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Govt. to move Bill in RS to make insult to the National Song a criminal offence

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Centre will begin the Monsoon Session of Parliament on Monday with a move to grant statutory protection to the National Song *Vande Mataram*, listing the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

This legislation seeks to amend the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.

The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill by Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the 1971 Act provides that any act of intentionally preventing the singing of the National Anthem or causing disturbance to any assembly engaged in such singing constitutes a punishable



Amit Shah

offence. The proposed amendment seeks to extend similar protection to *Vande Mataram*.

According to the Bill, any act causing obstruction in the singing of the National Song or insulting it in any form would become punishable.

“Presently, there is no specific legal provision to prevent insults to the sing-

ing of *Vande Mataram*... in order to prohibit any person from intentionally preventing the singing of the National Song or causing disturbance to any assembly engaged in such singing, it is proposed to amend Section 3 of the said Act to include the National Song also within its ambit, so as to make such acts punishable,” the Bill circulated among Rajya Sabha members said.

The government’s move comes amid year-long celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of *Vande Mataram*.

Earlier, the Union Home Ministry had written to the States directing that the song be played or sung at official functions where the National Anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, is rendered.

1. **Context (GS II – Polity & Governance):** The Union Government has introduced the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026 in the Rajya Sabha to extend statutory protection to Vande Mataram (National Song) by making its intentional insult, obstruction, or disruption during singing a punishable offence.

2. **Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971**

- * **Enacted to protect** the dignity of the National Flag, Constitution of India and National Anthem.
- * **Section 3 punishes** anyone who intentionally prevents the singing of the National Anthem or causes disturbance to an assembly singing it.
- * **Punishment:** Imprisonment up to 3 years, or fine, or both.
- * **2026 Amendment:** Extends the same legal protection to Vande Mataram, making intentional insult or obstruction during its singing punishable.

3. **Vande Mataram – Basics & Recent Development**

- * **Written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay;** first published in Anandamath (1882).
- * **The first two stanzas** were adopted as the National Song by the Constituent Assembly on 24 January 1950.
- * **Recent development:** The Union Government has been observing the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, and the Ministry of Home Affairs recently advised States to ensure that Vande Mataram is played or sung at official functions where the National Anthem is rendered. The present Bill gives statutory backing by extending legal protection under the 1971 Act.
- * **Difference:** Jana Gana Mana is the National Anthem, while Vande Mataram is the National Song; both command high national respect, but **until now only the National Anthem had explicit statutory protection under the 1971 Act.**

Making sense of embodied AI: the next frontier in robotics

Unlike the AI chatbots that learn from texts, images, and videos, embodied AI must master gravity and balance, which are more difficult due to the countless physical scenarios a robot must face and the 'simulation-to-real gap', where success in simulation rarely translates perfectly to the real world

John Xavier

In April 14, Boston Dynamics and Google DeepMind announced that Spot, the yellow-colour robot dog that spent most of its life running narrowly scripted routines, is getting an AI brain. Gemini Robotics-ER 1.6 is being folded into Spot and into Boston Dynamics' Orbit inspection platform, giving both stronger spatial reasoning, autonomous decision-making, and the ability to keep learning inside complex industrial sites.

Spot's hardware has been good for years, but the intelligence needed to make it useful in a messy factory, without a human driving it frame by frame, is only arriving now. That gap – between a machine that can move and a machine that understands what it is moving through – is exactly what a decades-old field called embodied AI has been trying to close.

What 'embodied' actually means

The easy mistake is to think embodied AI just means "AI in a robot body." The deeper claim by experts working on this field is that a body is not a delivery mechanism for intelligence, but a part of the computation itself.

In their book *How the Body Shapes the Way We Think*, Rolf Pfeifer, longtime director of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at the University of Zurich, and Josh Bongard, computer science professor at the University of Vermont, argue that thought is not independent of the body but is tightly constrained, and at the same time enabled, by it.

Pfeifer has worked extensively on building physical robots to test behaviours that emerge from the body's design and look for results that tell something about intelligence in general.

