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India-Nepal train to connect Janakpur Dham and Ayodhya

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Indian Railways is going to operate a new weekly train service between Janakpur Dham in Nepal and Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

The route will cover approximately 604 kilometres, connecting Janakpur Dham with Ayodhya Cantt.

The train will have stoppages at Jaynagar, Madhubani, Shisho, Sitamarhi, Raxaul, Narkatiaganj, Gorakhpur, Basti, Mankapur, and Ayodhya Dham, besides its terminal stations.

The Railway Ministry said the service would operate once a week, with its originating days being Sa-

Ayodhya Cantt.

Citing the role of railway connectivity on bilateral cooperation, the Ministry said in a statement, "India and Nepal share centuries-old cultural, historical and social bonds, with religious traditions and cross-border community relationships forming an integral part of this partnership. The new train service will add another dimension to bilateral cooperation by using railway connectivity to bring communities closer."

India and Nepal have held discussions on cross-border railway links, including passenger train services on the Janakpur-Ayodhya section, and bilat-

1. India–Nepal Train to Connect Janakpur Dham and Ayodhya

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II – International Relations

Context: Indian Railways has approved a new weekly train service connecting Janakpur Dham in Nepal with Ayodhya Cantt. in Uttar Pradesh, strengthening cross-border connectivity, religious tourism and people-to-people relations.

1. Janakpur–Ayodhya Railway Link

- **Distance:** Approximately 604 km.
- **Route:** Janakpur Dham–Ayodhya Cantt.
- **Major stops:** Jaynagar, Madhubani, Sitamarhi, Raxaul, Narkatiaganj and Gorakhpur, among others.
- **Cultural significance:** Connects Janakpur, associated with Mata Sita, and Ayodhya, associated with Lord Ram.
- **Importance:** Promotes religious tourism, local trade and cross-border community relations.

2. Major India–Nepal Connectivity Projects

Project	Significance
Jaynagar–Janakpur–Bijalpura Railway	Passenger connectivity; extension to Bardibas is ongoing
Jogbani–Biratnagar Railway	Cross-border freight connectivity
Raxaul–Kathmandu Railway	Proposed railway link connecting Nepal's capital with India

Hulaki/Terai Roads	Improves road connectivity across southern Nepal
Integrated Check Posts (ICPs)	Operational at Birgunj, Biratnagar and Nepalgunj
Motihari–Amlekhgunj Pipeline	Cross-border petroleum transportation

Other proposed initiatives include the Siliguri–Jhapa petroleum pipeline, Amlekhgunj–Chitwan pipeline extension and new ICPs at Bhairahawa and Dodhara Chandani.

3. Hydropower and Water-Resource Cooperation

Project	River	Importance
Arun III (900 MW)	Arun	Hydropower development with Indian participation
Lower Arun (approximately 670 MW)	Arun	Additional hydropower capacity
Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project	Mahakali	Hydropower, irrigation and flood management
Kosi and Gandak Projects	Kosi and Gandak	Irrigation and flood-control cooperation

Important agreements:

- **Kosi Agreement (1954; revised 1966):** Flood control and irrigation.

- **Gandak Agreement (1959; revised 1964):** Irrigation and water-resource cooperation.
- **Mahakali Treaty (1996):** Equitable utilisation of Mahakali River waters, including the Pancheshwar project.

4. Broader Development Partnership

1. **Healthcare:** B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, Dharan; Nepal Bharat Maitri Emergency and Trauma Centre, Kathmandu.
2. **Education and capacity building:** Schools, educational institutions and Nepal Police Academy at Panauti.
3. **Disaster reconstruction:** Assistance following the 2015 earthquake.
4. **Community development:** High Impact Community Development Projects covering schools, health centres, drinking water and sanitation.

5. Strategic Significance for India

- Strengthens the **Neighbourhood First Policy**.
- Improves trade, transit and regional economic integration.
- Promotes religious tourism and civilisational ties.
- Enhances energy security through cross-border electricity trade.
- Strengthens India's strategic and economic engagement with Nepal.

6. Way Forward

1. Ensure timely completion of railway, road and petroleum pipeline projects.
2. Promote equitable sharing of water and hydropower benefits.
3. Develop environmentally sustainable and disaster-resilient infrastructure.
4. Strengthen bilateral dialogue and institutional cooperation.

7. UPSC Prelims 2026 – Important PYQ Linkages

Question 1. Which of the following connectivity projects is/are a part of cooperation between India and the ASEAN member countries?

1. Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project
2. India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway
3. Agartala–Akhaura Rail Line

Select the correct answer.

