

**NOTHING
WILL WORK UNLESS
YOU DO**

Important Issues of the Day

- **Excise duty – Page No. 1, GS 3**
- **Avalanche – Page No.1 , GS 3**
- **North-south divide – Page No. 6, GS 2**
- **A shade of dark – Page No.6 , GS 2**
- **Defence Acquisition Council – Page No. 8, Prelims**

Petrol, diesel excise duty cut; prices won't change

Centre reduces duty on petrol, diesel by ₹10 a litre each, but says the move will not lower fuel prices; it says the cut aims at easing the fiscal hit on oil marketing companies due to high oil prices

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Thursday reduced the special additional excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹10 a litre each, effectively bringing down the duty on diesel to zero and on petrol to ₹3 a litre. However, the move will not translate into lower fuel prices for consumers.

Instead, the government said the duty cut was aimed at reducing the fiscal hit that oil marketing companies were absorbing due to high and rising oil prices.

In response to a question from *The Hindu*, Vivek Chaturvedi, Chairman of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, said the reduction was ex-

Fiscal cushion

Government cuts excise duty on fuel to ease OMC losses, but consumers see no relief at pumps



Fuel rush: Long queues seen at a petrol pump in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Friday.

pected to cost the exchequer ₹7,000 crore over the next 15 days.

The government also hiked the export duties on diesel to ₹21.5 a litre, and on ATF to ₹29.5 a litre. Mr. Chaturvedi said the government expected to add

- Oil marketing companies (OMCs) will not pass on **excise cuts** to consumers, govt. says
- The purpose of the cuts is to **reduce the losses** OMCs are facing
- Govt. estimates these losses to be **₹2,400 crore a day**
- Govt.'s net revenue loss due to tax cuts expected at around **₹5,500 crore per 15 days**
- Private sector OMC Nayara Energy has **raised petrol and diesel prices**

₹1,500 crore to the exchequer through these hikes, which would mitigate some of the impact of the excise duty cuts on domestic petrol and diesel.

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Centre hikes LPG allocation by 20%

NEW DELHI

Offering respite to entities, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas called for increased allocation of the hydrocarbon gas by another 20%, taking the total allocation of commercial LPG to 70% of pre-crisis levels. » **PAGE 11**

Trump extends pause on strikes

U.S. President Donald Trump said he is pausing any strike on Iran's power plants until April 6 and added that "talks" with the Islamic Republic are going "very well". "Talks are ongoing, and they are going very well," he wrote in a social media post. » **PAGE 12**

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- **Instead, the government said the duty cut was aimed at reducing the fiscal hit that oil marketing companies were absorbing due to high and rising oil prices.**
- **Excise duty is a form of tax imposed on goods for their production, licensing and sale.**
- **It is the opposite of Customs duty in sense that it applies to goods manufactured domestically in the country, while Customs is levied on those coming from outside of the country.**

- **The GST introduction in July 2017 subsumed many types of excise duty.**
- **Today, excise duty applies only on petroleum and liquor.**
- **Alcohol does not come under the purview of GST as exclusion mandated by constitutional provision.**
- **States levy taxes on alcohol according to the same practice as was prevalent before the rollout of GST.**

Before the introduction of GST:

- **Entry 84 of the Union List (Seventh Schedule) empowered Parliament to levy excise duty on manufactured goods.**
- **The Central Excise Act, 1944 governed the levy and collection.**
- **After GST (2017):**
- **Excise duty continues only on specific goods such as petroleum products and tobacco.**



Vehicles stuck under snow after an avalanche hit the Srinagar-Leh National Highway near Zero Point at the Zojila Pass on Friday. ANI

5 killed as avalanche strikes Zojila Pass

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Five persons were killed and as many injured after an avalanche hit the high-altitude Zojila Pass, which connects the Kashmir Valley with Ladakh, on Friday.

Two more persons are feared trapped in the snow.

Officials said the avalanche, apparently triggered by bright sunlight, hit the Srinagar-Leh National Highway near Zero Point at the Zojila Pass in

the afternoon, when several passenger vehicles were negotiating the snow-laden road. Eyewitnesses said a huge volume of snow came crashing down and buried some vehicles at an altitude of 3,580 metres.

