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Editor's **TAKE**

UN: Trust is running out, reforms cannot wait

Created to uphold peace, the United Nations is constrained by an outdated power structure. It must reform before losing relevance

When world leaders take the podium in New York on Tuesday for the 81st General Debate, the theme, "Restoring trust, managing transformation: a United Nations that delivers for all", will read less like an aspiration than an admission. General Assembly President Khalilur Rahman of Bangladesh said as much when he gavelled the session open on September 8: trust is in deficit. The evidence is everywhere. The Gulf has swung between truce and strikes since the US-Israeli attacks on Iran in February, with the Strait of Hormuz, and the world economy, held hostage. Ukraine remains unresolved, and Gaza's peace plan awaits full implementation. Secretary-General António Guterres says de-escalation in the Middle East must be "priority one, priority two and priority three". The Security Council, constrained by the vetoes of its five permanent members, has too often been a spectator.

The house is also short of money. In January, Guterres warned of "imminent financial collapse" as arrears hit a record \$1.57 billion. The 2026 budget was cut by about 7 per cent to \$3.45 billion. Washington, which funds 22 per cent of the regular budget, paid \$827 million this month, yet still owes roughly \$4.2 billion. An organisation counting the days to payroll cannot credibly preach delivery.

Has the UN lived up to its promise? Partly. It has helped the world avoid a third world war, eradicated smallpox, phased out ozone-eating chemicals through the Montreal Protocol, and fed and sheltered millions through the WFP and UNHCR. But Rwanda and Srebrenica remain stains it has never washed out, and today's paralysis feeds the perception that international law binds only the weak. Reform is therefore overdue, and it must go beyond cost-cutting. The UN80 initiative, launched in 2025, has trimmed budgets and posts. That was necessary, but efficiency is not legitimacy. The real reform is political. A

1. UN: Trust Is Running Out, Reforms Cannot Wait

Source: The Pioneer

GS: GS-2 — International Relations

Context

- Created in **1945 after World War II**, the United Nations (UN) was designed to prevent another global war and promote **peace, cooperation and human rights**.
- Today, conflicts, Security Council deadlock and inadequate representation have raised questions about its effectiveness.

1. Original purpose: Maintain international peace and security through collective action and peaceful settlement of disputes.

- **Security Council:** Given the primary responsibility for international peace and security under **Article 24 of the UN Charter**.
- **Structural mismatch:** The permanent membership of the Security Council continues to reflect the **post-World War II power structure**.
- **Changing world:** New centres of economic and political influence have emerged, but their representation in global decision-making remains limited.

2. Why Is the UN Losing Trust?

- **Security Council paralysis:** Veto power of the five permanent members can prevent collective action.
- **Representation deficit:** **Africa has no permanent seat**, while countries such as **India** remain outside permanent membership.
- **Implementation gap:** Resolutions and diplomatic efforts do not always translate into action on the ground.
- **Financial constraints:** Delayed member contributions have affected the UN's ability to function effectively.
- **Credibility concern:** These problems create a gap between the UN's **mandate and its capacity to deliver**.

3. Reform: What Needs to Change?

- **Security Council:** Expand representation to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities.
- **Veto:** Encourage voluntary restraint, particularly in situations involving **mass atrocities**.
- **Negotiations:** Move towards **text-based negotiations** instead of prolonged discussions without concrete outcomes.
- **UN80 Initiative:** Improve administrative efficiency, reduce duplication and ensure better use of resources.

- **Financial sustainability:** Ensure timely payment of assessed contributions by member states.
- **Core principle:** Administrative efficiency must be accompanied by **political and structural reform**.

4. India's Stake

- **Permanent seat:** India seeks permanent membership in a reformed Security Council.
- **Basis:** Large population, growing global role, contribution to **UN peacekeeping** and representation of developing countries.
- **Global South:** Greater representation of developing countries can make global governance more inclusive.
- **India's objective:** A **representative, effective and rules-based multilateral order**.

Police reforms remain a work in progress



SOMESH GOYAL
EX-DGP, HIMACHAL PRADESH

SEPTEMBER 22 has become synonymous with police reforms as it marks the day when the Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment in 2006. In this ruling, the Court issued seven binding directives aimed at professionalising policing and its administration, following a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by former Uttar Pradesh DGP Prakash Singh and others.

