

Headlines

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Repeat after me:
I'm allowed to do
what's best for me,
even if it upsets people.

MQ
FB MOTIVATIONALQUOTES

VARUNA Exercise

About Varuna 2025

- **It is a bilateral naval exercise between India and France.**
- **Location: Arabian Sea**
- **Aim: Enhanced jointmanship, upholding principles of rules-based maritime order, promoting stability in Indo-Pacific**
- **It included mock air-to-air combat between French Rafale-M and Indian MiG-29K.**

Blue Flag tag

- **Rushikonda Beach wins back the Blue Flag tag which was earlier withdrawn due to poor maintenance.**
- **Rushikonda Beach in Visakhapatnam is the only Blue Flag beach in Andhra Pradesh and is among the 13 Blue Flag beaches in India.**

About Blue Flag tag

- **Conferred upon: For beaches, marinas, and sustainable tourism boats. (has different criteria for each)**
- **Conferred by: Denmark-based Foundation for Environment Education (FEE).**
- **Blue Flag beaches are considered the cleanest beaches of the world. It is an eco-tourism model endeavouring to provide the tourists/beachgoers clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities, a safe and healthy environment and sustainable development of the area.**



Equalisation Levy

- **The government has proposed abolishing the 6% Equalisation Levy on online advertisements from April 1, 2025, through amendments in the Finance Bill 2025, benefiting platforms like Google, Meta, and X.**
- **What it is:**
- **A tax imposed on non-resident digital service providers for services related to online advertisements and e-commerce transactions targeting Indian users.**
- **Adopted in:**
- **Introduced in the Finance Act, 2016 for online advertisements.**
- **Extended in the Finance Act, 2020 to e-commerce supplies and services.**
- **Aim: To ensure a fair tax system for foreign digital platforms generating revenue from Indian customers without having a physical presence in India.**

Equalisation Levy

- **Categories under Equalisation Levy:**

Online Advertisement Services (from June 1, 2016):

- **6% levy on payments made to non-resident service providers for digital advertising services.**

E-Commerce Transactions (from April 1, 2020, till August 1, 2024):

- **2% levy on the value of e-commerce goods or services supplied or facilitated by non-resident e-commerce operators.**

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Description

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Prashant tiwari

Education

Educator at StudyIQ IAS

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Newspaper



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Reviews



PYQ

'Russia, Ukraine have agreed to end military action in Black Sea'

Page No. 14, GS 2

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

Russia and Ukraine agreed on Tuesday to halt military strikes in the Black Sea and on energy sites during talks brokered by the U.S., which offered as a first concrete incentive to Moscow to ease pressure on agricultural exports.

With U.S. President Donald Trump pushing for a rapid end to the war that has killed tens of thousands of people, U.S. negotiators shuttled separately over three days in the Saudi capital Riyadh between delegations from Ukraine and Russia.

In parallel statements, the White House said that each country "agreed to ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea."

U.S. to also look for ways to enforce a ban on strikes on energy infra in the two countries

The U.S. said it would also look for ways to enforce a ban on strikes on energy infrastructure in the two countries.

The Kremlin meanwhile said the agreement to halt strikes on the Black Sea could only come into force after the lifting of restrictions on its agriculture sector.

'Right steps'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said it was too early to tell if the agreements will work but that they were "the right steps."

"No one can accuse Ukraine of not moving towards sustainable peace af-

ter this," Mr. Zelenskyy told a news conference in Kyiv.

In the first concrete step by the United States toward Russia in return for the engagement, the White House said it would "help restore access to the world market" for Russian agricultural and fertilizer exports.

Moscow said the deal would "come into force" after the "lifting of sanctions restrictions" on the Russian Agricultural Bank and other "financial institutions involved in international trade of food," and only after they are reconnected to the SWIFT international payment system.

Mr. Zelenskyy, while saying he did not know full details of the U.S. decision, voiced alarm.

"We believe that this is a weakening of the position and a weakening of sanctions," he said.

