CURRENTLY — 12 AUGUST 2026

1. RBI, BRICS in Talks to Link Payment Systems, CBDCs — The Indian Express | Page 12 | GS-II: International Relations | GS-III: Economy, Digital Payments & Technology
2. No Path to Peace — The Hindu Editorial | Page 6 | GS-II: International Relations, Human Rights & Humanitarian Issues
3. Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026 — The Hindu* | Page 6 | GS-II: Polity, Judiciary & Governance
4. Deepening ties, NASA invites ISRO to join its Moon Base programme — The Indian Express | Page 1 | GS-III: Science & Technology, Space Technology
5. FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026 — The Hindu | Page 1 | GS-II: Parliament, Governance & Civil Society

RBI, BRICS in talks to link payment systems, CBDCs: Governor

George Mathew
Mumbai, August 11

RESERVE BANK of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Tuesday said the RBI was working to increase the use of the rupee in cross-border trade and payments, and it was also discussing ways with BRICS countries to make international transactions faster and cheaper.

Cross-border payments and the use of local currencies for international trade were closely linked to the broader effort to internationalise domestic currencies, including the rupee, Malhotra said while speaking at a FICCI-Indian Banks Association (IBA) event.

"We have a task force on payments under BRICS," Malhotra said, adding that cross-border payments remained an area of interest for member countries because of the scope to reduce costs, particularly for retail transactions, and improve transaction speeds.

He cited Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as an example of how payments can be made almost instantaneously. "Look at UPI, for example. It is instantaneous. You have to wait for some hours, some days for your foreign remittances to take place. So, there is a lot of work that is being done over there," he said. The governor said several options were being discussed to improve cross-border payments, including linking payment systems of different countries and the possible use of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs). However, these proposals were still at the discussion stage.

The RBI is also seeking to increase the use of local currencies in international trade.

Malhotra said India already had arrangements with a number of countries to facilitate trade in local currencies, although the volumes remained relatively small. "We need to expand that," he said. As part of this effort, the RBI has started entering into memoranda of understanding with central banks of other countries to create greater awareness among importers and exporters about the benefits and mechanisms for using local currencies in international trade. The RBI has so far signed such arrangements with the UAE, Mauritius, the Maldives and Indonesia, Malhotra said. "They have given us encouraging results and we will continue our efforts to internationalise the rupee and promote the use of local currencies for cross-border payments and for trade," he said. The push comes as central banks globally explore alternatives to traditional correspondent banking arrangements.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

With reference to Central Bank digital currencies, consider the following statements :

1. It is possible to make payments in a digital currency without using US dollar or SWIFT system.
2. A digital currency can be distributed with a condition programmed into it such as a time-frame for spending it.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Context [GS-II – International Relations | GS-III – Economy & Digital Technology]

RBI is working with BRICS countries to make cross-border payments faster, cheaper and more efficient through payment-system linkages, local currencies and CBDCs.

1. Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)

- **CBDC**: Digital form of sovereign currency issued by a central bank; India's CBDC is the Digital Rupee (e₹) issued by RBI.
- **CBDC ≠ UPI**: CBDC is digital money, while Unified Payments Interface is the payment system used to transfer money.
- **Potential**: Interoperable CBDCs can enable faster, cheaper cross-border settlement with fewer intermediaries.

2. BRICS Framework

- **17th BRICS Summit, Rio de Janeiro (2025)**: **The Rio de Janeiro Declaration** called for continued work on the BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative and greater interoperability of national payment systems.
- **BRICS Payment Task Force**: RBI is participating in discussions on payment-system linkages and possible CBDC use.

3. India's Approach

- **Local currencies**: RBI is promoting trade settlement in local currencies, including the rupee.
- **Existing arrangements**: Local-currency arrangements exist with the United Arab Emirates, Mauritius, Maldives and Indonesia, though volumes remain small.
- **Strategic significance**: Reduces dependence on traditional correspondent banking and dominant international currencies while lowering transaction costs.

