

DAILY PT POINTERS

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How is TRAI and the govt. combating spam?

How will blockchain technology effectively counter spam? What are some of the steps being taken by the government against unsolicited commercial communications? Have some of the measures already taken been effective against unwanted calls and messages? What is a do-not-disturb registry?

EXPLAINER

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) will be using distributed ledger technology (DLT) to register spam preferences from customers, TRAI chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti said. Spam rules will be tightened to make commercial messages traceable, the TRAI has indicated.

What is TRAI's role in fighting spam?

The TRAI regulates the telecom industry, and its main role is in regulating Unsolicited Commercial Communications (UCC), the official name for spam. Starting in 2007, the regulator implemented a do not disturb (DND) registry, which would force telemarketers to abide by customer preferences when it came to commercial calls.

If a telecom customer signs up to the DND registry, they are not supposed to get any spam calls or SMS messages.

TRAI had also worked with an external agency to develop a DND app, which would allow customers to register their DND preference, and accept complaints.

Under the Telecom Commercial Communication Customer Preference Regulation (TCCCPR), 2018, telemarketers who called or sent messages to DND registered customers would receive warnings, and if enough warnings accumulated, they would be blacklisted from sending messages to telecom operators.

The DND app has not always been maintained by the TRAI, and was briefly unavailable from 2022 onwards. An SMS reporting facility where users would have to report messages in a particular format was available, but further steps were taken to make the process more user friendly. In 2024, TRAI mandated that DND recording be made available on



(IETF/PHOTOS)

What role does blockchain play?

In order to fight the deluge of spam messages, TRAI mandated in the TCCCPR that telcos use a blockchain ledger, also known as a distributed ledger, in order to store a constantly updated list of approved senders of SMS messages. Telcos would also be required to approve specific formats of messages. For instance, an OTP message that goes, "Your OTP is 433212," would be stored in the blockchain as "Your OTP is ..." with space for a variable. These messages have been required to be sent from sender IDs, and not phone numbers.

This has been one of the most stringent rules that have been issued to fight SMS spam anywhere in the world. Blockchain as a technology allows for so-called immutability, which means that every

reliable, un-tamperable version of the same data. At the time of the 2018 regulations, the necessity to use blockchain for the purpose of maintaining a spam exemption database was debated, as enthusiasm about the technology's potential had spilled over beyond cryptocurrencies, where it continues to be a mainstay.

In 2024, the regulations were tightened to ensure "traceability" of messages, thus making sure that telcos would have a complete record of who issued a message before it is sent to an SMS gateway. This was aimed at plugging a crucial flow in the system that would allow anyone to register on the blockchain solutions implemented by telecom operators and send out fraudulent or spam messages in spite of the system in place to combat

further tightened in the coming year.

Have these measures been effective?

For those who have registered their DND preferences, communications from legitimate businesses that follow the rules may have reduced. However, spam has a constantly changing character. While much of spam is merely commercial messages that may be annoying but harmless, the wave of digitisation has increased incentives to get around the protections against commercial messaging and calling. A wave of fraudulent calls have also emerged, with cyber frauds seeking to ensnare Indians in financial scams. Many of these operations are done outside the framework of SMS sender IDs, and are run through disposable 10-digit phone numbers, making it hard for real-time enforcement of anti-spam regulations.

There is also the issue of spam and scam calls from international numbers, which can be lessed from certain online voice over internet protocol (VoIP) providers, but appear as legitimate international call traffic.

Which are the other steps taken by the government to end spam?

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has launched the Sanchar Saathi portal, which has a reporting site called Chakrab. DoT has partnered with law enforcement, banks, and other stakeholders in order to accept reports of "suspected fraudulent" calls and messages, and has moved to cancel banks of numbers that are associated with unauthorised telemarketers and scammers.

