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# CEC can be removed only like an SC judge, ECI says in affidavit

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**

NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, and the two Election Commissioners have filed a joint affidavit highlighting that any attempt to restrain the functioning of the CEC will be contrary to law.

The nearly 250-page document, filed in the top court late on Monday, said a CEC cannot be removed from office except in the manner and the grounds identical to ousting a Supreme Court judge.

The affidavit said a media report on the inner frictions and alleged unilateral or authoritarian functioning of the CEC was hardly evidence in court. Petitions basing itself on media reports should not be even maintainable in court.

Petitioners who have challenged the functioning of the CEC include the Leader of the Opposition

in the Lok Sabha and other INDIA bloc leaders.

The affidavit, which shows the CEC to be on the same page as both Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, said the commission had “neither released nor authorised the release of any internal note or file to any news agency”.

## **‘Rule of majority’**

They submitted that the multi-member commission, in case of any “difference of opinion” would follow the rule of majority to arrive at decisions in accordance with Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023. The affidavit indicated that there was no room for unilateral decision making in the ECI.

“Decisions are first sent to one Election Commissioner and then to the other Election Commissioner

and then finally to the CEC. Such approved decisions of the EC are duly noted in the files concerned of the EC and bear the signature of the Election Commissioners and the CEC. Thereafter, the decision is notified and implemented by the EC Secretariat,” the affidavit said.

However, the ECI concedes that “when it is not feasible for the CEC or any of the Election Commissioners to be available in person”, an approval of the members of the ECI is obtained through “electronic means” and recorded later in the official file.

The affidavit, however, indirectly confirmed that Mr. Sandhu and Mr. Joshi had written to the Cabinet Secretary about the conduct of Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Maneesh Garg, following a July 28 order affecting levels of IT oversight over electoral rolls. The order was passed without the knowledge of the two.

# 1. Chief Election Commissioner's Removal and Independence of the Election Commission

## GS Paper II – Indian Polity and Constitutional Bodies

**Context:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) has told the Supreme Court that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) can be removed only through the constitutionally prescribed process, amid allegations concerning the Commission's internal functioning.

### 1. Constitutional Safeguards

1. **Article 324:** Vests the ECI with superintendence, direction and control over electoral rolls and elections.
2. **Article 324(5):** The CEC can be removed in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court judge. Other Election Commissioners can be removed only on the CEC's recommendation.
3. **Article 124(4):** Removal of a Supreme Court judge requires a presidential order following a special-majority address by Parliament on grounds of proved misbehaviour or incapacity.

### 2. Decision-Making within the ECI

1. **Collective Functioning:** The ECI is a multi-member constitutional body; its decisions are not exclusively determined by the CEC.
2. **Rule of Majority:** Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, provides for majority-based decisions.
3. **Official Records:** Decisions and approvals must follow applicable procedures and be appropriately documented.

### 3. Landmark Supreme Court Judgment

#### Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023)

1. The Supreme Court prescribed a selection committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or

leader of the largest opposition party) and the Chief Justice of India for appointments to the ECI, until Parliament enacted a law.

2. Parliament subsequently enacted the 2023 Act, establishing a different selection committee framework.
3. The judgment highlighted the importance of institutional independence in ensuring free and fair elections.

#### 4. Key Concerns

1. **Institutional Independence:** Protecting the CEC from arbitrary removal and political pressure.
2. **Internal Accountability:** Preventing unilateral decision-making and ensuring collective deliberation.
3. **Transparency:** Maintaining proper records of decisions, approvals and dissent within the Commission.
4. **Electoral Credibility:** Preserving public confidence in the impartiality of election administration.
5. **Executive Influence:** Ensuring that appointments and institutional functioning do not compromise the ECI's autonomy.

#### 5. Way Forward

1. **Transparent Decision-Making:** Establish clear procedures for recording decisions, approvals and differences of opinion.
2. **Institutional Autonomy:** Safeguard the ECI from undue executive or political interference.
3. **Collective Functioning:** Ensure meaningful deliberation among the CEC and Election Commissioners.
4. **Accountability:** Strengthen appropriate parliamentary and judicial scrutiny while respecting constitutional boundaries.
5. **Public Confidence:** Promote impartial enforcement of electoral laws and transparent communication of important decisions.

