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BARRING SOME PROGRESS IN ARGENTINA, GOVT'S FLAGSHIP OVERSEAS ACQUISITION VEHICLE KABIL HAS STRUGGLED TO MAKE A MARK

Why India is finding it difficult to buy critical mineral assets abroad, expand footprint

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, August 17

INDIA'S EFFORTS to secure critical mineral assets overseas are facing a series of hurdles, ranging from high asset valuations, volatile mineral prices, financial constraints, to socio-political risks in resource-rich countries.

Incorporated in 2019, the government's flagship overseas acquisition vehicle, Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) — a joint venture of National Aluminium Company Ltd, Hindustan Copper Ltd, and Mineral Exploration & Consultancy Ltd — is mandated to identify, explore and acquire overseas critical mineral assets to help meet India's growing demand for these strategic resources.

However, barring some progress in Argentina, KABIL has struggled to expand its overseas footprint in other mineral-rich countries, including Australia, Vietnam, Mali, and Chile, as proposed investments in critical mineral extraction projects have either stalled or fallen through.

In Argentina, KABIL has so far acquired five lithium brine blocks in Catamarca province. It is also evaluating seven additional greenfield lithium blocks in Catamarca and is in discussions for two more lithium projects in Jujuy province.

Lithium projects lost to POSCO

In December 2024, a consortium comprising KABIL, Coal India Ltd (CIL), Oil India Ltd (OIL), and ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) submitted a non-binding offer (NBO) of $184 million to acquire 10% equity stake each in the Mt Marion and Wodgina lithium mines in Australia. The proposed transaction involved acquiring a 20% stake in the holding company, Mineral Resources Ltd, which owned 50% stakes in both mines. After the process was reopened, the consortium submitted a revised NBO of $233 million in September 2025, seeking to acquire a 20% stake in each of the two mines. This would have entailed acquiring a 40% stake in Mineral Resources Ltd.

But the assets were ultimately acquired by South Korean steel and chemical major POSCO, which paid $765 million for 15% stake each in the Wodgina and Mt Marion mines, equivalent to a 30% stake in Mineral Resources Ltd.

When a parliamentary panel, whose report was tabled in the Parliament on August 12, sought details from KABIL on the unsuccessful bid, the company outlined several key lessons from the failed attempt. These included the absence of a domestic value chain for spodumene concentrate, the end product of the Mt Marion and Wodgina projects, high volatility in lithium prices, significant variations in long-term spodumene concentrate price forecasts published by different market intelligence agencies, and the high valuation of assets amid intense competition for lithium projects.

KABIL also failed to submit a bid for a lithium brine project in Chile that involved a "high-value investment". The company had signed a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) for the project in October 2025 and was subsequently granted initial-stage access to the project's "data room". In its response to the parliamentary panel, KABIL said that given the scale of investment involved, it decided to pursue a joint bid with other public sector undertakings, including CIL, OIL, and OVL. "Due diligence by the partnering companies was initiated. Due to limited time period, bid could not be submitted," it said. In another case involving Chile's state-owned mining company ENAMI, KABIL had signed an NDA to evaluate potential business opportunities across the lithium value chain, including exploration, extraction, processing, and commercialisation. However, KABIL decided to hand over the opportunity to CIL, citing its "limited financial capacity" and the investment requirements associated with developing the five lithium brine blocks it acquired in Argentina in January 2024.

Queries sent to KABIL and the Ministry of Mines remained unanswered till press time.

Proposed investments in critical mineral extraction projects have either stalled or fallen through. REUTERS

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

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

Context (GS-III: Critical Minerals, Mineral Security, Energy Security & Technology)

India is seeking secure access to critical minerals required for EVs, batteries, renewable energy, electronics and defence, but acquiring overseas assets remains difficult due to high valuations, competition and geopolitical risks.

1. National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) + Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL)

- **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)**: Approved in January 2025, it aims to secure the entire critical-mineral value chain — exploration → mining → beneficiation → processing → manufacturing → recycling — through domestic development as well as overseas sourcing.
- **Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL)**: Established in 2019 by National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO), Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL) and Mineral Exploration & Consultancy Limited (MECL) to identify, explore and acquire critical-mineral assets abroad.
- **KABIL's role**: Acts as India's overseas mineral-acquisition arm, while NCMM provides the broader national framework for mineral security.
- **Progress**: KABIL has made progress in Argentina's lithium sector, while attempts involving assets in Australia and Chile have faced commercial and strategic hurdles.