No path to peace

Israel's rejection of peace plan shows its intent to subjugate Gaza

It has been nearly a year since the U.S.-brokered ceasefire supposedly ended Israel's bombardment and decimation of Gaza. But since the ceasefire, Israel's strikes have killed nearly 1,300 Palestinians and its forces hold about 65% of the Strip, where much of the two-million population lives in tent camps amid rubble with schools and hospitals shut. Aid remains severely restricted, while Israel has blocked reconstruction, insisting that Hamas disarm first. Yet, when Hamas agreed to decommission and store its heavy weapons in phases, with U.S.-backed Palestinian technocrats in step with a gradual Israeli withdrawal – as part of a 15-point road map proposed by the Donald Trump-led "Board of Peace" – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to accept this. He said Israel was "ruling out the 15-point document" and that there would be no withdrawal until Hamas gave up "heavy weapons, lighter weapons, all weapons". Israel is keen not only on Hamas's disarmament, but also on the total subjugation of Gaza, at a continuing cost to civilians and children. It faces genocide proceedings at the International Court of Justice while the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Mr. Netanyahu, who also faces a corruption trial still before the courts. By promising the complete destruction of Hamas, he has been trying to stay in power by retaining the support of the jingoistic right wing; any concession on withdrawal would invite political repercussions for his right-wing coalition in elections due in October.

The war on Iran launched by Mr. Trump and Israel on February 28 to effect a regime change has proved to be a disaster, setting off a fuel crisis that has affected several countries. With the Strait of Hormuz barely functioning, rising costs of American petrol and fertilizers have begun to affect the U.S. economy, leading to Mr Trump seeking a face-saving breakthrough in West Asia. Waning sympathy for Israel as the U.S. mid-term elections approach also explains the Board's proposal. While the farcical Board's vision of a "New Gaza" – free-trade zone, privatised infrastructure, no Palestinian representation on the Board – resembles an attempt at naked profiteering following the disastrous conflict, the 15-point proposal would actually be welcomed by the battered people of Gaza. For Hamas, which has few cards left, disarmament is an imperative, but must be matched by Israeli withdrawal. Mr Trump and his advisers must ask whether Washington's decades-long Faustian bargain – arming and shielding a militarised Israel on Israel's terms – is worth continuing, or whether it will use its leverage as Israel's principal arms supplier to compel a genuine withdrawal. It is still not too late.

Context [GS-II – International Relations | Human Rights & Humanitarian Issues]

The Gaza conflict remains unresolved amid disputes over Hamas's disarmament, Israeli military withdrawal, humanitarian access and post-war governance, despite a U.S.-backed 15-point roadmap.

1. Current Situation

- **Israeli control**: Around 65% of Gaza remains under access restrictions/direct Israeli control, according to United Nations humanitarian reporting.
- **Humanitarian crisis**: Large-scale displacement, damaged health, education, water and sanitation infrastructure, and restricted humanitarian access continue to affect civilians.
- **Political deadlock**: Israel and Hamas remain divided over the sequencing of disarmament, withdrawal and governance of Gaza.

2. 15-Point Peace Roadmap

- **Disarmament**: The roadmap envisages phased disarmament of Hamas and other armed groups.
- **Israeli withdrawal**: Disarmament is linked with a gradual/full Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza.
- **Governance**: The framework envisages Palestinian technocratic administration and international involvement in stabilisation and reconstruction.
- **Current obstacle**: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected the 15-point document, maintaining that Israeli withdrawal should follow complete Hamas disarmament.

3. What Sustainable Peace Requires

- **Security**: A credible mechanism for disarmament, demilitarisation and security guarantees for both Israelis and Palestinians.
- **Political settlement**: A legitimate Palestinian representative governance structure with a credible pathway towards self-determination.
- **Territorial settlement**: A clearly agreed framework for Israeli withdrawal, borders and security arrangements.
- **Humanitarian recovery**: Unrestricted humanitarian access followed by reconstruction of housing, health, education, water and essential infrastructure.
- **Economic revival**: Restoration of livelihoods, employment, trade and basic services to prevent prolonged humanitarian dependence.
- **International guarantees**: UN/regional/international monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance by all parties.

