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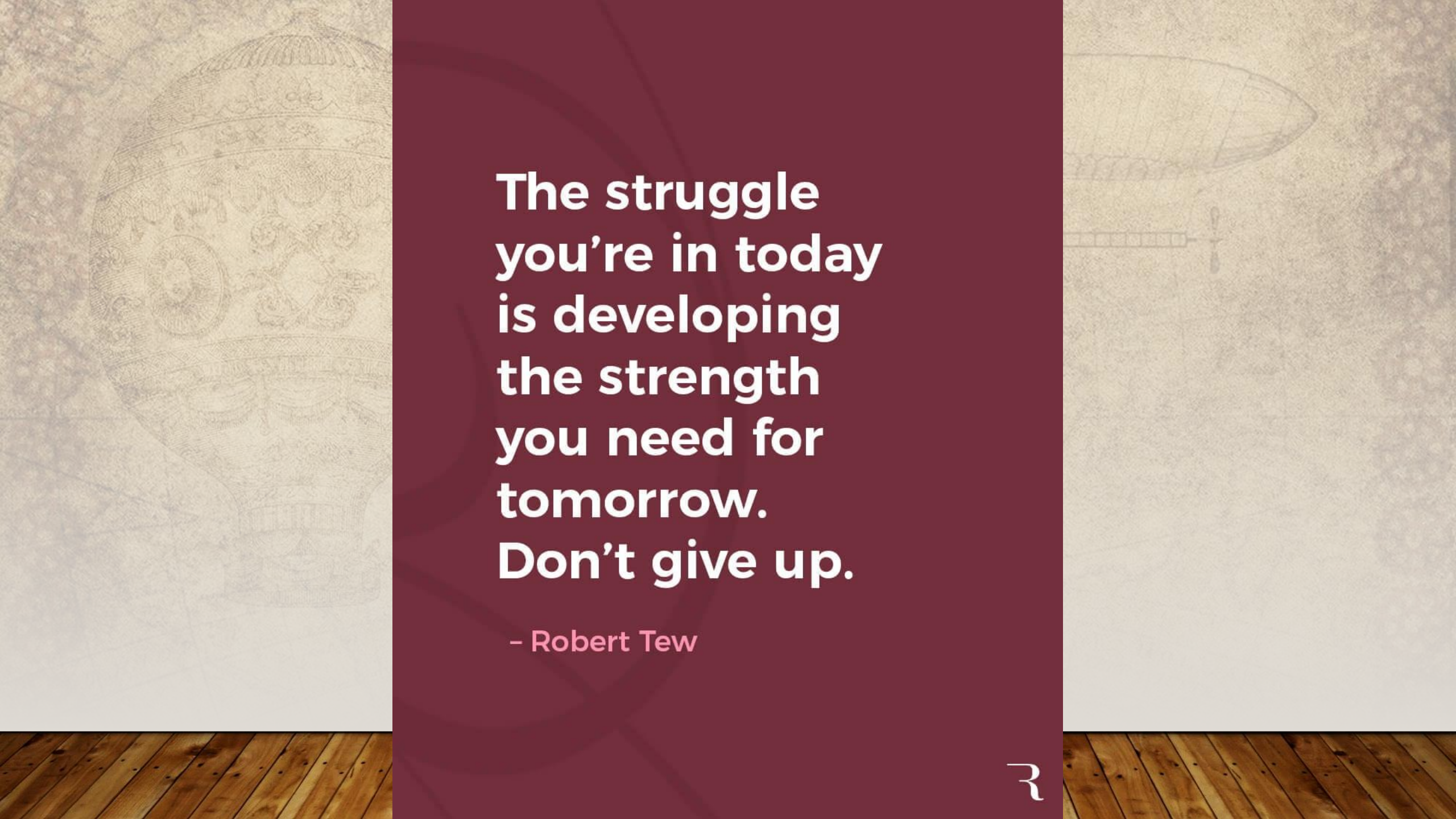
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**The struggle
you're in today
is developing
the strength
you need for
tomorrow.
Don't give up.**