It also set up the Telecom Security Operation Centre at its New Delhi headquarters to monitor suspicious internet traffic in real time. Meanwhile, firms like Airtel have taken steps to declare suspicious calls using Artificial Intelligence as "Suspected Spam," a move that is being replicated by other telcos as well. The telco has also started labelling

THE GIST

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- TRAI regulates telecom spam through the Do-Not-Disturb (DND) registry and has introduced blockchain to track and trace commercial messages.
- In 2024, regulations were tightened to ensure better message traceability and prevent fraudulent messages. Despite these measures, challenges like fraudulent calls and international scams persist.
- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) launched the Sanchar Saathi portal and is working with law enforcement to tackle fraud.
- Telecom companies like Airtel are using AI to flag suspicious calls and label international calls as spam.

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What did the ILO report state about international migrants?

Why are there more male international migrants in the global labour force than women? Which are the countries that have absorbed the most international migrant workers?

Garimella Subramaniam

The story so far:

By addressing labour market shortages in host nations and contributing remittances to home countries, International Migrants (IM) continue to make contributions to world economic growth, the fourth edition of 'Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers', released by the International Labour Organization (ILO), said.

What did the ILO state?

In 2022, IMs made up 4.7% (167.7 million) of the global labour force, defined as both employed and unemployed (but available for work); over 30 million more than in 2013. An estimated 155.6 million were employed and 12.1 million unemployed. The share of IM men in the total employment for males globally was

estimated at 4.7% and that of IM women at 4.4%. However, between 2019-2022, the rate of growth dipped annually to less than 1%, influenced among other factors by the pandemic.

What about age and gender?

A higher proportion of IM males were employed – 61.3% out of a total of 102.7 million. Conversely, only 38.7% female IMs were employed out of a total of 64.9 million in 2022. All the same, the number of women IMs has steadily risen ever since the ILO began compiling global estimates in 2015.

One explanation for the smaller proportion of women in the global labour force is their lower representation in the total population of IMs.

At 74.9% (125.6 million), prime-age adult IM workers – those aged between 25 and 54 years, both men and women – constituted the largest majority of IM

workers in the labour force in 2022. Less than one out of 10 IMs were below 25. Way behind the above category, at 9.3% were young IM workers, aged between 15-24 years, numbering 15.5 million, in the global labour force. IMs aged between 55-64 years were 12.5% and those above 65 at 3.4%.

Which economic sectors attract IMs?

The largest proportion of IMs, 68.4%, were concentrated in the services sector, even higher than non-migrants. Women IMs held the dominant share in this arena at 80.7%, as against 60.8% among their male counterparts. The corresponding figures for non-migrant women and men in the services industry were 59.4% and 46.3% respectively. Significantly, the dominance of IMs in this sector has remained consistent over the decade, upwards of 67% between 2013-2022. In industry, the proportion of IMs was 24.3%

and that of non-migrants 24.2%. In agriculture, IMs accounted for 7.4%, whereas non-migrants were at a significantly higher share of 24.3%.

Which are the main host countries?

High-income countries absorbed the largest number of IMs, accounting for 68.4% (114 million people), in key sectors such as services, especially in the provision of care. At about a quarter of this share, 17.4% (29.2 million), were distributed among upper-middle-income countries. For an entire decade between 2013-2022, high-income and upper-middle-income countries have consistently remained primary destinations for IMs.

The share of IM workers in northern, southern and western Europe in the year 2022 was at 23.3%, increasing by less than one percentage point after 2013. In Northern America on the other hand, the share of IMs in the labour force in 2022 was at 22.6%, a more than one percentage point decrease over the same decade. The Arab states accounted for 13.3% of IM workers in 2022, down three percentage points over 2013. A combination of ageing populations, growing demand in the care economy and greater economic opportunities means that high income countries will continue to remain attractive destinations for the bulk of IMs.

The writer is Director, Strategic Initiatives, AgnoShin Technologies.

THE GIST

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- The ILO's 2022 report highlights that international migrants (IMs) make up 4.7% of the global labor force, with 167.7 million workers.
- While male IMs have higher employment rates than females, the number of female IMs has steadily increased.
- The majority of IMs work in the services sector, especially in care-related jobs, with high-income countries hosting the largest share (68.4%).
- Despite challenges, high-income countries will remain primary destinations for IMs due to aging populations and increasing demand for care workers.