Australian roboticist Rodney Brooks, who wrote the foreword for the book and whose own work at MIT in the late 1980s and 1990s made the case even more provocatively, asserting against the dominant symbolic-AI paradigm of the time, that robots didn't need internal world-models and elaborate planning to act intelligently. A layered "subsumption architecture" of simple reflexes, tightly coupled to sensors and motors, could produce robust, real-time behaviour without anyone programming a representation of the world at all.

You don't need to build an abstract map of a room if your sensors and body can just react to the room as it actually is, moment to moment. Practically, this plays out as "morphological computation" – offloading work that would otherwise require a brain, onto the physical structure of the body.

A passive-dynamic walker can stroll down a slight incline with no motors or control system at all, purely because the leg geometry and joints are shaped to do the computing. A soft, compliant robot hand can grasp an oddly shaped object without a controller that has explicitly modelled that shape, because the material itself deforms and adapts.

A common thread connecting Pfeifer's Zurich lab, Brooks's robots, and today's humanoid is that intelligence is distributed between brain, body, and environment, not confined to just one part.



Boston Dynamics' Atlas robot makes a yoga pose on the football field. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Why this matters now, and why it's hard

The current wave of interest is precisely about discovering how hard that distribution problem is at scale. Unlike the AI chatbots that learn from texts, images, and videos, embodied AI must master gravity and balance, which are profoundly difficult because of the countless physical scenarios a robot must face and the "simulation-to-real gap," where success in simulation rarely translates perfectly to the real world.

Industry data bears this out starkly. Though the embodied AI market is projected to reach \$23 billion by 2030, most humanoid robots still last only about 90 minutes on a charge, and policies that succeed 95% of the time in the lab drop to roughly 60% in the real world. The gap between demo and deployment is the field's central, unglamorous problem.

Embodied AI vs. neuromorphic AI

In common discussions, people tend to conflate embodied AI with neuromorphic AI as both take biology seriously. But they answer different questions.

Embodied AI is about where intelligence lives. The field views cognition distributed across brain, and body, meaning computational work is not fixed to the brain. It is largely agnostic about what kind of processor sits inside the robot; you could run an embodied robot's "brain" on an ordinary GPU cluster.

Neuromorphic AI is about how the processor itself is built – it is a hardware and algorithm paradigm that tries to mimic the physical mechanics of biological neurons, most commonly through spiking neural networks (SNNs).

SNNs operate through discrete spikes: each neuron integrates incoming signals and fires only when a threshold is exceeded, which makes them well suited to time-sensitive tasks like motion

sensing. Neuromorphic chips are also notably power-efficient, since only the neurons actively spiking consume energy at any given moment.

The two areas in robotics increasingly overlap in practice as a growing body of research on "embodied neuromorphic intelligence" puts spiking, event-driven chips inside physical robots specifically because their low power draw and timely response suit real-world, always-on embodied tasks.

Where evolution comes in

If bodies do computational work, an obvious question follows: how do you design the right body for the task, instead of bolting an AI model onto whatever frame engineers have built?

This is the terrain of evolutionary computation.

Yaochu Jin, an Alexander von Humboldt Professor at Bielefeld University, makes the case that neural control and physical form should not be designed separately and then combined. Instead, the two have to be developed together, the way biological organisms grow nervous systems and bodies in tandem.

Mr. Jin's research sits at the intersection of evolutionary algorithms, developmental biology, and computational neuroscience, focused on the interaction between evolution, learning, and artificial systems.

His research focuses on co-evolving nervous systems and morphology, and modelling how feedback from the environment shapes an organism's sensory distribution.

This matters directly for embodied AI's central bottleneck: robot bodies are frequently mismatched to the tasks and environments they end up in, and manually re-engineering hardware every time a task changes is slow and expensive. Evolutionary methods offer a way to

search body-and-brain design space automatically, letting simulated populations of robotic forms compete and replicate based on task performance before anything is built.

The unresolved problems

Even as capital and models pour into the field of embodied AI, a fairly consistent list of hard problems keeps surfacing. For instance, the gap between simulation and real-world experience in using robotic systems is still not narrow. Policies trained in simulation that can be run millions of times cheaply, degrade sharply when deployed onto real hardware.