Answer: 1 and 2 only

Explanation: Kaladan and the India–Myanmar–Thailand Highway involve ASEAN member countries. Agartala–Akhaura connects India and Bangladesh; Bangladesh is not an ASEAN member.

Question 2. Match the following projects supported by India with their respective countries.

Project	Country
A. Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project	1. Maldives
B. Restoration of Stor Palace	2. Afghanistan
C. District Hospital at Dickoya	3. Bhutan
D. Institute of Security and Law Enforcement Studies	4. Sri Lanka

Answer: A–3, B–2, C–4, D–1

Prelims lesson: UPSC expects familiarity with India's development projects across neighbouring countries—not merely the project name, but also its location, partner country and purpose.

Mains linkage – GS II: India–Nepal relations; neighbourhood diplomacy; regional connectivity; water-sharing and energy cooperation.

India to contribute €7 million to Italian research facility

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

India has committed to contribute at least €7 million (approximately ₹73 crore) over the next five years, beginning in the current financial year, towards the Elettra 2.0 programme, Union Science Minister Jitendra Singh said in Italy on Saturday.

Elettra Sincrotrone Trieste is an international research centre in Trieste, Italy, that operates a synchrotron light source – a facility in which electrons are accelerated to nearly the speed of light and made to emit extremely bright X-rays and other forms of electromagnetic radiation. These beams allow scientists to examine the structure and properties of matter at the atomic structure, composition, and behaviour of matter with extraordinary precision, including processes occurring over extremely short timescales.

Indian scientists have conducted research at Elettra since 1998 and continue to use its facilities

Scientific partnership

India's participation will support the development of research infrastructure and human resource capacity, marking a "significant new phase" in the longstanding scientific partnership between India and Italy, an accompanying press statement noted.

India and Italy have collaborated on research for

2. India to Contribute €7 Million to Italy's Elettra Research Facility

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper III – Science & Technology

Context: India has committed at least **€7 million (approximately ₹73 crore) over five years** towards Italy's Elettra 2.0 programme, strengthening international scientific cooperation and advanced research infrastructure.

1. What is Elettra Sincrotrone?

- **Location:** Trieste, Italy.
- **Nature:** International research facility operating a synchrotron light source.
- **Working principle:** Accelerates electrons to nearly the speed of light to generate intense X-rays and electromagnetic radiation.
- **Purpose:** Studies the structure, composition and behaviour of matter at atomic and molecular scales.

Major facilities:

1. **Elettra:** Third-generation synchrotron light source.
2. **FERMI:** Free-electron laser producing extremely bright, ultrashort light pulses.

2. India–Italy Scientific Cooperation

- Indian scientists have used Elettra's facilities since **1998**.
- India is its second-largest user after Italy.
- Around **1,100 research proposals** have been submitted by Indian research groups.
- India's contribution to Elettra 2.0 will support research infrastructure and scientific capacity-building.

3. Applications

1. **Materials Science:** Studying advanced materials and their properties.
2. **Nanotechnology:** Understanding matter at nanoscale.
3. **Biology and Medicine:** Analysing molecular and biological structures.
4. **Archaeology:** Scientific examination and preservation of cultural heritage.

4. Other Important Global Research Facilities

Facility	Location	Research focus
Large Hadron Collider (LHC)	CERN, France–Switzerland border	Collisions of high-energy particles; fundamental particle physics
Elettra	Italy	Synchrotron radiation; atomic and molecular structures
LIGO	USA	Detection of gravitational waves
FAIR	Germany	Antimatter, nuclear and hadron physics
Square Kilometre Array (SKA)	Australia and South Africa	Radio astronomy

Elettra vs Large Hadron Collider

- **Elettra:** Uses accelerated electrons to produce intense synchrotron radiation for studying matter.
- **LHC:** Accelerates and collides particles to investigate fundamental particles and forces of nature.

5. UPSC Prelims PYQ

UPSC Prelims 2009: In the year 2008, which organisation conducted a complex scientific experiment in which subatomic particles were accelerated to nearly the speed of light?

(a) European Space Agency
(b) European Organization for Nuclear Research
(c) International Atomic Energy Agency
(d) NASA

Answer: (b) European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN).

India backs UN resolution on rights of Palestinians

Press Trust of India
UNITED NATIONS

India has voted in favour of a UN General Assembly draft resolution that reaffirms the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the population of the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources and demands that Israel cease the exploitation and damage of these resources.

The 193-Member UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on Wednesday in favour of the resolution 'Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources' proposed by Uruguay. India voted in favour



The UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of the resolution.

of the resolution along with 150 other UN Member States, while Israel and the U.S. were among the seven nations that voted against the draft, which got 11 abstentions.

The resolution reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and of the population of the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources. It demanded that Israel "cease the exploitation, damage, cause of loss or depletion and endangerment of the natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan.