– Robert Tew

SC stays HC's 'inhuman' remarks on rape attempt

Page No. 1, GS 2

Justice Gavai noted that parts of March 17 order, which described a minor's trauma but concluded the accused lacked intent to rape, showed a 'complete lack of sensitivity' in handling the case

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed an Allahabad High Court order of March 17, which concluded that "mere" grabbing the breasts of a minor victim, breaking the string of her pyjama to "bring down" her lower garment are not sufficient to constitute an offence of attempt to rape.

A day after the Supreme Court took *suo motu* cognisance of the order, a Bench headed by Justice B.R. Gavai said the observations made by a Single Judge Bench of Justice Ram Manohar Narayan Mishra of the High Court were "totally insensitive, inhuman" and "unknown to the tenets of law".

Justice Gavai pointed

Trial trail

Timeline of key developments in the case



Nov. 10, 2021: Alleged incident takes place

Jan. 12, 2022: Victim's mother files an application before the Special Judge,

POCSO Act, Kasganj district, U.P.

March 21, 2022: Special Judge treats the application as a complaint

June 23, 2023: After recording statements, the Special Judge issues a summons to the accused

Nov. 13, 2024: Revision petition against the summons order is filed and reserved for judgment by the Allahabad HC

March 17, 2025: Judgment in question is pronounced

out that certain paragraphs of the order, which graphically recounted the trauma endured by the minor victim at the hands of the two accused persons only to conclude their actions did not show any determination on the part of the duo to rape her,

showed a "complete lack of sensitivity".

The Bench said what made it worse was the order was not dictated by the judge on the spur of the moment. The case was reserved for orders in November 2024. The order passed on March 17, almost

four months later, was, even according to Justice Mishra, after "thoughtful consideration and meticulous examination of the facts of the case".

Later, in the post-lunch session, a lawyer urged the Bench to restrict the media from reporting the top court order. "No, the judge should have thought 10 times before writing such things," Justice Gavai retorted.

In the morning, the top court was assisted by Attorney-General R. Venkataramani and Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, who urged the Bench to examine the *suo motu* case with great care. The court issued notice to the Centre and Uttar Pradesh.

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Content.

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- **Justice Gavai pointed out that certain paragraphs of the order, which graphically recounted the trauma endured by the minor victim at the hands of the two accused persons only to conclude their actions did not show any determination on the part of the duo to rape her, showed a “complete lack of sensitivity”.**

Fact

- **The Bench said what made it worse was the order was not dictated by the judge on the spur of the moment. The case was reserved for orders in November 2024. The order passed on March 17, almost four months later, was, even according to Justice Mishra, after “thoughtful consideration and meticulous examination of the facts of the case”.**
- **Later, in the post-lunch session, a lawyer urged the Bench to restrict the media from reporting the top court order. “No, the judge should have thought 10 times before writing such things,” Justice Gavai retorted.**
- **The High Court was hearing an appeal by the accused against an order of a POCSO court summoning them to trial under Section 376 IPC (rape) and Section 18 (punishment for attempt to commit an offence) of the POCSO Act.**

Fact

- It is a crucial distinction, as “preparation” is not punishable in the vast majority of cases, while an “attempt” to commit an offence is criminally punishable.
- The distinction is also relevant for an important ongoing debate: how should courts define and punish an attempt to commit rape?
- In *Abhaynand Mishra v. State of Bihar* (1961), the SC ruled that to prove an attempt to commit an offence, the prosecution must broadly show that:
 - The accused had the “intention” to commit that offence.
 - The accused made preparations to commit the offence.
 - The accused then acted towards committing the offence — this need not be the “penultimate act”, that is, the final act before the offence is committed.
 - The penultimate act took place “during the course of committing that offence”. (This is known as the requirement of “proximity”).