Sophisticated reasoning models are often too slow to keep pace with a robot arm or leg that needs to react in milliseconds, forcing a split between heavy "thinking" done off-device and lighter reflexive control on it. Short runtimes due to extensive battery use and vulnerable components keep undercutting otherwise successful pilots.

These systems also lack data. Text and image models were scaled on troves of internet data; embodied systems have no equivalent. Efforts like the Open X-Embodiment dataset and Generalist AI's GEN-O, pretrained on hundreds of thousands of hours of manipulation data, are attempts to build that missing corpus. But to put these systems in real world situations they need to be trained on at least tens of millions of hours of data.

Embodied AI should be viewed as a systems challenge rather than only a software challenge as safe deployment depends on sensors, hardware robustness, operational design limits, human interaction, cybersecurity, and organisational processes, not algorithms alone. Regulators must start asking for evidence of what counts as proof for allowing learning-enabled robotics systems to be deployed in real world.

All of these problems cannot be solved by a single breakthrough. They're being chipped away in parallel with better simulators to narrow the simulation-to-real gap, larger shared datasets to address data scarcity, split "brain in the cloud, reflex on the robot" architectures to handle the speed mismatch, and slowly maturing safety frameworks to handle governance.

Evolutionary methods of the kind Mr. Jin champions add another angle to that effort.

Instead of only improving how a fixed body learns, they ask whether a different form factor would make the problem easier to solve in the first place.

Embodied AI systems have come a long way. Boston Dynamics' humanoid robot Atlas on the football field during FIFA World Cup 2026 shows how robots are able to adapt to uneven surfaces. In a separate event, on America's Got Talent Season 21, China's Unitree G1 robots performed alongside Wu Yufei, a 26-year-old Chinese dancer. Spot is now powered by an AI brain and can assist e-commerce delivery agents.

It is starting to become clear that intelligence was never just a matter of better software sitting inside better computers. It was also, at least partly, a matter of testing out new form factors. And these designs are starting to get better with advances in quadruped and avian design-inspired robots.

With the present state of development, Artificial Intelligence can effectively do which of the following ?

1. Bring down electricity consumption in industrial units
2. Create meaningful short stories and songs
3. Disease diagnosis
4. Text-to-Speech Conversion
5. Wireless transmission of electrical energy

Select the correct answer using the code given below :

- (a) 1, 2, 3 and 5 only
- (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2, 4 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

1. **Context (GS III – Science & Technology):** Artificial Intelligence is evolving from software-based systems to Embodied AI, where intelligent robots can perceive, learn and interact with the physical world, expanding applications across industry and public services.

2. Embodied AI vs Neuromorphic AI

- * **Embodied AI:** Focuses on AI with a physical body (robot) that learns through sensing, movement and interaction with the environment.
- * **Neuromorphic AI:** Focuses on brain-inspired hardware (AI chips) that mimics biological neurons to make AI faster and more energy-efficient.

Easy Recall:

Embodied AI = AI with a Body

Neuromorphic AI = AI with a Brain-like Chip

3. Embodied AI

- * AI integrated with a physical robot capable of sensing, reasoning, learning and acting.
- * Intelligence is distributed across the brain (AI), body (robot) and environment.
- * **Key challenge: Simulation-to-Real Gap**—performance in simulations often does not match real-world conditions.
- * **Applications:** Manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, defence, disaster response and household assistance

Shah unveils India's first immersive language museum

The Hindu Bureau

KOLKATA

Highlighting that a country's language carries its heritage and offers a window into its culture, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday inaugurated the Museum of Word at the National Library campus here and called it a step to preserve the *virasat* of India.

Developed by the National Library under the aegis of the Union Culture Ministry, the first immersive language museum in the country, also known as *Shabdlok*, celebrates India's rich linguistic heritage and showcases the evolution of its oral and written traditions through interactive and technology-driven exhibits.

"Our Prime Minister [Narendra Modi] has prioritised both *Vikas* (development) and *virasat* (heritage). This museum is a step to preserve India's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. Our language carries our heritage, and through languages you can understand a country's culture," Mr. Shah said addressing the inauguration event.

