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India's 1st fly ash-rare earth tender likely in 2 months

SAKET KUMAR &
SUDHEER PAL SINGH
New Delhi, 14 June

In what could mark a major technological breakthrough in India's critical mineral sector, state-owned NLC India plans to award the country's first project for extracting rare earth elements from fly ash, a byproduct of lignite-based power generation, within two months.

The project, being developed in collaboration with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (Barc), seeks to recover rare earth elements from fly ash generated at NLC's Neyveli operations in Tamil Nadu. If successful, it could open a new domestic source of strategic minerals at a time when India is seeking to reduce dependence on imports of critical materials required for clean energy technologies, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare applications.

"The pilot project is at the tendering stage, and we expect to award it within the next two months," NLC Chairman and Managing Director Prasanna Kumar Motupalli told *Business Standard* in an exclusive interview.

The project is being set up with support from Barc to demonstrate the advanced extraction process, with rare earth elements already identified. "NLC has identified the presence of rare-earth elements in fly ash generated from its lignite-based power stations in Neyveli. The concentration of rare earth elements in Neyveli fly ash is substantial, and the project has generated a lot of interest among stakeholders," Motupalli said.

The company estimates a tentative investment of around ₹600 crore for the pilot project and ₹5,000 crore for the commercial-scale project, subject to successful results.

"The pilot facility is expected to be commissioned within eight to nine months of award, with pilot-scale production targeted within about one year," Motupalli said.

Among the rare earth elements identified in the fly ash is lutetium, a high-value metal used in nuclear medicine, targeted cancer therapies, medical imaging, and scientific research. The company has also identified several other rare earth elements that could potentially be recovered economically, including cerium, neodymium, lanthanum, samarium, gadolinium, praseodymium, and europium.

Several of the rare earth elements identified by NLC have strategic industrial applications and play crucial roles in emerging technologies. Neodymium and praseodymium are used in high-performance permanent magnets deployed in electric vehicles and wind turbines, while europium is used in lighting and display technologies. Cerium and lanthanum are widely used in catalysts, batteries, and optical applications, while samarium and gadolinium are used in aerospace, defence, electronics, and medical technologies.

India has stepped up efforts in recent years to secure domestic supplies of critical minerals and reduce dependence on China for imports amid growing global competition for resources essential to the energy transition. While most initiatives have focused on conventional mining and overseas asset acquisitions, the NLC-Barc project seeks to unlock value from industrial waste streams.

Motupalli said NLC generates 5,000-6,000 tonnes of fly ash daily in the Neyveli area, which could serve as feedstock for the extraction process. If the pilot demonstrates commercial viability, the project could provide a new avenue for recovering strategic minerals while addressing fly ash utilisation challenges.

From ashes to assets

- Project being developed in collaboration with Barc
- Pilot project may see investment to the tune of ₹600 crore
- Commercial-scale project could require over ₹5,000 crore
- Pilot facility expected to be commissioned within 8-9 months, with production targeted in about a year
- Rare-earths identified being used in nuclear medicine, targeted cancer therapies, medical imaging, and scientific research
- NLC generates 5,000-6,000 tonnes of fly ash, providing feedstock for the extraction process
- The project could help reduce dependence on imports

"NLC HAS IDENTIFIED THE PRESENCE OF RARE-EARTH ELEMENTS IN FLY ASH GENERATED FROM ITS LIGNITE-BASED POWER STATIONS IN NEYVELI"

Prasanna Kumar Motupalli
CMD, NLCIL

Which of the following statements about Rare Earth Elements (REEs) and Critical Minerals is/are correct ?

1. Modern technological innovations including Artificial Intelligence, robotics and space exploration extensively utilise Rare Earth Elements (REEs).

2. China has the highest share in mining of REEs followed by India.

3. The Government of India launched the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) in 2025 to establish a robust framework for self-reliance in the critical mineral sector.

4. Rare Earth Elements are a set of 13 metallic elements.

Select the answer using the code given below :

(a) 1 and 3 only

(b) 3 only

(c) 1, 3 and 4

(d) 1, 2 and 4

Consider the following statements :

Statement I :

Some rare earth elements are used in the manufacture of flat television screens and computer monitors.

Statement II :

Some rare earth elements have phosphorescent properties.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

(a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II explains Statement I

(b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct but Statement II does not explain Statement I

(c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is not correct

(d) Statement I is not correct but Statement II is correct

With reference to 'fly ash' produced by the power plants using coal as fuel, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Fly ash can be used in the production of bricks for building construction.
2. Fly ash can be used as a replacement for some of the Portland cement contents of concrete.
3. Fly ash is made up of silicon dioxide and calcium oxide only, and does not contain any toxic elements.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

(a) 1 and 2

(b) 2 only

(c) 1 and 3

(d) 3 only

1. Context: NLC India Ltd. (Neyveli, Tamil Nadu), in collaboration with BARC, is planning India's first project to extract Rare Earth Elements (REEs) from fly ash generated by lignite-based thermal power plants. The project aims to create a domestic source of strategic minerals, reduce import dependence, and utilise industrial waste productively.