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- **Avalanches occur when an unstable mass of snow breaks away from a mountain slope. As it descends, it gathers more snow, ice, and debris, turning into a powerful force capable of destruction.**
- **They are common in high-altitude regions with significant snowfall, steep slopes, unstable snowpacks.**

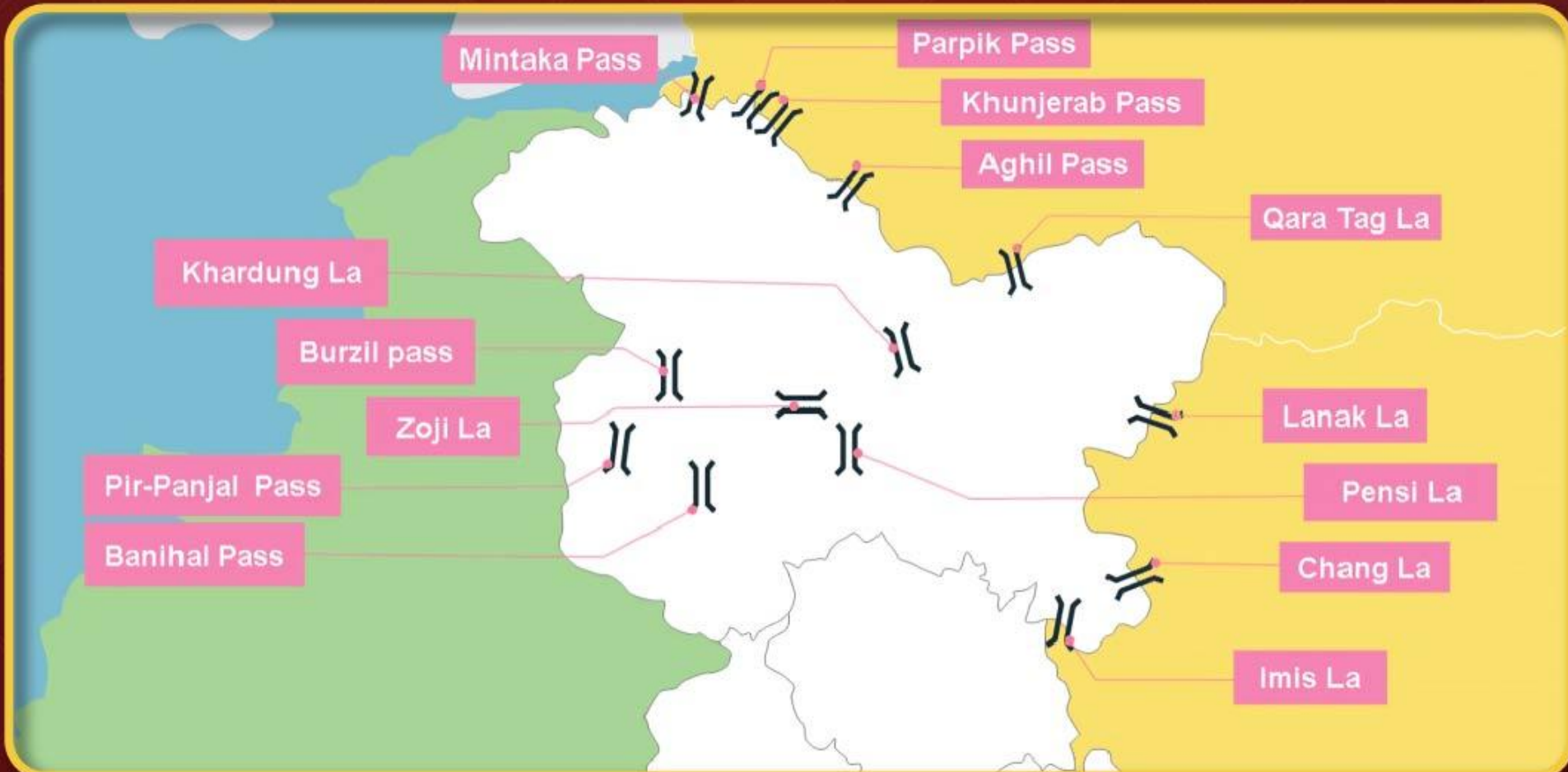
Types

- **Snow Avalanches:** These include sluff (small slides of dry, powdery snow) and slab avalanches (large, cohesive slabs of snow that break off and slide down).
- **Rock Avalanches:** Consist of massive chunks of rock breaking off and sliding down steep slopes.
- **Ice Avalanches:** Common around glaciers, where large ice masses break off and slide down slopes.
- **Debris Avalanches:** Contain soil, loose stones, and a mix of materials that move downhill with force.

- **Heavy Snowfall:** Continuous snowfall increases the load on existing snow layers, and strong winds can deposit snow unevenly, creating unstable zones.
- **Layering of Snow:** Snowpacks form in layers over time, and weaker layers may collapse under stress.
- **Steep Slopes:** Avalanches typically occur on slopes steeper than 30 degrees, where gravity plays a crucial role in the downward movement of snow.
- **Global warming:** Warming weakens bonds between snow layers, increasing the likelihood of slides.
- **Human Activities:** Construction, skiing, and vehicular movement in avalanche-prone areas can disturb the snowpack, leading to deadly slides.
- **Earthquakes:** Seismic activity and loud noises can destabilize snow layers, initiating an avalanche.

- **Avalanche Detection and Monitoring:** Scientists analyze snowpack stability, wind patterns, and temperature variations to assess avalanche risks.
- **Structural Barriers:** Diversion walls, fences, and rakes help redirect or slow down snow masses.
- **Controlled Explosions:** In ski resorts and high-risk zones, authorities use controlled explosions to trigger small avalanches before they become dangerous.
- **Reforestation and Vegetative Barriers:** Trees and vegetation help stabilize slopes and reduce the chances of snow slides.
- **Early Warning Systems:** Using advanced sensors and beacons, authorities can warn residents and workers in avalanche-prone areas.