Fact

- The HC judgment also found that “There is no allegation that accused tried to commit penetrative sexual assault against the victim”. Penetration is a precondition for proving rape under the IPC.
- Therefore, the court held that the accused cannot be summoned for the offence of attempted rape — and they are only liable to be summoned “for minor charge of Section 354(b) IPC i.e. assault or abuse a woman with intent to disrobing or compelling her to be naked”, which carries a punishment of 1-5 years’ imprisonment.

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2. NCERT Playlist:-

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Educator at StudyIQ IAS

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PYQ

Part of 'pattern of issuing biased' assessments: Centre on report by U.S. commission

Page No. 10, GS 2

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

The Union government on Wednesday lashed out at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for its latest report that expresses concerns about "attacks and discrimination" against religious minorities in India and calls for sanctions against India's intelligence agency.

The 2025 Annual Report of the USCIRF has recommended again that the U.S. government designate India, along with 15 other countries, a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC).

In its sharpest criticism thus far, the USCIRF, a congressional body that does not represent the U.S. government but is mandated to make recommendations to it, accused the Indian government of misusing



Randhir Jaiswal

laws such as the UAPA, FCRA, and CAA to "crack down" on religious minorities and civil society organisations, and even accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "hateful rhetoric and disinformation against Muslims and other religious minorities to gather political support".

For the first time, the USCIRF called for sanctions against the Research and Analysis Wing and Vikas Yadav, named in the Pannun assassination plot case. It also sought the ap-

plication of the Transnational Repression Act on India and a review of the sale of MQ-9B Predator drones for their potential use in "religious freedom violations" by Indian authorities.

"The USCIRF's persistent attempts to misrepresent isolated incidents and cast aspersions on India's vibrant multicultural society reflect a deliberate agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, calling the report a part of the "pattern of issuing biased and politically motivated assessments".

"Such efforts to undermine India's standing as a beacon of democracy and tolerance will not succeed. In fact, it is the USCIRF that should be designated as an entity of concern," he said.

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- **The report documents religious freedom conditions in 2024 and recommends policy to the White House, Congress, and State Department to advance freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) abroad. Congress mandated USCIRF’s Annual Report in the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998.**

- **In its sharpest criticism thus far, the USCIRF, a congressional body that does not represent the U.S. government but is mandated to make recommendations to it, accused the Indian government of misusing laws such as the UAPA, FCRA, and CAA to “crack down” on religious minorities and civil society organisations, and even accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of “hateful rhetoric and disinformation against Muslims and other religious minorities to gather political support”.**
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- **“The USCIRF’s persistent attempts to misrepresent isolated incidents and cast aspersions on India’s vibrant multicultural society reflect a deliberate agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom,” External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, calling the report a part of the “pattern of issuing biased and politically motivated assessments”.**

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF):

- **It is U.S. federal government agency.**
- **It was created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), as amended.**
- **Functions: USCIRF reviews the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.**
- **Composition:**
 - **USCIRF's nine Commissioners are appointed by either the President or Congressional leaders of each political party.**
- **It is based on international human rights standards, especially Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that ensured freedom of religion.**
- **It monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in countries other than the US.**

COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

Afghanistan
Burma
China
Cuba
Eritrea
India

Iran
Nicaragua
Nigeria
North Korea
Pakistan
Russia

Saudi Arabia
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Vietnam

SPECIAL WATCH LIST COUNTRIES

Algeria
Azerbaijan
Egypt
Indonesia

Iraq
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Malaysia

Sri Lanka
Syria
Turkey
Uzbekistan

ENTITIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

Boko Haram
Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
The Houthis

Islamic State – Sahel Province
Islamic State in West Africa Province
Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin

Al-Shabaab

'Over half of ₹1-lakh crore collected for the welfare of mining districts not spent'

Page No. 12, GS 2,3

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A first-of-its-kind analysis of the District Mineral Foundations (DMF) shows that despite collecting about ₹1-lakh crore in the past decade, more than half the funds is unspent.

