



THE HINDU



GS Paper 2-Governance

Free speech is an integral part of healthy and civilised society: SC

It quashes hate speech case filed against Congress MP; Bench says a person's views can't be silenced because the majority does not like them; Justice Oka says State shouldn't victimise individual opinions on behalf of those crippled by insecurity

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said the fundamental right to free speech through poetry, theatre, stand-up comedy, and satire must be cherished, as it quashed a criminal case accusing Congress MP Imran Pratapgadhi of inciting discord through his poem on "suffering injustice with love".

The judgment was

for that matter, any form of art or entertainment, such as stand-up comedy, can be alleged to lead to animosity or hatred amongst different communities. Subscribing to such a view would stifle all legitimate expressions of view in the public domain, which is so fundamental to a free society," a Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan wrote in its verdict.

Restrictions and rights

Justice Bhuyan explained



The Gujarat Police had filed a case against Imran Pratapgadhi, accusing the Congress MP of inciting discord through his poem. ANI

said the State and the police should not play ball to victimise individual opinions on behalf of those crippled by insecurity and view criticism as a threat to their power and position.

The Gujarat Police had registered a case against Mr. Pratapgadhi, accusing him of promoting enmity among people of different groups on the basis of caste and religion.

Justice Oka, during a March 3 hearing of the case, remarked the poem

KEY POINTS

- The Supreme Court dismissed a case against Congress MP Imran Pratapgadhi, affirming the protection of free speech through art and expression, and criticized efforts to suppress individual opinions or misuse state power.





THE HINDU



GS Paper 2-Governance

Govt. passes Bill to simplify maritime regulations

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Friday passed a Bill, which seeks to modernise provisions governing the carriage of goods by sea and simplify maritime regulations.



KEY POINTS

- The Lok Sabha passed the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2024, to modernize maritime regulations, replacing the 1925 Act while retaining key provisions. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal stated it aims to eliminate colonial-era laws and simplify business processes.





THE HINDU



GS Paper 3-Economy

Cabinet okays
₹22,919 crore
scheme for
electronics
component
manufacturing

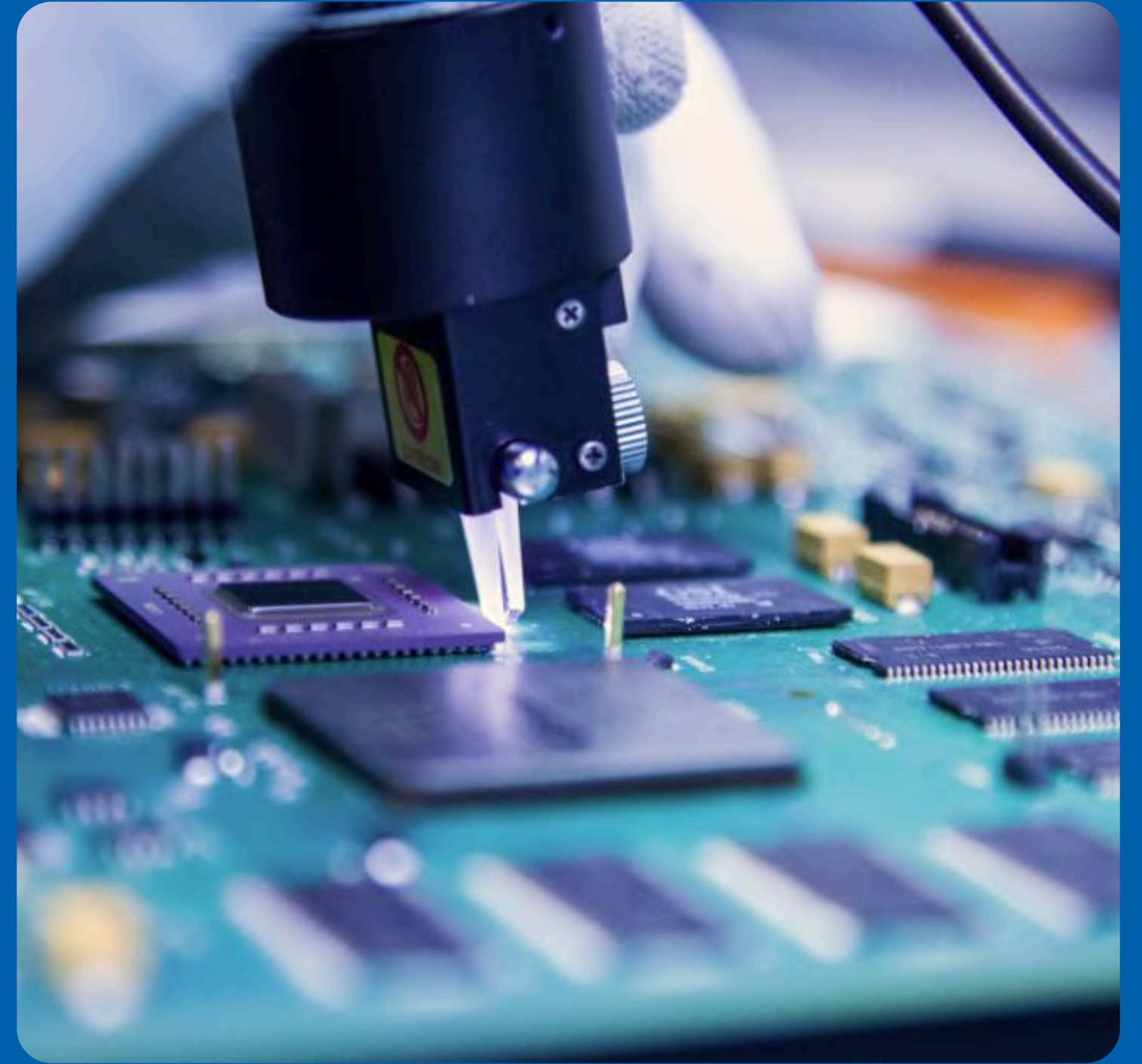
The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Fri