The judgment was the culmination of a decade-long hearing that began in 1996 and brought unprecedented hope to law enforcement personnel, litigants and civil society. The core objectives of these directives were to insulate law enforcement from unwarranted political interference, ensure functional stability and enhance accountability.

The Court had issued the following directives:

1. Constitute a State Security Commission for a broad policy framework and evaluation of the state police force
2. Ensure a fixed tenure for the post of Director General

of Police (DGP)

3. Provide a fixed tenure for operational field officers
4. Separate investigation and law & order functions

5. Set up a Police Establishment Board (PEB) to decentralise and depoliticise personnel decisions. The PEB handles postings, transfers and promotions for officers below the rank of DSP
6. Establish a Police Complaints Authority
7. Form a National Security Commission for selecting chiefs of Central Police Organisations

The directives marked progress towards reforms, but did not address the aspirations of all stakeholders. At least three of the seven directives (2, 3 and 7) aim to provide stability in the tenure of police officers at all ranks.

However, stability does not inherently lead to autonomy, professionalism, integrity, fairness or empathy.

From the perspective of citizens, reforms should signify a new orientation and uniformity in service delivery that bridges the trust gap. The public must feel confident that, regardless of frequent transfers, every officer will uphold the law and the Constitution.

The civil police is included in the Constitution's State List. States argue that the appointment procedure for the Head of Police Force (HoPF), although described as a temporary measure "until the



INCLUSION: The foot soldiers remain faceless numbers in the reform process. ISTOCK

appropriate legislation is framed," undermines the spirit of federalism by denying them the right to select the head of their police force. This has resulted in the appointment of ad hoc heads of state police forces, exacerbating the problem. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has not distinguished itself in following the selection criteria, which may not be in consonance with the Court's clear directive to select from the three senior-most empanelled officers.

Empanelment at the Central level is generally delayed compared to promotions at the state level, and the 360-degree review remains grossly opaque. The procedures adopted to address this mismatch have further corrupted

It may be time to look beyond the Court's directions by understanding what the citizens want their police to be like.

the intent of the original directive, with the UPSC calling on all officers in the eligibility zone to choose a convenient candidate. At times, they have overlooked more than half-a-dozen senior officers and even downgraded outstanding performance reports to exclude deserving candidates. The so-called reform regarding the removal of HoPFs in the states has also been much abused.

Most discussions tend to focus on the appointment of the DGP for the state, overshadowing the needs of 85% of police personnel—the foot soldiers who represent the police to the public. They remain faceless numbers in the reform process. Despite their improved education, awareness and motivation,

there has been insufficient progress in role definition, training and inclusion in decision-making processes. The colonial mindset of not assigning investigative work to this large group of young, capable police officers remains a significant concern.

A Supreme Court-appointed committee led by Justice KT Thomas, along with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and Common Cause, has appraised the implementation of the directives from time to time. It transpires that the implementation has been partial and diluted. States are not yet ready to forgo their discretionary control over the police, and bureaucratic inertia only helps maintain the status quo.

The Court paved the way for separating law and order from the investigative wing. Special task forces or separate wings to deal with crimes involving narcotics, traffic, cybercrimes and women & children have been created. However, police leadership has shown no intent to conduct an internal exercise to divide these responsibilities.

Creating silos can have its problems, but specialisation brings in greater professionalism and efficiency. Internal orders and SOPs can be framed to enlist special units to deal with large-scale law-and-order situations.

The pursuit of autonomy by the Police Headquarters (PHQ) is often viewed as a

confrontation with the government. As a result, many police chiefs tend to avoid this path. The most far-reaching reform to improve accountability was the creation of Police Complaints Authorities at the state and district levels. However, the PHQ and state governments have responded lukewarmly to this reform.

Much of the initial euphoria, hope and debate surrounding these reforms has unfortunately diminished. Since 2007, there have been over 10 formal contempt petitions and 150 interlocutory applications, most of which remain pending.

After three decades of the struggle for reforms, the common citizen still has to run from pillar to post to get an FIR registered. There are cases of custodial violence, wanton arrests and unwarranted application of stringent provisions of laws like UAPA.

It may be time to look beyond the Court's directions by understanding what the citizens want their police to be like and make a fresh start to make a police system that is service-oriented, well-trained and equipped, reliable, efficient, accountable, people-friendly, human rights-compliant and independent, with a robust oversight mechanism in place.

The Court has shown the path, but the journey of police reforms will be long-winded and arduous.