## ONLY FOR FLEX-FUEL VEHICLES, NOT OTHERS

# Govt notifies E100 as auto fuel

**Dheeraj Mishra**

*New Delhi, October 26*

AMID THE ongoing debate over the use of E20 fuel, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) Monday notified a key change in the Central Motor Vehicle Rules, allowing flex-fuel vehicles to run on up to E100 or nearly pure ethanol. This does not mean that every petrol car can use E100 now. The new regulation expands the range of fuels that can be used in vehicles and paves the way for the manufacturing and supply of more flex-fuel vehicle components, ethanol production infrastructure, and the deployment of such vehicles on the road.

The Ministry said that ve-

hicles designed as flex fuel vehicles will not have material compatibility issues with E100. It also said that E85 or E100 shall be used in vehicles designed by the original equipment manufacturers as flex-fuel vehicles. This means that the vehicles that use normal fuel or E20 cannot use E100.

“Flex-fuel vehicles are specifically designed with fuel-system components and materials that are compatible with ethanol blends from E20 to E100. Vehicles designed as flex fuel vehicles will not have material compatibility issues. Motorists should check the fuel compatibility sticker on their vehicle and follow the manufacturer's guidance in the owner's manual while opting for the fuel choice

at the fuel station,” said the Ministry in its explanatory note on the amendment. It further said the advanced engine management systems will automatically adjust vehicle operation according to the fuel composition, ensure optimum performance under different driving conditions, and reduce dependence on imported crude oil.

“Ethanol has a lower fossil carbon footprint than conventional gasoline. The use of higher ethanol blends can help reduce tailpipe emissions of carbon monoxide and certain hydrocarbons, while contributing to lower lifecycle greenhouse-gas emissions, depending on the feedstock and production pathway,” said MoRTH. FULL REPORT ON

[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

## 2. E100 Ethanol Fuel: India's Biofuel Transition

### GS Paper III – Energy Security, Environment and Indian Economy

**Context:** The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has notified E100 as an automotive fuel for compatible flex-fuel vehicles, expanding India's alternative-fuel options.

#### 1. Understanding Ethanol Blending

1. **E20:** Petrol blended with 20% ethanol.
2. **E85:** Fuel containing 85% ethanol and 15% petrol.
3. **E100:** Nearly pure ethanol.

4. **Flex-Fuel Vehicles:** Specially designed vehicles capable of operating on different ethanol–petrol blends. Ordinary petrol vehicles cannot automatically use E100.

## 2. Significance: Recent Data

1. **Blending Progress:** India achieved its 20% ethanol-blending target in the 2025–26 supply year, ahead of the original 2030 deadline; blending increased from 1.53% in 2013–14.
2. **Energy Security:** The programme has substituted over **316 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil**, reducing dependence on imported petroleum.
3. **Foreign Exchange Savings:** The programme has generated savings exceeding **₹1.97 lakh crore**.
4. **Farmers' Income:** More than **₹1.66 lakh crore** has been transferred to farmers and distillers through the ethanol programme.
5. **Environmental Benefits:** Reported carbon dioxide emissions reductions exceeded **950 lakh metric tonnes**, although actual lifecycle benefits depend on feedstock and production methods.

## 3. Key Concerns

1. **Vehicle Compatibility:** High-ethanol blends require compatible engines and fuel systems.
2. **Food Security:** Diverting food crops towards ethanol may create competition between food and fuel.
3. **Water Stress:** Sugarcane-based ethanol can increase pressure on water resources.
4. **Environmental Costs:** Lifecycle emissions depend on feedstocks, production methods and land-use changes.
5. **Supply Stability:** Crop failures and feedstock-price fluctuations can affect production.

## 4. Way Forward

1. Promote ethanol from agricultural residues and sustainable non-food feedstocks.

2. Encourage water-efficient production and region-specific feedstock choices.
3. Expand certified flex-fuel vehicles and provide clear fuel-compatibility information.
4. Evaluate lifecycle emissions, fuel economy and environmental costs.
5. Balance ethanol expansion with food security, farmers' interests and other clean-mobility options.

# CCPA fines Britannia over '100%' whole wheat bread claim

**Press Trust of India**

NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed a penalty of ₹1 lakh on Britannia Industries Ltd. for a misleading advertisement that claimed "100% whole wheat bread" though the product's declared wheat content is just 62%.

In its order dated October 22, the CCPA, headed by Chief Commissioner directed the firm to discontinue the advertisement with immediate effect across print, electronic and social media.

Britannia has been

**In its order, the CCPA asked firm to discontinue the advertisement with immediate effect**

asked to submit a compliance report in 15 days.