2. Why Overseas Acquisition Is Difficult

- **High valuations**: Rising global demand has made quality critical-mineral assets increasingly expensive.
- **High financial risk**: Mining requires large upfront capital, long gestation periods and uncertain returns, compounded by volatile mineral prices.
- **Global competition**: India competes with resource-rich countries and large corporations possessing greater financial and technological capabilities.
- **Geopolitical & regulatory risks**: Resource nationalism, changing mining regulations and strategic control over minerals can complicate foreign investments.
- **Value-chain gap**: Acquiring a mine ≠ securing supply; India also needs processing, refining, technology and downstream manufacturing capacity.

3. Way Forward

- **Diversify sources**: Build partnerships and acquire assets across multiple mineral-rich countries to reduce concentration risk.
- **Secure the entire chain**: Combine overseas mining rights with long-term offtake agreements, processing and refining arrangements.
- **Strengthen domestic ecosystem**: Use NCMM to accelerate exploration, beneficiation, processing, recycling and mineral substitution.
- **Leverage private capital**: Build Public Sector Undertaking (PSU)–private partnerships to combine strategic objectives with capital and technical expertise.
- **Strengthen mineral diplomacy**: Integrate critical minerals into India's strategic partnerships, trade agreements and development cooperation.

'Ashoka-era stupa, bigger than Sanchi': 90 years on, Ujjain mound comes under renewed focus

Striking engineering and construction, says 1938 survey report

Anand Mohan J
Bhopal, August 16

Vaishya Tekri has an estimated height of 100 feet against the 54-foot stupa at Sanchi, according to the excavation report

THE MADHYA Pradesh government has begun a push to excavate and restore monuments linked to Mauryan-era emperor Ashoka, beginning with a fresh excavation of Vaishya Tekri — after an almost 90-year-gap — in Ujjain.

The project comes amid a push by Chief Minister Mohan Yadav who has expressed interest in speeding up the excavation and restoration of the site, which belongs to his constituency of Ujjain.

Ujjain was an important city in the Mauryan world, and Ashoka was considered traditionally associated with it before he became emperor.

Dr Shivakant Bajpai, ASI Superintending Archeologist (Bhopal), told The Indian Express, "We have sent a proposal to the DG, ASI, for excavation of the site. It will take at least three years for the excavation to yield meaningful results and may also take several more years for completion. Restoring the stupa will be another monumental task and our objective is to ensure it is restored without inflicting any damage to the site."

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) believes that there is a possibility that a stupa larger than the famous Sanchi stupa may exist at this site. However, there is a need for a deeper scientific study to establish the fact.

The renewed focus on Vaishya Tekri is significant because the first excavation, carried out in 1938-39 by the Archaeological Department of the erstwhile Gwalior State, had already established that the enormous mound was not a natural formation but the remains of a major stupa.

The original excavation report, preserved in the Annual Administration Report of the Archaeological Department, Gwalior State, for Vikram Samvat 1995 (1938-39), provides a detailed account of what archaeologists found beneath the mound.

The excavation report described Vaishya Tekri as a "huge stupa", estimating its base at approximately 350 feet in diameter and its height at not less than 100 feet. The height of the stupa at Sanchi is approximately 54 feet.

ASI officials said the name of the mound (or tekri) stems from the queen of Emperor Ashoka, who came from the Vaishya or merchant community. Ashoka is believed to have had a palace built there during his viceroyalty of Ujjain. However, at the time, the first archeologists who excavated the site opined that "excavations do not bear out the tradition."

What the 90-year-old report said

The monument's size was only one part of what fascinated the excavators; its construction was unlike what they had encountered elsewhere. Instead of a conventional solid brick structure, the heart of the monument was made from local blackish murum, rammed hard to form the massive core. The exterior was then faced with brick masonry laid in mud mortar.

"The hearting is made up of local blackish murum rammed hard, while the facing is composed of brick masonry laid in mud mortar," the excavation report stated. The bricks were exceptionally large. The report recorded the biggest as measuring 22¼ inches by 18¼ inches by 3¾ inches, while another variety measured 22¼ inches by 15¼ inches by 3¾ inches.

