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# Should India review its inflation target in a world of rising prices?

*Global price instability reopens a debate over the ideal target for monetary policymakers to pursue*



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The six members of the monetary policy committee (MPC) will meet in early October to decide their next move. There are three main reasons why a growing number of economists, traders and financial market participants believe that the committee will hike the main policy interest rate in India much before they had expected, perhaps in its next meeting itself.

First, the minutes of the previous MPC meeting show that many of its members were signalling that interest rates would have to be increased as soon as there was clear evidence that price pressures were spreading across the Indian economy, beyond a few sectors.

Second, the inflation data for August that was released earlier this month not only showed a sharp spike in the headline number, but also gave enough indication that price pressures have spread beyond food and transport, or that the effect of supply shocks were not being contained within these two sectors of the economy.

Third, international interest rates have been climbing, not only in the bond market, but also through rate hikes by central banks such as the US Federal Reserve. Just 1.25 percentage points now separate the Indian repo rate and the upper end of the US federal funds target rate band.

The ability of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to cool down domestic

demand by increasing its key policy rate could be constrained by the fact that the local money market is awash with surplus liquidity, primarily because of the torrent of money that has come in thanks to the dollar-rupee swap offered by India's central bank on foreign currency non-resident (bank) deposits. The transmission of monetary policy signals to the actual borrowing costs of governments, businesses and households works best when domestic liquidity is aligned with the policy stance; more specifically, a rate hike will ripple through the economy more efficiently when liquidity is tighter.

RBI will have to suck the excess liquidity out of the money market through some form of bond sales if its expected interest rate hikes are to be effective. Note that while the nominal target of Indian monetary policy is consumer price inflation, the operating target is the weighted call money market rate, a bellwether for the state of the money market.

The Indian central bank needs to grapple with these issues at a time when inflation has moved up in many major economies. In a section of its January 2014 report to explain how it arrived at a numerical inflation target for India, the Urjit Patel committee explained that one of the factors that matters for any country is the inflation rate in major trading partners, "consistent with its broader integration in the global economy." Ergo, how inflation is behaving elsewhere matters when deciding the inflation target.

So how has inflation been behaving elsewhere? Over the past two years, average monthly inflation in major economies such as the US, Japan, Britain and Germany has inched up. Take the US. Its average inflation since June 2023—even after the post-pandemic price shock died down—has been 3%. That is a full percentage point above where its central bank would like it to be. It has been much the same in Europe as well. China is a big exception.

This has implications for how we think about the Indian inflation target. One way to interpret the 4% target given to RBI based on recommendations of the Urjit Patel committee is as follows. The inflation rate in advanced economies is pegged at 2%. A further two percentage points is added to that based on what economists call the Balassa-Samuelson effect, which explains why inflation in emerging economies is higher than in the advanced economies despite an equally disciplined monetary policy. The inflation gap is explained by faster productivity growth in the tradables sector of the economy.

So, the 4% inflation target in India could be seen as a combination of the 2% inflation in advanced economies plus a further two percentage points because of the Balassa-Samuelson effect. However, inflation in advanced economies has moved up by a full percentage point over the past few years. Does that mean that India should also move its inflation target higher?

There is no need for haste, since an inflation anchor should not be changed often. Also, there are other studies about the inflation rate that maximizes economic growth in India, leading to an economy that is neither too hot nor too cold. These also support the current Indian inflation target.

Yet, in case we are moving to a new world of higher inflation—because of lax fiscal policies, geopolitical shocks and the rise of protectionism—this is a question worth pondering. Would a one percentage point increase in the global inflation trend point to a similar one percentage point increase in the Indian inflation target, if not right away, then in the future?

The point of raising this question is to provoke discussion rather than argue for any hasty change in India's official inflation target. The implication of such a move could be a change in the macro policy mix towards a looser monetary policy and a tighter fiscal one. Think about it.

3. भारत में निरंतर उच्च खाद्य मुद्रास्फीति के कारण क्या हैं? इस प्रकार की मुद्रास्फीति को नियंत्रित करने में आर० बी० आइ० की मौद्रिक नीति की प्रभावशीलता पर टिप्पणी कीजिए। (उत्तर 150 शब्दों में दीजिए)

What are the causes of persistent high food inflation in India? Comment on the effectiveness of the monetary policy of the RBI to control this type of inflation.

(Answer in 150 words) 10

## 1. Should India Review Its Inflation Target in a World of Rising Prices?

Source: Mint

GS: GS-3 — Indian Economy | Inflation | Monetary Policy

### Context

- Rising inflationary pressures across major economies have revived the debate over whether India's **4% inflation target** remains appropriate in a changing global environment.

### 1. Why Is Global Inflation Rising?

1. **US and other advanced economies:** Inflation has remained above the levels traditionally targeted by major central banks, indicating a more uncertain global price environment.
2. **Geopolitical conflicts:** Wars and geopolitical tensions can disrupt energy, food and commodity supplies, pushing global prices upward.
3. **Protectionism:** Tariffs and trade restrictions increase the cost of imports and can pass higher costs to consumers.
4. **Supply-chain disruptions:** Disruptions in production, transport and international trade can create shortages and raise prices.
5. **Expansionary fiscal policies:** Higher government spending can strengthen aggregate demand and add to inflationary pressure.
6. **Spillover to India:** Global commodity prices, capital flows, exchange-rate movements and imported inputs can transmit international inflationary pressures to India.

### 2. India's Inflation-Targeting Framework

1. **Consumer Price Index (CPI):** India uses CPI-based retail inflation as the principal measure for its inflation-targeting framework.
2. **Urjit Patel Committee, 2014:** It recommended a numerical CPI inflation target and identified price stability as the key monetary-policy objective.
3. **Flexible Inflation Targeting:** The **RBI Act, 1934** was amended in 2016 to give statutory backing to India's flexible inflation-targeting framework.