2. Basics: Rare Earth Elements (REEs) & Fly Ash

Rare Earth Elements (REEs)

* Group of 17 elements (15 Lanthanides + Scandium + Yttrium).
* Critical for EVs, wind turbines, electronics, defence systems and medical equipment.
* REEs identified in Neyveli fly ash include Neodymium, Praseodymium, Europium, Cerium, Lanthanum, Samarium, Gadolinium and Lutetium.

Fly Ash

* Fine ash produced during coal/lignite combustion in thermal power plants.
* Commonly used in: Bricks | Cement | Concrete | Road & Embankment Construction

3. What is the News All About?

The core idea is that India wants to recover valuable rare earth elements from fly ash, which was earlier treated largely as a waste product.

Why is it important?

i. Critical Mineral Security: Reduces dependence on imported rare earths, particularly from China.
ii. Circular Economy: Converts industrial waste into a valuable economic resource.
iii. Clean Energy Transition: Supports domestic manufacturing of EVs, wind turbines and advanced electronics.
iv. Environmental Benefit: Helps utilise large quantities of fly ash generated by thermal power plants.

HISTORY

How a Mohenjo-daro figurine became a 'dancer' — and a challenge to 'modesty'

Vikas Pathak
New Delhi, June 16

A CLASS 9 textbook shaded over the bare torso of the iconic "Dancing Girl" of Mohenjo-daro before the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) decided to restore its original image.

This was not the first time an attempt had been made to cover up the Harappan-era bronze figurine. In 2023, a fully clothed version of the 'Dancing Girl' was unveiled as the mascot of the International Museum Expo.

The story of "vulgarity" being attached to the statue, however, dates back several decades. It is largely associated with archaeologist John Marshall choosing to interpret it as the image of a "nautch girl" or "dancing girl" without compelling evidence.

Competing claims

The government of Pakistan also had similar reservations when it was trying to acquire Harappan artefacts from India in the 1950s, arguing that Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were both in Pakistan. India, however, contended that the legacy of the Harappan civilisation belonged to South Asia and not Pakistan alone.

An academic paper by Panjab University historian Ashish Kumar, *Sahib's Nautch Girl*, brings out interesting details. Around 12,000 Harappan objects from Mohenjo-daro were in Delhi when Partition took place. These had been brought to the capital from the Lahore Museum by Mortimer Wheeler, who was Director General of the Archeological Survey of India between 1944 and 1948, for an exhibition.

"Owing to partition, almost all of the Harappan sites including Mohenjodaro and Harappa went to Pakistan leaving with India only two minor sites (Rangpur in Gujarat and Kotla Nihang Khan in East Punjab) of the first urban civilization of the Indian subcontinent," Kumar writes. "Since the Harappan artifacts had been found in the territory of Pakistan at Mohenjodaro, the Pakistani officials demanded all these artifacts back from India. But the Indian officials refused to entertain this demand and put forth an equal claim over the Harappan civilization."

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The bronze figurine was discovered in 1926

Finally, India and Pakistan agreed to a 50:50 division of the Harappan artifacts "found at Mohenjodaro and Chanhu-daro with the help of Mortimer Wheeler".

While Pakistan wanted both the 'Dancing Girl' and the 'Priest King', India was willing to hand over just one of the two.

"The Pakistani officials chose the priest king to avoid any backlash at home that a figure of a naked teenager could have invoked from religious quarters," Kumar writes. "Here the 'nudity' of a teenager girl impacted the decision of the Pakistani officials, who considered its sexuality as a threat to their moral beliefs."

However, the clamour to acquire the 'Dancing Girl' statue continued in Pakistan till recently too. In 2016, a writ petition in the Lahore High Court sought directions to the Pakistan government "to bring back the famous 'Dancing girl' bronze statue from India", Kumar states.

"Since this bronze girl statue had been discovered from Mohenjo-daro in 1926, Pakistan was held to be the real owner of this five thousand years old Harappan artifact," the paper says. "In response to this Pakistani claim, Vasant Shinde (then Vice-chancellor of Deccan College, Pune) questioned Pakistan's exclusive claim over the Harappan civilization...since this civilization was considered a common heritage of South Asia."

'Nautch girl'

Significantly, even the identification of the statue as that of a dancing girl by John Marshall is contested. Marshall wrote about the statue: "The only other sculpture in the round from Mohenjo-daro that claims notice here is the bronze dancing-girl... This is a small figurine of rather rough workmanship with disproportionately long arms and legs. Almost, indeed, it is a caricature, but, like a good caricature, it gives a vivid impression of the young aboriginal nautch girl, her hand on hip in half-impudent posture, and legs slightly forward, as she beats time to the music with her feet."

He added: "Small, too, as this figurine is, the modeling of the back, hips, and buttocks is quite effective, and in spite of obvious defects shows sound observation on the part of the artist."

However, Gregory L Possehl, in his book *The Indus Civilisation*, expressed doubt whether the statue represents a female dancer. Historian Upinder Singh also said in *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*: "The dancing girl may not have been dancing at all, and even if she was, she may not represent a professional dancer."