Fact

- **Russia and Ukraine agreed on Tuesday to halt military strikes in the Black Sea and on energy sites during talks brokered by the U.S., which offered as a first concrete incentive to Moscow to ease pressure on agricultural exports.**
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- **In parallel statements, the White House said that each country “agreed to ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea.”**
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Cannot be compelled to join the SAHYOG portal: X to Delhi HC

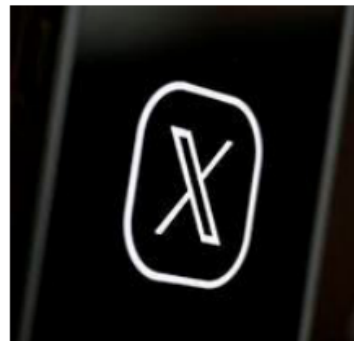
The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Social media platform X has informed the Delhi High Court that it cannot be compelled to come on board the Centre's SAHYOG portal, which aims to create a unified framework to combat cyber-crime, arguing that "X Corp has its own portal to process valid legal requests".

Pointing to the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Shreya Singal vs Union of India* case, X argued that the SAHYOG portal falls outside the statutory scheme of Section 69A of the IT Act, which empowers the government to order online platforms to block information in specific circumstances.

The portal would "create a parallel mechanism to the existing mechanism under Section 69A of the IT Act albeit



X argued that it has its own portal to process legal requests.

without any procedures or safeguards. Thus, it is stated that X Corp cannot be compelled to come on the SAHYOG portal," it said.

During the hearing on March 18, Akhil Sibal, senior counsel representing X, submitted that the Elon Musk-owned platform has also filed a petition before the Karnataka High Court challenging the SAHYOG portal. That petition had termed the portal a "censorship" tool.

CONTINUED ON
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Content.

- **'Sahyog' Portal has been developed to automate the process of sending notices to intermediaries by the Appropriate Government or its agency under IT Act, 2000 to facilitate the removal or disabling of access to any information, data or communication link being used to commit an unlawful act.**
- **The IT Act 2000 is India's primary law governing cyber activities, digital transactions, and electronic governance.**
- **It provides a legal framework for cybersecurity, digital signatures, data protection, and penalties for cyber offenses.**

Content.

- **Section 69A of IT Act, 2000:**
- **Empowers the government to block public access to online information in interest of sovereignty, security, public order, or prevention of incitement.**
- **Requires written orders and procedural safeguards, upheld in the Shreya Singhal vs Union of India (2015) verdict.**

- **Section 79 of IT Act, 2000:**
- **Provides conditional immunity to intermediaries for third-party content.**
- **Under Section 79(3)(b), intermediaries must remove unlawful content when notified by the government or lose immunity.**
- **Does not authorize direct blocking orders; only notifies intermediaries of liability.**

About Sahyog Portal:

- **What it is:** An online platform developed to automate the issuance of notices to intermediaries for content removal under the IT Act.
- **Ministry Involved:** Developed and managed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- **Aim:**
 - To enable swift and coordinated action against unlawful digital content.
 - Create a clean and secure cyberspace for Indian citizens.
- **Functions:**
 - Brings together authorized government agencies and intermediaries on one digital platform.
 - Facilitates the issuance, tracking, and monitoring of content removal notices.
 - Enhances compliance, monitoring, and quick responses to cyber law violations.

SC considers question of timeline for Speakers to decide on defections

Page No. 12, GS 2

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked if constitutional courts cannot direct Speakers, who act as quasi-judicial tribunals under the anti-defection law, to decide disqualification petitions filed with them under the Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) of the Constitution within a specified period.

A Bench headed by Justice B.R. Gavai is hearing petitions filed by Bharat Rashtra Samithi leaders seeking timely action by the Telangana Assembly Speaker on disqualification proceedings pending against 10 MLAs who shifted allegiance to the ruling Congress in the State.

Until now, the apex court had only urged Speakers to decide anti-defection pleas within a “reasonable time”. The court had not specified what the



“reasonable” time ought to be in due regard to the Constitutional office of the Speaker.

But Justice Gavai on Tuesday said Constitutional courts were after all the “custodians of the Constitution”.

The court considered the question “whether a Constitutional court was so powerless that it cannot direct a Constitutional authority like the Speaker to perform his mandate under the Constitution”.

Senior advocate C.A. Sundaram, for the petition-

ers, said the response would necessarily be a ‘yes’. The senior lawyer hinted at political partisanship which guided Speakers while noting that in the U.K. the Speaker of the House was the last position held before abandoning active politics.

“We have the best and most vibrant democracy here,” Justice A.G. Masih commented.

‘Vibrant experience’

Justice Gavai reacted with a smile, saying “the experience in Maharashtra in the last five years has been really vibrant”.