"The size of bricks indicates that the structure belonged to the Mauryan period (3rd century BC)." That conclusion was further supported, the report said, by two coins recovered during the excavation — a punch-marked coin and a cast Avanti coin.

The archaeologists consequently considered a possible connection with Ashoka, but again stopped short of presenting it as an established fact and opined that "it is possible that the stupa is one of the many which Asoka is said to have built." The ancient builders had also substantially altered the landscape around the stupa. The report says the enormous quantity of murum used for the core had been quarried from the surrounding area. The excavators found that these quarry areas had effectively formed a regular square moat around the stupa, while leaving a gap between the moat and the monument itself. On the western side, they found evidence of a passage across the moat.

"In the centre of the West side of the moat there are the vestiges of a passage across the moat, for worshippers coming from the city, which was situated in that direction," the report said.

But the first excavation also demonstrated just how much of Vaishya Tekri had already been lost. "The facing of the stupa has all but disappeared and it is not possible from what has survived to determine the exact plan and elevation of the stupa," it said.

Most striking was the engineering at its base. "An unusual and ingenious engineering device has been employed in the construction of the masonry at the bottom of this stupa..."

"This part of the masonry is built up in the shape of a bowl which supports the superstructure and with its slanting sides, resists the oblique thrust of the filling which is wide at the bottom and gradually narrows down as it rises up towards the top," it said.

The report also suggested that the monument had originally been taller than what survived. "The existing altitude of the stupa is slightly less in proportion to its base as compared with other stupas of the period but this can be explained by the fact that the top has been washed away," said the report.

The government and ASI will first have to secure control of the archaeological site. Ujjain district administration has sent a proposal to acquire the surrounding private land for Rs 40 crore for the excavation to begin in the first place.

Which of the following statements on the Amaravati Stupa and its relief sculpture is/are correct ?

1. It was located in the lower Krishna valley.

2. In India, it was next only to the Sanchi Stupa in size.

3. The Amaravati school of sculpture made a lasting impact on the later South Indian sculpture, and its products were carried to Sri Lanka and South-east Asia.

Select the answer using the code given below :

(a) 1 only

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Context (GS-I: Ancient History, Art & Culture, Buddhist Architecture)

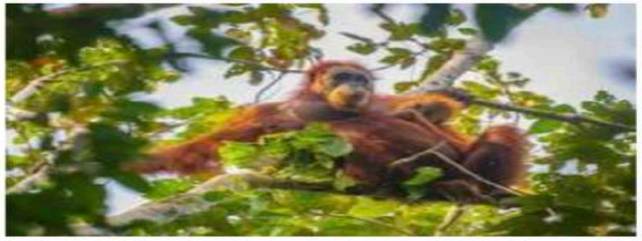
The Madhya Pradesh government and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) are reviving excavation at Vaishya Tekri in Ujjain, where a 1938–39 excavation identified a massive Mauryan-period stupa that may have been larger than Sanchi.

1. Vaishya Tekri: What the 1938–39 Excavation Revealed

- **Location: Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh** — an important city in the Mauryan period and traditionally associated with Ashoka's early career.
- **Scale**: The old report estimated the stupa at ~350 ft diameter and at least 100 ft high, compared with the ~54-ft height of Sanchi's Great Stupa.
- **Dating**: Large bricks and two recovered coins — a punch-marked coin and a cast Avanti coin — supported its attribution to the Mauryan period (3rd century BCE).
- **Engineering**: Its core used rammed blackish murum, faced with brick masonry; a bowl-shaped foundation helped resist the outward thrust of the massive superstructure.
- **Landscape planning**: Excavation revealed a square moat created from quarrying material for the stupa, with evidence of a western passage for worshippers coming from the city.

2. Why the Site Matters

- **Mauryan architecture**: Provides evidence of large-scale construction techniques and engineering during the 3rd century BCE.
- **Buddhist heritage**: Adds to the understanding of the spread of Buddhist architecture and patronage in central India.
- **Archaeological value**: The survival of the mound despite the loss of much of its original brick facing makes systematic excavation important.
- **Heritage conservation**: The renewed excavation is expected to take at least three years to yield meaningful results, followed by restoration. Surrounding private land also needs to be acquired, with the district administration proposing ₹40 crore for this purpose.