2. Police Reforms Remain a Work in Progress

Source: The Tribune

GS: GS-2 — Governance

Context

- Despite the Supreme Court's **Prakash Singh judgment (2006)**, police reforms remain incompletely implemented across States.
- The challenge is to make policing **adequately staffed, professionally independent and institutionally accountable**.

1. Police in India: Scale and Structural Challenge

- **Constitutional position:** Police is a **State subject**, under **Entry 2, List II, Seventh Schedule**.
- **Police strength:** As of 1 January 2022, India had:
 - **Sanctioned strength:** 196.23 police personnel per lakh population
 - **Actual strength:** 152.80 per lakh
 - **Gap:** Nearly **22% below sanctioned strength**
- **Implication:** Vacancies increase workload and constrain investigation, beat policing and specialised crime response.
- **Changing crime:** Cybercrime, organised crime, narcotics and crimes against women require **specialised personnel and investigation**.

2. What the Supreme Court Directed in 2006

In **Prakash Singh & Others v. Union of India (2006)**, the Supreme Court laid down **seven directives** to improve police autonomy, professionalism and accountability:

1. **State Security Commission**
 - Reduce unwarranted political interference and provide broad policy direction.
2. **Merit-based DGP selection**
 - Selection of the **Director General of Police (DGP)** through the prescribed **Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)** process.
 - Minimum **2-year tenure**.
3. **Minimum tenure**
 - **2-year tenure** for key field officers such as **Inspector General (IG), Deputy Inspector General (DIG) and Superintendent of Police (SP)**.
4. **Separate investigation from law and order**
 - Dedicated investigation machinery for **better quality, speed and specialisation**.
5. **Police Establishment Board**
 - Greater institutionalisation of **transfers, postings and promotions**.
6. **Police Complaints Authority**
 - Independent **State and District-level mechanisms** for complaints against police misconduct.
7. **National Security Commission**
 - Merit-based selection and improved functioning of chiefs of **Central Police Organisations**.

3. Why Reform Remains Incomplete

- **Uneven implementation:** States have adopted the directives differently.
- **Political interference:** Transfers and postings can continue to affect police autonomy.
- **Manpower shortage:** Vacancies increase pressure on the existing force.
- **Investigation burden:** Investigation and law-and-order responsibilities often remain insufficiently separated.
- **Weak external accountability:** Police Complaints Authorities have not become equally effective across States.
- **Constabulary concerns:** Reform must also address **training, working conditions, welfare and career progression** of lower-rank personnel.

4. **What Comprehensive Reform Requires**

- **Fill vacancies:** Strengthen police-population capacity according to local requirements.
- **Professionalise investigation:** Separate investigation from law and order and strengthen **forensics and cyber capabilities**.
- **Ensure stability:** Provide reasonable tenure to key operational officers.
- **Strengthen accountability:** Make Police Complaints Authorities genuinely independent and functional.
- **Improve personnel welfare:** Better training, working conditions, housing and career progression.
- **Citizen-centric policing:** Ensure policing remains **accessible, impartial, responsive and respectful of fundamental rights**.

Why did the SC reject methanol rules?

What did the Supreme Court find wrong with Maharashtra's methanol rules? Why did the court hold the methanol restrictions disproportionate? What constitutional rights did the impugned rules violate? What guidelines did the Supreme Court issue to prevent tragedies?

EXPLAINER

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

In September 18, the Supreme Court struck down Maharashtra government rules requiring methanol to be denatured with a colourant and bitterant before sale to non-drug manufacturers, holding that the measures were disproportionate and lacked sufficient connection with the problem they sought to address. A Bench, including J.B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran, allowed the writ petitions filed by the methanol-based product manufacturers against the mandatory inclusion of additives in methanol because of amendments to the Maharashtra Poisons Rules, 1972.

What was the case about?

Methanol, or methyl alcohol, is a highly toxic substance. It is also widely used as an industrial raw material in products including formaldehyde, paraformaldehyde, paints, resins and other chemicals.

The Maharashtra government introduced stricter controls on methanol following a 1991 hooch tragedy in Mumbai, in which around 93 people died after consuming spurious liquor containing methanol. A committee headed by then Additional Director General of Police P.R. Parthasarthy was constituted to examine the causes of the tragedy and suggest measures.

In 2011, Maharashtra amended its Poisons Rules and introduced Rules 18A and 18B.