Mr. Sundaram said the usual ploy was to keep disqualification petitions pending till the end of the tenure of the House.

“When the law and the Rules are silent about the time [to decide petitions under the anti-defection law], does it give Speakers, acting as quasi-judicial tri-

bunals, an absolute largesse to take whatever time they want or would the Constitutional court have the power to ensure that the petitions are decided within a time which is in tune and in the spirit of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution,” Mr. Sundaram framed the question in the case.

He said since Speakers function as a tribunal, the courts definitely would have the power of judicial review over their actions.

“The courts, of course, cannot pass impeding orders which stop the Speaker from exercising his powers, but they can direct the Speaker to exercise his Constitutional authority,” Mr. Sundaram argued.

Senior advocate Dama Seshadri Naidu, also appearing on the petitioner side, urged the court to fix four weeks as a reasonable time for Speakers to decide disqualification petitions.

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Grounds for Defection:

- **Voluntary Give Up:** If an elected member voluntarily gives up his membership of a political party.
- **Violation of Instructions:** If he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by his political party or anyone authorized to do so, without obtaining prior permission.
- **Elected Member:** If any independently elected member joins any political party.
- **Nominated Member:** If any nominated member joins any political party after the expiry of six months.

The 'Great Abandonment' of Afghanistan

The showdown in the Oval office between United States President Donald Trump and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last month and the subsequent developments were watched everywhere, but they have echoed the loudest for Afghans around the world, many of whom live in exile. The comparisons to how the U.S. – under Mr. Trump and then former President Joe Biden – lost interest, cut funding, pulled out stakes and left it to be ruled by the Taliban regime, were evident.

A reflection of the present

What may surprise many is how other U.S. actions resemble the present: in September 2017, for example, Mr. Trump shook hands with then-President Ashraf Ghani for a deal that would give U.S. companies access to rare earth mineral deposits in Afghanistan. In July 2018, U.S. officials began talks with the Taliban directly, without bringing the elected Ghani government on board. In February 2020, they announced the Doha Accords – heavily skewed in the Taliban's favour – virtually accepting the narrative that the Taliban were the representatives of Afghanistan, extracting no binding commitments on a political process, shutting terror camps, securing rights of women or minorities. This flawed ceasefire accord was presented as a *fait accompli* to the Afghan government, which turned tail and fled, easing the path for the Taliban.

The years that followed have shown what the cost of that compromise for a ceasefire was. Even though the regime has not so far been recognised by any country, Taliban 2.0 (2021-present) has a firmer grip on the country, is more brutal to women, and is less tolerant of any opposition. That they are able to ban girls from school, college, all employment, and even from sight, is all the more horrifying as it follows two decades when such official restrictions did not exist, women worked in many spheres, and Afghanistan even had a woman candidate for President. While the past (2001-2021) was by no means utopian, the present is clearly hell-like. The situation led a speaker at a recent conference of exiles in Spain to say that rather than the "Great Game", Afghanistan today was witnessing a "Great Abandonment".

The U.S. and Europe have washed their hands of the problem inside Afghanistan, while Russia, China, Pakistan, and the Central and West Asian countries have embraced the regime within it, allowing the Taliban flag to fly at embassies of the erstwhile Republic.

India has been teetering on the edge, not allowing a Taliban-appointed Ambassador into the Embassy in New Delhi, but not supporting the Republic's diplomats either. After closing its embassy in Kabul in 2021, India reopened a "technical mission" in 2022, engaging Taliban



Suhasini Haidar

ministers at the level of a Ministry of External Affairs official. That may be set to change, as a wide range of sources say that India is now negotiating to expand its presence in Kabul, while allowing a Taliban-appointed Ambassador to serve in Delhi. In addition to the humanitarian aid it sends, India also wants to revive its development projects in Afghanistan. Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's meeting with Taliban Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai in January 2025, that discussed these possibilities, was the first such meeting announced publicly, as, thus far, it was the Joint Secretary in charge of the region who dealt with Taliban 'Ministers'.

Engaging with Taliban 2.0

What then is prompting the Narendra Modi government, especially given the Bharatiya Janata Party's political base, to make overtures to the band of radical Islamists that controls Kabul? Several reasons are being proffered by officials, who mostly pitch this as a matter of pragmatism and realpolitik.