Moreover, the funds are often diverted to activities that are not directly linked to the welfare of mining districts – a contravention of the Centre's guidelines. The DMFs are non-profit trusts set up in mining districts and tasked with ensuring that a portion of the revenues generated from mining is spent on the development of the districts. They have been established in 645 districts across 23 States.

The funds are often diverted to activities that are not directly linked to the welfare of mining districts, says report

The report was prepared by iForest, an independent research group.

In 2015, the Centre launched the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana to drive change in mining-affected areas through investments in various developmental projects. The PMKKKY is implemented through funds accrued to the DMFs.

Odisha accounts for the highest share of DMF funds, about 29% (₹30,126 crore) of the country's to-

tal, followed by Chhattisgarh (₹14,564 crore) and Jharkhand (₹13,791 crore).

"The prime focus of DMF and PMKKKY is to alleviate poverty and deprivation, which requires a balanced investment in human resources and infrastructure. However, this balance has not been achieved in any district. Consider the example of Dhanbad. Out of 1,164 projects sanctioned in Dhanbad till 2024, only ₹1.86 crore have been allocated for skill development and livelihood generation. Similarly, in Kendujhar, project details evaluated until 2022 show that only about 3.2% of the total allocations are for livelihood and skill development projects," the authors noted.

Content.

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- **“The prime focus of DMF and PMKKKY is to alleviate poverty and deprivation, which requires a balanced investment in human resources and infrastructure.**
- **As per the Mine and Minerals Development Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2015, in every district affected by mining-related operations, the state government shall, by notification, establish a trust as a non-profit body to be called the District Mineral Foundation.**

DMF Funds:

- **Funds every mining lease holder of will pay a fraction of royalty, not exceeding one-third of the royalty, to the DMF as per rates prescribed by Central Government.**
- **This fund will be used for welfare of the people affected in the mining affected areas.**
- **In Keonjhar, the total DMF fund collection has touched an astounding ₹8,840 crore, the highest for any district in India.**
- **Objective:**
- **The idea behind the contribution is that local mining-affected communities, mostly tribal and among the poorest in the country, also have the right to benefit from natural resources extracted from where they live.**
- **Functioning:**
- **The functioning of the DMF trusts and the fund use governed by states' DMF Rules incorporate the mandates of a central guideline, Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY).**

Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY)

- **The Ministry of Mines launched PMKKKY in 2015 for the welfare of areas and people affected by mining-related operations, using the funds generated by DMFs.**

Objectives:

- **to implement various developmental and welfare projects in mining-affected areas, complementing the existing ongoing schemes of the State and Central Government;**
- **to minimize/mitigate the adverse impacts, during and after mining, on the environment, health, and socio-economics of people in mining districts; and**
- **to ensure long-term sustainable livelihoods for the affected people in mining areas.**

Implementation:

- **It will be implemented by the DMFs of the respective districts using the funds accruing to the DMF. The MMDR Amendment Act, 2015, mandated the setting up of DMFs in all districts in the country affected by mining related operations.**
- **The Central Government has notified the rates of contribution payable by miners to the DMFs.**
- **In case of all mining leases executed before 12th January, 2015 miners will have to contribute an amount equal to 30% of the royalty payable by them to the DMFs. If mining leases are granted after 12.01.2015, the rate of contribution would be 10% of the royalty payable.**