A Tapanuli orangutan on a tree in the Batang Toru forest in Indonesia's North Sumatra. AFP

'Dangerous misinformation': experts decry AI wildlife visuals

Agence France Presse

The black-and-white image appears to show the unlikeliest of interactions: an orangutan cradling endangered leopard cubs deep in the jungles of Malaysia's Sabah state. But the viral image is not just unlikely, it is fake, part of a trend of wildlife images generated by artificial intelligence that experts warn endanger animals and people.

Fact-checkers have debunked scores of similar synthetic visuals, from an elephant climbing a tree to escape flooding in Myanmar to a pink dolphin leaping out of water in the Philippines.

They may seem more like feel-good fiction than dangerous misinformation, but experts warn hyper-realistic visuals of wild animals behaving like pets, or even like humans, can distort public perceptions of wildlife and harm conservation efforts.

"This misunderstanding can lead people to approach animals too closely or interact with them in unsafe ways," Jose Guerrero-Casado, a zoology professor at Spain's University of Cordoba, said. He cited a widely reported incident in China's northwest Xinjiang region in January, where a woman was attacked by a rare snow leopard after trying to get closer for a photo.

China's forestry department said it stepped up patrols after the incident and warned the public to maintain a safe distance when encountering wild animals.

Conservationists say AI visuals portraying wild animals as cute or cuddly make it harder for social media users to discern what is real and can fuel exploitation. They increase demand for certain species "to be used in the tourism industry as photo props, exploited to make social media content or to be kept as pets", said Chris Lewis, a researcher at the international wildlife charity Born Free.

And while the visuals could encourage some people to support animal protection, "the negative impacts outweigh that completely," said Jenny Roberts of conservation group WWF. "People could get hurt," she said.

WWF uses real images for its fundraising efforts, but fake content online "desensitises" people to even the most incredible original visuals, she said.

"When you do have something remarkable, people question it," Roberts said, recounting an incident where a camera trap set up by her charity captured a tiger with five cubs in China. Such footage had never been filmed before in the East Asian country, she said. "But when we put the content out there, we were questioned on social media: 'Is this AI-generated?'"

A September study in the journal *Conservation Biology*, co-authored by Guerrero-Casado, concluded that the rapid spread of AI misinformation and its potential to harm environmental efforts is a "major threat" to society. The researchers highlighted another challenge for those working in conservation: AI images "could affect the ability of people to identify species" and cause misunderstandings about the abundance and distribution of wildlife.

Scientists often mine data from citizen science platforms that accept photos and recordings of wildlife submitted by users.

But AI generation and manipulation could lead to flawed research, several experts warned in a recent commentary in the journal *Nature*.

Meta, Facebook's parent company, and TikTok require users to label realistic visuals that have been generated or significantly altered using AI. They also say their platforms have tools that automatically label content as AI-generated. However, fact-checkers spotted multiple wildlife posts without clear labels.

Which one of the following makes a tool with a stick to scrape insects from a hole in a tree or a log of wood?

(a) Fishing cat

(b) Orangutan

(c) Otter

(d) Sloth bear

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What we UnderStand, We Conquer

Context (GS-III: Environment, Biodiversity & Emerging Technology)

Hyper-realistic AI-generated wildlife images are blurring real and fake wildlife information, creating risks for conservation, scientific research and human–wildlife interaction.

1. Orangutan: Prelims Basics

- **Great ape: Orangutans belong to the genus Pongo and are among the most intelligent primates, known for tool use, problem-solving and learning.**
- **Three species: Bornean (Pongo pygmaeus) | Sumatran (Pongo abelii) | Tapanuli (Pongo tapanuliensis).**
- **Tapanuli Orangutan: Recognised as a distinct species in 2017; found only in Batang Toru, North Sumatra, Indonesia; Critically Endangered and fewer than 800 individuals.**
- **PYQ Link: Orangutans can use a stick to extract insects from holes in trees/logs.**

2. AI Wildlife Visuals: Why They Are Dangerous

- **False behaviour: AI images showing wild animals as pets, humans or unusually friendly distort understanding of natural behaviour.**
- **Human–wildlife conflict: Such imagery can encourage people to approach or interact with wild animals, creating danger for both.**
- **Exploitation: "Cute" portrayals may increase demand for wildlife as pets, tourism props or social-media content.**
- **Research integrity: Fake images can contaminate citizen-science and ecological datasets, affecting species identification and estimates of abundance/distribution.**
- **Trust deficit: Repeated exposure to fake content can make people doubt even genuine and extraordinary wildlife photographs.**