4. **4% target:** The central government, in consultation with RBI, sets the inflation target once every five years.
5. **Current target period:** The **4% target is currently applicable from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2031**, with a **2% lower and 6% upper tolerance limit**.
6. **Why 4%?** The framework considered the relatively higher inflation normally associated with an emerging economy, including factors explained by the **Balassa-Samuelson effect**.
7. **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC):** The MPC uses the policy interest rate to steer inflation towards the target while keeping growth considerations in view.

### 3. Why Should India Consider Revising the Target?

#### Arguments in favour

1. **Changing global inflation regime:** If higher global inflation becomes structural, the assumptions behind the existing target may need reassessment.
2. **Persistent external shocks:** Geopolitical conflicts, protectionism and supply disruptions may make inflation more difficult to contain.
3. **Changing Indian economy:** India's deeper integration with global markets increases its exposure to international price movements.
4. **Scope for greater flexibility:** A somewhat higher target could potentially give monetary policy more room to balance inflation control with growth.

#### Arguments against revision

1. **Inflation anchor:** The 4% target provides a clear benchmark for households, firms and investors.
2. **Policy credibility:** Changing the target without strong evidence could weaken confidence in India's commitment to price stability.
3. **Temporary shocks:** Food, energy or geopolitical shocks may be temporary and should not automatically justify changing a long-term target.
4. **Growth–inflation balance:** A higher target could provide flexibility for growth but would also mean greater tolerance for erosion of purchasing power.
5. **Need for evidence:** Revision should follow evidence of a **structural change in India's inflation dynamics**, rather than short-term inflation movements.

### Way Forward

1. **Periodic review:** Continue reviewing the target every five years using evidence on inflation, productivity, growth and global conditions.
2. **Separate structural from temporary inflation:** Change the framework only when higher inflation appears persistent and structural.
3. **Strengthen supply-side management:** Improve food, energy, logistics and supply-chain resilience to reduce non-monetary inflationary pressures.

4. **Maintain credibility:** Any revision should be transparent, evidence-based and carefully communicated.
5. **Balance growth and stability:** Monetary policy should maintain price stability while allowing sustainable economic growth.

## ● 55 Indian cities in world's fastest-growing 100

Of 100 fastest-growing cities, 55 are in India. But, in overall rankings that take into account economics, human capital, quality of life, environment, and governance, the top-ranked Indian city was Delhi at 268, according to Oxford Economics' 2026 Global Cities Index.

● The likes of New York, London, and Paris were the top-three overall, with cities from Europe and North America accounting for 78 of the top 100. But the rest of the world is not standing still.

● "Chinese and Indian cities will be at the forefront, combining large population sizes with significant gains in productivity and income. Shanghai, Beijing, and Delhi are all currently ranked outside the top 100 in our index, but they will see some of the largest increases in GDP through to 2050," the economic advisory firm said last week.

### INDIA'S TOP CITIES (global rank)

| Rank | Cities    | Score |
|------|-----------|-------|
| 268  | Delhi     | 57.6  |
| 311  | Bengaluru | 53.2  |
| 330  | Mumbai    | 51.2  |
| 381  | Chennai   | 47.3  |
| 421  | Hyderabad | 45.1  |
| 427  | Pune      | 44.9  |
| 477  | Thrissur  | 42.2  |
| 489  | Kochi     | 41.6  |
| 496  | Kolkata   | 41.3  |
| 499  | Kozhikode | 41.1  |

### WORLD'S TOP-10 CITIES

| Rank | Cities        | Score |
|------|---------------|-------|
| 1    | New York      | 100.0 |
| 2    | London        | 98.8  |
| 3    | Paris         | 93.4  |
| 4    | Seattle       | 92.8  |
| 5    | San Francisco | 91.9  |
| 6    | Dublin        | 91.3  |
| 7    | Boston        | 90.7  |
| 8    | San Jose (US) | 89.6  |
| 9    | Tokyo         | 89.5  |
| 10   | Zurich        | 89.1  |

### DELHI RANKING



**13th**  
Human  
Capital



**116th**  
Economics



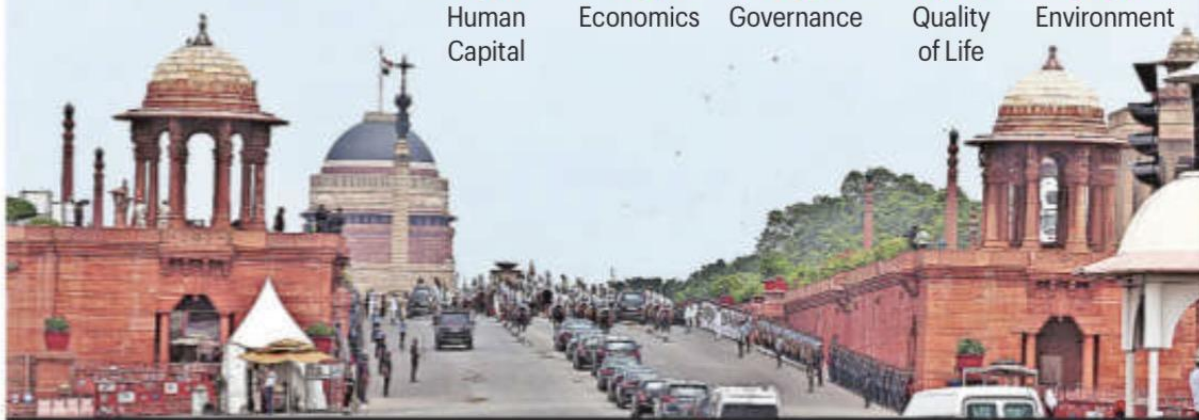
**415th**  
Governance



**781st**  
Quality  
of Life



**915th**  
Environment



## 2. 55 Indian Cities Among the World's 100 Fastest-Growing Urban Economies

Source: Oxford Economics — *Global Cities Index 2026*

GS: GS-1: Urbanisation | GS-3: Indian Economy

### Context

- **55 Indian cities** feature among the **world's 100 fastest-growing urban economies**, with **23 Indian cities in the top 50**.
- The growth is not limited to major metros; **smaller Indian cities are also emerging as new growth centres**.