Going electric

India must be a reliable trade partner to compete in the EV space

India's decision to exempt import duties on 35 capital goods used in the manufacture of electric vehicle (EV) batteries and 28 items used in the making of mobile phone batteries is a welcome step toward boosting domestic manufacturing and clean technology adoption. Proposed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget 2025-26 and formalised through the Finance Bill 2025 passed in Parliament on Tuesday, this signals a strategic policy shift. Earlier in March, Chinese EV giant BYD unveiled its "Super E-platform", capable of giving a vehicle a 500-kilometre range with just five minutes of charging – a major leap toward alleviating range anxiety, which is a key barrier to EV adoption. This innovation directly challenges the convenience of conventional vehicles and could accelerate the global EV transition if scaled and deployed with the same ubiquity as traditional fuel stations. Batteries remain the most expensive component in an EV, comprising roughly 40% of the vehicle's cost. This cost burden has slowed EV adoption in lower-income countries, despite the long-term advantage of reducing oil import dependence, which is especially relevant for India. Another critical barrier is the lack of indigenous technological capability in battery manufacturing. China currently dominates this sector, producing over 70% of all EV batteries globally, according to the International Energy Agency. The lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) battery has emerged as the industry standard over the past five years due to its lower cost, higher energy density, and better thermal management.

While EVs made up 45% of all car registrations in China in 2024, they accounted for just 2% of India's passenger car market. However, electric two-wheelers (e2w) have seen notable momentum in India, with 1.14 million units sold in 2024, making up about 60% of total EV sales. Though India's duty exemptions are partially aimed at strengthening bilateral trade ties with the United States and avoiding reciprocal tariffs, the broader strategic objective should be to decarbonise its transport sector. To achieve this, India must integrate into both the upstream (mining and refining) and downstream (manufacturing and assembly) segments of the global EV battery value chain. This would not only help lower battery costs through technology transfer but also position India as a reliable alternative to China in the eyes of developed nations seeking supply chain diversification. India's long-term success in the EV space will depend on its ability to leverage favourable trade policies, invest in research and development, and secure a strong foothold in the global battery ecosystem.

Page No. 6, GS 3

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- India's long-term success in the EV space will depend on its ability to leverage favourable trade policies, invest in research and development, and secure a strong foothold in the global battery ecosystem.

The CBSE's 'two-exam scheme' overcomplicates things

Page No. 6, GS 2

The draft scheme by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to allow, from 2026, students of Class 10 to take their board examinations twice in an academic session (tentatively scheduled for February/March and in May) has been positioned as a student-friendly reform aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The proposed shift, titled "Draft Scheme for Two Examinations, Class X from 2026", is meant to reduce the immense pressure on students, offer them an additional opportunity to improve their scores, and move towards a more holistic assessment model. On paper, this seems to be a progressive step, but a closer look at the draft policy reveals several operational, financial, and pedagogical concerns that could ultimately make the system more cumbersome rather than more effective.

Logistical issues, more stress

While the NEP 2020 calls for a shift towards conceptual learning and competency-based assessment, the CBSE's draft policy focuses primarily on scheduling and logistics. The draft states that board exams will test 'core capacities/competencies rather than months of coaching and memorization', but it remains unclear how question papers will be redesigned to reflect this shift. Without further clarity there is a risk that the emphasis on multiple examinations may still lead to 'coaching-driven preparation' rather than genuine conceptual learning. Instead of reducing student anxiety, this reform might result in students preparing intensively for two rounds of examinations rather than one, exacerbating rather than alleviating the burden.

The logistical demands of implementing this scheme are daunting. The CBSE's own data projects that 26.6 lakh students will appear for the Class 10 examinations in 2026. With two examination cycles, the number of answer scripts for evaluation will exceed 1.72 crore. Managing this scale effectively requires a vast pool of evaluators and a system that ensures uniform grading standards.

The overlap with the Class 12 examinations ('about 20 lakh students in 2026') adds another layer of administrative complexity, stretching



Jehosh Paul

is a lawyer and research consultant

The CBSE's draft scheme for Class 10 students seems progressive but a closer look raises operational, financial and pedagogical concerns

school resources and placing an additional burden on the teachers responsible for evaluation. Schools will have to conduct multiple examinations for the same subjects at different times, secure and manage question papers across multiple test windows, and ensure fairness in the allocation of examination dates. All of this could become a significant logistical challenge.