3. Evidence & Broader Concern

- **A Conservation Biology study identified the rapid spread of AI misinformation and its potential harm to environmental efforts as a major societal threat.**
- **Researchers also warn that AI-generated content can cause species misidentification and flawed ecological research.**
- **Core concern: AI can therefore affect not only what people see, but also how they behave towards wildlife and how scientists understand ecosystems.**

• POLICY

The Centre-states tussle over the Mines and Minerals Bill

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, August 17

THE PASSAGE of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, in Parliament last week has reignited a long-running tussle between the Centre and states over taxation of mineral resources and the revenues they generate.

The amendments seek to restrict states from imposing specified levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, which they had been exploring following the Supreme Court's landmark 2024 ruling upholding their power to tax mineral rights.

The Bill has drawn sharp opposition from states. Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren has threatened protests against the amendments, saying they could significantly dent the state's prospective revenue, while Kerala Chief Minister V D Satheesan has raised concerns over their implications for India's federal structure.

The Bill will also extinguish unpaid or unrecovered dues arising from such levies imposed before it comes into force, with some estimates putting the value of such outstanding dues across the mining sector at around Rs 2 lakh crore. The Centre's stand is that unchecked state-level levies could raise the cost of key minerals, feeding into inflation and infrastructure costs.

Fiscal certainty for industry

According to Mines Ministry officials, the amendments seek to address what the Centre considers excessive cess and other levies imposed by some states following the Supreme Court's 2024 judgment.

The July 25, 2024 ruling overruled the 1989 ruling in *India Cement Ltd v. State of Tamil Nadu*, which had held that royalty was a tax and that states lacked the legislative competence to tax mineral rights, as the subject fell under the Union List.

B K Bhatia, mining industry expert and former Director General of the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries, told *The Indian Express* that the amendments would help prevent states from imposing multiple and excessive levies on mining companies.

"Apart from royalty, District Mineral Foundation and National Mineral Exploration and Development Trust contributions, mining companies currently pay various other cesses, including environmental and pollution cesses. But the mineral-bearing land tax was the biggest additional burden on the industry," Bhatia said.

According to him, while the amendments will help the industry by providing greater certainty over the fiscal burden, they are unlikely to result in any material revenue loss for states, as most of these levies have been legally contested for decades, resulting in large amounts of pending dues.

A senior official at the Mines Ministry said there are around 14 levies in the mineral sector, which will stay. "All we are saying is all these levies together should not go beyond a certain percentage," the official said, adding that this percentage would be decided after consultation with all the states.

Implications for federalism

- The Bill has drawn sharp opposition from states, who have raised concerns over loss of prospective revenue.
- The Centre's stand is that unchecked state-level levies could raise the cost of key minerals, feeding into inflation.

States' revenue loss

Last week, Jharkhand CM Soren, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said mining revenue accounted for approximately 84.9% of the state's own non-tax revenue in 2024-25. Soren claimed the Mineral Bearing Land Cess, which the state has been imposing on mining companies, was expected to generate approximately Rs 11,000 crore annually.

"These figures demonstrate that mineral-related revenues are not marginal receipts but a critical component of the state's fiscal capacity," the letter read.

Prabhat Ranjan, Senior Director at Nexdigm, a global consulting and advisory firm, said the amendments would, in effect, serve as a cost-containment and investment-certainty measure for mining companies, but concerns over potential revenue loss for states cannot be brushed aside. "The Centre should use the new framework to establish reasonable and transparent guardrails, while ensuring adequate consultation with mineral-producing states," he said.

The dispute

The Centre's stand is that unchecked state-level levies could raise the cost of key minerals, feeding into inflation and infrastructure costs.

States have raised concerns over loss of revenue as well as over the Bill's implications for India's federal structure.

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Context (GS-II: Federalism & Centre–State Relations | GS-III: Mineral Resources & Mining)

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 seeks to restrict specified State levies on mineral rights, following the Supreme Court's 2024 ruling affirming States' power to tax mineral rights.

1. Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957

- The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) is the principal Central law governing the development and regulation of mines and minerals.
- Entry 54, Union List: Parliament can regulate mines and mineral development in the public interest; Entry 23, State List gives States a role subject to Union control.
- States administer mining leases and receive mineral-related revenues, including royalty under Section 9.

2. Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India Ltd. — Supreme Court, 2024

- Royalty ≠ Tax: Royalty under the MMDR Act is not a tax.
- State taxing power: States can tax mineral rights under Entry 50, State List.
- Parliamentary power: Entry 50 allows Parliament to impose limitations on State taxation of mineral rights through a law relating to mineral development.
- Core implication: The judgment recognised State taxing power while simultaneously recognising Parliament's constitutional power to limit it.

3. What Has Parliament Changed in 2026?

- Restriction on State levies: The amendment restricts specified taxes, cesses and other levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, bringing them within a more uniform framework.
- Past dues: It provides for dealing with certain unpaid or unrecovered dues arising from such State-level levies.
- Investment certainty: By reducing multiple and unpredictable charges, the Centre seeks to make mining projects more financially predictable and investment-friendly.

- **National mineral market**: A uniform framework is intended to prevent different State levies from creating different mineral costs across India.
- **Strategic rationale**: Lower and predictable mineral costs are important for manufacturing, infrastructure, energy transition and critical-mineral security.

4. Why Are States Concerned?

- **Fiscal autonomy**: States argue that taxation of mineral rights is a constitutionally recognised State power under Entry 50.
- **Revenue**: Mineral-rich States could lose an important source of potential own-source revenue.
- **Local externalities**: Mining States bear the costs of displacement, environmental degradation, rehabilitation and infrastructure pressure.
- **Federal balance**: Extensive restrictions on State taxation may increase centralisation and weaken fiscal federalism.

5. Way Forward

- **Cooperative federalism**: Institutionalise Centre–State consultation before determining limits on State mineral levies.
- Predictability with autonomy: Create a uniform and investment-friendly regime while retaining a reasonable State fiscal role.
- **Benefit-sharing**: Ensure mineral-producing States and affected communities receive adequate benefits from resource extraction.
- **Strengthen District Mineral Foundation (DMF)**: Use mining revenues effectively for local development and rehabilitation.
- **Balance**: National mineral security + investment certainty + State fiscal autonomy.

Editorial to Mains Answer Initiative — Day 9

GS-II | GS-III | 15 Marks | 250 Words

“The recent changes in the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) framework have reignited the debate over Centre–State relations.” Discuss the key issues relating to State fiscal autonomy, national mineral security and investment certainty, and suggest a way forward based on cooperative federalism.

“खनिज एवं खनिज (विकास एवं विनियमन) व्यवस्था में हालिया बदलावों ने केंद्र–राज्य संबंधों पर बहस को फिर से तेज कर दिया है।” राज्य की राजकोषीय स्वायत्तता, राष्ट्रीय खनिज सुरक्षा और निवेश सुनिश्चितता से जुड़े प्रमुख मुद्दों की चर्चा करते हुए सहकारी संघवाद पर आधारित आगे की राह सुझाइए।

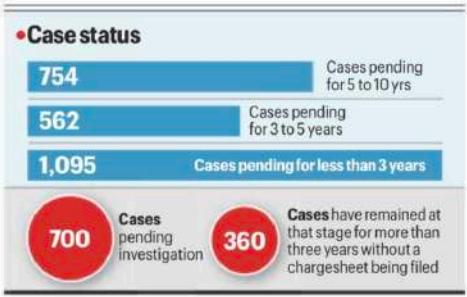
Over 4,000 cases pending against MPs, MLAs: Amicus curiae to SC

Vineet Bhalla
New Delhi, August 17

A TOTAL of 4,192 cases against sitting and former MPs and MLAs are pending trial across the country with 519 cases pending for more than a decade, according to a report submitted before the Supreme Court by Senior Advocate Vijay Hansaria, appointed amicus curiae in a PIL seeking expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs.

Another 700 cases are pending investigation while 360 have remained at that stage for more than three years without a chargesheet being filed.

The figures form part of Hansaria's 22nd Amicus report. It notes that the 4,192 figure is based on information received from High Courts and their websites; the Allahabad High Court did not submit a report and its figure of 1,171 cases is from its website as of February 2024. The High Court websites, in total, show 4,442 pending cases.