### 1. What Does the Global Cities Index Measure?

1. **Global Cities Index (GCI):** Oxford Economics assesses **1,000 cities** globally on their overall urban performance.
2. **Five dimensions:** The index covers **Economics, Human Capital, Quality of Life, Environment and Governance**.
3. **Economic growth ranking:** The “100 fastest-growing” finding specifically highlights cities with strong **projected economic growth**, rather than saying they are the world's 100 best cities.
4. **Indian leaders:** **Delhi** ranks highest among Indian cities overall at **268th**, followed by **Bengaluru (311), Mumbai (330), Chennai (381), Hyderabad (421) and Pune (427)**.

### 2. What Makes India's Urban Growth Significant?

1. **Broad-based urbanisation:** India's growth is spreading beyond traditional metros to cities such as **Amravati, Surat and Tiruchirappalli**.
2. **Economic drivers:** Rising productivity, expanding labour pools, corporate networks and universities are supporting urban growth.
3. **Human-capital advantage:** Delhi ranks **13th globally in Human Capital**, highlighting the strength of India's talent base.
4. **Future economic potential:** Delhi's urban economy is projected to become the **world's 14th-largest by 2050**, showing the scale of India's long-term urban transformation.

### 3. What Is the Key Challenge for India?

1. **Growth vs quality of life:** Rapid economic expansion has not translated proportionately into better urban living conditions.
2. **Environmental stress:** Pollution, particularly poor air quality, remains a major constraint on Indian cities.

3. **Urban governance:** Rapid population and economic growth require stronger municipal institutions and service delivery.
4. **Inclusive urbanisation:** India needs to convert economic growth into **better housing, transport, basic services, jobs and liveability.**

## • LEGAL

# How SC has strengthened safeguards around re-arrest



AMAAAL SHEIKH

THE SUPREME Court has strengthened the Constitutional safeguards governing arrest, holding that an accused released for violation of the fundamental right to be informed of the grounds of arrest is not released on bail, but from an "illegal and unconstitutional detention".

A Bench of Justices Ujjal Bhuyan and Anil S Chandurkar held on Monday that the safeguards under Article 22(1) are "fundamental principles which are required to be followed" whenever a person's liberty is curtailed.

The court laid down a procedure requiring judicial approval before investigating agencies can arrest such a person again and held that High Courts may award compensation "as part of the public law remedy in a case of violation of Article 22(2) of the Constitution, with liberty to the accused to avail his remedy under the private civil law."

The bench was hearing an appeal filed by an accused in a POCSO case in Punjab in May. The ruling builds on a line of judgments that have progressively strengthened the rights of arrested persons, particularly the requirement that they be informed, in writing, of the grounds of their arrest.

## The legal framework

The case turns on the interplay between the right to life under Article 21 and the protection against arrest and detention under Article 22. Article 22(1) requires police to inform an arrested person of the grounds of arrest, and Article 22(2) requires production before a magistrate within 24 hours.

The question of whether an accused must be given a written copy of the grounds of arrest came up before the SC in *Pankaj Bansal v. Union of India* (2023). The case turned on Section 19 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, which says that a person must be informed "of the grounds of such arrest", but does not spell out how that information is to be conveyed.

The court noted that Article 22(1) of the Constitution guarantees an arrested person

## • Written grounds for arrest: SC's evolving jurisprudence

• **Article 22** is a fundamental right under the Constitution that provides for an accused to be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest, to get legal representation — and to be informed about the grounds of arrest.

• **The question** of whether an accused must be given a written copy of the grounds of arrest first arose in *Pankaj Bansal v Union of India* (2023), where the court held a written copy must be furnished "as a matter of course and without exception".

• **That position** was diluted in *Ram Kishor Arora v Directorate of Enforcement*, which held that "Pankaj Bansal" would apply only prospectively.

• **The court** in *Prabir Purkayastha v State (NCT of Delhi)* in 2024 reaffirmed that an arrested person must be provided the grounds of arrest in writing at the earliest.

• **The Supreme Court** finally settled the position in 2025, in *Mihir Rajesh Shah v State of Maharashtra*, holding that grounds of arrest must be communicated in writing "in the language he/she understands", and that non-compliance would render "the arrest and subsequent remand ... illegal".

• **It allowed** grounds to be conveyed orally in exceptional cases, provided a written copy followed within a reasonable time, at least two hours before the accused was produced for remand.

the right to know why they are being arrested. It said that this safeguard would mean little if the grounds were merely read out and not handed over in writing. The Court said a written copy of the grounds of arrest must be furnished to the accused "as a matter of course and without exception".

That position was watered down in *Ram Kishor Arora v. Directorate of Enforcement* (2023); the Court held that the *Pankaj Bansal* ruling would apply prospectively. Since the arrest predated that judgement, the court found that informing the accused of the grounds of arrest and allowing him to read them was sufficient compliance with PMLA Section 19, even though no copy was furnished to him.

However, the SC in 2025 settled the position in *Mihir Rajesh Shah v. State of Maharashtra*, where it held that the constitutional requirement of communicating the grounds of arrest is mandatory to arrests under all statutes. The SC said that "the grounds of arrest must be communicated in writing to the arrestee in the language he/she understands," and that non-compliance would render "the arrest and subsequent remand ... illegal." It allowed grounds to be conveyed orally in exceptional cases, provided a written copy followed within a reasonable time, at least two hours before the accused is produced for remand.