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The impact of H-1B visas on the tech industry in U.S.

Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, both immigrants and Mr. Trump's picks to overhaul the U.S. government, are supportive of the skilled foreign worker visa programme

John Xavier

The last week of 2024 didn't exude the holiday spirit for several folks in the tech world. A section of billionaires, politicians, and tech workers were piqued by a specific U.S. immigration policy that allows skilled foreign workers to work in the country.

A verbal mudslinging began after President-elect Donald Trump appointed Sriram Krishnan as his senior policy advisor on Artificial Intelligence (AI). Within days after the announcement, Laura Loomer, a prominent MAGA supporter, wrote rancorous social media posts against the decision, calling Indian immigrants "third world invaders." The right-wing influencer then doxxed Mr. Krishnan, sharing his domicile details scooped from the U.S. Federal Election Commission (FEC). While Ms. Loomer apologised for doxxing Mr. Krishnan, she



computer-related occupations.

The impact of H-1B workers

A 2013 study, titled 'STEM Workers, H-1B Visas, and Productivity in U.S. Cities' by economist Giovanni Peri, found that H-1B workers had a positive impact on the wages of native college-educated workers and overall productivity in U.S. cities.

The study examined the influx of foreign STEM workers through the H-1B visa programme and their impact in 219 cities between 1990 and 2010. It noted that H-1B-driven increases in STEM workers boosted wages for native college-educated workers. A one percentage point increase in the foreign STEM share of a city's employment led to an increase of around 7-8 percentage points in the wages of native college-educated workers.

Also, wages of non-college-educated native workers saw a positive, though smaller, increase. These workers experienced a 3-4 percentage point increase in wages for every one percentage point increase in the foreign STEM share of employment. The study estimates that the growth in foreign STEM workers may account for 30% to 50% of aggregate productivity growth in the U.S. between 1990 and 2010. Fast forward to 2024, and the impact of foreign workers on U.S. wages and productivity continued to be positive.

In a follow-up study, titled 'Immigration's Effect on US Wages and Employment Redux,' economists

- In late 2024, debates over the U.S. H-1B visa program, which allows skilled foreign workers, especially from India, to work in the country, intensified following the appointment of Sriram Krishnan, an Indian immigrant, as a senior AI policy advisor to President-elect Donald Trump.
- The discussion, fueled by political figures like Laura Loomer and Bernie Sanders, centers on the impact of foreign workers on U.S. jobs and wages.
- Proponents, including tech leaders like Elon Musk, argue that H-1B workers boost U.S. innovation and productivity, while critics raise concerns about its potential abuse by outsourcing companies.
- Studies show H-1B workers contribute positively to native wages and U.S. economic growth, but there is a push for reform to focus on individual skills rather than corporate interests.

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Nine Navies hold joint drills in strategic straits between Indian Ocean and the Pacific

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The Navies of nine Indo-Pacific countries, including India, are taking part in a multilateral exercise, La Perouse, hosted by France in the strategic straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok, between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

The Indian Navy has deployed its guided-missile destroyer *INS Mumbai* for the exercise scheduled from January 16 to 24 and led by the French Carrier Strike Group (CSG) headed by the carrier *Charles de Gaulle*.

The three straits are crit-

provide entry and exit into the Indian Ocean Region. With forays by the Chinese Navy in the region rising, the straits are under increased focus.

Maritime safety

“Strengthening maritime safety will be at the core of this exercise, with the development of interoperability and the ability to act collectively in the event of a maritime crisis, which will contribute to it,” the French Embassy in India said in a statement.

On the location of the exercise, it noted that these straits, mainstays of global maritime trade, are subject to numerous hu-

maritime accidents and environmental hazards, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and natural risks such as earthquakes and tsunamis.

Australia, Canada, France, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the U.K., and the U.S. are part of the exercise.