The CCPA took suo motu cognisance of the matter after noticing the product packaging declared a wheat content of 62% despite the "100%" claim in its advertisements.

During the investigation, the firm accepted its "100% whole wheat bread" contained only 62% wheat flour (atta).

### **3. Britannia Case: Deceptive Marketing and Consumer Misrepresentation**

#### **GS Paper IV – Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude**

**Context:** The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) fined Britannia ₹1 lakh for advertising its bread as “100% whole wheat” despite its declared wheat-flour content being only 62%.

#### **Ethical Concept:**

1. **Deceptive Marketing:** Misleading consumers through inaccurate product claims.
2. **Integrity Deficit:** Failure to uphold honesty in commercial communication.
3. **Consumer Exploitation:** Undermining informed consumer choice.
4. **Corporate Irresponsibility:** Prioritising brand image and sales over ethical conduct.
5. **Trust Deficit:** Eroding public confidence in businesses.

**Ethics Application:** An example of how commercial communication can become ethically misleading when brand claims do not accurately reflect a product's composition.

# A final surge

## Lula is the resistance to U.S. imperial ambitions in South America

**A**t one point, it seemed almost impossible for Brazil's 80-year-old President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, to turn the tide after finishing second to Flávio Bolsonaro in the first round of elections on October 4. In Brazil's history, no candidate who has finished second in the first round has gone on to win the presidential run-off. Most of the candidates who dropped out after the first round were from the right. Flávio's Liberal Party cemented its position in both houses of Congress, while right-wing candidates won several provincial elections. But Lula, a former trade unionist and organiser, who lost a finger in an accident as a teenager, was not ready to give up. Lula and his Workers' Party identified campaign weaknesses, shifted their attention to economic issues, promised growth and welfare, and persuaded more voters to turn out for Sunday's run-off. Lula won 51.7% of the vote against Flávio's 48.2%, a greater lead than his victory against Jair Bolsonaro, Flávio's father, four years ago. Over the weeks, Lula turned the right-wing's gains in the first round against it, highlighting the threats that a Bolsonaro victory could pose to democracy and civil rights. Flávio's campaign pledge to free his father – he is serving a 27-year prison sentence for attempting to overturn Lula's

## 4. Lula da Silva's Fourth Presidential Victory in Brazil

### GS Paper II – International Relations

**Context:** Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, leader of Brazil's Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT), reportedly secured a fourth presidential election victory, with implications for Latin American geopolitics and India–Brazil relations.

### Geopolitical Significance

1. **U.S. Influence in Latin America:** Lula's political position differs from that of U.S. President Donald Trump on several regional and international issues.
2. **Strategic Autonomy:** Lula advocates an independent foreign policy, allowing Brazil to pursue its national interests without automatically aligning with Washington.
3. **Multipolar World Order:** Brazil's engagement with BRICS supports greater representation of emerging economies in global governance.
4. **Regional Politics:** The result reflects the continuing contest between left-wing and conservative political forces in Latin America.
5. **Domestic Constraints:** Brazil's Congress, economic conditions and competing political interests may influence the implementation of Lula's agenda.

### India–Brazil Relations

1. **Global South Cooperation:** Both countries cooperate through BRICS, the G20 and the IBSA Dialogue Forum to strengthen developing countries' representation in global institutions.
2. **Trade and Investment:** Bilateral trade reached approximately US\$15 billion in 2025. Both countries have opportunities to expand trade in pharmaceuticals, chemicals, agricultural products and engineering goods.
3. **Energy Cooperation:** Biofuels, renewable energy and sustainable agriculture offer opportunities for bilateral cooperation.

4. **Technology and Industry:** Critical minerals, digital technologies, defence and industrial cooperation can diversify supply chains and strengthen economic ties.
5. **Strategic Partnership:** Closer cooperation can advance shared interests in multilateral reform, climate action and a more representative international order.

• SCIENCE

# A new 'cocktail' could help treat cobra bites

**Arnav Chandrasekhar**  
*Bengaluru, October 26*

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SCIENTISTS FROM IISc Bengaluru's Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES) and the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) have created an antivenom that could potentially be used to treat snakebites from the diverse cobra species of India. The discoveries were published in the journal *Science Translational Medicine*.

## *Challenges in treatment*

Cobras generally kill their prey using "neurotoxins" in their venom that paralyse their prey and stop them from breathing. Cardiac issues and other side effects have been observed in some cases of attacks on humans.