The report states that Chief Ministers of 14 of 28 states have criminal cases against them pending trials. Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy faces the highest number of cases at 89, followed by West Bengal CM Suvendu Adhikari (29), Karnataka CM D K Shivakumar, Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu (both 19) and Kerala CM V D Satheesan (18).

Of the 4,192 cases, 754 have been pending for 5 to 10 years, 562 for 3 to 5 years, and 1,095 for less than 3 years, it states. Among the states/High Courts with the highest reported pendency are Uttar Pradesh (1,171), Kerala (543), Bihar (373), Maharashtra (364) and Odisha (330). The cut-off dates for these figures vary. The report says the number of cases pending trial has fluctuated but remained above 4,000 since 2018 — rising from 4,075 in December 2018 to 5,140 in November 2022 before settling at 4,192 in July 2026.

In 2017, the Supreme Court ordered the setting up of 12 special courts in 10 states, UTs for speedy trials in criminal cases involving legislators. In December 2018, it directed that one designated Sessions Court and one designated Magisterial Court be identified in every district to try cases on priority.

In November 2023, the SC directed the Chief Justices of all HCs to register suo motu cases to monitor the early disposal of such cases and empowered special benches to issue directions for expeditious trials.

The matter was referred to a three-judge Bench in February 2025 after the previous amicus report highlighted the absence of effective monitoring by most HCs. It has been listed for hearing before the three-judge Bench on August 18.

Hansaria said that despite top court's directions, the pendency had remained at roughly the same level and attributed the delay to designated courts being burdened with regular judicial work, repeated adjournments, non-appearance of accused persons, delays in securing witnesses and inadequate monitoring by High Courts.

The amicus recommended that designated courts exclusively conduct trials involving lawmakers until their backlog is cleared; that cases pending for more than 3 years be heard day-to-day; and that courts issue NBWs where an accused lawmaker fails to appear on two consecutive dates. The report also proposes a nodal prosecution officer for securing witnesses and requiring real-time uploading of case data and order sheets on HC websites.

He has also sought that trials be completed within one year of framing of charges, monthly monitoring by HCs of cases pending for more than 3 years and "micro-monitoring" of individual delayed cases.

Context (GS-II: Parliament & State Legislatures | Judiciary | Electoral Reforms | Rule of Law)

The Supreme Court is monitoring the long-pending criminal cases involving sitting and former MPs and MLAs. Despite special courts and repeated judicial directions, delays persist at both the investigation and trial stages, raising concerns over timely justice and institutional accountability.

1. Scale of Pendency — Key Data

- **4,192 cases are pending against sitting and former MPs/MLAs across India.**
- **519 cases have been pending for >10 years; 754 for 5–10 years; and 562 for 3–5 years.**
- **700 cases remain under investigation; in 360 cases, no chargesheet has been filed even after >3 years.**
- **Pendency: 4,075 (2018) → 5,140 (2022) → 4,192 (2026) — showing persistence despite judicial intervention.**
- **Highest pendency: Uttar Pradesh – 1,171 | Bihar – 543 | Maharashtra – 364 | Odisha – 330.**

2. What the Data Reveals — Investigation to Trial Bottlenecks

- **The problem is not limited to court delays: prolonged investigation and delayed filing of chargesheets are major bottlenecks.**
- **519 cases pending for over a decade indicate that criminal proceedings can extend across multiple electoral cycles.**
- **360 cases without chargesheets for over three years point to weaknesses in investigation, prosecution and case management.**
- **14 of 28 States have Chief Ministers facing pending criminal cases, highlighting the wider relevance of timely adjudication of cases involving political representatives.**
- **Important: A pending case does not establish guilt; the concern is ensuring a timely determination of guilt or innocence.**

3. Supreme Court Intervention

- **2017: Directed establishment of 12 special courts across 10 States/UTs for speedy trials involving legislators.**
- **2018: Directed designated courts in every district to prioritise such cases.**
- **2023: High Courts directed to suo motu monitor cases involving legislators.**
- **2025: Matter referred to a 3-judge Bench amid concerns over inadequate implementation and monitoring.**

4. Way Forward — From Judicial Directions to Implementation

- **Time-bound investigation: Prevent cases from remaining at the investigation stage indefinitely.**
- **Priority trials: Cases pending for >3 years should receive focused, day-to-day hearings wherever feasible.**
- **Judicial capacity: Strengthen designated courts with adequate judges, prosecutors and court infrastructure.**
- **Digital monitoring: Real-time uploading of case status and orders can enable High Court-level supervision and transparency.**
- **Micro-monitoring: Track individual long-pending cases rather than relying only on aggregate pendency figures.**

Navy to lease two new MQ-9B Sea Guardian unmanned aircraft from US firm

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, August 17

THE MINISTRY of Defence on Monday inked a Rs 1,943-crore contract with American defence major General Atomics Aeronautical to lease two MQ-9B Sea Guardian High-Altitude Long-Endurance (HALE) Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) for the Indian Navy for 30 months.

