risk of dying from common childhood diseases,” the report by the UNIGME states.

Mortality data also frequently fail to capture severe acute malnutrition as an underlying cause of

death, suggesting the burden is likely substantially underestimated. Some of the countries with the highest numbers of direct deaths from severe acute malnutrition include Pakistan, Somalia, and Sudan.

Newborn deaths account for nearly half of all under-five deaths. Leading causes of newborn deaths were complications from preterm birth (36%), and complications during labour and delivery (21%).

Beyond the first month, infectious diseases, including malaria, diarrhoea, and pneumonia were major killers. Malaria remained the single largest killer in this age group (17%), with most deaths occurring in endemic areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2024, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 58% of all under-five deaths.

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Mains Question

Malnutrition remains a critical factor contributing to child mortality in India.

Discuss the interlinkages between nutrition, healthcare access, and child survival.

कुपोषण भारत में बाल मृत्यु दर का एक प्रमुख कारण बना हुआ है। पोषण, स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं की उपलब्धता तथा बाल जीवितता के बीच संबंधों की विधायकी की शक्ति।

Port of Fujairah





- **A major deep-water, multipurpose port and global oil storage/bunkering hub serving as a critical export outlet for UAE's hydrocarbons.**
- **Located in: Fujairah Emirate, United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the eastern coast.**

Sea Open to:

- **Directly opens into the Gulf of Oman / Arabian Sea, bypassing the Strait of Hormuz.**
- **Construction began in 1978; became operational in 1983 as part of UAE's economic diversification strategy.**
- **Gradually expanded into one of the largest oil storage and bunkering hubs globally.**

NCERT book ban, a chapter on judicial transparency

Page No.6 , GS 2

Max Boot, former Features Editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, authored the seminal study on the United States judiciary, 'Out of Order: Arrogance, Corruption, and Incompetence on the Bench' (1998). Robert H. Bork, former Solicitor General of the United States, wrote the foreword to it with a striking conclusion – "Our Courts are behaving badly and the public, to the degree it can be brought to understand that, will exert force for reform, a reform that must be structural as well as intellectual and moral."

He observed that the book's subtitle sums up a system in distress. The book underscores the critical role that the media and citizens must play while dealing with the judicial institution in a democracy.

In February this year, the Supreme Court of India, faulting what it felt as selective reference to corruption within the judiciary, directed "a complete blanket ban" on a Class eight social science textbook published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The three-judge Bench, presided over by the Chief Justice of India, further alluded to "an underlying agenda to undermine the institutional authority and demean the dignity of the judiciary".

The Court subsequently ordered that the persons responsible for preparing the passages should be 'disassociated' from future projects by governments and public universities. The Court thus instantly punished them, without due process or hearing. The prohibition by the Court is problematic as it sends critical signals about the shape of India's democracy today.

What appears to have annoyed the Bench were the passages in the book on judicial delay and corruption in judiciary. As per the news report cited by the Court, the textbook has data on the approximate number of pending cases in Indian courts. It refers to the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, which prescribe values for judicial life. It also discusses the in-house procedures evolved by the Supreme Court and the constitutional mechanism for the removal of errant judges.

An undermining of freedom

By itself, a book ban is the most egregious form of censorship. Such a move directly impacts the right to freedom of speech under Article 19, a solemn promise in the Constitution. This right could be restricted only by a law made by the



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The top court's ban on an NCERT textbook exposes gaps in judicial accountability and public trust

state on grounds expressly provided under Article 19(2), such as "the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offence". There is no law made by the state to justify the ban on the book in question. Judicial orders or judgments do not come under the realm of 'law' made by the state, as understood in the context of Article 19 (*Naresh Shridhar Mirajkar vs State of Maharashtra*, 1966).