It stressed that the wall and settlements being constructed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, are contrary to international law and seriously deprive the Palestinian people of their natural resources.

The resolution called upon Israel to comply strictly with its obligations under international law and immediately and completely cease all policies and measures aimed at altering the character and status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

3. India Backs UN Resolution on Palestinian Rights and Resource Sovereignty

Source: Press Trust of India
GS Paper II – International Relations

Context: India voted in favour of a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution reaffirming the Palestinian people's permanent sovereignty over their natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan.

1. Key Features of the Resolution

- **Proposed by:** Uruguay.
- **Voting outcome:** 151 countries in favour, 7 against and 11 abstentions.
- **India's position:** Voted in favour of the resolution.
- **Core demand:** Israel must cease the exploitation, damage and depletion of natural resources in the occupied territories.
- **International law:** Called upon Israel to comply with its obligations under international law and end measures altering the character and status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

2. Major Issues Highlighted

1. **Resource sovereignty:** Recognition of Palestinian rights over their land and natural resources.
2. **Israeli settlements:** Condemnation of settlements and the separation wall in occupied Palestinian territories as contrary to international law.
3. **Resource exploitation:** Concerns over the depletion and damage of natural resources in the occupied territories.
4. **Territorial integrity:** Opposition to unilateral measures changing the character and status of occupied territories, including East Jerusalem.

3. India's Position on Palestine

- **Historical support:** India recognised the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1974 and recognised the State of Palestine in 1988.
- **Two-State Solution:** Supports an independent, sovereign and viable Palestine living alongside Israel in peace and security.

- **Self-determination:** Supports the legitimate aspirations and right to self-determination of the Palestinian people.
- **Balanced diplomacy:** Maintains diplomatic relations with both Israel and Palestine, pursuing engagement with both sides.

4. Significance for India

1. **International law:** Reinforces India's commitment to the UN framework and international legal principles.
2. **Foreign policy continuity:** Reflects India's longstanding support for Palestinian statehood and self-determination.
3. **Strategic balance:** Preserves India's diplomatic engagement with both Israel and Palestine.
4. **Regional stability:** Supports a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Palestine–Israel conflict.

India and Egypt to work on terms of reference for potential trade pact: Goyal

Press Trust of India
CAIRO



Union Minister Piyush Goyal with Egyptian Minister Mohamed Farid Saleh in Egypt on Sunday. PTI

India and Egypt on Sunday announced that officials from both countries will work toward finalising the terms of reference (ToR) for a potential bilateral trade agreement.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said promoting trade in local currencies would help boost economic ties and reduce the cost of doing business.

"I welcome the announcement....We will have teams led by Petal Dhillon (Joint Secretary in the Commerce Ministry) to work with the Egyptian team in a time-bound manner on the terms of reference, that would potentially elevate our economic ties to the next level, both in terms of trade, investments and a much more comprehensive partnership, spanning many other areas like education," Mr. Goyal said here at the Joint Trade Committee meeting.

The Egyptian side was represented by Mohamed Farid Saleh, Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade of Egypt.

Terms of reference are broad contours for formally negotiating a trade agreement. A working group will be set up to decide on the ToR.

Mr. Goyal also said the two countries can increase cooperation in areas such as pharmaceuticals and healthcare; engineering and the automotive industry; agriculture; digitisation and fintech; and museums.

Mr. Goyal said the current bilateral trade is $6.5 billion, but "we need to be much more ambitious".

Elaborating on increased cooperation in the fintech sector, Mr. Goyal said Indian and Egyptian central banks are working to promote local currency trade. He suggested linking India's digital public infrastructure, such as the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), with Egyptian payment systems.

Egypt is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and world-famous museums. To preserve and present this heritage, the Yuge Yugeen Bharat Museum is being developed as a landmark national cultural institution at the historic North and South Block Complex in New Delhi.

4. India–Egypt Potential Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

GS Paper II – International Relations | GS Paper III – Economy

Context: India and Egypt have agreed to finalise the Terms of Reference (ToR) for a potential bilateral trade agreement to expand trade, investment and economic cooperation. Current bilateral trade stands at approximately **US$6.5 billion**.

1. Terms of Reference (ToR): Meaning

ToR is the preliminary framework that defines the scope, objectives and procedures for negotiating a trade agreement.

In the India–Egypt context:

- A joint working group will finalise the ToR.
- It will establish the framework for formal trade negotiations.
- It is a preparatory step, not a concluded trade agreement.

Major components:

1. Scope – goods, services and investment.
2. Objectives – reducing trade barriers and improving market access.
3. Negotiating mechanism – working groups and institutional responsibilities.
4. Timeline – proposed schedule and milestones.