- **Emergency Response Planning:** Training personnel and equipping them with rescue tools, including avalanche beacons and probes, enhance survival chances during disasters.

IMPORTANT MOUNTAIN PASSES IN INDIA



Mains Question

Examine how climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of disasters in India. Suggest suitable mitigation and adaptation strategies.

जांच कीजिए कि जलवायु परिवर्तन भारत में आपदाओं की आवृत्ति एवं तीव्रता को कैसे बढ़ा रहा है। उपयुक्त शमन एवं अनुकूलन रणनीतियाँ सुझाइए।

Defence proposals of ₹2.38 lakh cr. get approval

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Friday granted Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition proposals worth about ₹2.38 lakh crore, significantly enhancing India's combat, surveillance and mobility capabilities across the armed forces.

For the Army, approvals include air defence tracked systems.

The Air Force received approvals for medium transport aircraft and the S-400 long range, surface-to-air missile system.

For the Coast Guard, approval was given for heavy duty air cushion vehicles.

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India signs ₹858-cr. defence deals with Russian, U.S. firms

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Defence on Friday signed contracts worth ₹858 crore for the procurement of air defence systems for the Army and maintenance support for the Navy's reconnaissance fleet, reinforcing India's balanced defence partnerships with Russia and the United States.

A contract worth ₹445 crore was signed with Russian agency JSC Rosobornexport for the procurement of the Tunguska Air Defence Missile System for the Army. The deal was inked in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh at Kartavya Bhavan. The system is expected to significantly enhance India's multi-layered air defence capabilities



The Tunguska weapon system will enhance capabilities against aerial threats such as drones and cruise missiles. FILE PHOTO

against aerial threats such as aircraft, drones and cruise missiles, while further strengthening the Indo-Russian strategic defence partnership.

In a parallel move, the Ministry signed a ₹413-crore contract with U.S. firm Boeing India Defense Private Limited for depot-level inspection of the Navy's P-8I Long-Range Maritime Reconnaissance Air-

craft under the 'Buy Indian category with 100% Indigenous Content'.