For an act to amount to contempt of court, there must be material that scandalises the authority of the court or prejudices or interferes with judicial proceedings or the administration of justice, as defined under Section 2(c) of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971. Whether mere references to corruption in the judiciary and case backlogs meet this high threshold for criminal contempt was a question that, unfortunately, did not form part of the Court's deliberations. What was also not examined was whether the statements were too general in nature to suggest any malicious intent to scandalise the Court.

Further, and importantly, going by the scheme of judicial review, courts must put to constitutional scrutiny the law passed by Parliament often violating fundamental rights. When the courts take on the task of book banning, citizens are left without remedy, as constitutional courts are the last resort to safeguard fundamental rights.

Global efforts

In advanced democracies, the credibility of the court is a matter of concern, primarily for the court itself. Transparency International has conducted a number of surveys that show that there is a prevailing notion about judicial corruption. Judiciaries across the world have made efforts to address this problem. In Kenya, the reforms led by Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, between 2011 and 2013, are an illustrative example. During this period, institutions such as judicial ombudspersons, court users' committees, and performance management committees were established.

By 2013, public trust in Kenya in the judiciary had risen to 61%, compared to 27% in 2009. The reforms continued even thereafter. This happened only by acknowledging the issues and trying to address them, rather than suppressing critical voices.

In India, the courts including the top court have acknowledged the menace of delay and corruption. Judges have repeatedly warned about the 'bad apples' within the system. The very existence of the in-house Procedure indicates the possibility that a minuscule number of judges may breach their oath.

In *K. Veeraswami vs Union Of India And Others* (1991), the Court categorically held that judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court fall within the definition of "public servant" for the purposes of prosecution under the Prevention of Corruption Act, while also cautioning against the potential for misuse of this provision by the executive. The Court also said: "We consider that the society's demand for honesty in a judge is exacting and absolute. The standards of judicial behaviour, both on and off the Bench, are normally extremely high. For a Judge to deviate from such standards of honesty and impartiality is to betray the trust reposed on him. No excuse or no legal relativity can condone such betrayal. From the standpoint of justice, the size of the bribe or scope of corruption cannot be the scale for measuring a judge's dishonour. A single dishonest judge not only dishonours himself and disgraces his office but jeopardises the integrity of the entire judicial system."

The need for introspection

Therefore, the need to eradicate corruption and delay is also in the best interest of the judiciary. In the interim order directing the book ban, the Court also pointed out that the "book also chooses not to delve into any of the transformative initiatives and measures pioneered by this Court towards overhauling legal aid mechanisms and streamlining the ease of access to justice". Not addressing all counterarguments might render an opinion potentially incomplete. Yet, that is no reason for banning the view expressed. If the exercise of free speech is required to follow a particular form, the right itself becomes illusory. During judicial deliberations, nobody pointed out that the judiciary, like other organs of the state, must be open to dissent and reform.

The first step in fighting systemic problems such as corruption – whether in the executive or the judiciary – is acknowledging it. After all, it is imperative to curb all kinds of corruption and that civil society is educated about the institutional challenges. A court that continuously reforms itself is the bedrock of any democracy.

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India's future demographic challenges

A new report by the International Institute of Migration and Development and the Population Foundation of India titled 'Unravelling India's Demographic Future: Population Projections for States and Union Territories, 2021-2051', underscores the demographic risks that are beginning to surface nationwide. India's population is projected to increase from 1,355.8 million in 2021 to 1,590.1 million in 2051, with an average annual increase of 0.5%, suggesting a prolonged period of slower population expansion. These figures fall below earlier estimates, strengthening the case that India is unlikely to face the threat of population explosion that once dominated political and academic debates. These projections point to a turning point, where India is poised to move beyond a youth-led, fast-expanding population into an era of a more urban, steadily ageing, and balanced demographic structure.

A problem for schools

The projections point out that the pre-primary school-going population (0-4 years) is expected to dwindle from 113.5 million in 2021 to 8.6 million by the middle of this century. Since most regions in the country are now close to universal primary school enrolments, the demand for new schooling facilities could ease out, especially in the government sector. A sustained drop in fertility could leave the country with an escalating number of 'uneconomic schools' (schools with lesser enrolment rates that cannot justify their economic costs), raising the threat of teachers losing their jobs, a trend that the State of Kerala has seen play out for more than three decades.