The petitioners are aggrieved by the operation of the impugned Rules 18A and 18B of the Maharashtra Poisons Rules, respectively, which restrict the purchase of methanol and mandate the addition of bitterant and colourant to methanol before sale to a non-drug manufacturer. Further, by operation of Rule 18B, any possession of methanol without a licence in Form A is liable to confiscation.

Companies told the court that colour contamination could make products



GETTY IMAGES

unacceptable to the paint and pharmaceutical industries, while the additives could affect catalysts, laboratory and pharmaceutical applications.

The State, however, argued that the rules were necessary because methanol could be mixed with liquor and cause fatal poisoning. Making methanol identifiable and bitter would help prevent its misuse, it added.

What did the court examine?

The central question was whether Rules 18A and 18B violated Articles 14 and 19(1)(g) of the Constitution.

The basic tenet of Article 14 is fairness in action and non-arbitrariness, while Article 19(1)(g) protects the right to carry on an occupation, trade or business. The court said that the State does have the power to regulate methanol. The Poisons Act, 1919 permits State governments to make rules regulating the possession and sale of poisons. But the question before the court was whether Rules 18A and 18B, respectively, of the Maharashtra Poisons Rules could be said to be arbitrary, disproportionate, and unreasonable.

What was the ruling?

The Supreme Court held that the impugned provisions of the Maharashtra Poisons Rules, 1972, were unconstitutional.

The court found that Rule 18A(1), which

required verification of a purchaser's Form A licence before methanol could be sold, imposed a disproportionate restriction on legitimate industrial users. The court held that merely verifying a Form A licence did not establish how the purchaser would use methanol.

The court also struck down Rule 18A(2), which required methanol sold to non-drug manufacturers to be mixed with a colourant and bitterant. It held that the requirement did not have a reasonable and proximate nexus with preventing the misuse of methanol in illicit liquor. The State failed to demonstrate that the additives would prevent diversion or manufacture of spurious liquor.

"What is discernable from the above is that in practicality, the impugned rules prescribe a regulatory framework that does not prevent the misuse of methanol in liquor which takes place in the unregulated field. The sub-rule even in the best case of full compliance cannot prevent the misuse it aims to prevent... It addresses a mischief, it does not in fact remedy while imposing a continuous burden on the industries," it observed.

As for Rule 18B, which provided for confiscation of methanol possessed without a Form A licence, the court found that it could conflict with the lawful possession of methanol under a Form B permit and effectively render that permit redundant. The provision, therefore, also

failed the proportionality test.

Applying the proportionality framework laid down in *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017), the court held that although the prevention of loss of life from methanol-adulterated liquor constituted a legitimate aim, the impugned restrictions were neither suitable nor necessary to achieve that objective. The court consequently allowed the writ petitions, disposed of the connected civil appeal, and held that the impugned rules were violative of Articles 14 and 19(1)(g). The court noted that "a policy that is irrational, or lacks rational justification, or is violative of any constitutional, statutory or any other provision of law is liable to be struck down".

What were the guidelines?

The court passed the guidelines regarding important aspects and steps to prevent hooch tragedies and for effective implementation of the policies.

The court said States should work together through the prohibition, excise, police, transport, industries and health departments, along with NGOs, to prevent illegal liquor. This includes checking State borders, stopping illegal transport, identifying places where illicit liquor is made or stored, and monitoring industrial units that may illegally supply chemicals used to make spurious liquor.

As regards the existing rules in States/Union Territories, the court said methanol rules should be strengthened. Licences should be granted only after proper verification and should be regularly reviewed. Industrial users should return unused or excess methanol, maintain proper stock and consumption records, and face suspension or cancellation of licences for violations. Methanol should be transported in dedicated tankers under excise supervision and sealed in a way that prevents theft, diversion or tampering.

It also called for more de-addiction centres, support for affected families and local counselling centres.

The court added that while it could issue directions, effective implementation ultimately depends on the police and enforcement machinery.

THE GIST

▼ The Supreme Court struck down Maharashtra's rules requiring methanol sold to non-drug manufacturers to be denatured with colourant and bitterant, finding them disproportionate and unconstitutional under Articles 14 and 19(1)(g).

▼ It held that the rules did not have a reasonable and proximate nexus with preventing methanol misuse in illicit liquor, while imposing continuing burdens on legitimate industries.

▼ The court issued guidelines for States to strengthen methanol regulation, including stricter licensing, stock and transport controls, and inter-departmental enforcement.