Senior Advocate Nitya Ramakrishnan told *The Indian Express* that the require-

## Strict guidelines

The court laid down strict guidelines for re-arresting a person if they were earlier released for not being provided grounds of arrest.

In such cases, the bench said, the authorities should provide the accused with written grounds of arrest, seek magistrate's nod, and transfer the probe to a different officer.

ment of furnishing written grounds of arrest is especially important in serious offences, where securing bail is often difficult. Referring to earlier judgments such as *Pankaj Bansal* and *Prabir Purkayastha*, she said the courts had recognised that the safeguard assumes significance in cases where an accused's ability to challenge arrest or oppose remand may otherwise be constrained. "The significance of its application to serious offences was not only recognised, but reiterated and reemphasised with greater rigour," she said.

"The grounds of arrest under Article 22 were not considered the ground for release," Senior Advocate Sidharth Luthra told *The Indian Express*. "It was not given that high and an appropriate stature. Later on, through SC decisions, it was sought to be given some content. Then there has been dilution, then an attempted reconsideration of its standards."

## What the court held

Monday's ruling builds on *Mihir Rajesh Shah*. It held that any violation of Article 22(1) or 22(2) invalidates the arrest itself. It said: "Any breach or non-compliance would entail immediate release of the arrested person because such arrest is unconstitutional. We cannot tinker with the most important safeguards provided under Article 22."

The State had argued that the seriousness of the offence meant Article 22(2)

Under Article 22, a person must be informed about grounds of arrest. The SC ruling means that arrests flouting this right are invalid in law

should not give the accused "blanket immunity" from re-arrest. The court rejected this, holding that where an arrest is unconstitutional, police cannot simply re-arrest the accused on their own.

It laid down a procedure tightening the process — agencies that believe custody is necessary must first furnish the grounds of arrest, then move the jurisdictional magistrate with an application explaining the need for custody and the reasons for the earlier non-compliance, endorsed by the officer's immediate superior.

"The significance of the judgment is mainly in the context of re-arrest," Ramakrishnan said. Unlike a release on bail, she said, the Court has treated such cases as involving an arrest that is invalid in law itself.

"The arrest ceases to be. So, you are not being released on condition. Because it is in law that arrest is bad, so it is as though you were never arrested," she said.

She said the decision marks a supervision of the judiciary over the State's power to deprive a person of liberty, though not over the investigation itself. "Because arrest is done during the course of investigation of cognizable offences...but it's not in relation to the integrity of the investigation. It's really more judicial supervision over the state's police power to affect personal liberty." The judgement also requires a superior officer to endorse a re-arrest application to transfer the investigation to another officer and order a departmental enquiry.

Luthra said the judgment reinforces the constitutional nature of arrest safeguards. "The Constitution is the fundamental core of our law. Breach of constitutional provisions and rights should have consequences. Because if there is a right, there has to be a remedy and a result," he said.

According to him, the ruling makes clear that Article 22 protections cannot be applied selectively or diluted depending on the nature of the offence. "This judgment comes at a point where it says that these are sacrosanct principles which ought not to be diluted, and you cannot make it offence specific unless Parliament chooses to do so," he said.

He also said courts unfortunately do not award compensation enough in cases of illegal arrest or detention.

Ramakrishnan said: "Conceptually, it is meant to give greater accountability to the police powers of the State."

## 3. How SC Strengthened Safeguards Around Re-Arrest

Source: The Indian Express

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

## Context

- In **Jaskaran Jeet Singh Deol v. State of Punjab**, the Supreme Court examined whether a person whose arrest was declared unconstitutional for violating **Article 22** could be re-arrested by the police in the same case.
- The Court's central concern was to prevent **police from repeating an arrest without first correcting the constitutional violation and obtaining judicial approval**.

## 1. Constitutional Safeguards During Arrest

1. **Article 22(1)**: An arrested person must be informed of the **grounds of arrest**, enabling them to understand and challenge the deprivation of liberty.
2. **Written grounds**: The Supreme Court has held that merely reading out the grounds is insufficient; they must ordinarily be **provided in writing**.
3. **Article 22(2)**: An arrested person must be produced before the nearest **Magistrate within 24 hours**, excluding necessary travel time.
4. **Constitutional nature**: These are not merely technical procedures; they are **fundamental safeguards protecting personal liberty under Article 21 read with Article 22**.
5. **Effect of violation**: If these safeguards are breached, the resulting detention is **illegal and unconstitutional**, and the person is entitled to release from that detention.

## 2. What Did the Supreme Court Decide on Re-Arrest?

1. **No automatic re-arrest**: Police cannot simply take the person back into custody after the earlier arrest has been declared unconstitutional.
2. **Judicial approval**: If further custodial interrogation is genuinely required, the investigating agency must approach the **jurisdictional Magistrate** before re-arrest.
3. **Written grounds first**: The accused must be furnished the grounds of the proposed arrest in writing.
4. **Explain the earlier violation**: The police must explain why the grounds were not supplied during the original arrest and why custody is now necessary.
5. **Senior-officer endorsement**: The re-arrest application must be endorsed by the **immediate superior police officer**, preventing the same authority from unilaterally repeating the violation.
6. **Magistrate's satisfaction**: The Magistrate must separately examine whether there were genuine reasons for the initial failure and whether fresh custody is actually necessary.

## 3. Why Is This Judgment Significant?

1. **Checks arbitrary police power**: Police discretion to arrest is now subject to a stronger judicial checkpoint when the earlier arrest violated Article 22.
2. **Protects personal liberty**: The seriousness of an alleged offence cannot by itself justify ignoring constitutional safeguards.
3. **Strengthens accountability**: Where police officers violate the safeguards, the Court directed **departmental inquiry** and appropriate action.