The museum features nine galleries exploring different facets of the history of languages and their influence on India's civilisa-



Home Minister Amit Shah at an event in Kolkata on Sunday. PTI

tion and culture. It seeks to present language as a living entity that has continuously shaped society while also being shaped by it.

Linguistic diversity

The first phase of the museum chronicles the diversity of Indian languages, scripts, and literature.

Rather than a conventional repository, it has been designed as an immersive cultural experience using digital displays, holograms, and motion-sensor technology to engage visitors.

Shabdlok celebrates India's 22 official languages and traces their journey from oral traditions and ancient manuscripts to printed works and modern electronic texts, highlighting the country's enduring linguistic diversity.

1. **Context (GS I – Indian Heritage & Culture):** Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated India's first immersive language museum, "ShabdaloK", at the National Library, Kolkata, to preserve and showcase India's linguistic and cultural heritage using modern digital technology.

2. **ShabdaloK (Museum of Words)**

- * **India's first** immersive language museum.
- * **Developed by** the National Library under the Ministry of Culture.
- * **Location:** National Library Campus, Kolkata, West Bengal.
- * **Uses** digital displays, holograms and motion-sensor technology for an interactive visitor experience.
- * **Showcases** the evolution of Indian languages, scripts and literature.

3. **Key Features**

- * Features nine galleries on the history and evolution of Indian languages.
- * Celebrates all 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- * Traces the journey of languages from oral traditions and ancient manuscripts to modern printed and digital texts.

Much more than 'Melbourne meets Modi'

In terms of rock star performances by foreign leaders, it would be hard to beat Prime Minister Narendra Modi's magnetic engagement with a Melbourne crowd in Australia in the second week of July. As one of those in the crowd, I can attest that the audience revelled in Mr. Modi's energy, and the messages of aspiration for the diaspora and for the Australia-India partnership.

Mr. Modi's visit to Australia took place from July 8 to 10. But this visit was a lot more than a rock star performance. It opened new chapters in the India-Australia story – in investment, strategic trust, culture, sports and people.

Beyond symbolic diplomacy

A short call of the board is warranted. The leaders, Mr. Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese agreed on: a new Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation that deepens our work together as a force for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific; a new Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies and Supply Chains that strengthens our respective cyber capabilities, improves regional and global cyber resilience, and boosts our industrial and business linkages; a sports playbook that leverages Australia's expertise in major sporting events, as India seeks to demonstrate its global leadership by hosting the Commonwealth Games and bidding for the Olympic and Paralympic Games; a statement on energy security that commits Australia and India to more resilient energy supply chains, while making possible Australian uranium exports to India for peaceful purposes, and a Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap that charts the way forward for Australia and India to expand



Philip Green

Australia's High
Commissioner
to India

The 'Melbourne momentum' is opening new chapters in security, business, education and culture

cooperation on maritime security in the vast Indian Ocean that lies between our shores.

Business, education, cricket

That is a lot for a single visit. And business leaders chipped in – Australia's largest pension fund, Australian Super, decided to invest half a billion dollars (that is ₹3,360 crore) in India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited. That is on top of Australia's leading hyperscalers committing to build tens of billions of dollars in data centres across India.

Our education sectors reminded us that eight Australian universities have now undertaken to open foreign branch campuses in India, including the University of New South Wales (UNSW), which is a global top 20 university. When its campus opens later this year, UNSW will be the highest-ranking university in India.

And a big next step in our relationship was also foreshadowed, with the plans for an annual showcase of the best of Australian culture and business under the banner "G'Day - Namaste". G'Day - Namaste will coincide with the Australian Big Bash League playing its first game (cricket) on foreign soil in December this year.

To me, this rich set of outcomes represents more than a fair bit of work in preparation for the visit. It shows that there is a lot more headroom to deepen and expand our collaboration. That is because of three underlying drivers that are impelling our partnership forward: The fact that we are reliable partners at a time when our region, and the world more broadly, is in flux, and when each of us needs to find deeper international connections to safeguard our interests; the fact that we have highly complementary economies – Australia's

strengths in energy, mining, and education and skills fit neatly with India's rapidly growing manufacturing industry, and the fact that the Indian diaspora in Australia – Australia's fastest-growing – is a source of pride and dynamism for our two governments.