3. Supreme Court Judgment on Maharashtra's Methanol Rules

Source: The Hindu

GS: GS-2 — Polity & Governance

Judgment: *M/s Balaji Formalin Pvt. Ltd. & Anr. v. Union of India & Anr.* — Supreme Court, 18 September 2026, **2026 INSC 1009**.

Context

- On 18 September 2026, the Supreme Court struck down **Rules 18A and 18B of the Maharashtra Poisons Rules, 1972**.
- The Court held that the restrictions on methanol were disproportionate and insufficiently connected to preventing methanol-related hooch tragedies.

1. Background: Why Were the Rules Introduced?

- **Methanol (methyl alcohol):** Highly toxic chemical used as an industrial raw material in formaldehyde, paints, resins and other products.
- **1991 Mumbai hooch tragedy:** Around 93 people died after consuming spurious liquor containing methanol.
- **Government response:** A committee headed by P.R. Parthasarthy, Additional Director General of Police, examined the causes and suggested safeguards.
- **2011 amendment:** Maharashtra amended the Maharashtra Poisons Rules, 1972, introducing Rules 18A and 18B.

2. What Did the Challenged Rules Require?

- **Rule 18A(1):** Seller had to verify the purchaser's Form A licence and ascertain the intended use of methanol.
- **Rule 18A(2):** Methanol sold to non-drug manufacturers had to be mixed with:
 - **Methylene carmine:** Colourant
 - **Denatonium saccharide:** Bitterant
- **Rule 18B:** Methanol possessed without a valid Form A licence could be confiscated.
- **Industry concern:** The additives could affect the quality and usability of methanol-based industrial products.

3. Why Did the Supreme Court Strike Them Down?

- **Legitimate objective:** Preventing deaths from methanol-adulterated liquor is a legitimate State objective.
- **Article 14:** Restrictions must be fair, non-arbitrary and reasonable.
- **Article 19(1)(g):** Right to practise a profession or carry on an occupation, trade or business, subject to reasonable restrictions.
- **Proportionality:** Applying the proportionality principle associated with *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017), the Court found the measures excessive in relation to their objective.
- **Insufficient nexus:** Denaturing methanol at the point of lawful industrial sale did not adequately address diversion, pilferage and illegal supply channels.
- **Rule 18A(1):** Merely verifying a Form A licence did not establish how the purchaser would actually use the methanol.
- **Rule 18B:** Confiscation under Form A requirements could conflict with lawful possession under other licensing arrangements.

4. What Did the Court Suggest Instead?

- **Stricter licensing:** Strengthen licensing and verification mechanisms.
- **Stock monitoring:** Maintain proper records and reconcile procurement, storage and consumption.

- **Transport controls:** Strengthen monitoring of methanol during transportation and prevent diversion or tampering.
- **Inter-departmental coordination:** Police, excise, transport, health authorities and industries should work together.
- **Enforcement:** Focus on the actual illegal supply chain rather than imposing disproportionate burdens on legitimate industrial users.
- **Public health:** Strengthen de-addiction centres and support systems for families affected by illicit liquor tragedies.

Unsafe space

Deployment of weapons calls for multilateral governance in space

Although the U.S. military doctrine was openly considering offensive and defensive space control by 2025, the admission on September 14 by U.S. Air Force Secretary Troy Meink, and confirmed by Space Force chief Gen. Douglas Schiess, that the country has deployed “on-orbit space control weapons” to “defend against hostile adversary action” is cause for concern. Satellite systems increasingly underpin communications, energy, and financial networks and many commercial systems serve civilian and military users. To that end, the U.S., Russia, China, and India, among others, have been developing counter-space capabilities while contributing to the technological and strategic environment rendering earth orbit the next major battlefield. The increasing military use of commercial satellites can endanger the protections they enjoy under international humanitarian law even as this law is underprepared for satellites being highly interconnected and often dual-use. That said, the details that justify the need for orbital defence systems also make poorly specified weapons a potential cause of instability. Mr. Meink described the weapon as defensive, but U.S. military doctrine defines “space control” as encom-

4. Unsafe Space: Deployment of Weapons Calls for Multilateral Governance in Space

Source: The Hindu

GS: GS-2 — International Relations | GS-3 — Science & Technology, Security

Context

- The U.S. has acknowledged the deployment of “**on-orbit space control weapons**” to counter hostile actions in space.
- The development highlights the growing **militarisation of outer space** and the limitations of existing international rules.