The contract will enable in-country maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) of the P-8I fleet, enhancing operational readiness, in line with the government's Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India push. The agreements underline India's focus on strengthening combat capabilities.

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- **The DAC is the highest decision-making body in the Defence Ministry for deciding on new policies and capital acquisitions for the three services (Army, Navy and Air Force) and the Indian Coast Guard.**
- **The Minister of Defence is the Chairman of the Council.**
- **It was formed, after the Group of Ministers recommendations on 'Reforming the National Security System', in 2001, post Kargil War (1999).**

Mains Question

“India’s heavy dependence on defence imports poses strategic and economic challenges.” Critically examine.

“रक्षा आयात पर भारत की अत्यधिक निर्भरता रणनीतिक एवं आर्थिक चुनौतियाँ उत्पन्न करती है।” समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए।

Beyond the rhetoric of the north-south divide

Page No. 6, GS 2

For decades, the discourse surrounding India's development has been framed as a slow but steady march toward national synchronisation. The prevailing hope was that the economic dynamism of the south would eventually pull the rest of the country along, creating a unified middle-income power. However, as the Census and the subsequent delimitation exercise loom, a more fractured reality is emerging. The socioeconomic gap between what economist Rathin Roy calls the Great Indian Plain and the Peninsular States has not merely persisted; it has calcified into an existential fault-line that threatens the very structural integrity of the Indian Union. This is not merely a regional squabble over tax shares or language; it is a profound asymmetry where the locus of economic prosperity is increasingly decoupled from the centre of political power.

Distinct nations in one sovereign space

The physical and economic geography of modern India reveals two distinct nations inhabiting one sovereign space. On one hand, we have the Peninsular States, boasting per capita incomes that are at least double those of their northern counterparts. In States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, human development indicators – life expectancy, maternal health, and literacy – align closely with (and in some cases exceed) upper-middle-income countries in Europe or South America. On the other hand, the Great Indian Plain, encompassing the populous Hindi heartland of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, remains mired in a reality comparable to sub-Saharan Africa. While the heartland leads in population and fertility, the Peninsula leads on every other metric of modern progress.

This divergence has created a potential political problem of unprecedented proportions. In most healthy federal polities, such as the United States, Canada, or Australia, the most economically prosperous regions also hold the majority of the population, ensuring a natural alignment between wealth creation and political representation. India is treading the dangerous path once walked by the USSR and Yugoslavia – the only two major historical examples where an economically prosperous minority was tasked with subsidising a politically dominant but impoverished majority.

Following the next Census, if parliamentary seats are redistributed purely by population, the ratio of parliamentary seats in the south to the Hindi heartland seats will fall dramatically. The voice of the region that generates the nation's wealth will be further muffled by the sheer demographic weight of the region that consumes it.



Shashi Tharoor

A fourth-term Member of Parliament (Congress) for Thiruvananthapuram (Lok Sabha), the award-winning author of 28 books, including, most recently, 'The Sage Who Reimagined Hinduism: the Life, Lessons and Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru', and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee for External Affairs

A great Indian fault line exists but dialogue must ensure prosperity for many

This is the essence of India's existential crisis. When prosperity vests with the majority, they can conceivably subsidise the minority in perpetuity to maintain stability. But when a productive minority is forced to subsidise a relatively poor and deprived majority that holds the reins of dominant political power, conflict is not just a possibility – it is a probability. The current trajectory suggests a scenario where the South could increasingly be viewed by some as an extractive colony for the political ambitions of the Hindi-speaking "cow belt". A rupture between the heartland and the peninsula could well follow, unless handled wisely by both sides.

As negotiations follow on the revised delimitation of seats in Parliament, the idea of digressive proportionality, advanced in this space by Professor Santosh Mehrotra – "Reimagining delimitation", January 12, 2026 – goes the farthest towards balancing the interests of the more populous States of the north with those of the high-human development States of the South. It ensures fair representation in Parliament by giving larger States more seats but fewer per person and giving smaller States fewer seats but more representation per person. By balancing population size with State equality to prevent total domination by large States, it is likely to strengthen national unity better than any other system.