Ashish Kumar also says that there is no evidence to suggest that she was a dancer. The fact that colonial officials, who stayed in India alone, would often find comfort in the company of nautch girls, may have led to the instant association, he says. Marshall also associated the bronze statue with the devdasi tradition, thus suggesting continuity from Harappan times to recent times.

Significantly, while many nude terracotta representations of the female body were found from Harappan sites, these were identified as a marker of the Mother Goddess cult, while the bronze statue was identified as a "nautch girl".

The famous female figurine known as 'Dancing Girl', found at Mohenjo-daro, is made of

(a) carnelian

(b) clay

(c) bronze

(d) gold

1. **Context**: The Dancing Girl of Mohenjo-daro has reignited discussions on the interpretation of archaeological artefacts, their representation in educational material, and the question of shared India–Pakistan ownership of Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) heritage. The debate highlights how modern nations engage with a civilization that existed long before present-day political boundaries.

2. **Dancing Girl**
* Discovered in 1926 at Mohenjo-daro (Pakistan).
* A 10.5 cm bronze figurine made using the Lost-Wax Casting Technique.
* Considered one of the finest examples of Harappan metallurgy and artistic excellence.

3. **India–Pakistan Heritage Dimension**
* Most major Harappan sites, including Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, lie in present-day Pakistan.
* However, one of the most famous Harappan artefacts, the Dancing Girl, is housed in India.
* The Priest-King sculpture is housed in Pakistan.
* The issue raises a broader question of whether the legacy of the Indus Valley Civilization should be viewed as the heritage of a single country or as a shared civilizational heritage of South Asia.

4. **Important Indus Valley Sites**

Pakistan: Mohenjo-daro (Great Bath, Dancing Girl) | Harappa (Granary, Cemetery R-37) | Chanhu-daro (Bead-making Centre) | Kot Diji (Pre-Harappan Fortification)

India: Dholavira, Gujarat (Water Management System, Signboard) | Lothal, Gujarat (Dockyard) | Kalibangan, Rajasthan (Ploughed Field) | Rakhigarhi, Haryana (Largest Harappan Site in India) | Banawali, Haryana (Fortified Town Planning) | Surkotada, Gujarat (Horse Remains) | Ropar, Punjab (Sutlej Settlement) | Alamgirpur, Uttar Pradesh (Easternmost Harappan Site)

The RBI and its growing fiscal role

RBI's record ₹2.87 lakh crore surplus transfer to the Centre shows its growing fiscal significance, as earnings from reserve management and foreign assets support govt. finances; the trend raises questions about central bank independence, fiscal centralisation, and exclusion of such transfers from fiscal devolution to States

ECONOMIC NOTES

Deepanshu Mohan
Ankur Singh

The Reserve Bank of India continues to operate within a well-defined framework. REUTERS

Central banks occupy a peculiar position in modern democracies. Governments spend, tax, and borrow. Central banks manage inflation, preserve confidence in the currency, and safeguard financial stability. Their credibility rests on maintaining a degree of distance from the fiscal compulsions of the governments they serve.

Recent developments surrounding the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) invite a closer examination of that relationship.

Much of the recent discussion has focused on the RBI's management of foreign exchange reserves, interventions with respect to managing the rupee, including instances of reserve-rebalancing through gold sales, and increased foreign-currency holdings.

Yet, the more consequential story surrounding this is the extent to which the institution may be seen to be becoming more executive or fiscalised in its role to support the government.

In May, the RBI approved a record surplus transfer of ₹2.87 lakh crore to the Union government for FY26. While fully consistent with the Economic Capital Framework, its scale raises questions about the evolving role of the central bank within India's fiscal architecture.

A structural shift

Surplus transfers have been around the ₹30,000 crore to ₹65,000 crore level for the past few years. The tipping point was reached in 2019 after the implementation of the revised Economic Capital Framework.

The transfer is now at a record high of ₹2.87 lakh crore for FY26.

This move coincides with the phenomenal growth of the RBI's balance sheet. It increased by 20.6% in one year to ₹91.97 lakh crore by March 2026. Gross income increased by over 26% during the same period.

Traditionally, governments fund expenditure through taxation, borrowing, and revenue growth. Political consent is needed for taxation. Borrowing is disciplined by markets and future repayment obligations. Economic growth requires real growth in productive capacity.

Central-bank transfers are different. They generate fiscal space without new taxes, new borrowing, or commensurate growth in economic production. The latest transfer alone is bigger than the annual budgets of several Indian States.

This is not a bad practice to make such transfers. However, it does pose an interesting question. When does a stabilising institution start to act as a fiscal instrument?

The evolution of the RBI's reserve management is a good example.

The RBI may have sold almost $12 billion worth of gold and bought foreign-currency assets by about $7.5 billion in the face of rupee pressures, according to recent reports.

These are standard reserve-management decisions when looked at superficially. Central banks are constantly adjusting their portfolios based on market conditions. Gold is a strategic reserve asset. Foreign-currency assets are the source of liquidity for intervening in exchange-rate markets.