1. On-Orbit Space Control Weapons: What Are They?

- **Space control:** Capability to protect a country’s own space assets while **denying, disrupting or degrading** an adversary’s space capabilities.
- **On-orbit weapons:** Weapon systems deployed in orbit that can affect or operate against other space assets.
- Their possible roles include:
 - Protecting satellites from hostile action.
 - Disrupting or disabling adversary satellites.
 - Conducting close-proximity operations.
- The U.S. has acknowledged their deployment, but the **specific capabilities have not been publicly disclosed**.

2. Emerging Counter-Space Capabilities

- **U.S.:** Has acknowledged deployed on-orbit space-control weapons.
- **Russia:** Possesses anti-satellite, electronic-warfare and co-orbital capabilities.
- **China:** Has demonstrated **ASAT** capability and advanced proximity operations.
- **India:** Demonstrated an **ASAT capability through Mission Shakti (2019)**.
- **France, Japan and UK:** Developing various counter-space and space-security capabilities.
- These capabilities are **not necessarily equivalent** to the U.S. on-orbit weapons.

3. Outer Space Treaty, 1967: Existing Legal Framework

- **Adopted:** 27 January 1967 | **Entered into force:** 10 October 1967.
- **India:** Signed in 1967 and **ratified in 1982**.
- **Purpose:** Establish basic principles for the **peaceful exploration and use of outer space** and prevent certain forms of weaponisation.

- **Article I:** Outer space is free for exploration and use by all States and should benefit all countries.
- **Article II:** No national appropriation of outer space or celestial bodies.
- **Article III:** Space activities must comply with **international law and the UN Charter**.
- **Article IV:** Prohibits **nuclear weapons and other WMDs** in Earth orbit; celestial bodies must be used exclusively for peaceful purposes.
- **Article VI:** States remain responsible for their national space activities, including those undertaken by non-governmental entities.

4. **Way Forward: Strengthening Space Governance**

- **Close the legal gap:** Develop rules specifically addressing **conventional on-orbit weapons**, which are not comprehensively prohibited by the Treaty.
- **Prevent arms race:** Strengthen UN-led efforts on **Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)**.
- **Build transparency:** Promote information-sharing and confidence-building measures on military space activities.
- **Prevent escalation:** Establish communication and notification mechanisms for potentially threatening space manoeuvres.
- **Regulate emerging technologies:** Develop norms for **autonomous, AI-enabled and dual-use space systems**.
- **Protect sustainability:** Minimise satellite destruction and debris generation to preserve the long-term usability of outer space.

Cannot penalise refusal to sing National Song, says SC

Top court seeks response from the Union government on a plea by renowned Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna challenging the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026

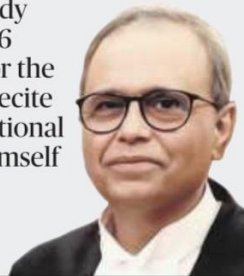
Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday observed that while a democratically elected government may give shape to the scope and length of the National Song, it cannot violate individual and collective religious freedoms or subject conscientious objectors, who refuse to sing one or all the stanzas of the *Vande Mataram*, to penal consequences.

“What is the National Song is not in dispute... It is for the democratically-elected state to decide and give aspiration as to what the National Song is, whether it should be two stanzas or four stanzas. But nobody can infract Article 25 and 26 [religious freedom] or subject a conscientious objector to pe-

What is the National Song is not in dispute... But nobody can infract Article 25 and 26 [religious freedom]... It is for the conscientious objector to recite one or all stanzas of the National Song without subjecting himself to criminal prosecution

JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI
Supreme Court judge



nal consequences... It is for the conscientious objector to recite one or all stanzas of the National Song without subjecting himself to criminal prosecution,” Justice Joymalya Bagchi, part of a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, observed. He said the 1986 Supreme Court precedent in *Bijoe Emmanuel versus State of Kerala*, upholding the right to religious free-

dom, constitutional tolerance, and silent objection, still holds true.

The court sought a response from the Union government on a petition filed by renowned Carnatic vocalist and author T.M. Krishna challenging the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026, read with the administrative directions issued by the Union Home Ministry in January

and a subsequent circular in July.

Mr. Krishna, represented by senior advocate S. Muralidhar and advocate Prasanna S., said the amended law and executive orders compel the playing and mass singing of the entire six stanzas of *Vande Mataram* ahead of the National Anthem at public functions. Non-compliance would risk three years’ imprisonment or fine or both.