2. Stages of a Free Trade Agreement

1. **Exploratory Discussions:** Assess trade potential, economic interests and feasibility.
2. **Finalisation of ToR:** Define objectives, scope and negotiating framework.
3. **Formal Negotiations:** Discuss tariff reductions, services, investment, rules of origin and market access.
4. **Legal Finalisation:** Finalise the agreement's legal text and tariff schedules.
5. **Signing and Domestic Approval:** Sign the agreement and complete required domestic procedures.
6. **Entry into Force:** The agreement becomes operational after fulfilling stipulated legal requirements.
7. **Implementation and Monitoring:** Monitor commitments and resolve trade disputes.

3. Major Components of an FTA

Component	Purpose
Trade in goods	Reduction or elimination of customs duties
Trade in services	Improved access to IT, banking and healthcare
Investment	Facilitation and protection of investments
Rules of origin	Determines the country of origin of products eligible for concessions
Trade facilitation	Simplifies customs procedures and documentation
Dispute settlement	Resolves trade-related disagreements

4. Important Distinction

- **ToR:** Framework for conducting negotiations.
- **Negotiations:** Bargaining over trade commitments.
- **Signing:** Formal acceptance of the negotiated text.
- **Entry into force:** Agreement becomes operational.

Important: Finalising the ToR does not mean that an FTA has been concluded. It establishes the framework for formal negotiations.

EXPRESS special

For Bengal blueprint, Suvendu dips into models: Gujarat for industry, Andhra for rural jobs

Single-window industrial clearances, land pooling to law & order — BJP govt studies successes and experiences in other states

Atri Mitra
Kolkata, November 15

SEEKING TO put an end to West Bengal's "long standing bottlenecks", Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari is looking beyond the state for policy models, drawing on the experiences of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana.

From introducing a single-window clearance system for industries and exploring land pooling to expanding plantation drives, strengthening rural employment schemes like the VB G-RAM-G and tightening the law and order framework, the new BJP government is seeking to replicate practices it believes have delivered results elsewhere.

Soon after taking charge, CM Adhikari said "Let us endeavour to make West Bengal like Gujarat in the next five years. If not fully, at least 50% of that should be achieved." Six months into the new government, the administration seeking to move away from systems followed during the 15-year tenure of the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government.

Ease of doing business

While unveiling the state's new Industrial Promotion Policy, Adhikari indicated that the government would introduce a single-window clearance system on the lines of the model pioneered by Gujarat nearly two decades ago.

The proposed single window portal will serve as the principal interface for investors, facilitating applications, approvals, assistance, grievance redressal and investor aftercare throughout the the project. The government has also proposed providing a legal guarantee for time-bound industrial services through laws, rules, notifications or executive orders.

Departments and agencies will have to record and justify delays beyond the prescribed timelines, with each stage of the application, approval and payment process assigned a deadline and a designated officer.

A state-level empowered committee will also be constituted to identify strategic and mega projects, approve customised incentives and higher benefit ceilings, consider special provisions relating to location and power subsidies, and resolve inter-departmental issues.

Land availability, another major hurdle to industrial investment in Bengal, is also on the government's agenda. Adhikari said, "We will neither have a forcible land acquisition policy like the Left, nor will we have a flawed land policy like the TMC, asking industries to buy their own land without any support from the government."

The government plans to create a land bank for industries by arranging to purchase land. It is also examining land pooling models followed in UP, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh.

Under land pooling, land parcels belonging to different owners are consolidated for planned development. In return, landowners receive a proportionate share of the developed land or compensation, depending on the policy framework. Adhikari has indicated that landowners could get back 25 to 30% of their land after development.



Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari in Kolkata on Sunday. ANI

The model is intended to reduce acquisition costs while increasing value of land through the provision of roads, utilities and other infrastructure. It also allows original landowners to remain stakeholders in the development process rather than being displaced through conventional acquisition. The government believes such an approach could reduce litigation, protests and project delays while facilitating planned urbanisation.

Lesson from Andhra

The administration is also looking to Andhra Pradesh for lessons in implementing the 125-day rural employment scheme, the VB G-RAM-G. According to officials, Andhra Pradesh ranks second in the country, after Tamil Nadu, in generating person-days under the programme, while West Bengal is among the lowest performers.

To understand the reasons behind the difference, the Bengal government sent a four-member delegation of Panchayat officials to Andhra on the day after Bijaya Dashami. The delegation met state officials and visited several areas to study the implementation.

Officials said the delegation found that Andhra had generated more than 5 crore person-days in the first four months after the scheme began on July 1 as against around 50 lakh in West Bengal.