In the way

The government should not be able to remove tribunal members at will

Tribunals have a *raison d'être* in the justice system: they allow specialists to settle technical disputes faster than the judiciary could. In *S.P. Sampath Kumar* (1987) and *L. Chandra Kumar* (1997), the Supreme Court said that tribunals' decisions remain subject to review by High Courts because judicial review is part of the basic structure. Sensible though they were, the orders left a structural flaw standing. Tribunals have historically been administered by the same Ministries whose decisions the tribunal might have to review. In *Rojer Mathew* (2019), the Court recommended an independent, statutory National Tribunals Commission (NTC) to oversee the selection and administration of tribunals. However, Parliament used the Finance Act 2017 to give the executive more control over appointments and the Tribunals Reforms Ordinance 2021 to reinstate conditions the Court had rejected. The final straw was the Court's judgment in *Madras Bar Association* (2025), where it struck down the objectionable provisions Parliament had re-enacted, restored the previous framework, and gave the government four months to establish the NTC. That is the Tribunal Reforms Bill 2026, which the Lok Sabha passed on August 10 with no discussion, and the Rajya Sabha on August 11. To its credit, *inter alia*, the Bill restores the five-year terms for tribunal members, introduces uniform service conditions, includes provisions for a National Tribunals Data Grid, and does not maroon already pending appointments.

However, the Bill still does not give the NTC enough institutional autonomy. For one, Section 14 leaves the qualifications, manner of selection, salaries, allowances, and other conditions of service of tribunal members to future executive rules. But in *Rojer Mathew*, Justice Deepak Gupta had held that defining who is qualified to exercise judicial power is an essential legislative function that cannot be delegated to rulemaking. Yet, the Bill claims consonance with the 2025 judgment while making room for the sort of delegation the judge's line of reasoning had resisted. Experts have also flagged similarly vague language in Section 3. Further, under Section 16, a Ministry will first screen a complaint before it passes to the NTC for inquiry. So, while the process is more elaborate than it was in 2021, the Centre still appoints the NTC's members, only consulting the CJI for the chairperson and judicial members, and retains substantial influence over its finances and administration. That is essentially a continuing failure: a commission designed to insulate tribunals from executive control cannot be thus subject to the terms of the executive. The government must make the NTC fully independent by forsaking its power to appoint or remove its members at will.

Context [GS-II – Polity, Judiciary & Governance]

The Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026, passed by Parliament on 10–11 August 2026, seeks to establish a National Tribunals Commission (NTC) to improve the efficiency, transparency, uniformity and administration of tribunals.

1. Constitutional & Judicial Framework

- Articles 323A & 323B: Provide the constitutional basis for Administrative Tribunals and tribunals dealing with specified matters such as taxation and industrial disputes.
- Judicial review: Under Articles 226–227, High Courts can review tribunal decisions; L. Chandra Kumar (1997) held this power to be part of the basic structure.
- Judicial evolution: Rojer Mathew (2019) and the Madras Bar Association judgment (2025) stressed the need for greater institutional independence in tribunal administration.

2. Key Provisions of the Bill

- National Tribunals Commission: Creates a central institutional mechanism for appointments, administration, performance review and complaints concerning tribunals.
- Five-year tenure: Restores a five-year term for tribunal Chairpersons and Members, subject to prescribed age limits.
- National Tribunals Data Grid: Creates a common data system to improve monitoring, transparency and evidence-based administration.
- 16 tribunals/appellate bodies: The framework seeks common standards across the covered tribunals.

3. Core Concern — Institutional Independence

- Executive control: The Central Government retains important powers relating to appointments, service conditions and removal, which can affect the perceived independence of tribunals.
- Removal power: Members can be removed on specified grounds, including misconduct, incapacity, abuse of position and incompetence/inefficiency; safeguards in the inquiry process therefore become important.
- Financial autonomy: If administration and finances remain substantially dependent on the executive, an institution intended to provide independent adjudication may remain vulnerable to executive influence.

4. What Effective Tribunal Reform Requires

- **Independence**: Appointment, tenure, removal and financial arrangements should provide sufficient institutional insulation from the executive.
- **Efficiency**: Fill vacancies quickly, strengthen infrastructure and use the National Tribunals Data Grid for monitoring pendency and performance.
- **Accountability**: Independence must be accompanied by transparent selection, performance standards and grievance mechanisms.
- **Constitutional balance**: Tribunalisation should supplement, not weaken, High Court judicial review, separation of powers and access to justice.

INDIA-U.S. CIVIL SPACE JOINT WORKING GROUP ADVANCES CIVIL AND COMMERCIAL SPACE COOPERATION

By **U.S. MISSION INDIA**

4 MINUTE READ

11 AUGUST, 2026

The 9th meeting of the India-U.S. Civil Space Joint Working Group (CSJWG) was hosted by India on 5-6 August 2026 at the headquarters of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in Bengaluru.