However, the management of reserves has become a financial issue.

The recent surplus transfer included a significant portion of gains from foreign assets, foreign exchange transactions, and interest earned on securities holdings. The activities are mainly being carried out to ensure monetary and financial stability, but are also producing increasingly significant fiscal revenues for the sovereign.

This is where the discussion transcends accounting. The RBI's balance sheet is now at ₹92 lakh crore. The composition of reserves, intervention in the exchange rate, and asset allocation decisions now impact not just monetary stability, but also the economy's overall health. They are becoming more and more important for fiscal results as well.

The experience of India is different from that of the advanced economies, where central banks became entangled with fiscal policy by engaging in quantitative easing and buying a large number of bonds. In this case, the link has come about because of the increasing significance of the fiscal value of central-bank earnings.

The federal blind spot

The least talked about part of this debate is fiscal federalism.

The total amount of ₹2.87 lakh crore transfer is non-tax revenue and hence it is a Union government gain. It is not part of the divisible pool of income tax collections or GST revenues which are subject to Finance Commission formulas. There is no automatic share to the States.

States still have significant spending obligations. Concurrently, they have restrictions on borrowing under Article 293 and have much less fiscal flexibility than the Union government.

However, one of the biggest transfers of resources from the public sector in recent years is still not part of fiscal devolution.

The point isn't whether States have a legal claim to RBI profits. They do not. The question is whether a central institution acting on behalf of the monetary union as a whole should indirectly support fiscal centralisation, without any mention of accountability, transparency or federal balance.

Dividend transfers, cesses, surcharges and borrowing restrictions are all considered to be individual policy instruments when viewed individually. Together, they show a progressive shift in the fiscal landscape of India towards the centre.

An evolving institution

The debate over the RBI's record surplus transfer is therefore not ultimately about the dividend itself. It is about how modern states finance themselves.

The central bank has evolved from being primarily a guardian of monetary stability into an increasingly important source of fiscal capacity. The latest transfer may have eased borrowing pressures and strengthened the government's fiscal position, but it also underscores how closely monetary institutions and fiscal outcomes have become intertwined.

The RBI continues to operate within a well-defined framework and retains substantial operational autonomy. Yet central bank independence is not merely a matter of legal design. It is also a question of institutional distance.

As surplus transfers become larger and fiscal pressures intensify, preserving that distance may become more difficult. It may also become more important.

(Deepanshu Mohan is Dean and Professor of Economics at O.P. Jindal Global University. He is currently Visiting Professor at LSE and a Visiting Research Fellow at University of Oxford. Ankur Singh is a Research Analyst with Centre for New Economics Studies)

THE GIST

- The RBI's balance sheet increased by 20.6% in one year to ₹91.97 lakh crore by March 2026, while gross income rose by over 26% during the same period.
- The RBI may have sold almost $12 billion worth of gold and bought foreign-currency assets by about $7.5 billion in the face of rupee pressures, with the recent surplus transfer including gains from foreign assets, foreign exchange transactions and interest earned on securities holdings.

The Reserve Bank of India regulates the commercial banks in matters of

1. liquidity of assets
2. branch expansion
3. merger of banks
4. winding-up of banks

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

(a) 1 and 4 only

(b) 2, 3 and 4 only

(c) 1, 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

In India, which one of the following is responsible for maintaining price stability by controlling inflation?

(a) Department of Consumer Affairs

(b) Expenditure Management Commission

(c) Financial Stability and Development Council

(d) Reserve Bank of India

With reference to inflation in India, which of the following statements is correct?

(a) Controlling the inflation in India is the responsibility of the Government of India only

(b) The Reserve Bank of India has no role in controlling the inflation

(c) Decreased money circulation helps in controlling the inflation

(d) Increased money circulation helps in controlling the inflation

Consider the following statements :

1. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Review Committee Report has recommended a debt to GDP ratio of 60% for the general (combined) government by 2023, comprising 40% for the Central Government and 20% for the State Governments.

2. The Central Government has domestic liabilities of 21% of GDP as compared to that of 49% of GDP of the State Governments.

3. As per the Constitution of India, it is mandatory for a State to take the Central Government's consent for raising any loan if the former owes any outstanding liabilities to the latter.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

1. Context: RBI transferred a record ₹2.87 lakh crore surplus to the Union Government for FY26, triggering a debate on RBI's growing fiscal significance, fiscal federalism and central bank independence.

2. RBI Surplus Transfer: Basics
* Surplus Transfer: RBI's excess profit transferred to the Centre after maintaining reserves and risk buffers.
* Legal Basis: Section 47, RBI Act, 1934.
* Framework: Economic Capital Framework (ECF) based on the Bimal Jalan Committee (2019).
* ECF determines how much capital RBI should retain against future risks; the remaining profit is transferred to the Government.

Why was FY26 surplus unusually high?
* Higher earnings from foreign exchange reserves.
* Gains from forex interventions and reserve rebalancing.
* Higher interest income from government securities.