One of the practices that caught the delegation's attention was the identification of large stretches of barren land for plantation and other development activities. The state also has a separate Panchayat Engineering Directorate responsible for roads and other infrastructure development, allowing gram panchayats to identify local requirements while the engineering wing undertakes the execution of infrastructure works.

Following the visit, discussions have begun within the West Bengal administration on setting up a similar directorate. One proposal under consideration is to reorganise or merge the existing West Bengal State Rural Development Agency to create a dedicated institutional mechanism for rural infrastructure development.

Afforestation is another area where Adhikari has indicated that he intends to draw from UP. Referring to PM Narendra Modi's "Ek ped maa ke naam" (one tree in mother's name) initiative, the CM said his government would take up an ambitious plantation drive. "I am competing with Yogi ji. He is the CM of a big state. He said, I will plant 26 crore trees. I have said, I will plant 10 crore trees. I will go with you," Adhikari said.

Zero-tolerance to crime

Law and order is another area where the new government is looking at the UP and Gujarat models. A section of administrative officials said Adhikari is seeking to adopt a zero-tolerance approach towards organised crime, crimes against women, drug trafficking and infiltration, drawing comparisons with the policies pursued by the Yogi Adityanath government.

UP has enacted the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act and the Uttar Pradesh Control of Organised Crime Act. Gujarat, meanwhile, brought the Gujarat Control of Terrorism and Organised Crime Act into force in 2015, following amendments to its earlier legislation.

In Bengal, the government has introduced the West Bengal Public Safety and Control of Anti-Social Activities Bill, 2026, proposing wider powers to tackle organised crime, habitual offenders and activities considered threats to public order.

Increasing police strength is also a priority for the Adhikari government. The CM pointed out, "Our state has 105 police personnel per one lakh citizens, while the national average is 155. Bengal will be ahead of UP in the number of police personnel in the next two years."

5. Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh Models: Lessons for West Bengal and Other States

Source: The Indian Express

GS Paper II – Governance | GS Paper III – Indian Economy

Context: West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari is studying Gujarat's approach to industrial investment and Andhra Pradesh's approach to rural employment and infrastructure development to address the state's development challenges.

1. Gujarat Model – Promoting Industrial Development

Objective: Attract industries, simplify business procedures and improve investor confidence.

1. **Single-Window Clearance:** A single platform for industrial approvals, licences, assistance and grievance redressal.
2. **Time-Bound Approvals:** Prescribed deadlines for industrial clearances, with accountability for administrative delays.
3. **Land Pooling:** Landowners contribute land for planned development and receive a share of the developed land or compensation. The proposed model in West Bengal may allow landowners to receive 25–30% of their land back after development.
4. **Industrial Infrastructure:** Development of roads, electricity, utilities and other facilities to attract investment.
5. **Investor-Friendly Governance:** Simplified regulations and predictable approvals reduce the cost and uncertainty of doing business.

Expected outcome: Greater industrial investment, employment generation and faster industrialisation.

2. Andhra Pradesh Model – Rural Employment and Infrastructure

Objective: Generate rural employment by linking wage employment with the creation of durable village infrastructure.

1. **Employment Generation:** Effective implementation of the 125-day rural employment scheme, VB-G-RAM-G.
2. **Performance:** Andhra Pradesh generated over 5 crore person-days in the first four months after the scheme began on July 1, compared with approximately 50 lakh in West Bengal.
3. **Decentralised Planning:** Gram Panchayats identify local infrastructure requirements and development priorities.
4. **Dedicated Institutional Mechanism:** A separate Panchayat Engineering Directorate undertakes infrastructure execution.
5. **Local Asset Creation:** Employment is linked to the construction and improvement of rural infrastructure, including roads and community assets.

Person-days: One person working for one day equals one person-day. For example, 100 workers employed for 10 days generate 1,000 person-days.

Expected outcome: Rural employment, improved village infrastructure and stronger local governance.

3. Lessons for West Bengal and Other States

1. **Balanced Development:** Combine industrial growth with rural employment rather than relying on a single development strategy.
2. **Ease of Doing Business:** Introduce transparent, predictable and time-bound industrial approvals.
3. **Land Management:** Adopt mutually beneficial land-pooling arrangements to facilitate industrial development while protecting landowners' interests.
4. **Decentralised Governance:** Empower Gram Panchayats to identify local needs and implement infrastructure projects.
5. **Institutional Accountability:** Establish clear responsibilities, dedicated implementation agencies and regular monitoring.
6. **Context-Specific Replication:** Adapt successful models to local economic, geographical and administrative conditions instead of copying them mechanically.