Dr. V. Narayanan, Chairman, ISRO/ Secretary, Department of Space and H.E. Sergio Gor, the U.S. Ambassador to India addressed the opening segment and highlighted the significance of further strengthening the bilateral space cooperation. The meeting was co-chaired on the Indian side by Mr. M. Sankaran, Director, UR Rao Satellite Centre, ISRO and on the U.S. side by Dr. Wesley Brooks, Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs and Ms. Kathleen Karika, NASA Associate Administrator for International and Interagency Relations.

The meeting advanced civil and commercial space cooperation under the U.S.-India Transforming the Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology (TRUST) Initiative, in line with the February 2025 Joint Leaders' Statement issued by Prime Minister Modi and President Trump.

Both sides discussed expanding cooperation following the successful launch of the joint NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission last year, as well as pursuing future science and human space flight technology collaborations. They reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) guidelines on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, as well as reviewed ongoing multilateral efforts for ensuring the Committee's effectiveness.

NASA invited ISRO to join its Moon Base program, building on the two countries' partnership under the Artemis Accords. The two sides also agreed to advance discussions for cooperation on open scientific data sharing under the Accords.

Deepening ties, NASA invites ISRO to join its Moon Base programme

Anjali Marar
& Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, August 11

MOVING TO strengthen their partnership, US space agency NASA has invited ISRO to join its Moon Base programme, the recently-launched effort to get humans back to the Moon with the larger objective of setting up a permanent settlement there.

The offer, disclosed Tuesday, was made at the ninth meeting of the India-US Civil Space Joint Working Group in Bengaluru on August 5 and 6 which US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor also addressed.

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

US envoy Sergio Gor spoke at the Bengaluru meeting last week. FILE

E. EXPLAINED

The collaboration

NASA's invitation to ISRO for the Moon Base programme reflects the growing ties between the two space agencies. It comes in the wake of Shubhanshu Shukla's Axiom flight to the ISS last year and the launch of the dual-frequency radar satellite NISAR. In 2023, India signed the US-led Artemis Accords.

Moon Base

In 2023, India had joined the Artemis Accords, a US-led space alliance, whose stated purpose is to evolve and commit to a common set of principles that govern the civil exploration of outer space including the Moon. India was the 27th country to sign on the Artemis Accords. Now, a total of 70 countries are part of the Accords.

"NASA invited ISRO to join its Moon Base program, building on the two countries' partnership under the Artemis Accords," a read-out from the US Embassy in India stated.

"The two sides also agreed to advance discussions for cooperation on open scientific data sharing under the Accords," it stated.

In the last few years, the space agencies of the two countries have come closer to each other than ever before. The same year that India joined the Artemis Accords, the two countries had also agreed to develop a "strategic framework for human spaceflight cooperation".

It was in the same vein that NASA had agreed to provide advanced training to Indian astronauts at its facilities with the objective of sending them to the International Space Station through privately-operated missions. The flight of Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla to the ISS in 2025 was a result of this arrangement.

Last year, two space agencies achieved a big milestone when they launched the long-awaited NISAR (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar) mission, an ambitious and first-of-its-kind joint space mission.

The offer to cooperate further on Moon missions is a logical extension of these efforts.

"The August 5-6 meeting focused on further expanding commercial and civil space cooperation between the two countries. The two sides also spoke on furthering joint missions to the Moon and beyond, and identified the areas in which the two countries could share their expertise and knowledge," an ISRO scientist said.

"NISAR's data sharing and operations were discussed in-depth. It is seen as a successful joint venture and could pave the way for more such complex space missions, including the human space flight mission and building the lunar base," the scientist said.

NASA has launched an Artemis programme to take humans back to the Moon.

ISRO is also pursuing its own human spaceflight programme Gaganyaan. It has plans to make a human landing on the Moon by 2040.

Context [GS-III – Science & Technology | International Space Cooperation]

At the 9th India–U.S. Civil Space Joint Working Group (CSJWG) meeting in Bengaluru on 5–6 August 2026, NASA invited ISRO to join its Moon Base programme, deepening cooperation in lunar exploration, human spaceflight and commercial space.