Evidence from different parts of the country suggests that declining fertility rates have already started influencing schooling requirements, with classrooms adjusting to smaller cohorts. Data from the Unified District



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The growing elderly population is set to exert increasing pressure on healthcare and social security, thereby putting a strain on the state's finances

Information System for Education and the Ministry of Education highlights a significant reduction in the number of government schools over the last decade, with schools dropping from 11.07 lakh in 2014-15 to 10.18 lakh in 2023-24, amounting to a reduction of close to 90,000 schools across the country. This decline has been accompanied by a sharp increase in private schools; their numbers grew from 2.88 lakh to 3.31 lakh over the same period, an increase of 43,000 schools.

While falling birth rates have led to a reduction in enrolments and closure of government schools, smaller families and improved capacity to afford education have propelled the demand for private schools. Many parents choose private schools in the hope of giving their wards the education they never had in life, nudged by social pressure and a common perception that government schools generally fall short on quality compared to private schools.

Greying population

As the demographic dividend largely depends on the working age population (15-59), a relatively higher proportion of this specific group can lead to faster economic growth, a dynamic evident in the development phases of several countries, including China, Japan, and South Korea. India has one of the world's largest workforces, rising from 833.8 million (65.2%) in 2021 to a projected peak level of 1,009.0 million (65.5%) in 2041, before declining to 998.1 million (62.8%) by 2051. There is an impending concern that the demographic dividend window will close after 2041, highlighting the urgency of leveraging it before its contribution to economic growth starts to diminish. Nevertheless, close to six out of every 10 persons in the country are expected to be part of the workforce by 2051, which is an encouraging sign.

However, India's population is ageing. In 2021, India's elderly

population (60+) stood at 130.5 million or 9.62% of the population. By 2051, this number is projected to touch 325.3 million (20.5%), highlighting that there will be a profound increment in the ageing population. The median age, a measure that splits the population evenly by age, is projected to climb from 28 years in 2021 to 40 by 2051, signalling India's shift towards a more advanced stage of demographic transition. The growing elderly population is set to exert increasing pressure on healthcare and social security, thereby putting a strain on the state's finances.

Policy signals

The declining child population is expected to offer a better teacher-pupil ratio and expand infrastructural facilities in schools. Further, declining birth rates reduce demand for maternity care, allowing the healthcare system to rationalise the use of resources and offer better quality care. Though fertility levels have been falling, continued investments are required for family planning and to prevent unintended pregnancies, as well as reduce infertility and ensure the reproductive rights of women.

India needs to overhaul its education and skill development system to cope with modern-day challenges. It should also equip the younger generation to seize new opportunities before our demographic leverage disappears in the coming decades. The decline in the working-age population can be offset by bringing in more women to formal work (gender dividend) and by expanding access to better-quality employment. With the rapid growth of the elderly population, India's financial and healthcare systems, especially geriatric care, must be redesigned to support the growing needs of elderly citizens. At the same time, this creates a strong potential for a thriving silver economy, and could help in unlocking a second demographic dividend in the future.

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No end to suffering

India must enlist more support against Pakistan's bombing of Afghanistan

As the U.S.-Israel war against Iran rages, India's western frontiers have flared up, intensified by recent clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan forces on the Durand Line. On Tuesday, Pakistani airstrikes tragically killed at least 400 Afghans at a drug treatment and rehabilitation centre. Pakistan, which has accused the Taliban administration of harbouring the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and supporting its terror attacks on Pakistan, denied Afghanistan's accusations, claiming that its strikes had only targeted "military installations". Despite the denial, it is clear from visuals that the Omid Rehabilitation Facility in Kabul was destroyed. In an extremely strong statement, India condemned what it called Pakistan's "cowardly" targeting of a hospital, rejecting its denial as a cover-up for a "massacre", and called for an international inquiry. The Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict, which has been simmering for over a year, escalated in February when the Pakistan Air Force struck Taliban bases in Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia in what it called Operation Ghazab Lil Haq (Righteous Fury). Tensions have also risen after TTP attacks killed 11 soldiers and a child in Bajaur and 32 people in an Islamabad mosque following a suicide bombing. Pakistan has also been angered by closer India-Afghanistan ties and New