4. **Transfer of investigation:** If re-arrest is sought, the further investigation should be handled by **another officer**, rather than leaving it with the officer responsible for the earlier violation.
5. **Builds on earlier jurisprudence:** The ruling strengthens the safeguards developed through **Pankaj Bansal (2023)**, **Prabir Purkayastha (2024)** and **Mihir Rajesh Shah (2025)**.

# Towards recognising women farmers

Maharashtra's passage of the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill, granting women independent recognition as farmers irrespective of land ownership, brings into focus the structural bias against the female agricultural workforce, highlights the need for a database of women farmers and using it to ensure access to welfare schemes

## ECONOMIC NOTES

Sanchit Gupta  
Tanu M. Goyal

**P**icture a farmer. The image that comes to mind is of a man. But when one looks at who is actually farming, she is increasingly likely to be a woman. This perception-reality mismatch is caused by age-old practices of collecting data, designing policies and defining who a farmer is. It makes millions of women who work on farms, make agricultural decisions and contribute to production nearly invisible. That may, however, finally be beginning to change.

In July 2026, Maharashtra passed the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill, granting women independent recognition as farmers, irrespective of land ownership, through a Woman Farmer Certificate. This is the first Indian State legislation to give enforceable legal form to the activity-based, land-delinked definition of 'farmer' that the National Policy for Farmers set out in 2007 but never operationalised. The Bill arrives nearly two decades after that policy, and 15 years after a comparable law was first proposed at the national level (a lapsed bill introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 2011). It is, in effect, the culmination of three decades of women farmers' movements backed by civil society organisations.

State-level efforts have also sought to recognise women farmers before this. Kerala's Kudumbashree collectives have enabled women to participate in group farming, while Odisha's KALIA scheme has reached landless and sharecropper women. But a women farmers' registry delinked from land records had been missing. Maharashtra's legislation, therefore, represents a potentially important shift, from recognising the owner of agricultural land to recognising the person who actually farms. This matters because women's participation in agriculture has risen sharply.

### The recognition gap

In 2025, agriculture employed roughly 110 million women and 127 million men (rural, as per the PLFS, Census adjusted), bringing the sector close to gender parity. Women's agricultural workforce has more than doubled since 2017-18, and nearly three-quarters of all rural women workers are now in agriculture, compared with less than half of men. Regrettably most women work without pay. In 2025, more than 41% of female agricultural workers were unpaid, against 20% of men (Chart 1). By contrast, nearly 63% of men were own-account workers compared with 39% of women. While women's position has improved over time, the gap remains stark. This is where the question of recognition becomes critical, as women are increasingly farming but are not necessarily recognised as farmers.

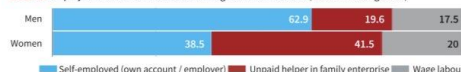
### The worker-owner dichotomy

In India, women largely work on the family lands, even though they may not own it or have their name on the land records, as patriarchal norms have meant that the land records are primarily in men's names. Subsequently, only 14% of operational agricultural land holdings (as measured primarily through land records) are with women (according to the Agricultural

## Unseen workforce

All States have women engaged in farming, but many remain unrecognised as farmers, leaving them out of databases and limiting their access to welfare schemes

Chart 1: Employment status of rural workers in agriculture and allied (% within each gender)



1 Nearly three-quarters of all rural women workers are employed in agriculture, compared with less than half of men



2 Women largely work on family land, though they may not own it or have their names on the land records

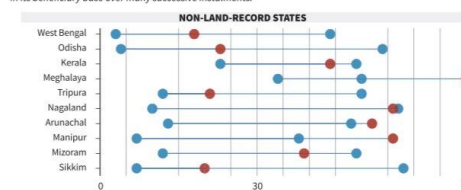
Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey 2025; rural workers aged 15+ in agriculture and allied sectors

Chart 2: Three measures for estimating the recognition gap

● Women as % of total agriculture and allied workers (2025, age 15+, usual status, rural-urban) ● Women operational holdings as % of total operational holdings (2015-16) ● Women beneficiaries as % of total PM-KISAN beneficiaries (2024, eligible)



■ PM-KISAN and operational holdings data sit 9 years apart. Where PM-KISAN's share exceeds operational holdings share, it also reflects that the scheme counts individuals per landholding family (including successor widows), while the Census counts each holding once through land records - not necessarily translating into more land in women's names. Punjab's very low PM-KISAN share follows a large reduction in its beneficiary base over many successive instalments.



■ These States lacked standard land records for the Census and used sample estimates. PM-KISAN either used updated records or alternative methodology for Northeastern States among these, partly explaining the larger share of PM-KISAN women beneficiaries in them. Meghalaya's high share reflects matrilineal inheritance, under which women are the customary landholders.

Notes: States are ordered by the number of rural working women in agriculture (2025). Each dot is women's share of a different total, in different years - of all agricultural workers, of all operational holdings, and of all scheme beneficiaries, approximating the recognition gap.

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey 2025; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; Agriculture Census 2015-16; Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; PM KISAN eligible beneficiary data, 2024

Census 2015-16). The person whose name is in the records gets included in the database and receives the benefits. As a result, not only does the recognition of women agricultural workers as farmers remain ambiguous, but they are also unable to access key Central and State agricultural schemes and incentives linked to land titles (land records).

All States have a large population of women engaged in farming who are never counted as farmers. Since each State uses its land revenue records as the source of truth for administrative purposes, the structural bias against women is carried forward into scheme access and databases. This ultimately translates into women farmers being unable to access credit, subsidies, technology, extension services and

### The Maharashtra Act recognises women engaged in agriculture for at least one agricultural season a year, irrespective of the nature of the land

other related opportunities. For instance, only 23% of women have been beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme, which provides direct financial assistance of ₹6,000 per year to eligible landholding farmer families to support their agricultural expenses and household needs. For some States, the gap widens (See Chart 2). Even in States where the share of women in the agriculture workforce is more than 50%, the share of women beneficiaries in most States is less than

one-third. The exceptions are revealing. Meghalaya, where women account for 70% of beneficiaries, followed by Kerala with 44% stand apart. These States have institutional or social arrangements that provide women with greater recognition or access to land and agricultural resources. In some northeastern States, customary tenure and matrilineal systems matter; in Kerala, collective farming through groups such as Kudumbashree provides an alternative route to participation and recognition.