3. Core Issues Raised
i. RBI's Monetary Role vs Fiscal Role
RBI's core mandate is inflation control, monetary policy, financial stability, currency management and forex reserve management. However, record surplus transfers are making RBI an increasingly important source of fiscal resources for the Centre.

ii. Fiscal Federalism Concern
RBI surplus is non-tax revenue and is not part of the divisible pool shared with States. Further, States face borrowing constraints under Article 293 (Centre's consent required in certain cases), leading to concerns of growing fiscal centralisation.

iii. Central Bank Independence
A central bank should take decisions based on inflation, financial stability and economic conditions, not government financing requirements. The concern is not that RBI has lost independence, but that growing reliance on RBI profits could blur the distinction between the RBI's monetary objectives and the Centre's fiscal needs.

India-Slovakia Joint Statement

Posted On: 15 JUN 2026 5:32PM by PIB Delhi

At the invitation of His Excellency Robert Fico, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, paid a State Visit to the Slovak Republic on 15 June 2026.

The visit is the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Slovakia since its independence in 1993, marking a historic milestone and charting a new course in the enduring friendship between the two nations. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1993, India and Slovakia have developed a traditional friendship and multifaceted cooperation based on trust, equality and mutual respect.

Building on the historic nature of this visit and their shared commitment to deepen bilateral cooperation, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India and the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic agreed to elevate the relationship to a Comprehensive Partnership between the Republic of India and the Slovak Republic. The Comprehensive Partnership aims to take bilateral relations to a new level, strengthen existing cooperation mechanisms and explore new avenues for deepening cooperation, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

Recognising the growing geopolitical, economic and technological importance of the Indo-Pacific, the two leaders acknowledged the value of a stronger partnership between India and Slovakia in support of mutually beneficial cooperation, regional connectivity, open international trade, freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of disputes and a rules-based international order.

Both leaders underscored the importance of regular high-level exchanges and sustained political dialogue, and agreed to enhance exchanges of delegations at all levels. The two sides also agreed to enhance parliamentary exchanges, contacts and cooperation with a view to promoting greater mutual understanding and sharing of legislative experiences and best practices.

The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core, and to a rules-based international order, while supporting comprehensive reforms of multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, particularly the United Nations Security Council, to make them more representative, inclusive, effective and reflective of contemporary geopolitical realities. The leaders stressed on the urgent need to expand the UN Security Council in both permanent and non-permanent categories. In this context, India appreciated Slovakia's continued support for India's permanent membership in a reformed and expanded UN Security Council. The two leaders also agreed to continue consultations and coordination on their respective candidacies in international organisations and to exchange views and cooperate closely in global forums, including the United Nations. The two leaders also discussed the importance of upholding the global nonproliferation architecture. Slovakia reaffirmed its constructive approach to India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

The leaders agreed to support the development of cooperation with regional groupings such as the Slavkov 3, Visegrad 4 and 3 Seas Initiative, including interconnected and mutually beneficial infrastructure projects that promote connectivity, sustainable economic growth and regional integration. The two sides further reaffirmed their commitment to a free, open, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific, based on respect for international law, sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

List of Outcomes during the visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister to Slovakia

Posted On: 15 JUN 2026 5:17PM by PIB Delhi

Memorandum of Understanding/Letter of Intent

S.No.	Title
1.	MoU on cooperation in the field of Labour Migration
2.	Letter of Intent promoting cooperation in the Defence field
3.	MoU on Digital Technologies
4.	MoU on Cooperation in the field of Higher Education and Research
5.	MoU on Audio-visual Creation
6.	Establishment of first ever ICCR Chair in Artificial Intelligence at the Technical University of Kosice
7.	Memorandum of Understanding in the field of Quantum Communication and Critical Infrastructure Protection
8.	MoU between National Institute of Naturopathy, Pune, Ministry of Ayush, and Slovak Health Spa Piestany
9	Agreement between Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi and Slovak Technical University for cooperation in student exchange programs, scholarships and research collaboration
10	Tourism cooperation between Association of Tour Operators
11	Agreement on Scientific Cooperation between the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS)

Announcements

1.	Elevation of bilateral relationship to Comprehensive Partnership
2.	Establishment of Joint Working Group in Counter Terrorism
3.	Establishment of Consular Dialogue

Prime Minister conferred with the highest national honour of the Slovak Republic - ''Order of the White Double Cross, 1st Class''

Posted On: 15 JUN 2026 11:35PM by PIB Delhi

In a special ceremony, the President of the Slovak Republic, H.E. Mr. Peter Pellegrini, conferred upon Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Slovakia's highest State honour, "The Order of the White Double Cross, First Class".

Prime Minister expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the President, the Government, and the people of Slovakia for the distinguished honour. Accepting the award, he noted that the honour was a tribute to the 1.4 billion people of India, and to the enduring bonds of friendship between India and Slovakia.

Terming the award as a testament to the warmth, trust, and affection that unite the people of India and Slovakia, Prime Minister hoped that the honour would inspire future generations in both countries to continue nurturing their special friendship.