Government data from 2024 had estimated the annual snakebite fatalities at 50,000. The spectacled cobra (*Naja naja*), one of India's "Big Four" venomous snake species, accounts for at least 12.5% of these snakebite deaths — this number could be higher, as the snake is not always identified by the victim.

India has several cobra species, and different species have different kinds of venom. Venom from the same species might vary in composition for cobras from different locations.

This poses a challenge when using antivenom. For example, while the Polyvalent antivenom is used in India

to counter the venom of the Big Four snakes



## 5. Antibody Cocktail for Cobra Bites: Advancing Snakebite Treatment

### GS Paper III – Science and Technology; Health

**Context:** Researchers from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, and the Technical University of Denmark have developed an experimental antibody cocktail to improve cobra-bite treatment. India's Big Four venomous snakes are the spectacled cobra, common krait, Russell's viper and saw-scaled viper.

#### 1. Why Is a New Antivenom Needed?

1. **Neurotoxic Venom:** Cobra venom contains neurotoxins that can cause paralysis and respiratory failure.
2. **High Mortality:** India faces a substantial snakebite burden, with the article citing approximately 50,000 deaths annually.
3. **Venom Diversity:** Differences in venom composition across species and geographical regions can limit the effectiveness of existing antivenoms.
4. **Treatment Gaps:** Conventional Indian polyvalent antivenom targets the Big Four but does not effectively neutralise king cobra venom.
5. **Delayed Treatment:** Limited access to appropriate antivenom and healthcare facilities increases the risk of fatal outcomes.

#### 2. How Does the New Antibody Cocktail Work?

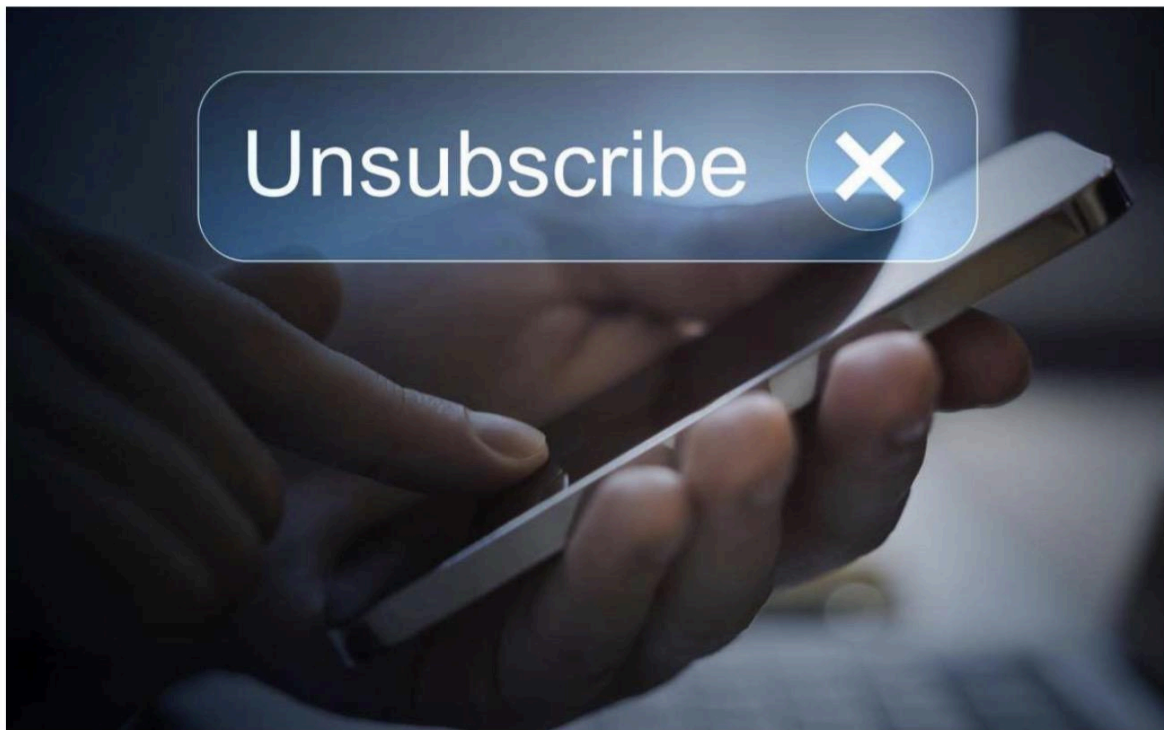
1. **Antibody Selection:** Researchers identify antibodies capable of neutralising specific venom toxins.
2. **Antibody Engineering:** Selected antibodies are engineered and combined to target multiple toxins.
3. **Preclinical Testing:** The cocktail was tested in mice using venom from spectacled cobras, monocled cobras and two king cobra species.
4. **Experimental Results:** The cocktail protected mice from death when administered 30 minutes after venom injection.