In an important sign of strengthening interoperability, the statement said, “During this exercise, all navies will train in the use of IORIS, a communication and coordination system dedicated to the exchange of information, documents in order to effectively and collectively face a maritime crisis in a synchronized

- Nine Indo-Pacific countries, including India, are participating in the La Perouse naval exercise, hosted by France from January 16-24 in the strategic Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok straits.
- The exercise, led by the French Carrier Strike Group, focuses on enhancing maritime safety, interoperability, and collective response to crises.
- Participating nations will also train using the IORIS communication system for synchronized coordination during maritime emergencies. The exercise aims to address risks in critical trade routes amid rising Chinese naval activity.

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Indian cryptography research gears up to face the quantum challenge

Areas where Indian researchers are working extensively include communication complexity, the amount of communication required to complete a computational task; proof complexity, the computational resources required to prove or disprove statements; and algebraic coding theory.

T.V. Padma

Fundamental research in cryptography that's used worldwide to facilitate internet banking, e-commerce services, and secure messaging systems is now taking root in India as well.

The principal goal of those developing or using cryptographic systems is to improve system security. Cryptography – from the English roots of “hidden writing” – is the name for techniques that secure information by converting plain text into ciphertext. It is concerned with the creation and use of encrypted messages that only the sender and the receiver can understand and which a malicious actor who interferes with the communication can't.

Sending secret messages isn't new. Archaeologists have unearthed clay tablets made by the ancient Mesopotamians in which they wrote down cryptic formulae to make ceramic glazes. In the first century BC, the Roman dictator Julius Caesar used the eponymous Caesar cipher to relay messages of strategic value to his generals.

More recently, many Polish codebreakers fled their country after Adolf Hitler invaded it in 1939 to work with reputed British mathematicians, including the father of modern computing, Alan Turing, to crack Germany's famed Enigma cryptosystem. Turing's work in particular established much of the foundational theory for modern algorithmic computing.



- Cryptography research in India is growing, focusing on improving system security for internet banking, e-commerce, and secure messaging.
- Researchers are exploring key areas like public-key cryptography, communication complexity, and quantum-resistant cryptography.
- India is also investing in quantum communication technologies, such as satellite-based secure systems, and true random number generation for stronger encryption. Cryptographers are addressing challenges like homomorphic encryption, which allows computations on encrypted data, and preparing for quantum computing's impact on encryption.
- With rising cloud data, encryption is becoming essential for protecting sensitive information against emerging cyber threats.

HEADLINES OF THE DAY

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A boat carrying domestic tourists passing through a narrow channel in Lake Naivasha last December. AP

Water hyacinth threatens the livelihoods of fishers on Kenyan lake

Associated Press

For someone who fishes for a living, nothing says a bad day like spending over 18 hours on a lake and taking home nothing.

Recently, a group of fishermen were stranded on Kenya's popular Lake Naivasha for that long and blamed the water hyacinth that has taken over large parts of it.

"They did not realise that the hyacinths

- Fishermen on Kenya's Lake Naivasha face challenges due to the invasive water hyacinth. Introduced in the 1980s, the plant traps boats and reduces fish populations.
- The water hyacinth is native to South America and was reportedly introduced to Kenya in the 1980s "by tourists who brought it as an ornamental plant

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Why dead olive ridley turtles are washing up on Tamil Nadu's beaches

NIKHIL GHANEKAR
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 19

OVER THE past two weeks, numerous dead olive ridley turtles have washed ashore in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Chennai. Experts have estimated that so far, between 300 and 350 turtles have been found dead.

Olive ridley turtles arrive near the Tamil Nadu coast around September-October to breed. Their nesting season begins in late November and ends in March. Although deaths during nesting season are not unusual, the large number of turtle carcasses found this early in the nesting period has sparked concern among conservationists and citizens.

Where have carcasses been found?