Leadership drives partnership

Relationships grow when the objective conditions are fertile. They flourish when each nation sees in the other, solutions to some of its problems, and pathways to maximise their opportunities. That is where Australia and India are.

They also flourish when they have leadership with a shared vision and ambition for the relationship.

That shared ambition was much on display between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Anthony Albanese. Stability and continuity are on the side of our leaders too, with each focused on fixing long-term problems and seizing opportunities.

The two leaders have a deep respect and admiration for each other.

The genuine warmth between our Prime Ministers was on unmistakable display over two days in Melbourne – from their banter about cricket in quiet moments, to their attentive consideration of each other's viewpoints, to the bear-hugs that caught the attention of the cameras.

The visit is a vivid demonstration of what a positive place we find ourselves in, in the India-Australia partnership. Not all bilateral relationships have that just now, so we should celebrate it, and recommit ourselves to maximising the opportunities of a special moment of alignment of interests.

1. **Context (GS II – International Relations):** India–Australia relations have evolved into a robust Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, underpinned by shared democratic values, a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, defence and maritime cooperation, resilient supply chains, critical technologies, economic engagement and strong people-to-people ties. The recent bilateral engagements further institutionalise this long-term strategic partnership.

2. **Recent Developments in India–Australia Relations**

- I. Strengthened Defence and Security Cooperation through a Joint Declaration and enhanced strategic dialogue.
- II. Launched a Partnership on Cyber Security, Critical Technologies and Resilient Supply Chains.
- III. Adopted a Maritime Security Cooperation Roadmap to reinforce a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- IV. Expanded cooperation in civil nuclear energy, including Australia's uranium supply for India's civilian nuclear programme.
- V. AustralianSuper announced an investment of about ₹3,360 crore in India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF).
- VI. Australian firms committed investments in data centres, digital infrastructure and emerging technologies.
- VII. Eight Australian universities, including the University of New South Wales (UNSW), will establish branch campuses in India.
- VIII. Institutionalised the annual 'G'Day–Namaste' initiative to deepen trade, innovation, tourism and cultural exchanges.
- IX. Expanded collaboration in critical minerals, clean energy, education, manufacturing, sports and skilled workforce mobility.
- X. Reaffirmed the Indian diaspora as a strategic pillar for strengthening bilateral economic, cultural and innovation partnerships.

The stark reality of the missing jobs for India's Gen Z

India has one of the world's largest youth populations (371 million, according to United Nations data of 2025), often described as a demographic dividend. But this demographic dividend is only a promise and does not guarantee an automatic outcome. It pays off only when the transition occurs, enabling young people to move from classrooms into decent, productive work with higher skills. Right now, that transition is faltering, and the evidence is visible in Gen Z's employment patterns.

The term 'Gen Z' refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012. They succeeded the Millennials (also known as Generation Y), who were born between 1981 and 1996. The working-age population for Gen Z broadly falls within the 15-26 age group, while Millennials are aged between the years 27 to 42. According to the 2023-24 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), India has an estimated 29.94 crore working-age Gen Z individuals (aged 15-26 years), compared with 35 crore Millennials (aged 27-42 years). Using the same datasets, we analyse their occupational patterns, labour force participation rates, unemployment levels, and access to social security systems.

Gen Z work status

PLFS 2023-24 estimates show that a large share of Gen Z remains engaged in education. The data show that 41.7% of young males and 38.4% of young females are studying. While this partly explains their delayed entry into the labour market, the situation of the remaining youth is a cause for concern.

When young people do enter the labour market, many are absorbed into non-salaried and casual forms of employment. Among young males, 15.8% are engaged as unpaid family workers, 12.3% are in casual work – possibly with segments of the informal economy – and only 14.8% are regular wage earners. Among female Gen Z individuals, about 35% are engaged in domestic duties (out of the labour force), 10.7% work as unpaid family workers, and only 4.7% are regular wage earners.