5. **Potential Advantage:** Carefully selected antibodies may improve toxin targeting and potentially reduce treatment costs.

### 3. Significance

1. **Improved Venom Neutralisation:** May address gaps in existing antivenom coverage.
2. **Public Health:** Could help reduce snakebite mortality in India and other affected countries.
3. **Precision Treatment:** Demonstrates the potential of engineered antibodies to target specific venom toxins.
4. **Scientific Innovation:** May enable the development of more effective and standardised antivenoms.
5. **Global Application:** The approach could be adapted to develop treatments for other venomous snake species.

**Limitation:** The cocktail has shown promising results in mice, but its safety and effectiveness in humans remain unestablished. Further research and clinical trials are necessary before clinical use.



**A costly hassle:** Consumers such as time-pressed workers, minors, vulnerable adults, senior citizens, and non-literate customers face extra hurdles when struggling to offload unwanted subscriptions. GETTY IMAGES

# What is the significance of New York City's 'Click to Cancel' rule?

The 'Click to Cancel' rule aims to enable residents to cancel any subscription just as quickly as they can sign up — ideally with a single click; it covers subscriptions for goods or services that meet the definitions of 'automatic renewal' or 'continuous service offer'

Sahana Venugopal

**I**n October 1, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani announced the enforcement of the city's 'Click to Cancel' rule that essentially lets residents cancel any subscription just as quickly as they can sign up — ideally with a single click.

"No one should need 45 minutes of hold music to stop paying for something they never wanted," said Mr. Mamdani. "If a company can take your money with one click, you should be able to get your money back with one click."

## What is the need for a 'Click to Cancel' rule?

It can feel effortless to sign up online for a gym membership, a grocery subscription, a mobile phone plan, or a magazine delivery. When one wants to cancel the same service, however, the process is often so convoluted and time-consuming that customers end up keeping a subscription that they would prefer to eliminate.

This unethical retention is commonly achieved through digital "dark patterns" that make it hard for customers to act in their own best interests. For example, subscription cancellation or account deletion buttons might be obscured by multiple menus and sub-menus designed to confuse users. Or, they may require the user to "click" through pages and pages of text, wasting their time and making them likely to give up.

Sometimes, customers may not even know that they are locked into a subscription, as a free trial is converted into a paid commitment without clearly seeking consent.

Alternatively, many merchants who allow easy online subscriptions, arbitrarily require buyers to send personalised emails or letters, spend time on the phone, or even visit the business in person just to end their subscription.

This lack of parity ends up keeping reluctant customers locked into bad services.

Consumers such as time-pressed workers, minors, vulnerable adults, senior citizens, and non-literate customers face extra hurdles when struggling to offload unwanted subscriptions. In extreme cases, customers may even have to cancel their credit cards and get new ones in order to end a subscription.

The problem is so pervasive that media outlets have reported that people are resorting to AI agents — such as Meta's Muse — in order to identify and get rid of unnecessary subscriptions on their behalf.

'Click to Cancel' rules would force sellers to make cancellation processes easier, quicker, transparent, fairer, and customer-friendly, so that buyers don't need to depend on external tools and services.

As per one estimate cited by the NYC Mayor's office, the 'Click to Cancel' rule could save New Yorkers up to \$162.5

million per year.

## Who is covered by the 'Click to Cancel' rule?

The rule gives the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) citywide authority for enforcement, adding on to the New York state's existing regulations that govern subscription terms. The 'Click to Cancel' rule covers subscriptions for any type of goods or services meeting the definitions of "automatic renewal" or "continuous service offer," with exceptions for government-linked businesses and several licensed financial institutions.

"A person making an automatic renewal or continuous service offer to a consumer must provide the consumer with the option to cancel at any time using a simple cancellation mechanism that is as easy to use as the mechanism that the consumer used to provide consent and that is through the same medium that the consumer used to provide consent," stated the 'Click to Cancel' rule.