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Supraja Dharini, founder of the Tree Foundation, a non-profit which works on sea turtle conservation, said that dead olive ridley turtles have been found across Chennai and neighbouring Kancheepuram district. "Dead turtles have been reported in Neelankarai, Besant Nagar, and Kovalam, right up to areas of Kancheepuram district," she said.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

Officials of the state Forest Department said that they were still collating exact data on the mortalities. Deaths have also been reported from Pulicat in Thiruvalluvar district, north of Chennai, according to officials.

Volunteers of a few other conservation organisations said they have been getting calls from citizens in and around Chennai, reporting sightings of turtle carcasses from different beaches.



Olive ridley turtle hatchlings on the beach in San Jose del Cabo, Mexico. Wikimedia Commons

What is the reason behind the deaths?

Finding carcasses of olive ridley turtles is not uncommon during their mating season.

The turtles mate near shore areas and females arrive in small batches for nesting on Tamil Nadu's beaches. As a result, they often get trapped in long fishing nets of commercial trawlers as bycatch – the unintentional capture of non-target marine life – and die, according to experts.

K Sivakumar, professor at the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Pondicherry University, said, "Olive ridley turtles have to swim up to the sea surface to breathe. If they get tangled in nets, they asphyxiate and die."

This year, however, the increase in the number of deaths could be because of a large availability of fish close to the turtle gathering areas, according to Sivakumar. Due to more fish near the turtle gathering areas, more trawlers would have been stationed there, leading to the deaths of turtles, he said.

Besides, since turtles are omnivorous, they might feed on fish in areas where the fishing vessels operate, Sivakumar said.

Post-mortem of a carcass has revealed lesions on the lungs, indicating suffocation, Manish Meena, wildlife warden of Chennai said. Carcasses also had bulging eyes and swollen necks, which indicated death due to drowning, Dharini said.

Sivakumar suggested there should be a comparative analysis of the fish catch landings from Chennai's harbours this year with the corresponding period in previous years, to ascertain if there has been a spike in fish catch. He also said that authorities ought to strictly enforce the use of turtle-excluding devices that are fitted into nets, allowing incidental bycatch to escape through a flap in the nets.

How does the nesting season unfold?

Olive ridley turtles lay eggs across sev-

eral coastal states on India's east coast and west coast. However, mass nesting takes place in Odisha, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Odisha's Gahirmatha and Rushikulya beaches witness the arrival of lakhs of female olive ridley turtles every year. They make nests in the sand using their flippers and lay between 100 and 110 eggs each. After laying the eggs, they cover the nests with sand to prevent predation and return to the sea.

After 45-60 days, thousands of hatchlings make their way to the ocean. At nesting sites where human disturbance and predation are likely, Forest Departments create hatcheries. The eggs are retrieved from the nests with care and are placed in hatcheries. After the eggs hatch, the juveniles are placed in baskets and released near the sea.

- Over the past two weeks, numerous dead olive ridley turtles have washed ashore in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Chennai.
- It gets its name from the olive green color of its heart-shaped shell.
- It is among the **smallest of the world's sea turtles**.
- It is found throughout the world primarily in the tropical regions of the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic oceans.
- These turtles are best known for their unique mass nesting called **Arribada**, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
- **Odisha** is the largest mass nesting site for Olive Ridleys in the world.
- **Protection status** : Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule 1
IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
CITES: Appendix I

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Abetment to suicide: Why SC advised caution in using the provision

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 19

THE SUPREME COURT last Thursday highlighted the need to sensitise investigation agencies and courts in abetment of suicide cases under Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC).

A Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and KV Viswanathan stated: "It is time that investigating agencies are sensitised to the law... so that persons are not subjected to abuse of process of a totally untenable prosecution".

It further added that "while the persons involved in genuine cases where the threshold is met should not be spared, the provision (S.306 IPC, S.108 BNS) should not be deployed against individuals only to assuage the immediate feelings of the distraught family of the deceased".

The statements were made as the court cleared charges against a bank manager accused of abetting the suicide of a man who allegedly took his own life after he was un-

able to repay his loans.