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MJPS/SS/ST

1. Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid the first-ever visit by an Indian PM to Slovakia since its independence in 1993. During the visit, he was conferred Slovakia's highest state honour, "Order of the White Double Cross, First Class" — the 33rd international honour received by PM Modi. Both countries elevated ties to a Comprehensive Partnership.

2. India–Slovakia Relations
* Diplomatic relations established in 1993.
* Slovakia supports India's permanent membership in a reformed UNSC.
* Cooperation in trade, defence, digital technology, AI, semiconductors, education, mobility and clean energy.
* Slovakia is a major automobile and advanced manufacturing hub in Central Europe.

3. Major Outcomes of the Visit
i. Strategic & Security
* Bilateral ties upgraded to Comprehensive Partnership.
* Letter of Intent on Defence Cooperation.
* Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism established.
* Cooperation in cyber security, critical infrastructure protection and post-quantum cryptography.

ii. Technology & Innovation
* MoU on Digital Technologies.
* Cooperation in AI, Semiconductors, 5G/6G, IoT, Space and Start-ups.
* Establishment of first ICCR Chair in Artificial Intelligence at Technical University of Kosice.

iii. **Economy, Trade & Connectivity**

* Support for early implementation of India–EU FTA.
* Focus on automotive, electronics and advanced manufacturing sectors.
* Cooperation in supply chains, investment and industrial innovation.

iv. **Education, Mobility & Culture**

* MoU on Higher Education & Research.
* Labour Migration MoU and move towards a Social Security Agreement.
* MoU on Audio-Visual Creation and enhanced people-to-people exchanges.

v. **Green & Emerging Sectors**

* Cooperation in clean energy, net-zero technologies, nuclear energy, geothermal energy and water management.
* Collaboration in healthcare, pharmaceuticals and scientific research.

Prelims / State PCS Facts

* Capital: Bratislava
* Currency: Euro (€)
* Independence: 1993 (Velvet Divorce)
* Separated from: Czechoslovakia
* Member: EU, NATO, OECD, Eurozone

• POLICY

‘Like real life, kids need rules for social media use’

Social media companies need to come up with design changes that can make their use safer for everyone, including children

EXPERT EXPLAINS

RAVI IYER

MANAGING DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S MARSHALL NEELY CENTER

SIX MONTHS after Australia banned social media for those under 16, the UK became the latest country to tighten online safety for children. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has announced that under-16s would be banned from social media by spring 2027. **Uma Vishnu** spoke to **Ravi Iyer**, a social psychologist who has earlier worked at Meta (then Facebook), where he led data science, research and product teams. He collaborated closely with Jonathan Haidt to develop the government policy and collective action sections of the latter's *The Anxious Generation* (2024).

What is the best approach: a blanket ban, tobacco-style warning labels or design changes on platforms?

I often refer to it as an age limit, not a ban. In Australia, for example, if you want to use YouTube, you still can; just that you can't create an account (if you are under 16). And if you can't create an account, you won't get notifications late at night, you won't get as personalised an experience, you won't get messages from strangers, you can't post your own images and see how people react. You can still access the content. If there's an educational video you want to watch, you can still watch it. You can also send it to your friends. So children are not being prevented from reading or watching whatever they want. It's a limit on the contractual relationship you had formed with a company that targeted you in ways that may be inappropriate.

The warning-label idea is difficult because you are relying on teenagers, who don't always have a lot of self-control, to heed the warning. I do think design changes have a lot of promise. Take privacy settings. When you join a service, should you automatically be recommended to other people as a friend? In India, you have locked profiles, which give people a way to be safer and more private. Maybe that should be the default for children everywhere, rather than something they have to turn on themselves.

Design changes are great, but I also think we should have age limits for children because companies have not made these changes on their own. They have historically done whatever is possible to get as many people, including children, to use these products as much as possible.

How is Australia's policy working?

One survey noted that 70% of children in Australia are still on social media, but that means that 30% are now off. Many of them are using these platforms without an account. Platforms like Snapchat, where accounts are more essential, have dropped usage more than platforms like YouTube, where the experience of viewing content is largely the same without an account.

We may not get today's 15-year-olds off these platforms, but norms are changing such that children who are 12 today will feel less pressure to be on these platforms when they are 15. We have speed limits that people don't always obey, but they still serve a purpose. We have drinking ages that some teenagers circumvent, but they still serve a purpose. In the offline world, my children can't simply pretend to be 25. They're consistently treated as children. Digital services should work the same way.

Parents often have this guilt that they aren't doing enough to keep their kids off the phone.

Everyone has a role to play in this. A lot of what companies do is rely on 'network effects'. No child wants to be the one who is not on Snapchat if all the other children are on Snapchat. And no parent wants to be the one who stops their child from being on these products when every other kid is on it. So there is a real collective action problem. We need to make parents' jobs a lot easier.

Many tech companies would say high engagement simply means users are finding value in their products.