KEY POINTS

- The Union Cabinet approved a ₹22,919–crore Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme to boost domestic production, focusing on passive components and sub-assemblies. It aims to attract ₹59,350 crore in investments, generate ₹4,56,500 crore in production, and create 91,600 jobs.



GS 3-Environment



KEY POINTS

- The Ministry of Environment is finalizing the "tigers outside tiger reserves" project with a ₹176.45 crore budget until 2026–27. The project aims to monitor tiger populations, reduce poaching, address human–animal conflict, and improve habitats, focusing on areas like Wayanad, Chandrapur, and Pilibhit.



GS 3-Economy

Losing the thread



HARISH DAMODARAN

An irrational aversion to technology
has led to a fall in cotton production

IN 1853, KARL Marx famously wrote how British rule “broke up the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning wheel”, drove its textiles out of the European market, “introduced twist into Hindostan” and finally “inundated the very mother country of cotton with cottons”. Something similar has taken place with Indian cotton over the last decade or more. In this case though, it was not by any grand imperialist design, but by sheer domestic policy paralysis and ineptitude.

Consider the following: Between 2002-03 and 2013-14, India's cotton production almost trebled from 13.6 million to 39.8 million bales (mb; 1 bale=170 kg). During the three marketing years (October-September) ended 2002-03, its average imports of 2.2 mb exceeded exports of not even 0.1 mb. That completely changed in the three years ended 2013-14, with imports halving to 1.1 mb and exports

soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, producing proteins toxic to the deadly American bollworm pest — was planted from the 2002-03 crop season. This was followed four years later by GM hybrids based on a second-generation Bollgard-II technology, deploying two Bt genes to confer protection against the *Spodoptera* cotton leafworm pest as well.

Bt cotton's widespread adoption — covering some 95 per cent of the country's total 12 million hectares under cotton cultivation by 2013-14 — led to the fibre's second revolution: If H-4, Varalaxmi and other hybrids helped more than double the national average lint yield from 127 kg to 302 kg per hectare between 1970-71 and 2002-03, Bollgard pushed it up further to 566 kg by 2013-14.

It is unfortunate that India's cotton production has been on a downward slope from the peaks scaled in 2013-14, falling to an aver-

protein expression than Bollgard, to the Lucknow-based National Botanical Research Institute's whitefly and pink bollworm-resistant cotton — have struggled to jump through regulatory hoops, erected ostensibly to safeguard against the “risks” their release may pose to the country's agricultural ecosystems, biodiversity and human and animal health.

With the courts also stepping in to decide on matters best left to those with technical expertise and domain knowledge, the regulatory deadlock has been total: Even after three seasons of confined field trials from 2010-11 and submission of a 3,285-page dossier with biosafety data generated by the breeder in 2015, GM hybrid mustard is still be planted in farmers' fields. The same goes for cotton; no new technology has been approved after Bollgard-II in May 2006.

Those chickens have come home to roost.

KEY POINTS

- India's cotton industry has declined due to policy failures, particularly a moratorium on GM crops after 2010. While technological advancements, including GM Bt cotton, had boosted production, regulatory hurdles and environmental activism stalled progress. As a result, India shifted from being the top producer to a net importer, with global competitors benefiting.



GS 2-Governance

Judges' assets: disclosure norms, difference with politicians

SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

THE DISCOVERY of wads of cash at the residence of Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma has raised concerns regarding corruption in India's higher judiciary.

Among other things, it has given impetus to those arguing for the public disclosure of judges' assets and liabilities. Unlike other public servants, judges are not bound to make this information public, and in the majority of cases, they have not done so.

Where the SC stands

In a meeting in 1997 chaired by then Chief Justice of India J S Verma, the Supreme Court adopted a resolution which stated: "Every judge should make a declaration of all assets in the form of real estate or investment held in their names, in the name of their spouses

or any other person dependent on them, to the Chief Justice."

This was not a call for public disclosure of the assets of judges — only a disclosure to the Chief Justice.

Later, in a meeting held on September 8, 2009, the full Bench of the Supreme Court resolved to declare the assets of judges on the court's website, but added that this was being done "purely on a voluntary basis". These declarations appeared on the SC website in November that year after which a few High Courts followed suit.