Stanzas three to six of *Vande Mataram* were “expressly devotional, deity-invoking, and non-secular”, and the scheme violated fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution and offended the basic feature of secularism, the petitioner said.

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5. Cannot Penalise Refusal to Sing National Song, Says SC

Source: The Hindu

GS: GS-2 — Polity & Governance | Fundamental Rights | Secularism

Context

- The Supreme Court is examining whether a person can be **criminally punished for refusing to sing Vande Mataram**.

- The case raises a constitutional question: **Can respect for a national symbol be enforced at the cost of freedom of conscience and religious belief?**

1. What Is the Issue?

- **National Song:** The government has prescribed the manner in which **Vande Mataram** is to be sung at specified public occasions.
- **Compulsory participation:** The challenge questions whether a person can be forced to sing the National Song.
- **Freedom of conscience:** The key concern is whether a person with a genuine religious or conscientious objection can be punished for not singing.
- **Important distinction:** **Refusing to sing** is different from **preventing or disturbing others** who are singing.

2. What Did the Supreme Court Say?

- **State's authority:** The State can decide the form and manner of the National Song at public functions.
- **Constitutional limitation:** This power must operate within the limits of **Fundamental Rights**.
- **Conscientious objection:** The Court indicated that a person who **respectfully refuses to sing on genuine religious or conscientious grounds** should not face criminal consequences merely for the refusal.
- **Core principle:** Respect for a national symbol cannot automatically mean **compulsory expression by every individual**.

3. Why Did the Court Refer to Bijoe Emmanuel Case?

- **Facts:** In *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)*, three schoolchildren stood respectfully during the National Anthem but did not sing because of their religious beliefs.
- **Supreme Court's protection:** The Court held that their refusal to sing, while showing proper respect, could not by itself justify their expulsion.
- **Principle:** **Freedom of conscience protects genuine beliefs**, even when they result in peaceful non-participation.
- **Relevance today:** The same constitutional principle becomes relevant when considering refusal to sing the National Song.

4. Constitutional Dimensions

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Protects freedom of speech and expression; it can also raise the question of **compelled expression**.
- **Article 25:** Protects **freedom of conscience** and freedom to profess, practise and propagate religion.

- **Article 26:** Protects the religious affairs of denominations, subject to constitutional limitations.
- **Secularism:** Respect for national symbols must be balanced with India's **religious diversity and individual liberty**.

5. Way Forward

- **Respect national symbols:** Promote dignity and respect for the National Song and National Anthem.
- **Protect conscience:** Avoid criminalising **peaceful and genuine conscientious objection**.
- **Clear distinction:** Penal provisions should focus on **deliberate insult, obstruction or disruption**, rather than mere non-participation.
- **Constitutional balance:** Ensure that rules concerning national symbols remain consistent with **Fundamental Rights**.

Drug trade will be uprooted from the country by the end of 2029, says Shah

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday set a target of December 31, 2029 to “uproot” drug trade from the country.

“For the past five years, we have been taking one step after another in an effort to achieve the difficult goal of a drug-free India...the time has now come to deliver a decisive



Amit Shah

blow against narcotics, which have become the most serious threat to the country and the world,

and to achieve victory through collective efforts. By 31 December 2029, we will collectively succeed in uprooting the drug trade from India,” Mr. Shah said.

Addressing the third National Conference of Heads of Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) of States and Union Territories in Delhi, Mr. Shah said enforcement agencies must focus on breaking entire trafficking chains through financial in-

vestigations, tracing digital links, and targeting the profits generated by drug cartels.

He said that cartels should be attacked at three levels: entry point, inter-State distribution system, and local sales networks within districts. The Minister said the country's anti-narcotics strategy should shift from merely seizing drugs to dismantling the networks behind the trade.



6. Drug Trade Will Be Uprooted from India by 2029, Says Shah

Source: The Hindu

GS: GS-2 — Governance & Internal Security | GS-3 — Internal Security

Context

- The Government has set a **2029 target for a Drug-Free India**, with the focus shifting from merely seizing drugs to **dismantling the entire drug ecosystem** — production, trafficking, financing, distribution and consumption.
- The **Vision Document on Narcotics Control (2026–2029)** adopts a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

1. Drug Menace in India: Current Picture

- **Enforcement scale:** In 2025, all Drug Law Enforcement Agencies seized **12.41 lakh kg** of drugs, registered **1.48 lakh cases** and arrested **1.84 lakh persons**.
- **Financial action:** Property worth **₹836 crore** was frozen/seized in 1,356 cases in 2025, reflecting greater emphasis on attacking the financial base of drug networks.
- **Illicit cultivation:** In 2025, agencies destroyed about **42,685 acres of poppy** and **38,219 acres of cannabis** cultivation.
- **Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB):** Separately, the NCB seized **1,33,965 kg** of narcotic drugs in 2025 and recorded a conviction rate of nearly **67%**.