In a statement, the Defence ministry said the contract was signed in the presence of A Anbarasu, Additional Secretary and Director General (Acquisition), Department of Defence. It said the MQ-9B Sea Guardian HALE RPAS, equipped with advanced systems, state-of-the-art sensors and sophisticated payloads, will significantly enhance the Indian Navy's Maritime Domain Awareness capabilities.

"The systems will provide persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance coverage over vast areas of the maritime domain, strengthening India's ability to monitor and respond to developments across the Indian Ocean Region," it added.

In December last year, the Ministry of Defence approved the leasing of HALE RPAS for the Navy. Currently, the Navy operates two MQ9As on lease, which were procured in 2020 in the thick of border tensions between India and China for a period of one year, and their lease period was subsequently extended.

With the addition of two new high-altitude long-endurance systems, the Navy's inventory will increase to four units. This expansion will provide a greater operational coverage for the Navy in both the eastern and western regions. Until now, the limited number of just two HALE RPAS restricted simultaneous coverage of both fronts.

It is learnt that while the lease of the existing RPAS will expire after a certain period, the leases of the two new RPAS will continue until deliveries of the 31 MQ-9B HALE RPAS begin. It is further learnt that the new RPAS will have almost the same configuration as the 31 MQ-9Bs which are being procured, as against the existing HALE RPAS.

In 2024, India and the United States inked a deal of around $3.5 billion or over Rs 28,000 crore to procure 31 MQ-9B HALE RPAS for the Indian armed forces. Apart from ISR roles, they can also carry out precision strikes on strategic targets in mountains and the maritime domain during long-endurance missions.

A global MRO facility will be set up in India under contract with General Atomics to assemble some of the MQ-9Bs in India to support India's long-term goals to boost indigenous defence capabilities. A certain percentage of the components for the drones will be sourced indigenously.

Which of the following items of defence hardware is/are manufactured in India ?

1. Su-30 MKI Fighter Jets
2. T-90 MK-III Tanks
3. Akula Class Submarine

Select the answer using the code given below :

(a) 1 and 2

(b) 1 and 3

(c) 1 only

(d) 2 only

Context (GS-III: Defence & Security | GS-II: India–US Relations)

India has signed a ₹1,943-crore contract with General Atomics, USA, to lease two MQ-9B SeaGuardian HALE RPAS for 30 months, strengthening the Indian Navy's Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the Indian Ocean Region.

1. What is MQ-9B SeaGuardian?

- **A High-Altitude Long-Endurance (HALE) remotely piloted unmanned aircraft designed primarily for persistent maritime surveillance.**
- **Provides long-duration Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance (ISR) over vast ocean areas.**
- **Equipped with advanced maritime sensors, radar and electro-optical/infrared systems.**

2. Key Capabilities

- **Persistent surveillance: Monitors large maritime areas for prolonged periods.**
- **Maritime ISR: Tracks vessels and suspicious maritime activity.**
- **Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW): Can support submarine detection using specialised sensors/sonobuoys.**
- **Long-range coverage: Enhances surveillance beyond the reach of conventional short-endurance platforms.**

3. Why It Matters for India

- **Strengthens Maritime Domain Awareness across the Indian Ocean.**
- **Helps monitor Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and maritime traffic.**
- **Complements manned platforms such as the P-8I.**
- **Provides additional surveillance capacity on India's eastern and western maritime fronts.**
- **Useful against emerging sub-surface and maritime security threats.**

4. India's MQ-9B Programme

- **India signed a 2024 deal worth about $3.5 billion for 31 MQ-9B HALE RPAS for the armed forces.**
- **The Navy currently operates two MQ-9A systems on lease; the new lease will raise its HALE RPAS inventory to four during the transition.**
- **A Global Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility is planned in India, with some components to be sourced domestically.**