For example, an internet-based sign-up process cannot require a call-based or in-person cancellation process. New York City residents can also file complaints in order to seek mediation, while companies could face civil penalties starting at \$525 for violations.

## Does India have a 'Click to Cancel' policy?

India has a bank-based regulation that is

meant to protect customers from deceptive subscription practices. Even so, the reality is that many consumers are often manipulated by the merchants that they rely on for their daily needs.

"Take the Reserve Bank of India's 'Digital Payments - E-mandate Framework' from this April. It directs an issuer (of a mandate/recurring transaction) to send a pre-transaction notification to the customer at least 24 hours prior to the actual charge/debit. The issuer must share the merchant's name, transaction amount, date/time of debit, reference number of the e-mandate, and the reason for the debit. A post-transaction notification to the customer is also required.

In other words, merchants cannot silently deduct funds from customers' accounts and hope that they don't notice. However, a lack of regulation targeting "dark patterns" creates avenues for Indian consumers to be exploited by merchants.

According to Datum Intelligence's Dark Patterns Consumer Perception Study dated June 2026, e-commerce platforms Nykaa, Myntra, Flipkart, and Amazon, as well as quick commerce platforms Big Basket, Zepto, Swiggy Instamart, and Blinkit did not offer pre-renewal reminders for free trial billing. The study further noted that cancellation required more than 4 steps on most of the listed platforms.

In essence, Indian shoppers are far from being able to click to cancel.

## 6. Click to Cancel Rule: Consumer Protection and Subscription Transparency

### GS Paper II – Governance and Consumer Protection

**Context:** New York City introduced a “Click to Cancel” rule requiring businesses to make subscription cancellation as easy as signing up, addressing unfair practices that trap consumers in unwanted recurring payments.

#### 1. Key Features

1. **Easy Cancellation:** Consumers should be able to cancel subscriptions through a simple, accessible process.
2. **Coverage:** Applies to subscriptions involving automatic renewal or continuous service offers.
3. **Dark Patterns:** Addresses manipulative interface designs that make cancellation difficult.
4. **Consumer Convenience:** Protects time-pressed workers, senior citizens, minors and consumers with limited digital literacy.
5. **Enforcement:** New York City’s Department of Consumer and Worker Protection oversees compliance.

#### 2. Significance for India

1. **RBI Framework:** The Reserve Bank of India’s e-mandate framework requires pre-transaction notifications for recurring payments, generally at least 24 hours before the actual charge or debit.
2. **Consumer Protection Act, 2019:** Provides a legal framework to address unfair trade practices and misleading consumer practices.
3. **Dark Patterns Guidelines, 2023:** India has identified deceptive interface practices that manipulate consumer choices.
4. **Digital Consumer Rights:** Easier cancellation can improve transparency, informed consent and control over recurring payments.

5. **Regulatory Gap:** Payment notifications do not, by themselves, guarantee a simple subscription cancellation process across all digital platforms.

### 3. Key Concerns

1. **Manipulative Designs:** Businesses may use repeated prompts, hidden cancellation options or confusing menus.
2. **Digital Literacy:** Vulnerable consumers may struggle to locate or use cancellation options.
3. **Unwanted Charges:** Difficult cancellation procedures can lead to continued payments for unused services.
4. **Platform Accountability:** Responsibility may be unclear when payment providers and subscription platforms are separate.
5. **Cross-Border Services:** Enforcing consumer protections against overseas digital platforms can be challenging.

### 4. Way Forward

1. **Simple Cancellation:** Make cancelling subscriptions as easy as signing up.
2. **Regulatory Enforcement:** Strengthen enforcement of consumer protection and dark-pattern rules.
3. **Transparent Consent:** Require clear disclosure of renewal terms, charges and cancellation conditions.
4. **Consumer Awareness:** Improve digital literacy and awareness of complaint mechanisms.
5. **Platform Accountability:** Establish clear responsibilities for subscription providers and payment intermediaries.

# Iran, Mecca pact nations hold 'de-escalation' talks

Saudi Defence Minister, Pakistani Army chief and Turkiye's intelligence head meet Iranian officials; President Pezeshkian says Tehran supports any deal that would deepen regional cooperation

**Agence France-Presse**  
TEHRAN

Senior officials from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan held talks with Iran on Monday in an attempt to stop war in West Asia from reigniting.

Officials from the three Mecca pact countries flew to Iran as part of efforts to "de-escalate between the parties to the current crisis", a Saudi Foreign Ministry statement said.