1. India–U.S. Space Cooperation

- **Artemis Accords**: India joined the U.S.-led Artemis Accords in 2023 as the 27th signatory; there are now 70 signatories. It provides principles for peaceful and sustainable exploration of the Moon and beyond.
- **Moon Base**: NASA's programme aims at sustained human presence on the Moon; ISRO's participation can expand Indian capabilities in lunar technology and human spaceflight.
- **Human Spaceflight**: India–U.S. cooperation has already included astronaut training and support for Shubhanshu Shukla's 2025 International Space Station (ISS) mission.

2. NISAR — Key Joint Mission

- **NISAR**: NASA–ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar, launched on 30 July 2025 by ISRO's GSLV-F16, is the first joint NASA–ISRO Earth-observation satellite and the first spaceborne mission combining L-band and S-band Synthetic Aperture Radar.
- **Uses**: Provides all-weather observations for natural-disaster monitoring, agriculture, glaciers/ice sheets, soil moisture, ecosystem changes and land deformation.
- **Coverage**: It provides global observations approximately every 12 days, with a wide imaging swath of about 240 km.

3. Way Forward in Cooperation

- **Scientific data**: Both sides agreed to advance open scientific-data sharing under the Artemis framework.
- **Future missions**: Cooperation can extend from NISAR and lunar missions to human spaceflight, advanced space technologies and commercial space.
- **India's goal**: ISRO aims for a human lunar landing by 2040, making deeper international cooperation strategically relevant.

Amid backlash, Centre set to refer FCRA Bill to JPC

Govt. likely to move resolution in Lok Sabha today; Tamil Nadu Assembly urges the Centre to withdraw Bill, undertake consultations with stakeholders; Mizoram Christians hold mass rally

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

Faced with demands to scrap the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, from different corners of the country on Tuesday – including a unanimous resolution passed in the Tamil Nadu Assembly and mass protests in the streets of Mizoram's capital – the Union government informed its allies and other parties that it would move a resolution in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday to refer the Bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee, sources said.

Moving the resolution urging the Centre to withdraw the Bill in its present form, Tamil Nadu Minister Rajmohan said the Assembly was deeply concerned by provisions in the legislation relating to the transfer, management, and sale of assets of charitable organisations to the government on grounds such as expiry of FCRA registration, non-renewal or refusal of renewal, cancellation of registration, or surrender of registration. "These provisions may adversely affect the autonomy of charitable organisations and, in particular, the functioning of educational and social welfare institutions run by the minority communities," the resolution said, urging the Centre to undertake comprehensive consultations with all stakeholders, including State governments.

The Tamil Nadu resolution, which was passed unanimously, raised concerns over several provisions of the amendment Bill. ANI

Fears that Christian institutions will be disproportionately affected by the Bill overflowed onto the streets in Mizoram, one of the three Christian-majority States in the country. Hundreds of Christians from different denominations participated in a rally in Aizawl under the newly formed Council of Churches in Mizoram. The Bill would give a designated authority sweeping powers over the land, buildings, funds, and other assets of churches and NGOs whose FCRA registrations are cancelled or not renewed, without judicial oversight, said R. Lalbiakliana, the council's president.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

Context [GS-II – Parliament, Governance & Civil Society]

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, introduced in Lok Sabha on 25 March 2026, has faced Opposition objections over its asset-vesting provisions; the Government is now considering referring it to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for detailed scrutiny and wider consensus.

1. Concerns Raised by the Opposition

- **Asset vesting**: Opposition parties and civil-society/Christian organisations are concerned that assets created partly or wholly through foreign contributions could come under government control when FCRA registration ends.
- **Mixed funding**: Where an institution uses both foreign and domestic donations, critics fear that the entire asset could be affected even though only part was created from foreign funds.
- **Civil-society space**: Concerns have been raised that wider government powers could adversely affect Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), schools, hospitals and charitable institutions dependent on foreign contributions.
- **Due process**: Concerns also centre on the consequences of non-renewal of FCRA registration, particularly safeguards available to organisations against such decisions.

3. Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)

- **Nature**: A JPC is an ad hoc parliamentary committee, not a permanent committee; it is created for a specific Bill or issue and dissolves after submitting its report.
- **Composition**: Members are drawn from both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, broadly reflecting the strength of political parties.
- **Function**: It undertakes detailed scrutiny, examines stakeholders/evidence and submits recommendations to Parliament.
- **Recommendation**: Its report is not binding; Parliament takes the final decision.