These patterns underline the fact that women bear this burden disproportionately. Among Gen Z females, 27.1% are engaged in domestic duties only, compared with just 0.32% of males. Even where women want paid work, they face higher unemployment and weaker labour market attachment. This is not only a matter of jobs. It also reflects childcare burdens, safety concerns, mobility constraints and social norms, and the design of work itself. India cannot talk seriously about harnessing its demographic advantage while leaving such a large share of young women outside the paid economy.

What happens when young people try to enter



Santosh Kumar Dash

Assistant Professor at
IRMA, Tribhuvan
Sahkari University,
Anand, Gujarat



Balakrushna Padhi

Assistant Professor at
BITS Pilani (Pilani
Campus), Rajasthan

Celebrating
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the labour market? The answer is concerning: too many of them are unable to find adequate employment opportunities.

The first indicator to consider is the labour force participation rate (LFPR). Among Gen Z, 41.7% are in the labour force, against 75% of Millennials. Within Gen Z, rural participation (44.1%) exceeds urban participation (37.2%), suggesting that rural youth tend to enter the labour market earlier, whereas urban youth spend more time in education and training. A sharp gender divide is also evident. Among young males, labour force participation is 59.3% in rural India and 51.3% in urban India, compared to just 28% and 21.1% respectively for young females.

The unemployment situation is even more alarming. The overall unemployment rate for Gen Z is 11.9%, compared to only 2% among Millennials. In urban India, the situation deteriorates further, with Gen Z unemployment rising to 17.1%.

For urban young women, it reaches a staggering 22.6%. This is not merely a temporary labour-market friction; it is a serious warning sign that the economy is struggling to absorb young jobseekers, particularly in areas where aspirations and educational qualifications are often higher.

The graduate trap, social security mirage

For most of the youth, education offers a gateway of opportunity: more education leading to better jobs and lower unemployment. Instead, our estimate shows the opposite at the top end. Among Gen Z males with graduate-level education or above, unemployment stands at 29%. Among Gen Z females, it is even higher at 36.9%. This is the heart of India's silent jobs crisis. The country is producing educated young people faster than it is producing suitable jobs for them.

A similar disparity persists among Millennials. Only 5.2% of male graduates and above are unemployed, but the corresponding figure for women is significantly higher at 13.8%.

This disconnect perhaps points to a deeper mismatch between the education system and labour market requirements. While part of the problem relates to skill mismatches, it is also increasingly shaped by automation and the growing adoption of artificial intelligence, both of which are altering the nature of available jobs.

That mismatch carries a deeper risk. When higher education no longer improves employment prospects quickly or reliably, frustration rises, family investment in education comes under strain, and confidence in the growth story weakens. A labour market that cannot absorb its educated youth is not just inefficient. It can become socially corrosive and

destabilising. Even for those who do find work, the quality of employment remains deeply concerning. Only 20.1% of Gen Z individuals are covered by social security, and just 14.1% have a formal job contract. Among the remaining 79.9% who lack social security coverage, only 3.2% have a job contract. Overall, only 17.3% of Gen Z workers have any form of contractual employment.

This implies that most are entering the workforce without either. The challenge, therefore, is not merely unemployment but the widespread prevalence of informal, insecure, and weakly protected work. Further, in recent years, there has been growing evidence of the informalisation of formal employment among the Gen Z population.

The situation among Millennials is only marginally better. Merely 26% have a job contract, while only 28.6% are covered by social security.

The recent large-scale violent labour protests in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, led by industrial and factory workers demanding higher wages and better working conditions, reflect the frustration that insecure and poorly protected employment can produce.

A promise deferred

India's jobs debate is too often discussed in silos: unemployment, skill, women's work and labour force participation, and informality. However, these are not separate problems. They are one connected failure of labour market transition. Young people (Gen Z) are staying in education longer, but the bridge from education to work is weak. Women face structural barriers that keep them out or push them into unpaid roles. And even when work is found, it is too often outside the protections of formal employment.

It is time India moves beyond merely celebrating its large demographic dividend and begins treating the issue with greater urgency. Skill programmes have value, but they cannot substitute for actual job creation. The answer lies in expanding labour-intensive sectors, building stronger school-to-work pathways, linking training more closely to employers, and making it easier for women to enter and remain in paid work. Apprenticeships, formal hiring incentives, urban employment expansion, safe transport and childcare support all need to be part of the response.