If that were true, companies would not have to use every trick in the book to increase the usage of their products. You can ask any group of adults or kids if they want to be using their phone as much as they are. Most people will say they want to use their phones less. Kids are still developing self-control. I don't let my kids order whenever they want to from a restaurant for a reason. Similarly, we shouldn't expect kids to have the same self-control online and we shouldn't let companies target them in the same way.

What is it about social media design that makes these platforms addictive?

The companies are making these things more tempting, more powerful, more novel through algorithms that are constantly trying to figure out what they can show you. Features like ephemeral content that says, 'if you don't see this now, it'll go away'. And if you are not thinking about their product, companies develop AI-powered notification systems that predict the notification that will get you to come back. And then they also reduce your ability to exercise your own willpower with features like infinite scroll and autoplay. So there's this increased temptation through algorithms, combined with all these features that reduce your ability to exercise your willpower. And so, removing any of these things will help, right?

That's where I hope that some of these design laws will lead to these features being changed. You can then watch YouTube the way people used to watch videos, which is, they looked for a video or a friend sent them a video, they watched it and moved on with their lives. You don't have to have an endless scroll of content.

While the association between excessive social media use and rising mental health problems, especially among adolescents, is widely documented, the counter argument is that by focusing too much on social media, we could be ignoring other, bigger societal stressors. I'm familiar with those arguments and I disagree with them. I actually think that even those people who make that argument don't disagree that many children use it too much, way more than they want to, and that it disrupts their sleep. And we all know that sleep is important for kids to be productive at school and for their own mental health. There is wide agreement on these facts.

Even if you disagree on the association between social media and mental health, you would still agree that we need to do something about things like regretted usage or usage that disrupts sleep.

Social media was supposed to give everyone a voice, including children. What will it take to build a more responsible platform?

Giving people a voice was the mission of early social media, but it has changed and we should recognise that most people don't get any meaningful distribution of what they say online anymore. As for fixing the problem, I think we need to start by listening to what users actually want — including children. They want to learn new things and connect with their friends. Do they really need to be constantly recommended to strangers? There's a certain amount we want to use a product, and then we want to do other things with our lives. Companies are not respecting that boundary. And society is quite rightfully pushing back.

• PATCHWORK OF STATE PROPOSALS, CENTRE WEIGHS ACTION

CENTRE

- The Indian Express reported this March that the government was not in favour of an outright ban, and was instead considering a more nuanced and graded approach in specifying restrictions for children under 18 years.
- Government sources said that there will be distinct sets of restrictions for those in the 8-12 years age bracket, for 12 to 16-year-olds, and for those aged 16-18 years.

ANDHRA PRADESH

- Chief Minister N Chandrababu said in March 2026 that his government would roll out a programme to prevent children under 13 from accessing social media within 90 days.
- The state, Naidu said, was also considering regulating access to social media for those in the 13-16 age group.

KARNATAKA

- In March 2026, Karnataka announced a proposal to ban social media use for children under 16 in its 2026-27 Budget, becoming the first Indian state to do so.

AP

- A separate draft policy for 'Responsible Digital Use Among Students' includes suggestions such as capping screen time to one hour, cutting off internet access after 7 pm and implementing Aadhaar-enabled sign-ups.

GOA

- Goa is also weighing a social media ban for children under the age of 16, according to reports in January 2026.

How they keep you hooked

Ephemeral content that says 'if you don't see this now, it will go away'.

•

AI-powered systems that predict the notification that will get you to come back.

•

Infinite scroll and autoplay that reduce your ability to exercise your willpower.

Child cuddling is now being replaced by mobile phones. Discuss its impact on the socialization of children.	2023

SOCIAL MEDIA BAN FOR CHILDREN BELOW 16: IS A BLANKET BAN APPROPRIATE?

GS-1: Society – Changing Family Patterns | Socialization | Child Rights | Digital Society

INTRODUCTION

Concerns over the impact of social media on children's mental health, socialisation and well-being have led many countries and Indian States to consider age-bassed restrictions.

Australia: World's first law (2024) banning social media for children under 16. Law to come into effect in late 2025.

UK: Online Safety Act (2023) in force; Ofcom proposing stricter age verification and duties for platforms.

Indian States: Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Goa have proposed / are exploring measures to restrict social media use for children under 16.

The debate today is not about technology, but about balancing child safety and digital inclusion.

1 ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING RESTRICTIONS

1. **Protection from Online Risks**
   High exposure to cyberbullying, harmful content, online predators and privacy violations. *(UNESCO, 2023: Nearly 1 in 3 students worldwide have experienced bullying, including online.)*
2. **Mental Health Protection**
   Linked to anxiety, depression, loneliness, low self-esteem and self-harm risk. *(WHO, 2023: 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10–19 has a mental disorder.)*
3. **Healthy Socialisation**
   Excessive screen time reduces face-to-face interaction, empathy, emotional intelligence and family bonds. *(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2023: Children who spend >3 hours/day on screens have poorer psychosocial well-being.)*
4. **Curbing Addictive Design**
   Features like infinite scroll, likes, autoplay and AI-driven notifications exploit vulnerability and create digital dependency. *(Australia Online Safety Act, 2024: Law covers algorithmic feeds, likes and endless feeds.)*
5. **Academic & Sleep Protection**
   Screen dependency harms attention, learning outcomes and sleep. *(OECD, 2022: Students who spend >2 hours/day on social media perform significantly worse in reading tests.) (Sleep Foundation, 2022: Screen use before bed reduces sleep duration and quality.)*