Abetment of suicide law

The term "abetment" is defined under Section 107 of the IPC, which is the same as Section 45 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS).

A person abets the doing of a thing, if she (i) instigates any person to do that thing, or (ii) engages with one or more others in a conspiracy for the doing of that thing, or (iii) intentionally aids, by any act or illegal omission, the doing of that thing.

To prove abetment of suicide, one has to effectively show that the accused directly instigated or aided the deceased to die by suicide. The punishment for abetment of suicide provided under Section 306 IPC (Section 108 BNS) can be up to 10 years imprisonment along with a fine.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau's annual Crime in India report, the conviction rate in such cases was 17.5% in 2022 (latest available data).

For comparison, the overall conviction

rate for all crimes under the IPC was 69.8%. It was 54.2% for cognizable offences – which includes abetment to suicide – where an arrest can be made without a warrant.

The case before the Supreme Court

According to the police, the deceased person died by suicide in 2022. He left behind a note, stating he was being harassed by the accused bank manager to repay his loans. Based on this information, the police registered a case against the bank manager under Section 306 of the IPC.

Once the investigation was complete, a trial court in Madhya Pradesh framed charges under Section 306 against the accused on February 28, 2023.

The bank manager challenged the order on framing of the charges before the Madhya Pradesh High Court, stating that the ingredients for abetment under Section 107 were absent in this case.

The HC on July 25, 2023, rejected the plea

and allowed the trial to proceed. It held that there was a prima facie case as the deceased in the suicide note "has clearly made allegations of harassment by the applicant repeatedly and the deceased was mentally tortured by the present applicant on the pretext of recovery of loan".

In September 2023, the bank manager approached the Supreme Court challenging both the trial court and HC rulings. A Bench of Justices Oka and Pankaj Mishra ordered a halt to the trial court proceedings.

On January 15 this year, the apex court discharged the bank manager, highlighting that "hyperboles and informal exchanges without anything more should not be glorified as an instigation to commit suicide."

The court also criticised the approach of trial courts, stating that the court "should not adopt a 'play safe' syndrome to mechanically frame charges even when investigating agencies have shown utter disregard for Section 306 IPC".

The standard for abetment of suicide

In October 2024, the Supreme Court quashed a case of abetment in which a salesperson died by suicide after alleged harassment from senior officers in his company, who were forcing him to opt for a voluntary retirement scheme. The SC said that the police and the courts should avoid "unnecessary prosecutions" in cases of abetment of suicide stemming from the workplace.

A Bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra stated that the bar for proof would be higher in cases where the deceased and the accused have an official relationship (such as between an employer and employee), and both the courts and prosecuting agencies must see if there is evidence to show that the accused intended to cause the suicide.

The court also held that there must be "direct and alarming encouragement/ incitement by the accused" to prosecute someone for abetment to suicide.

The requirement for direct evidence can be found in other SC cases as well.

In *M Mohan v The State* (2011), the SC set a high bar for proving abetment of suicide under Section 306 IPC, including specific intent – it "requires an active... or direct act which led the deceased to commit suicide seeing no option and this act must have been intended to push the deceased into such a position that he/she committed suicide".

This standard was upheld in *Lile Singh v State of Haryana* (2019) as well, where the SC stated: "There must be a proof of direct or indirect act(s) of incitement to the commission of suicide".

However, the court also clarified that "if the accused by his acts and by his continuous course of conduct creates a situation which leads the deceased perceiving no other option except to commit suicide, the case may fall within the four corners of Section 306 IPC".

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- The Supreme Court emphasized the need for proper application of Section 306 IPC (abetment of suicide), urging courts and investigation agencies to avoid unjust prosecutions.
- The case involved a bank manager accused of abetting a suicide over loan repayment issues. The Court discharged the charges, highlighting that informal exchanges should not be considered as instigation.
- It also set a high standard for prosecuting abetment of suicide, requiring clear evidence of intent and direct acts leading to the suicide. The Court stressed that courts should avoid mechanical charge framing and focus on realistic evidence.