NEW QUESTIONS TO JOBS, INFORMAL SECTOR SURVEYS PUSHED BY TOP GOVT ADVISORS

To understand women's unpaid work, govt goes looking for data

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, November 15

THE GOVERNMENT'S target to make India a developed nation by 2047 faces a major hurdle: getting enough women into the workforce. The World Bank says raising the female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) to 50% — it was 34.6% in September — "could be the best way" for India to raise its GDP growth rate closer to the 8% needed to become a high-income country by 2047.

So, why aren't more women working?

"The argument that women don't take up employment because of care duties, that there is a direct relationship between the two, has to be established first," said Professor Neetha N of Centre for Women's Development Studies. "So far, only broad analysis and claims have been made as there is not enough macro data that can establish this link."

And so, the government is now looking for this data.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) wants to add questions to its jobs and informal sector surveys following requests from academics, the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and the government's top economic advisers, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

As per an official, the new questions will capture the "magnitude of care work being performed". And because care work can overlap with formal employment, they should also show how much domestic and caregiving work employed individuals undertake. "Among the unemployed, we also need to know how many are primary caregivers, or conversely, how many caregivers are unable to take up employment specifically due to care responsibilities."

New questions

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) hopes to get detailed answers on unpaid work done by household members.

While it already asks people not looking for work what the main reasons are — 44.4% of women in 2025 cited child care or personal commitments in home making — experts say this question is "too generic".

As per Pooja Sharma Goyal, Founding CEO of The Udaiti Foundation, it does not show "how many women take on unpaid household work by choice and how many because they feel it is their duty to do so".

Choice or duty

Unpaid domestic and care work is a major obstacle between women and paid jobs. MoSPI's Time Use Survey shows working-age men (15-59 years) spent 62 minutes per day in 2024 on unpaid activities, down from 74 in 2019.

Meanwhile, the figure for women went up from 364 minutes in 2019 to 366 in 2024. And yet, the female LFPR rose from 26.5% to 43.6% over the same period.

"A lot of policymaking and policy advisory happens at a macro level," said economist Mitali Nikore, Founder of Nikore Associates. "If a national survey shows there is interest in working, it would be completely against the stereotype we hold right now that *'wahan pe toh unko kaam hi nahi karna hai'*."

Hurdles to work

The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises also hopes to ask female business owners if curbs on time available for work, on women's mobility outside home, and household or caregiving responsibilities affect participation at work.

These seem rather obvious hurdles, but very few states have managed to solve for them. Tamil Nadu, though, has: it employs four out of every 10 directly-employed female factory workers in India, having replicated China's model of providing dormitories to women workers. With migrant workers crucial for southern states, dorms close to factories or on campus solve two key obstacles for women who want to work: distance from the job and living arrangements.

"Elder care, child care…it all adds up. These are one of the first factors that drive you out (of the labour force)," said Nikore. "But when you have to drive yourself back in, you need everything to fall in place – the pay, location, a safe way to get to work, the care support. All this hardly ever happens in an environment where jobs are scarce anyway."

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• WHAT THE SURVEY MISSES

PERIODIC LABOUR Force Survey hopes to get detailed answers on unpaid work done by household members.

44.4% OF women in 2025 cited childcare or personal homemaking commitments as main reasons for not seeking work, said the survey.

EXPERTS SAY the question is 'too generic'. They say it does not show how many take on unpaid work by choice and how many do so out of a sense of duty.



6. Measuring Women's Unpaid Work: Government Seeks Better Labour Force Data

Source: The Indian Express
GS Paper II – Social Justice | GS Paper III – Indian Economy

Context: The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) plans to introduce additional questions in the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and informal-sector surveys to capture women's unpaid domestic and care work more accurately.

1. Why Is Better Data Needed?

- **Low Female Labour Force Participation:** India's female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) was 34.6% in September, according to the article.
- **Unpaid Care Burden:** Around 44.4% of women in 2025 cited childcare or personal homemaking commitments as reasons for not seeking work.
- **Invisible Economic Contribution:** Conventional employment statistics often fail to capture unpaid household and caregiving activities.
- **Policy Gap:** Without reliable data, it is difficult to understand how unpaid work restricts women's participation in paid employment.

2. What Changes Are Proposed?

MoSPI plans to introduce more detailed questions in labour and informal-sector surveys to understand:

1. The magnitude of unpaid domestic and caregiving work.
2. The number of primary caregivers in households.
3. How many people undertake unpaid work by choice and how many due to family responsibilities.
4. How caregiving responsibilities affect participation in formal employment.