2 WHY BLANKET BAN MAY NOT BE APPROPRIATE?

1. **Digital Literacy is Essential**
   Digital skills are critical for education, innovation, employability and participation in the digital economy. *(WEF, 2023: 70% of jobs will require digital skills by 2030.)*
2. **Positive Uses Exist**
   Supports learning, creativity, peer interaction, mental health support communities and civic awareness. *(UNICEF, 2021: 67% of young people believe social media helps them connect with friends and communities.)*
3. **Enforcement Challenges**
   Age verification is difficult; easy to circumvent through fake accounts, VPNs and proxy IDs. *(Ofcom, UK, 2024: VPN-related searches rose 180% after age-verification consultations began.)*
4. **One-Size-Fits-All Problem**
   Children of different ages have different maturity levels, needs and digital capabilities. *(APA, 2023: Brain development and risk perception continue to develop into late adolescence.)*
5. **Risk of Digital Exclusion**
   May restrict access to information, opportunities and support networks, especially for marginalised children. *(UNDP, 2022: Digital divide can widen inequality in education and social participation.)*

3 A BALANCED WAY FORWARD

1. **Age-Graded Regulation**
   Different safeguards for 8–12, 12–16 and 16–18 age groups; focus on risk-based, not age-based, restrictions. *(EU Digital Services Act: Proportionate measures based on risk assessment.)*
2. **Child-Safe Platform Design**
   Privacy by default, restrict addictive features, transparent algorithms and safer recommendation systems. *(UK Online Safety Act, 2023: Platforms have legal duty to protect children online.)*
3. **Parental & Family Role**
   Co-viewing, screen-time rules, open communication and digital parenting practices. *(Common Sense Media, 2022: Active parental involvement reduces online risks by up to 50%.)*
4. **School-Based Digital Literacy**
   Curriculum on digital citizenship, critical thinking, online etiquette and cyber safety. *(UNESCO, 2023: Digital literacy education is key to safe and responsible internet use.)*
5. **Platform Accountability & Multi-Stakeholder Governance**
   Stronger compliance, audits, penalties and collaboration among government, industry, parents, schools and mental health experts. *(UNICEF, 2023: Multi-stakeholder approach essential for child safety online.)*

KEY DATA & FACTS

- **89%** of children (13–17 yrs) use social media worldwide. – *UNICEF, 2024*
- Average daily screen time for 8–12 yrs: 4.5 hours and 12–17 yrs: 7.5 hours. – *UNICEF, 2023*
- **1 in 7** adolescents (10–19 yrs) globally experience a mental health condition; social media is a key associated factor. – *WHO, 2023*
- Teens spending >2 hours/day on social media have ~2x higher risk of poor mental health outcomes. – *Sleep Foundation, 2022*
- **UK (2024):** VPN-related searches rose 180% after age-verification consultations began. – *Ofcom, UK, 2024*
- **India:** 24 crore+ children (under 18) are internet users; average daily usage ~3.3 hours. – *IAMAI–Kantar Report, 2024*

CONCLUSION

A blanket ban may address immediate concerns but is neither practical nor desirable in the long run.
The goal should be to create a safe, age-appropriate and responsible digital ecosystem that empowers children to benefit from technology while protecting their mental health, social development and well-being. In the digital world, children need what they receive in the physical world—freedom with safeguards, not exclusion.

VALUE ADDITION (GS-1 KEYWORDS)

Socialization | Family Institution | Digital Childhood | Mental Health | Child Rights | Digital Citizenship | Responsible Technology | Governance & Regulation

> "Children need in the digital world what they receive in the physical world: freedom with safeguards."

Number of countries in Kenya to adopt the Mombasa declaration

15 Fifteen countries from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Pacific adopted a declaration to step up efforts to combat illegal fishing. The Mombasa declaration calls on governments to improve access to information on fishing vessels, ownership and licensing. PTI

Context: Adopted by 15 countries at the Our Ocean Conference 2026 (Mombasa, Kenya) to strengthen global action against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing. India is not a signatory.

Objective: Enhance transparency in fishing vessel ownership, licensing and tracking, and improve international information-sharing to tackle IUU fishing.
Why it Matters: Protects marine biodiversity, fish stocks and coastal livelihoods; contributes to SDG-14 (Life Below Water).

Prelims Facts

* IUU Fishing = Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.
* Mombasa = Major port city of Kenya on the Indian Ocean.
* **FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), 2009** = First legally binding treaty against IUU fishing; India is a Party.

Mombasa Declaration vs PSMA

* Mombasa Declaration → Voluntary political commitment focused on transparency, vessel data and information-sharing.
* PSMA (2009) → Legally binding treaty focused on port inspections, denial of port entry and enforcement against illegally caught fish