The South has a crisis

It would be a historic blunder for the southern States to frame this divide solely as a grievance against a biased central government or worse, against the Hindi belt. While the political asymmetry is real, the south faces a deep-seated crisis of its own that threatens to stall its progress toward high-income status. The region is currently caught in a socio-economic "middle-income trap". Despite high per capita incomes, the southern economy remains largely extractive and unequal. The gap between the wealth of the rich and the daily wage of the common labourer is staggering. In Tamil Nadu, the per capita income is triple that of Bihar, yet the daily agricultural wage is not even double.

This indicates that the fruits of the South's "growth explosion" are being skimmed off by a narrow elite, leaving the bulk of the population behind. The inequality that defines India is as present in the gated communities of Hyderabad as it is in the hinterlands of Patna (Kerala is arguably an exception). Patriarchy, misogyny and casteism remain the great unifiers of the Indian experience. Whether it is the blatant caste discrimination in rural Tamil Nadu or the flouting of traffic and environmental laws in Bengaluru and Chennai, the South has largely failed to translate economic wealth into social

transformation. Literacy rates in districts such as Dharmapuri (Tamil Nadu) are lower than in dozens of districts in Uttar Pradesh, and the bulk of the wealth in States such as Karnataka and Telangana is concentrated in just three or four urban districts.

Still, the prognosis for a natural convergence between north and south is gloomy. A decade ago, one might have hoped for a "grand bargain" where the north caught up economically before political representation was rebalanced. But with a 300% differential in per capita income today, moving the needle will take generations. The second theoretical solution – massive population movement from the Hindi heartland to the Peninsula that "equalises" the demographic – is already happening, but it is creating a class of "internal outsiders" rather than a cohesive social fabric. These migrants still vote in the north and as Northerners, so they will do nothing to boost the South's political clout. The third scenario, where the Peninsula's prosperity grows so fast that it pulls the rest of the country up, is failing because the southern States are themselves punching below their weight due to weak institutions and a persistent disregard for the rule of law.

The need for sober dialogue

What is required now is a sober, intellectual dialogue that moves beyond the reactive rhetoric of regionalism. We are witnessing a situation where even prosperous States are forced to spend a large proportion of their resources compensating for economic failure and social fragmentation rather than investing in the future. The South's focus must shift toward internal inclusivity. True progress is not measured by the number of unicorns in a capital city, but by the daily wage of an agricultural labourer and the literacy rate of its poorest district. This is where Kerala alone scores well.

The divide between the South and the Hindi heartland is real, and the central government's push for hegemonic control only exacerbates the tension. However, the southern States must recognise that their economic lead is fragile. Without a radical commitment to social cohesion, better human capital, and the dismantling of extractive economic structures, they will remain trapped in a middle-income cycle, socially stagnant and increasingly, politically marginalised. The "grand bargain" for India's future cannot just be a political deal between New Delhi and the State capitals; it must be a social contract that ensures prosperity is shared by the many, not just the few. Only then can India hope to bridge the fault-line that, if it is allowed to worsen with the coming delimitation, threatens the Union itself.

- **The physical and economic geography of modern India reveals two distinct nations inhabiting one sovereign space.**
- **On one hand, we have the Peninsular States, boasting per capita incomes that are at least double those of their northern counterparts. In States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, human development indicators — life expectancy, maternal health, and literacy — align closely with (and in some cases exceed) upper-middle-income countries in Europe or South America.**
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- **In most healthy federal polities, such as the United States, Canada, or Australia, the most economically prosperous regions also hold the majority of the population, ensuring a natural alignment between wealth creation and political representation.**
- **India is treading the dangerous path once walked by the USSR and Yugoslavia — the only two major historical examples where an economically prosperous minority was tasked with subsidising a politically dominant but impoverished majority.**
- **Following the next Census, if parliamentary seats are redistributed purely by population, the ratio of parliamentary seats in the south to the Hindi heartland seats will fall dramatically.**
- **The voice of the region that generates the nation's wealth will be further muffled by the sheer demographic weight of the region that consumes it.**

Mains Question

“States that successfully controlled population growth may face reduced political representation after delimitation.” Analyze the implications.