The first is that the "Taliban is here to stay", and it makes sense for India to come to terms with it. While some engagement with the Afghan regime is inevitable in this second tenure, there is no reason to believe that the Taliban's grip is eternal. Already, reports indicate the tussle between Haqqani factions and Kandahari clerics over the issue of girls education has grown serious. According to the reports, Sher Abbas Stanekzai and Sirajuddin Haqqani, who are both India's main interlocutors within the Taliban, have had to flee the country for suggesting that the restrictions on females were unfair. The Taliban's mismanagement of the economy, and the drying up of foreign assistance, especially now with the Trump administration's freeze on the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and even the Chabahar port, will squeeze the situation further. A surge in refugees being returned by Pakistan and tensions with Pakistan along the Durand Line will exacerbate these fault-lines.

The second explanation, that India can help common Afghans only by working closely with the Taliban, is easily refuted. Between 1996 and 2001, India had kept up aid consignments to Afghanistan through other aid agencies. In any case, it is hardly likely that the Taliban would refuse to accept aid from India, given its importance.

The third explanation is that India would lose strategic space in Afghanistan by not reopening its embassy there when all other countries in its neighbourhood have. However, expecting strategic space from the Taliban's Islamic Emirate, given its ideology, is a risky proposition. The relationship India forged with the Afghan Republic: a strategic partnership (Afghanistan's

first), intelligence sharing with the National Directorate of Security (NDS), and working with the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to protect Indian interests, cannot be built with the Taliban. If Taliban 2.0 has not changed from Taliban 1.0 in other respects, it would be foolhardy to assume a change of heart on India too, given how the group targeted Indian missions, workers, diplomats and security force personnel for the 25 years prior to the takeover of Kabul.

New Delhi should worry instead about losing mind-space amongst Afghans, who have been deeply disappointed by the Modi government's decision not to open out visas for Afghans fleeing the Taliban in 2021, including those who risked their lives to protect Indians. According to officials privy to a high-level meeting on the issue, India's security establishment worried that those who come as "refugees" would later prove to be "terrorists".

The lived experience, however, is that those who took shelter in India in the past and came as students, patients and traders, built reservoirs of goodwill for India back home and proved invaluable in positions of power during the tenures of President Hamid Karzai and Ghani. The legacy of India's support to leaders of the Northern Alliance such as Ahmad Shah Massoud (1990s) has lived on in the hearts of many who are hurt by the harsh rejection they face today, even as India moves closer into a clinch with the Taliban.

Reversing policy

For all these reasons, the government must study the developing situation in Afghanistan more closely and reconsider any plans to allow the creeping Talibanisation of the Embassy in Delhi. Ties with the regime in Kabul may be a necessity, but there is an urgent need to rebuild ties with those opposed to the Taliban as well. India must speak up about the situation of women and provide them a platform when possible. It is surprising that with all its clout, The Board of Control for Cricket in India did not push the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) to recognise the Afghan women's cricket team that has regrouped in Australia, or even to host the women's team in India.

India should not shy away from allowing leaders of the exiled community to hold conferences and forums in India to raise their voice for political representation inside Afghanistan either. If there is one thing India's past problems in its neighbourhood have revealed, it is that New Delhi must engage with those in power, without abandoning contact with others across the political spectrum, if it wants to remain relevant in all eventualities and outcomes.

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- **India has been teetering on the edge, not allowing a Taliban-appointed Ambassador into the Embassy in New Delhi, but not supporting the Republic's diplomats either.**
- **After closing its embassy in Kabul in 2021, India reopened a “technical mission” in 2022, engaging Taliban ministers at the level of a Ministry of External Affairs official.**

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A bad omen for public trust in vaccines

Over the last few years, multiple petitions have been filed before the courts regarding vaccines. While most of them pertain to COVID-19 vaccines, two of them pertain to a rabies vaccine and a rotavirus vaccine. While not all these petitions have been admitted by the courts, they reflect growing concerns related to how vaccines are approved and administered in India.

Concerns in petitions

It would be a mistake to dismiss these petitions as part of the larger 'anti-vax' movement, which is fuelled primarily by conspiracy theories. One of these petitions was filed by a group in Kerala before the Supreme Court. The group complained about deaths caused due to the alleged failure of anti-rabies vaccine. Other petitions raise questions about transparency of clinical trial data, inadequate disclosure of the side-effects of vaccines, the monitoring of vaccine-related adverse events, and compensation in cases where vaccines may have caused deaths or serious adverse events. Trust in the regulator appears to be abysmal since the petitioners in the cases pertaining to the rabies vaccine and COVID-19 vaccines have requested courts to form independent committees to re-evaluate clinical trial data submitted by the vaccine manufacturers to the regulator.