2. Why the Drug Threat Is Becoming More Complex

- **Geographical vulnerability:** India lies close to the **Golden Crescent** and **Golden Triangle**, major regions associated with illicit narcotics production and trafficking.
- **Synthetic drugs:** Methamphetamine, MDMA and other synthetic substances are increasingly important because they can be manufactured closer to consumer markets and are difficult to detect.
- **Precursor diversion:** Legitimate chemicals used in pharmaceutical and industrial production can be diverted for manufacturing illicit drugs.
- **Darknet and cryptocurrency:** Traffickers increasingly use encrypted digital platforms, cryptocurrency and online networks to hide transactions and identities.
- **Organised crime and narcoterrorism:** Drug profits can finance organised criminal networks and, in some cases, activities connected with terrorism.
- **Cross-border networks:** Drug trafficking often involves multiple jurisdictions, making international intelligence-sharing, extradition and financial investigation essential.

3. Legal and Institutional Framework

- **Article 47:** Directs the State to endeavour towards prohibition of intoxicating drugs injurious to health, except for medicinal purposes.
- **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985:** Principal law dealing with illicit production, possession, trafficking and related offences.
 - **Section 8:** Prohibits unauthorised production, possession, sale, purchase, transport and consumption.
 - **Section 27A:** Deals with financing illicit traffic and harbouring offenders.
 - **Section 37:** Provides stringent conditions for bail in specified serious offences.
 - **Sections 42–43:** Provide powers relating to search, seizure and arrest.
 - **Section 50:** Provides safeguards relating to personal searches.
- **Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PITNDPS) Act, 1988:** Enables preventive detention of persons involved in illicit drug trafficking.
- **Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB):** Coordinates national-level drug-law enforcement and intelligence.
- **Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD):** A four-tier mechanism — **Apex, Executive, State and District** — for coordination among governments and agencies.
- **Anti-Narcotics Task Forces (ANTFs):** Notified in all **36 States/Union Territories**, although their capacity and structure vary.

4. 2026–29 Strategy: From Seizures to Dismantling the Network

- **Pillar 1 — Enforcement, Intelligence & Operations**
 - Intelligence-led action against the complete supply chain.
 - Target not only street-level traffickers but also **kingpins and organised networks**.

- Strengthen border, port, airport and village-level surveillance.
- **Pillar 2 — Precursor & Synthetic Drug Control**
 - Monitor chemicals that can be diverted for illegal drug production.
 - Strengthen forensic capacity and detection of synthetic drugs.
 - Improve regulation of legitimate pharmaceutical and chemical supply chains.
- **Pillar 3 — Demand Reduction & Harm Reduction**
 - Expand prevention, counselling, treatment and rehabilitation.
 - Strengthen the **Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan**.
 - Promote drug-free campuses, awareness programmes and early identification of substance abuse.
- **Pillar 4 — Capacity Building & Coordination**
 - Strengthen NCB, ANTFs, forensic laboratories and State enforcement agencies.
 - Improve information-sharing through NCORD.
 - Use advanced technology, including **Artificial Intelligence-enabled analytics** and dedicated **Darknet and Cryptocurrency Cells**.

5. What a Comprehensive Anti-Drug Strategy Requires

- **Follow the money:** Major NDPS cases should trigger financial investigation, asset tracing and seizure of proceeds of crime.
- **Break the entire chain:** Action should cover **source → precursor → manufacture → transport → finance → distribution → local network → kingpin**.
- **Strengthen border management:** Integrate Customs, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Border Security Force, Coast Guard and State Police intelligence.
- **Improve investigation and conviction:** Better forensic evidence, digital evidence collection and specialised prosecution can reduce delays and strengthen convictions.
- **International cooperation:** Use Interpol mechanisms, extradition and mutual legal assistance to pursue traffickers operating from abroad.
- **Balance enforcement with public health:** Traffickers and organised networks require strong criminal enforcement, while drug-dependent persons also require treatment, rehabilitation and social reintegration.