3. Important Data and Findings

- **Time Use Survey:** Women aged 15–59 spent approximately 366 minutes daily on unpaid activities in 2024, compared with 364 minutes in 2019.
- **Men's Contribution:** Men spent 62 minutes daily on unpaid activities in 2024, down from 74 minutes in 2019.
- **Female LFPR:** Increased from 26.5% to 43.6% over the period mentioned in the report.
- **Key concern:** Increased female labour-force participation does not necessarily indicate a corresponding reduction in women's unpaid domestic responsibilities.

4. Major Barriers to Women's Employment

1. **Care Responsibilities:** Childcare, eldercare and household work restrict women's availability.
2. **Mobility Constraints:** Distance from workplaces, unsafe transport and limited mobility.
3. **Inadequate Support Infrastructure:** Shortage of affordable childcare and caregiving facilities.
4. **Social Norms:** Unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities and the perception that caregiving is primarily women's duty.

5. Lessons and Policy Measures

1. **Better Statistical Measurement:** Incorporate unpaid domestic and care work into regular labour surveys and policy assessment.
2. **Care Infrastructure:** Expand affordable childcare facilities and community-based care services.
3. **Workplace Support:** Promote flexible working arrangements, safe transport and suitable workplace facilities.
4. **Women's Workforce Participation:** Encourage employment opportunities closer to residential areas and improve access to skills and formal jobs.
5. **Shared Responsibilities:** Promote more equal distribution of unpaid domestic work between men and women.



Privacy vs press freedom: where should the line be drawn?

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, has reignited the debate over the Right to Privacy and Freedom of Expression; How does the law reconcile data protection with the public's right to know?

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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The story so far:

On October 27, the Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA), representing 21 publishers, approached the Supreme Court seeking an interim stay on provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. In its October 6 petition, the association argued that the Act could impede investigative journalism, expose confidential sources, force the removal of published reports, and deter whistleblowers. Further, it contended that the absence of a specific journalistic exemption threatens press freedom. Representing the DNPA, senior advocate Madhavi Divan cautioned that if journalists were asked to obtain consent from the subjects of their reports, it would create "a complete regime of pre-censorship". The court has listed the case for further hearing on Tuesday. The challenge raises a constitutional question: what does the law say about privacy, press freedom, and the public's right to know?

Can journalists peep into a person's private life in the name of public interest?

A journalist's pursuit of an investigative story can sometimes lead them to delve into another person's private life. Though the Constitution protects the press freedom to investigate under Article 19(1)(a), this must be balanced against the Right to Privacy, which is recognised as a Fundamental Right under Article 21 in K.S. Puttaswamy judgment (2017).

In *R. Rajagopal v. State of Tamil Nadu* (1994), also known as 'Auto Shankar case', the Supreme Court drew a telling boundary: a government official cannot claim privacy to prevent scrutiny of actions performed in their official capacity. However, holding public office does not place every aspect of that person's private life under scrutiny. The Court also held that the State cannot impose prior restraint or prohibition of publication on privacy grounds.

Moreover, a journalistic investigation might unearth uncomfortable truths, but it cannot become a parallel trial. In *Sahara India Real Estate Corp. v. SEBI* (2012), the Supreme Court ruled that while investigative journalism and "open justice" are vital, courts can issue temporary postponement orders on media reporting if ongoing publicity poses a real and substantial risk to a fair trial. In *Manu Sharma v. State (NCT of Delhi)* (2010), the Supreme Court cautioned against media coverage that turns a suspect or an accused into a convict in the court of public opinion, even before the judiciary has pronounced its verdict.

Can journalists use sting operations to expose misconduct?

Yes, but there is a catch. A sting operation can expose corruption, but where does investigation end and entrapment begin? In *R.K. Anand v. Registrar, Delhi High Court* (2009), the Supreme Court upheld the sting as serving an important public cause by exposing an attempt to suborn a court witness and undermine the BMW trial. However, in *Rajat Prasad v. CBI* (2014), the top court recognised the public-interest value of investigative journalism but held that it does not provide blanket immunity for unlawful acts committed during a sting operation. That is, a claim of public interest does not, by itself, wipe out criminal liability arising from a sting operation. Further, the court held that the criminal intent of each accused and their role in the alleged offence must be determined on the basis of evidence.

How do laws of different countries balance privacy with press freedom?

Articles 17 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Articles 8 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights safeguard both privacy and freedom of expression.

In *Axel Springer AG v. Germany* (2012), the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) examined whether a newspaper's reporting on an actor's arrest, on suspicion of possessing cocaine, had crossed the boundary of privacy. By a 12-5 majority, the Grand Chamber ruled that there was a violation of the newspaper's freedom of expression. The court recognised the press as a watchdog in reporting matters of public interest and found that the restrictions imposed on the newspaper were not justified by the need to protect the actor's private life.