Taliban of turning Afghanistan into an "Indian colony" – a turnaround from its support in 2021, for the Taliban's rise to power in Kabul. Apart from its continued tensions and hatred of India, and now Afghanistan, Pakistan possibly benefits from the global focus on the U.S.-Israel war with Iran. The U.S.'s actions here and its statement expressing support for Pakistan's "right to defend itself against Taliban attacks", has also imbued Pakistan's generals with a sense of impunity to strike targets in Afghanistan at will.

New Delhi could be permitted some sense of 'payback' as Islamabad's fight against cross-border terrorism from Afghanistan mirrors India's problems with Pakistan. The constraints on Pakistan's military in a two-front situation with India and Afghanistan, compounded by a transnational war on the third front, may also be the source of some relief for India. With no dialogue with Pakistan, and the limited dialogue with a Taliban regime it deals with but does not formally recognise, India's diplomatic role in the conflict is limited. However, it must enlist other SCO members that have been concerned over the outbreak of an "open war" between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to intervene. The region is already suffering from trade, energy and travel restrictions as a result of the West Asia war, to risk more volatility and loss of lives, particularly in Afghanistan, where the vulnerable, especially women, have suffered the most.

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Fire and more fire

India must treat hospital fire safety as an issue of criminal accountability

Cuttack is not an anomaly. It is the latest entry in a ledger of preventable deaths in Indian hospital ICUs. In 2016, 22 people died in a fire at a private hospital ICU in Bhubaneswar, which did not have the mandatory fire safety clearance. Following this tragedy, fire safety audits were made compulsory for such facilities. Last year, the Odisha government allocated about ₹320 crore for fire safety improvement across hospitals in the State. But this did not prevent the fire at the government SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack, apparently caused by a short circuit in the ICU of the trauma care unit. Some reports suggest the fire may have started in a ventilator, which was later found heavily charred. The accident, which occurred in the early hours of Monday, claimed 12 of the 23 ICU patients. Although the hospital had a firefighting unit, its personnel arrived after more than 30 minutes, reportedly because staff did not alert them early. Additionally, the fire hydrants could not be operated by staff. Nevertheless, water is not the right medium to fight electric fires, which are best extinguished using carbon dioxide, a method that requires trained personnel. Last October, six patients were killed in an ICU fire in Rajasthan. In 2024, newborns died in an ICU fire in Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh. Two similar accidents were

reported in Maharashtra in 2021. An accident in Jhansi revealed hazards including exposed wiring, inadequate earthing and electrical circuits not matching power load requirements – the last being a leading cause of electrical fires in India.

ICUs have intrinsic safety risks, as their oxygen-rich environment can turn even a spark into an inferno. ICUs are also packed with electrical equipment, and the personnel are not always well trained in their safe handling. State-of-the-art medical equipment comes with advanced electronics and variable frequency drives that generate what are called “harmonic currents”. These currents flow within circuits and typically have no safety devices such as circuit breakers. Harmonics create silent, persistent overheating and insulation degradation and are a severe fire hazard. Today’s electrical practice lays down that every time a new ventilator is wheeled into an ICU, the wiring, protection and load capacity must be re-evaluated. Older facilities need an electrical upgrade before cutting edge equipment can be installed. As patients in ICUs are often sedated, intubated, and connected to machines, staff must be trained to ensure their safe evacuation. Until India treats hospital fire safety as a matter of criminal accountability rather than bureaucratic paperwork, the fires will keep burning and the bodies will keep mounting.

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