At the other extreme are States with some of the widest gaps. In Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, women make up nearly two-thirds of the workforce but represent a small fraction of beneficiaries. The binding constraint, therefore, is not land itself but the identification system built on it. Where the land record is the gatekeeper, women are more likely to be filtered out: where an alternative mechanism exists, women's access rises substantially.

### Year of the Woman Farmer

While the Maharashtra legislation came after decades of advocacy, it is well timed. With the United Nations naming 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer, Maharashtra has taken a potentially transformative first step and paved the way for other States. The Maharashtra Act broadens the definitions of 'agriculture' and 'farmer' to recognise women residents engaged in agriculture for at least one agricultural season a year, irrespective of the nature of the land, through a 'Woman Farmer Certificate'.

Importantly, it explicitly recognises categories like landless cultivator, landless livestock rearer, agricultural labourer, plantation labourer, and pastoralist. In principle, this creates a route through which women who do not own land can obtain an independent agricultural identity and gain access to state welfare schemes and credit. But recognition on paper is only the beginning. Implementation will require either self-registration or identification of women farmers by the Gram Sabha, including women who have no land or no land titles in their name. In both cases, this will require a robust information campaign.

This also provides for a new database of women farmers. Connecting this database with existing agricultural databases and avoiding duplication or exclusion will need to be worked out, presenting an opportunity for States to work together. A standardised system across States, for establishing common definitions for identifying women farmers, issuing certificates, and maintaining databases, would make it easier to link the identities of women farmers across schemes and administrative platforms, while avoiding multiple registrations.

But recognition must then translate into access. Linking these certificates to the Agri Stack (a digital platform developed by the Union Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare) and issuing FarmerIDs to the women is essential to integrating them into the broader digital agricultural ecosystem. However, for recognition to translate into empowerment, continuous efforts at the local level will be needed to make women farmers aware of the schemes and effectively ensure their access. (The authors work at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). Views expressed are personal.)

## THE GIST

▼ In July 2026, Maharashtra passed the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill. This is the first Indian State legislation to give enforceable legal form to the activity-based, land-delinked definition of 'farmer'

▼ It explicitly recognises categories such as landless cultivators, landless livestock rearers, agricultural labourers, plantation labourers and pastoralists. In principle, this creates a route through which women who do not own land can obtain an independent agricultural identity and gain access to welfare schemes

▼ But recognition must then translate into access. Linking these certificates to Agri Stack and issuing Farmer IDs to women is essential to integrating them into the broader digital agricultural ecosystem

**Q14.** ऐसे विभिन्न आर्थिक और सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक बलों पर चर्चा कीजिए, जो भारत में कृषि के बढ़ते हुए महिलाकरण को प्रेरित कर रहे हैं।

Discuss the various economic and socio-cultural forces that are driving increasing feminization of agriculture in India.

10

## 4. Towards Recognising Women Farmers

**Source:** The Hindu

**GS:** GS-1 — Women & Society | GS-3 — Agriculture, Inclusive Growth & Land Reforms

### Context

- Women's contribution to Indian agriculture has increased sharply, but **formal recognition of a farmer is still largely linked to land ownership**.
- Maharashtra has created a new model by legally recognising women as farmers **irrespective of whose name the land is registered in**.

### 1. The Recognition Gap

1. **Near gender parity in agricultural employment:** In 2025, agriculture employed about **110 million women and 127 million men**; women's agricultural workforce has more than doubled since 2017–18.
2. **Agriculture as a major source of work:** Nearly **three-fourths of rural women workers** were engaged in agriculture, compared with less than half of rural men.
3. **High unpaid contribution:** Around **41.5% of female agricultural workers** were unpaid workers, compared with about **19.6% of men**.
4. **Low land ownership:** Women held only about **14% of operational agricultural holdings** according to the Agricultural Census 2015–16.
5. **Worker-owner disconnect:** Many women cultivate family land but do not have their names in land records, making their agricultural contribution invisible to administrative systems.
6. **Consequent exclusion:** Land-based identification can restrict women's access to **institutional credit, crop insurance, subsidies, agricultural extension, technology and other government support**.
7. **PM-KISAN example:** Women constitute roughly **one-fourth of PM-KISAN beneficiaries**, despite their large contribution to agriculture. The scheme provides ₹6,000 annually to eligible landholding farmer families.

### 2. Maharashtra's New Model

1. **Independent farmer identity:** The **Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Act, 2026** recognises a woman as a farmer based on her agricultural activity, not merely on land ownership.
2. **Woman Farmer Certificate:** Eligible women can obtain an official certificate establishing their identity as farmers.
3. **Inclusive definition:** The framework covers activities such as **crop cultivation, livestock rearing, fisheries, dairy, horticulture, floriculture, apiculture and aquaculture**.
4. **Landless women included:** Recognition extends to **landless cultivators, tenants, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers and other women engaged in farming and allied activities**.
5. **Local identification:** Recognition can involve **self-registration as well as Gram Sabha identification**, helping women who are absent from conventional land records.
6. **Important conceptual shift:** Maharashtra moves towards an **activity-based definition of a farmer**, separating farmer identity from ownership of agricultural land.