Countries approach this balance differently. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1791) protects freedom of the press, while the Privacy Protection Act, 1980, restricts law-enforcement searches and seizures of journalists' unpublished work, subject to exceptions. The U.K.'s Data Protection Act, 2018, allows journalists to claim exemption from certain data-protection requirements, if they reasonably believe publication is in the public interest. Brazil's General Data Protection Law excludes data processing carried out for journalistic purposes, while Section 52 of Kenya's Data Protection Act, 2019, provides a conditional exemption from certain data-protection principles for journalistic purposes.

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7. Privacy vs Press Freedom: Where Should the Line Be Drawn?

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Context: The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, has reignited the debate over balancing the **Right to Privacy under Article 21** with **Freedom of Speech and Expression under Article 19(1)(a)**, particularly in investigative journalism and reporting on matters of public interest.

1. Background: How Does the DPDP Act Affect Journalism?

The Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA), representing 21 publishers, approached the Supreme Court seeking an interim stay on provisions of the DPDP Act, arguing that the law could restrict investigative journalism, expose confidential sources and create uncertainty regarding the publication of reports containing personal data.

Relevant provisions of the Act:

1. **Section 3(c)(ii) – Scope:** Excludes personal data made publicly available by the individual concerned or by another person legally required to make it public. This is a limited exclusion, not a general journalistic exemption.
2. **Sections 4, 5 and 6 – Processing of Personal Data:** Establish the grounds, notice and consent requirements for processing digital personal data.
3. **Section 8 – Obligations of Data Fiduciaries:** Prescribes responsibilities concerning lawful processing, security and erasure of personal data.
4. **Section 17 – Exemptions:** Provides specified exemptions, including for legal proceedings, law enforcement and certain research purposes. It does not expressly provide a blanket exemption for journalism.

Core concern: The absence of a specific general exemption for journalistic activities could create uncertainty for investigative reporting involving personal data.

2. Constitutional Conflict: Privacy vs Press Freedom

Right to Privacy	Freedom of the Press
Article 21	Article 19(1)(a)
Protects dignity, autonomy and personal information	Protects expression, investigation and public-interest reporting
Prevents unjustified intrusion into private life	Enables scrutiny of public institutions and officials

Constitutional principle: Neither right is absolute. A balance must be maintained between individual privacy, legitimate public interest and freedom of expression.

3. Supreme Court Judgments: Defining the Boundaries

1. **R. Rajagopal v. State of Tamil Nadu (1994) – Auto Shankar Case:** Public officials generally cannot prevent publication of information concerning their official conduct by invoking privacy. However, their private lives remain protected.
2. **Sahara India Real Estate Corp. v. SEBI (2012):** Courts may temporarily postpone media publication where it creates a real and substantial risk to a fair trial.
3. **Manu Sharma v. State (NCT of Delhi) (2010):** Media trials and prejudicial reporting must not undermine the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial.
4. **R.K. Anand v. Registrar, Delhi High Court (2009):** Recognised the public-interest value of sting operations exposing attempts to undermine the justice system.
5. **Rajat Prasad v. CBI (2014):** Public-interest journalism does not provide blanket immunity for unlawful acts committed during sting operations.

4. When Is Investigative Journalism Justified?

Legitimate public-interest reporting:

- Exposing corruption, abuse of authority and institutional misconduct.
- Investigating the official conduct of public officials.
- Using sting operations to expose wrongdoing, subject to legal limits.

Important limitations:

- Public office does not place every aspect of an individual's private life under public scrutiny.
- Public-interest claims cannot justify unnecessary intrusion into personal information.
- Reporting must not prejudice judicial proceedings or undermine the presumption of innocence.
- Investigative journalism does not provide immunity for unlawful conduct.

5. International Approaches

- **United States:** First Amendment protects press freedom; privacy is governed through separate legal frameworks.
- **United Kingdom:** Data Protection Act, 2018 provides exemptions for certain journalistic activities undertaken in the public interest.
- **Brazil:** General Data Protection Law excludes certain journalistic and artistic data-processing activities.
- **Kenya:** Data Protection Act, 2019 provides conditional exemptions for journalistic purposes.

6. Way Forward

1. **Clear Legal Safeguards:** Provide appropriate protection for legitimate investigative journalism under data-protection regulations.
2. **Public Interest Test:** Distinguish genuine public-interest reporting from unnecessary exposure of private information.
3. **Responsible Journalism:** Protect confidential sources while maintaining accuracy, fairness and accountability.
4. **Judicial Oversight:** Prevent arbitrary restrictions on publication while safeguarding privacy and fair-trial rights.
5. **Proportionate Regulation:** Ensure data-protection requirements do not unnecessarily restrict freedom of expression.