“जिन राज्यों ने जनसंख्या वृद्धि को सफलतापूर्वक नियंत्रित किया है, वे परिसीमन के बाद राजनीतिक प्रतिनिधित्व में कमी का सामना कर सकते हैं।” इसके निहितार्थों का विश्लेषण कीजिए।

A shade of dark

Reassessment of framework governing rights of transgender persons is due

Bulldozing a Bill through Parliament and pushing it into law while ignoring the public outcry is verily a failure of the democratic process. The way the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 was rushed through both Houses of Parliament – amid Opposition walkouts and a storm of protests by the LGBTQIA+ communities – is condemnable. There was neither a transparent consultative process during the drafting of the Bill nor an informed discussion on its various aspects in Parliament. While the Bill was framed as an effort to correct past legislative shortcomings, there is an apprehension among stakeholders that it applied a heteronormative lens to a law intended to address complex issues of gender identity and human dignity. The Bill explicitly states: “The purpose was and is not to protect each and every class of persons with various gender identities, self-perceived sex/gender identities or gender fluidities...” This stance has left many within the community uncertain regarding their legal standing. By moving away from broader definitions, the Bill has altered the legal landscape established by previous judicial precedents, such as the NALSA vs Union of India judgment. True, concerns have been raised about possible misuse of allowing self-perceived gender identities for those seeking to avail of public facilities and government benefits earmarked for transgender persons. But, in the attempt to do away with the

government benefits earmarked for transgender persons. But, in the attempt to do away with the contentious issue of self-identification of gender without certification by a medical board, it shifts the focus toward mandatory biological markers – including chromosomes, hormones, and genitalia – or specific socio-cultural communities such as kinner, aravani, hijra or jogta.

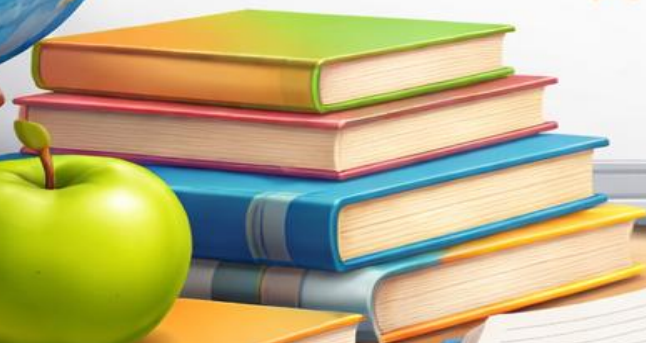
Moreover, it is problematic to conflate the distinct concepts of sex and gender as done in the Bill. In effect, the Bill reduces the psychological and socio-cultural markers of gender to biological characteristics. Only those identifiably within the specified set of socio-cultural communities escape the stipulations of the legislation. Despite these concerns, the government has maintained that the Act reflects a “collective conscience”, even as stakeholders suggest that the move limits existing protections instead of expanding them. Effective governance mandates engagement in consultation with all stakeholders. To address the current protests by members of the LGBTQIA+ communities, the government must return to a collaborative approach and move toward a rights-based law developed through a transparent consultative process. A new legislative proposal should aim to guarantee the equality of every citizen under the law, incorporate the perspectives of the LGBTQIA+ communities, and provide legal clarity while ensuring dignity for all. Otherwise, the government would appear to have created new problems in solving an old one.

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- **Progress without compassion is a silent crisis.**
- **करुणा के बिना प्रगति एक मौन संकट है।**
- **In an age of information, ignorance is often a choice.**
- **सूचना के युग में अज्ञानता अक्सर एक विकल्प बन जाती है।**
- **Technology connects the world, but disconnects the individual.**
- **प्रौद्योगिकी विश्व को जोड़ती है, परंतु व्यक्ति को अलग करती है।**

Thank You!



ABCs