### 3. From Recognition to Actual Empowerment

1. **Database creation:** A dedicated database of women farmers can make their contribution visible and improve targeting of government programmes.
2. **Digital integration:** Linking Woman Farmer Certificates with **Farmer IDs and AgriStack** can integrate women into the wider digital agricultural ecosystem.
3. **Access to resources:** Recognition should translate into access to **credit, insurance, subsidies, seeds, fertilisers, technology, extension services and markets**.
4. **Avoiding multiple exclusions:** A common and interoperable system across States can prevent women from having to repeatedly prove their farmer identity for different schemes.
5. **Recognition is not ownership:** The certificate establishes a **farmer identity**; it does not by itself confer ownership or inheritance rights over agricultural land.
6. **Implementation determines success:** Awareness campaigns, simple registration, Gram Sabha participation, grievance redressal and continuous local outreach are essential.

### Way Forward

1. **Replicate the Maharashtra model:** States can develop activity-based farmer identification mechanisms suited to their local tenancy and agricultural systems.
2. **Strengthen women's land rights:** Farmer recognition should be accompanied by **joint land titles, inheritance rights and greater ownership of productive assets**.
3. **Ensure scheme convergence:** Women's farmer identity should be connected with credit, insurance, subsidies, extension, Farmer Producer Organisations and markets.
4. **Measure outcomes:** Success should be assessed not merely by the number of certificates issued, but by **actual improvement in women's access to agricultural resources and decision-making**.

# Differing views by members a part of decision-making: EC

The poll body was responding to a news report that the two Election Commissioners recorded objections at least 14 times over 10 months; all actions have been 'in accordance of laws', says EC

**Sreeparna Chakrabarty**  
NEW DELHI

**R**esponding to reports of dissent within the Election Commission, the poll body on Wednesday said all its actions have been in accordance with the relevant laws and instructions. Highlighting "certain specific" internal notes or observations spread over a 10-month period while overlooking the much larger body of approvals, decisions, and initiatives give only "one part of the picture".

It was responding to an *Indian Express* report about dissent within the three-member Commission. The two Election Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, said major decisions were being made without their knowledge in the name of the full Commission, which includes Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. The two ECs had recorded formal objections at least 14 times over the last 10 months, the report said.

The EC first issued a source-based clarification to the report. "All decisions of the Election Commission of India, including SIR [the ongoing special intensive revision of electoral rolls], have been unanimous and with the appro-

 The Commission operates as a multi-member constitutional body. Written notes and internal checks-and-balances are standard, ongoing practices designed to ensure legal compliance and operational rigour. All actions of EC have been in accordance of laws and instructions of the Commission

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

val of both the Election Commissioners and the Chief Election Commissioner," the clarification said.

## 'Standard practice'

A formal, written statement followed. "The Commission operates as a multi-member constitutional body. Written notes, observations, technical suggestions and internal checks-and-balances are standard, ongoing practices designed to ensure complete transparency, legal compliance and operational rigour. All actions of ECI have been in accordance of laws and instructions of the Commission," it said.

The statement said that any operational queries or inputs raised by Commission members during draft stages are part of standard administrative practice, aimed at safeguarding voter rights. The suggestions given by the Commission-

ers were for further improving the electoral processes, it added.

The poll body said that differing views and observations are a normal part of deliberation in any institution and were part of the decision-making process before a final decision is taken. "Not only the three Commissioners, but every officer of the Commission is fully authorised to give his suggestions to the Commission for improving the electoral system," the statement said.

Highlighting certain specific internal notes or observations spread over the period of 10 months while overlooking the much larger body of approvals, decisions, instructions, and initiatives gives only one part of the picture, it argued. In recent months, the Commission has taken numerous decisions, issued instructions, introduced around 40 new

initiatives, and undertaken many electoral reforms, including the conduct of electoral roll revisions across the country. All these decisions are an outcome of the unanimous decisions of the full Commission over the past year, it said.

"All official orders, decisions and administrative directions issued by the Commission carry full legal sanctions and follow established statutory procedures under The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023," the statement said.

According to the *Indian Express* report, both the Election Commissioners had red-flagged several key issues, including the centralisation of the electoral roll database. They warned that "centralised software now overrides ground-level Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) decisions, blocking eligible voters," the report said.

In its response, the EC said that its digital platforms, such as ECINet, operate under strict data security protocols to prevent unauthorised tampering. IT security checks and audit controls are standard cybersecurity measures implemented across national databases.

## 5. Differing Views by Members a Part of Decision-Making: EC

Source: The Hindu

GS: GS-2 — Polity & Governance | Constitutional Bodies | Electoral Reforms

### Context

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has responded to reports of differences among its members, stating that **internal observations and differing views are part of institutional deliberation** and that final decisions taken by the Commission have followed the law.
- The issue is important because the reported differences concern **electoral-roll revision, voter registration and deletion, and management of electoral databases**, which directly affect the integrity of elections.

### 1. How Does the Election Commission Work?

1. **Constitutional basis:** The ECI is established under **Article 324** of the Constitution and is responsible for the superintendence, direction and control of elections.
2. **Composition:** It consists of the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two Election Commissioners (ECs)**; all three are members of the Commission.
3. **First among equals:** The CEC is the head of the Commission, but does **not have unilateral authority to decide every matter**; the three members participate in institutional decision-making.
4. **Decision-making:** Under **Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023**, business should, as far as possible, be conducted **unanimously**.
5. **If members disagree:** When the CEC and ECs differ on a matter, the issue is decided by the **majority opinion**.
6. **Importance of this structure:** The multi-member system is intended to promote **collective deliberation, internal checks and institutional accountability**.

### 2. What Is the Present Issue?

1. **Reported internal differences:** According to *The Indian Express*, Election Commissioners **Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi recorded objections at least 14 times over 10 months** regarding certain decisions and instructions.
2. **Electoral-roll concerns:** The reported objections related to matters such as **addition and deletion of voters, changes to Form 6 and appeals concerning electoral-roll decisions**.