The policy also raises questions on whether the proposed time gap between the two examinations would be sufficient for meaningful remediation. For example, students who do not perform well in February will have only about two months to prepare for the second attempt in May. This short window makes it difficult for students to make a genuine effort to improve their conceptual understanding. Without structured remedial support from schools, many may just attempt to re-memorise material rather than addressing fundamental gaps in their learning. This contradicts the NEP's stated vision of reducing dependence on rote learning and fostering deeper understanding.

The issue of examination fees and equity

The financial implications of this scheme could also disproportionately affect economically weaker students. The policy mandates an enhanced (and non-refundable) examination fee to be collected at the time of registration, covering both examination attempts. This means that students who are confident about appearing only once will still have to pay for two examinations, imposing an unnecessary financial burden. For students from marginalised backgrounds, this cost increase could be a significant barrier, contradicting the NEP's broader goal of equitable education. If private coaching centres begin capitalising on the two-examination format by offering specialised coaching for the second attempt, the policy might further entrench inequalities in educational access.

The impact of this scheme on school calendars and the transition to Class 11 also requires further scrutiny. If results for the second examination are only declared by June-end, this compresses the admission cycle for higher secondary education. Schools typically begin their academic session in April or May, which means that students awaiting

the second examination results might face delays in securing admission or finalising subject streams. This could create confusion for both students and school administrators, particularly in States where Class 11 admissions are already a competitive and tightly scheduled process.

What should be done

If the CBSE genuinely wants to align itself with the NEP's vision, it must go beyond logistical restructuring and ensure that competency-based assessments are effectively implemented. A structured remedial programme should be integrated between the two examinations so that students who perform poorly in the first attempt have a real chance at improvement rather than just getting another opportunity to attempt the same test. The examination fee structure should be revised to ensure that students who opt for only one attempt are not penalised financially.

While there are reports that a pilot is under way in 30 schools in the science and social science subjects, where students are being assessed internally at two levels based on their choice, the ultimate design of the policy must still undergo a thorough review of these pilot outcomes. Any broader implementation should be in phases, beginning with additional pilot programmes in different regions. A trial phase in varied contexts would allow policymakers to assess practical challenges, refine logistics and gather feedback from schools, teachers and students before expanding it to the national level. Without such a phased approach, the scale of this change could lead to serious administrative challenges that disrupt rather than improve the board examination system.

The intention behind the reform is commendable, but intent alone is not enough. A scheme of this magnitude requires careful planning, clear communication, and a genuine commitment to shifting India's assessment culture towards holistic and meaningful learning. As it stands, the CBSE's two-examination policy risks becoming another bureaucratic overhaul that increases complexity without addressing the core issues that plague India's school examination system.

The views expressed are personal

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Fact

- **Without further clarity there is a risk that the emphasis on multiple examinations may still lead to ‘coaching-driven preparation’ rather than genuine conceptual learning. Instead of reducing student anxiety, this reform might result in students preparing intensively for two rounds of examinations rather than one, exacerbating rather than alleviating the burden.**
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- **The overlap with the Class 12 examinations (‘about 20 lakh students in 2026’) adds another layer of administrative complexity, stretching school resources and placing an additional burden on the teachers responsible for evaluation.**

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The role of communities in conserving water

On March 22, World Water Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the need to conserve water for present and future generations through collective action. On the same day, the Ministry of Jal Shakti launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain 2025, emphasising the importance of community participation in water conservation.

Issues for consideration

In the context of this occasion, it is important to take a panoramic view of India's water policies, with a focus on rural areas. New environmental challenges and renewed understandings of ecosystems underscore the need to recalibrate rural water policies. The following issues must be considered by policymakers.

First, policies should ensure effective participation from communities and mainstream their ecological practices. Indigenous and local communities carry rich knowledge of their immediate ecosystems. Existing policies provide for their participation, but it is limited to the management of water sources; decision-making powers remain with state authorities. Further, policies have overlooked the need to identify and empower communities' own ecological practices on water management. Rather, they have formalised water governance by introducing uniform practices. This is counter-intuitive to the objective of encouraging effective participation from communities.