The delegations, which included Saudi Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman, Pakistani Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir and Turkey's intelligence head Ibrahim Kalin, met Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and other top security officials during the visit. The meeting ended without concrete announcements, with the various parties saying they "agreed to continue discussions", according to Iranian state media.

Mr. Pezeshkian said that Iran supports any agreement that would deepen regional cooperation, resolve differences and make greater use of the shared resources and capabilities of Islamic countries.

As the talks in Tehran



**Crucial meeting:** Saudi Arabia's Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman, Pakistan Field Marshal Asim Munir and Turkish intelligence chief Ibrahim Kalin in Tehran, Iran, on Monday. REUTERS

began, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said it was "essential to stop any escalation" in West Asia.

"The risk to have the combination of an overwhelming military attack on Iran, and an overwhelming military attack by Iran on the countries of the Gulf, needs to be avoided at all costs," he said.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei told reporters that the agenda for the meeting wasn't set, but the talks would "address the most pressing threats to regional security."

Mr. Baghaei added that the meeting, proposed

during a visit by Mr. Munir to Tehran last week, could be a first step towards establishing regional security mechanisms based on the interests of countries in the region.

In a televised address on Monday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned that renewed attacks on Iran would destabilise the region. "It is our hope that all parties will refrain from any actions that could drag our region into a new spiral of violence," Mr. Erdogan said.

## Rising tensions

Saudi Arabia intercepted another wave of missiles on Sunday as fighting with

Yemen's Houthis continued unabated.

The Saudi-led coalition battling the Iran-aligned group said on Monday that it has degraded their ability to strike targets inside the kingdom after destroying tunnels used to store ballistic missiles.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran have sharpened in recent days. President Donald Trump said on Friday the U.S. may carry out another military operation against Iran and Iran's leaders have said that a renewed U.S. military campaign would be met with a stronger response than before. *(With inputs from AP)*

## 7. Makkah Defence Agreement and Iran: Regional Security Dynamics

### GS Paper II – International Relations

**Context:** Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye held talks with Iranian officials in Tehran on 26 October 2026 to prevent renewed military escalation in West Asia.

#### 1. Makkah Joint Defence Agreement

1. **Signatories:** Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye signed the agreement in Makkah on 7 August 2026.
2. **Collective Defence:** An armed attack against one member is to be treated as an attack against all three.
3. **Objective:** Strengthen defence cooperation, military coordination and collective deterrence.
4. **Iran's Status:** Iran is not a member but participated separately in the de-escalation talks.

#### 2. Key Developments

1. **Diplomatic Initiative:** Senior officials from the three countries met Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Tehran.
2. **Regional Tensions:** The talks came amid rising Iran–US tensions, missile threats and continued Houthi-related hostilities affecting Saudi Arabia.
3. **Iran's Position:** Pezeshkian supported regional cooperation and the peaceful resolution of disputes.
4. **Outcome:** No concrete agreement was announced, but the parties agreed to continue discussions.

#### 3. Strategic Implications

1. **Iran's Strategic Vulnerability:** Closer defence coordination among Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye could heighten Iran's concerns about regional isolation.
2. **Collective Deterrence:** The agreement strengthens coordination among the signatories, although it does not explicitly target Iran.
3. **Risk of Regional Rivalry:** Iran's perception of encirclement could prompt countermeasures and intensify the regional security dilemma.
4. **Saudi Arabia's Strategic Leverage:** The agreement diversifies Saudi Arabia's defence partnerships and could strengthen its regional bargaining position.
5. **Diplomacy as a Counterbalance:** Engagement with Iran may prevent competing security alignments from escalating into direct confrontation.

#### 4. Impact on India

1. **Energy Security:** Escalation could disrupt oil and gas supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, raising import costs and domestic inflation.
2. **Diaspora Safety:** Conflict threatens Indian nationals in West Asia and could necessitate large-scale evacuations.
3. **Trade and Maritime Security:** Instability around the Red Sea and Gulf shipping routes could increase freight and insurance costs and disrupt trade.
4. **Connectivity:** Regional instability could affect initiatives such as the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).
5. **Strategic Autonomy:** India must maintain balanced relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye while supporting dialogue and avoiding entanglement in competing security blocs.

**Way Forward:** India should pursue balanced diplomacy, protect its economic and diaspora interests, and support inclusive regional dialogue to prevent further escalation.