3. **Centralisation concern:** The two Commissioners reportedly raised concerns about increasing centralisation of the **electoral-roll database**, including the access of ground-level **Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)**.
4. **ECI's position:** The Commission has not disputed that differing observations existed, but says these were part of the deliberative process and that the **final decisions were unanimous and legally compliant**.
5. **Core constitutional question:** The issue is therefore not simply whether Commissioners disagree, but **how such disagreements are recorded, considered and resolved within an autonomous constitutional institution**.

### 3. Why Does Dissent Matter?

1. **Internal check:** A dissenting view can identify **legal, procedural or administrative problems before a decision becomes final**.
2. **Collective accountability:** Since the ECI is a multi-member body, meaningful participation of all members strengthens the principle of **collective institutional responsibility**.
3. **Electoral credibility:** Decisions concerning voter inclusion, deletion and electoral databases require particularly strong safeguards because they affect the **right to participate in elections**.
4. **Transparency:** Properly recorded differences create an institutional trail showing **what concerns were raised and how the Commission dealt with them**.
5. **Dissent is not dysfunction:** Difference of opinion during deliberation does not by itself mean institutional failure; under the law, disagreement can ultimately be resolved through the **prescribed majority mechanism**.

### 4. What Should Be Strengthened?

1. **Full-member deliberation:** Major electoral decisions should involve meaningful consideration by all members of the Commission.
2. **Clear documentation:** Objections, legal reasoning and the basis of the final decision should be properly recorded.
3. **Decentralised electoral administration:** Statutory authorities such as EROs should retain clearly defined responsibilities while digital systems provide technological support.
4. **Digital safeguards:** Centralised electoral databases should have strong **access controls, audit trails, cybersecurity and accountability mechanisms**.
5. **Institutional transparency:** Major changes in electoral procedures should clearly disclose their **legal authority, decision-making process and safeguards**.

# India, EU to sign trade deal on December 16

## Final touches

Negotiations on the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, dubbed the 'mother of all deals', were concluded in January 2026

The FTA will see the EU dropping tariffs on **99.5%** of Indian exports to the region, with most tariffs going down to **0%**



India will give tariff concessions on **97.5%** of the traded value between the two economies

After the signing, the deal will take 1-2 months to pass in the European Parliament, paving the way for an 'early 2027' roll-out



**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
**Suhasini Haidar**

NEW DELHI

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union (EU) will be signed on December 16, two diplomatic sources have separately confirmed to *The Hindu*.

This will be part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's back-to-back trips

proval" in Europe, it will not require separate ratification by each EU country once the European Council gives its go-ahead.

The next step, after the signing, will be passage in the European Parliament, which will take another one to two months, paving the way for a roll-out in "early 2027".

"The most recent development was the European

## 6. India, EU to Sign Trade Deal on December 16

Source: The Hindu

GS: GS-2 — International Relations | GS-3 — Indian Economy, International Trade

### Context

- India and the **European Union (EU)** concluded negotiations for the **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** on **27 January 2026**, after negotiations were relaunched in June 2022. It has been described as the “**mother of all deals**” because it is the largest trade agreement concluded by either side.
- The EU is one of India’s major trading partners. **India–EU goods trade reached €118 billion in 2025**, accounting for **11.1% of India’s total trade**; services trade was **€67 billion in 2024**.

### 1. What Does the India–EU FTA Provide?

- Massive market access:** The EU will provide preferential access covering **99.5% of the value of Indian exports**, with **90.7% of Indian exports becoming duty-free from entry into force**.
- Indian concessions:** India has offered tariff liberalisation covering around **93% of EU trade value**, with additional products receiving partial liberalisation.
- Labour-intensive sectors:** More than **\$33 billion of Indian exports** in sectors such as **textiles, apparel, leather, footwear, gems and jewellery** are expected to receive duty-free access from entry into force.
- Agriculture:** India gains preferential access across about **87% of agricultural tariff lines** covering products such as **tea, coffee, spices, grapes, gherkins and selected fruits and vegetables**, while sensitive products such as dairy and cereals remain protected.
- Services:** The agreement provides market access in **144 services subsectors**, including **Information Technology (IT), professional services, business services and education**, along with a framework for movement of professionals.
- CBAM challenge:** The **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)** remains an important consideration for Indian exports of carbon-intensive products. Lower tariffs under the FTA do not remove separate EU climate-related requirements, making **green production and carbon accounting** increasingly important for Indian exporters.

### 2. Why Is This Deal Important for India?

- Export expansion:** Preferential access to the large European market can improve the competitiveness of Indian goods and help expand exports.
- Employment generation:** Labour-intensive sectors such as **textiles, leather, footwear and gems and jewellery** can benefit from greater European market access.

3. **Global Value Chains:** The agreement can help Indian firms integrate more deeply into **European and global production networks**.
4. **MSME opportunities:** **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** can gain access to European markets, provided they can meet EU quality, certification and sustainability standards.
5. **Investment and technology:** Greater economic integration can encourage **European investment, technology partnerships and supply-chain linkages** in India.
6. **Services advantage:** Greater access for Indian professionals and service providers can strengthen India's **services-export potential**, particularly in IT and business services.
7. **Strategic partnership:** Stronger economic interdependence can complement India–EU cooperation in **technology, supply-chain resilience, climate action and economic security**.

### 3. **Way Forward**

1. **Convert tariff access into actual exports:** Improve productivity, quality, logistics and export competitiveness.
2. **Prepare for CBAM:** Develop stronger **carbon measurement, reporting and low-carbon manufacturing** capabilities.
3. **Support MSMEs:** Provide testing, certification, finance and technical assistance to help smaller firms meet EU standards.
4. **Protect sensitive sectors:** Use appropriate safeguards for vulnerable agricultural and industrial sectors while maximising export opportunities.
5. **Strengthen value-chain integration:** Improve infrastructure, logistics and investment conditions so Indian firms can participate more deeply in European supply chains.