Take, for example, Water User Associations (WUAs), which are statutory bodies set up in different States since the 1990s to further participatory irrigation management. Water users (or farmers) are members of these bodies. While the responsibility to manage irrigation sources has been transferred to them, they have little say in decision-making.

Second, water policies should consider the disproportionate



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Water policies
should centre
communities'
voices in the
decision-making
process

vulnerability of certain groups to environmental crises. Subaltern social groups and economically marginalised individuals are more vulnerable to such crises than others. Within these groups, those located at the intersection of social and economic marginalisation are the most vulnerable. Therefore, it is crucial for policies to consider the interests of vulnerable groups. Concomitantly, policies must recognise their agency in managing water and ensure their participation in decision-making.

Third, policies must address the issue of fragmentation of water management. Here, fragmented management means that different parts of the ecosystem, such as forests, water, land, and biodiversity, are regulated by different policies and authorities. Such an approach fails to consider the interdependence of these constituents. While there have been some efforts towards taking an integrated approach, they are limited and ineffective. Since policies adopt a fragmented approach, they do not always achieve the desired goals, and in fact, adversely affect each other's potential to do so.

A good example of an integrated approach comes from the ecological practices of rural communities in western India. For example, the practice of establishing orans. Orans are sacred forests which hold deep religious and cultural significance to local communities. Some communities have been establishing orans to serve an additional purpose – water conservation. By augmenting tree and grass cover, orans trap surface runoff and support in-situ rainwater harvesting. Such an appreciation about the interdependence of water with other constituents of the ecosystem is key to effective water management and conservation.

Fourth, globally, there has been a thrust on adopting a more-than-human perspective in environmental governance. This means considering the interests of

the non-human environment in laws and policies that regulate the environment. This approach is based on the idea that the non-human environment has an intrinsic value, and so its interests must be considered in environmental policies. The judiciary has often subscribed to this approach and developed compelling jurisprudence recognising the rights of nature. However, water policies have overlooked this aspect. Their sole focus has been on human needs for water. Contrastingly, water management practices of some of the local communities in western India take a more holistic perspective to water governance. For example, the amount of water available for irrigation is partly dependent on its sufficient availability for animals.

A final issue is the impact of climate change on water. A recent report published in the journal *Nature* concluded that as global temperatures rise, the water gap in India will widen. Both climate and water policies must address the impact of climate change on water. Water policies must focus on creating climate-resilient water systems and increasing the climate resilience of existing systems; climate policies, particularly adaptation policies, should focus on building the resilience of ecosystems to water gaps.

Beyond the rhetoric

A common theme across these suggestions is that local and indigenous communities and their practices can support effective water management. Therefore, rural water policies should facilitate active engagement with communities. This means moving beyond the existing rhetoric of engagement, and centering communities' voices in the decision-making process. While doing so, we must be mindful that communities' practices may come with their own limitations which should be addressed through sensitisation and capacity building where required.

- **On March 22, World Water Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the need to conserve water for present and future generations through collective action.**
- **On the same day, the Ministry of Jal Shakti launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain 2025, emphasising the importance of community participation in water conservation.**
- **First, policies should ensure effective participation from communities and mainstream their ecological practices. Indigenous and local communities carry rich knowledge of their immediate ecosystems.**
- **Second, water policies should consider the disproportionate vulnerability of certain groups to environmental crises.**
- **Third, policies must address the issue of fragmentation of water management. Here, fragmented management means that different parts of the ecosystem, such as forests, water, land, and biodiversity, are regulated by different policies and authorities.**

Fact

- **A final issue is the impact of climate change on water. A recent report published in the journal Nature concluded that as global temperatures rise, the water gap in India will widen.**
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