But the SC website has not been updated since 2018. In fact, the website does not contain the declarations submitted by current judges. It simply gives a list of the 28 judges of the court (out of a total 33) "who have submitted their declarations of assets" to the CJI. Declarations by former judges have also been removed from the website.

This is despite the fact that the apex court

in 2019 held that judges' personal assets and liabilities are not "personal information". This was in a case that began in January 2009 when Right to Information (RTI) activist Subhash Chandra Agarwal filed an RTI application to determine whether SC judges had indeed declared their assets to the CJI, as had been resolved in 1997.

Situation in High Courts

As of March 1 this year, there are 770 judges in all the High Courts put together. Of these, only 97 judges from seven High Courts — Delhi, Punjab & Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madras, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, and Karnataka — have publicly declared their assets and liabilities. This amounts to less than 13% of all High Court judges.

Most High Courts in the country have been against the public disclosure of their judges' assets and liabilities.

The Uttarakhand High Court in 2012 had

passed a resolution stating that it "strongly objects to bring disclosure of assets by Judges under the purview of Right to Information Act."

The Indian Express had earlier filed an RTI application requesting information regarding the assets and liabilities of the judges of the Allahabad High Court. The court rejected the request, saying that such information fell outside the ambit of the RTI Act.

This newspaper received similar responses to its RTI applications from a number of other High Courts, including the Rajasthan, Bombay, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gauhati, and Sikkim HCs.

In view of this situation, Parliament's Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, and Law and Justice had recommended in 2023 that legislation should be introduced to ensure the mandatory disclosure of assets and liabilities of judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts. But there has been no progress on the recommendation yet.

Unlike many public servants

Public servants, unlike judges, are often mandated to declare their assets, and this information is often easily accessible to ordinary citizens.

The passage of the RTI Act in 2005, which seeks to promote transparency and accountability in the working of the government, has played a key role in this regard.

For instance, the RTI Act has pushed government officials to annually declare their assets to their respective cadre controlling authorities. In the majority of cases, these are available in the public domain.

Several states, such as Gujarat, Kerala, and Madhya Pradesh, have strict provisions to ensure state-level bureaucrats declare their assets. These too can be often found in the public domain, or can be accessed through RTI applications.

Beginning with the UPA-2 government (2009-14), it has become a norm for Union

Ministers — including the Prime Minister — to submit their declarations to the Prime Minister's Office. Nowadays, these can be accessed via the PMO's website. Many state governments have followed suit.

Members of Parliament submit their declarations to the Speaker (for Lok Sabha MPs) and the Chairperson of the House (for Rajya Sabha MPs). While these are not put before the public, they can generally be accessed through RTI applications. The situation is similar in most states.

Moreover, anyone contesting an election to Parliament or any state Assembly or Council must publicly declare their assets and liabilities as a part of the nomination process. This process was established as a result of a 2002 order by the SC mandating the same. These are by far the most detailed declarations that any public servant has to make, and even a minor mistake can lead to a candidate's nomination being rejected.

KEY POINTS

- The discovery of cash at Delhi High Court judge Yashwant Varma's residence has raised concerns about judicial corruption and the lack of asset transparency, with only 13% of High Court judges publicly declaring their assets, unlike other public servants.



GS3-Economy

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)



Cabinet approves inclusion of Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link Project of Bihar under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana- Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (PMKSY-AIBP)

Estimated cost of the Project is Rs.6,282.32 crore, including Rs.3,652.56 crore central assistance to Bihar to be completed by March, 2029

Remodelling of existing Eastern Kosi Main Canal (EKMC) up to 41.30 km and extension of EKMC up to river Mechi at 117.50 km.

Additional annual irrigation facilities in Kharif season to an area of 2,10,516 hectares in Araria, Purnea, Kishanganj and Katihar districts of Bihar

KEY POINTS

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link Project under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana– Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (PMKSY–AIBP). The Rs. 6,282.32 crore project, with central support of Rs. 3,652.56 crore, aims to improve irrigation in Bihar's Mahananda basin by diverting surplus water from the Kosi River. The project is set for completion by March 2029. PMKSY, launched in 2015–16, focuses on improving water access, expanding irrigation, and promoting water conservation.





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GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



GS3-Defence

Ministry of Defence



INDIAN AND RUSSIAN NAVIES SET FOR THE 14th EDITION OF MARITIME BILATERAL EXERCISE – INDRA 2025

Posted On: 28 MAR 2025 9:30AM by PIB Delhi

KEY POINTS

- The 14th India–Russia naval exercise INDRA will be held off Chennai from March 28 to April 2, 2025, featuring a Harbour Phase with exchanges and a Sea Phase with advanced naval drills. It aims to enhance interoperability and strengthen diplomatic ties.





GS Paper 3-Economy

NITI Aayog Launches Second Edition Of “Trade Watch Quarterly”



KEY POINTS

- NITI Aayog's Trade Watch Quarterly Report shows India's trade grew by 5.67% in April–September 2024, with exports up 5.23% and imports rising 6.07%. Merchandise exports averaged \$35.4 billion, while imports averaged \$57.8 billion. India ranks 6th in global textile exports, focusing on natural fibers. The report offers insights into trade performance, opportunities, and challenges.