The numbers tell a blunt story. India's youth challenge is no longer about whether young people are ready for work. It is about whether the economy is ready for them. Until that changes, the demographic dividend will remain what it has so far been: a promise deferred.

1. Context (GS III – Indian Economy – Employment)

India's demographic dividend can be realized only through productive, formal and quality employment. The challenge today is not merely creating jobs, but ensuring better labour force participation, employability, social security and a smooth transition from education to work, particularly for the youth.

2. Key Challenges in Gen Z Employment

I. **Low Labour Force Participation:** LFPR is only 41.7% among Gen Z compared to 75% among Millennials, indicating delayed or weak entry into the labour market.

II. **High Unemployment:** Overall Gen Z unemployment is 11.9%, rising to 17.1% in urban areas and 22.6% among urban women, reflecting poor job absorption.

III. **Graduate Employment Crisis:** Unemployment among graduates stands at 29%, increasing to 36.9% for female graduates, highlighting the education-employment mismatch.

IV. **Informal & Insecure Employment:** A large share of youth is engaged in casual work, unpaid family work or informal employment; only 17.3% have formal employment contracts.

V. **Weak Social Security:** Only 20.1% of Gen Z workers are covered by social security, making employment highly vulnerable.

VI. **Gender Disparities:** Women continue to face lower labour force participation due to unpaid care work, safety concerns, social norms and limited access to quality jobs.

VII. **Structural Labour Market Challenges:** Skill mismatch, automation, Artificial Intelligence and slow growth of labour-intensive sectors are reducing employment opportunities for educated youth.

3. Way Forward

I. Promote labour-intensive manufacturing and services to generate large-scale quality employment.

II. Strengthen school-to-work pathways through apprenticeships, vocational education and industry-academia partnerships.

III. Align higher education and skilling with industry demand and emerging technologies.

IV. Expand formal employment by improving social security, written contracts and labour protection.

V. Increase female labour force participation through childcare support, safe transport, flexible work arrangements and gender-sensitive workplaces.

VI. Encourage private investment, MSMEs and urban employment opportunities to fully harness India's demographic dividend.

At least 50 Malian soldiers killed in rebel-jihadist attack

Agence France-Presse

BAMAKO

At least 50 Malian soldiers were killed in an attack by Tuareg separatists and jihadists as they left the strategic northern town of Anefis, officials said on Sunday.

The attack on the army convoy leaving Anefis occurred on Saturday, following weeks of fighting with both sides attempting to take control.

In early July, fighters from the Tuareg separatist FLA and the al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) briefly captured the town and encircled a military base used by the Malian army and Russian paramilitaries from Africa Corps.

JNIM and the FLA claimed responsibility for the attack.



Critical loss: The reported aftermath of an attack by FLA separatist and jihadist militants in Gao, northern Mali on Saturday. AP

“The provisional toll of the attack is extremely heavy – more than 50 soldiers killed and at least 24 prisoners,” said a local elected official close to the ruling junta.

The official, who asked to remain anonymous, said it was the deadliest attack suffered by the Malian army in years.

“Some of our men were

simply executed,” said a source within the Malian army, adding that an investigation was under way to determine any tactical failures.

The Russian paramilitaries supporting the army had already arrived in Gao, their destination, when the attack happened and did not suffer any losses, sources said.



Algeria

Sahara Desert

Mali

Mauritania

Niger

Senegal

Bamako

Niger

Burkina Faso

Guinea

Côte
d'Ivoire

1. **Context (Places in news)**

More than 50 Malian soldiers were killed in an attack near Anefis in northern Mali by Tuareg separatists and the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), underscoring the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel region.

2. **Location in News – Mali**

I. **Mali**: Landlocked country in West Africa (Sahel); Capital – Bamako.

II. **Anefis**: Strategic town in the Gao Region, near Kidal, in northern Mali.

III. **Significance**: Conflict hotspot involving the Malian military, Tuareg separatists and Islamist militant groups.



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What we UnderStand, We Conquer