Courts are poorly placed to decide such issues. If history is any indicator, these cases will drag on for years before poorly reasoned orders with unsatisfactory conclusions are provided. To complicate matters, vaccine manufacturers such as Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech have gone on a spree filing defamation lawsuits against those questioning or criticising their vaccines. Some courts have granted these companies ex-parte interim injunctions. These responses are not good for public health or the credibility of India's vaccine manufacturers. It is time



Dinesh S. Thakur

Co-author of 'The Truth Pill: The Myth of Drug Regulation in India' (2022)



Prashant Reddy

Co-author of 'The Truth Pill: The Myth of Drug Regulation in India' (2022)

Multiple vaccine-related petitions that have been filed before courts reflect growing concerns about how vaccines are approved and administered in India

for policymakers in the Ministry of Health to tackle some of these issues through policy deliberations instead of litigation.

The trigger for many of these petitions has been the opacity with which vaccines were approved by the drugs regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO). There are two issues on the transparency front. The first is that the CDSCO makes key regulatory decisions along with "independent" doctors, but their details are not disclosed. Disclosing the names of the people and their potential conflicts of interest along with a transcript of their deliberations during the approval process is a bare minimum to build public confidence in the process.

The second issue is regarding the clinical trial data which forms the basis of the approval process. Typically, pharmaceutical companies conduct clinical trials and submit data to the regulator. As of now, the CDSCO does not release any information it evaluates prior to granting regulatory approval. This needs to change. The CDSCO should publicly disclose all raw clinical trial data and its own internal analysis, subject to redactions to protect patient privacy.

The other issue raised in one of the COVID-related petitions is the disclosure required to be made to citizens about the possible side-effects of a vaccine, without which there cannot be informed consent. It is not enough for the government to disclose such information on some obscure website. It needs to be made in a format which is understandable to citizens at the time of vaccination so as to enable them to make an informed decision. Indian law does not spell out a framework for 'informed consent' outside the context of clinical trials.

A related issue here is putting in place a transparent pharmacovigilance system which collects data on adverse events due to vaccination, known as an

'adverse event following immunisation' (AEFI). India has ad-hoc guidelines in place, but these lack the force of a parliamentary law and do not appear to be implemented well. A well-functioning AEFI system will go a long way in collecting data of high quality that pharmaceutical companies cannot control.

Issue of compensation

The last issue is that of compensation for those who lost family members due to the side-effects of COVID-19 vaccines. The Kerala High Court in *Sayeeda v. Union of India* (2022) asked the government to put in place a policy to deal with such claims. The government approached the Supreme Court against this order. Final arguments remain pending.

Under the first principles of tort law, such claims of compensation should be made against the vaccine manufacturers because they manufactured, sold, and profited from the vaccines. There is no reason for the government to step in and provide compensation unless it has agreed to indemnify vaccine manufacturers. Since the government has refused to make vaccine purchase agreements public, we do not know whether such an indemnification clause exists in these agreements. In fact, foreign vaccine manufacturers did not bid for tenders during the pandemic specifically due to the government's refusal to indemnify them; as a result, Indian vaccine manufacturers profited handsomely. As a corollary, they should also bear the risk.

Save for the compensation issue which has to be resolved by the courts, it would be a blunder for the Ministry of Health to leave the other issues to lawyers and judges. These are critical policy issues with long-term consequences for public trust in vaccines. It would behove the Health Minister to assure the petitioners in these cases that the government is cognisant of their concerns and promise them a policy response, preferably through a new law.

Content.

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1. The Hindu Playlist -

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2. NCERT Playlist:-

[https://youtube.com/playlist?](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpuxPG4TUOR5Q3pN6ivhc77yZ6HY9v7Ad)

[list=PLpuxPG4TUOR5Q3pN6ivhc77yZ6HY9v7Ad](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpuxPG4TUOR5Q3pN6ivhc77yZ6HY9v7Ad)

3. PIB Weekly:- [https://youtube.com/playlist?](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpuxPG4TUOR59OtRNhFu)

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Description

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Education

Educator at StudyIQ IAS

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