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IN WAKE OF SECTION 301 PROBE

Trump set to unveil new set of tariffs on India, China, EU, 13 other trade partners

USTR prepares to roll out new duties as White House targets excess factory capacity

David Lawder
Washington, November 24



US President Donald Trump in Washington. REUTERS

THE TRUMP administration is poised to imminently release the findings of a probe aimed at countering alleged excess industrial capacity in 16 major US trading partners, three people with knowledge of the matter said on Tuesday, with new import duties on a wide range of

down by the US Supreme Court in February. The administration's tariffs have in part contributed to higher prices on consumer goods in the United States, and a Reuters/ Ipsos opinion poll following November's midterm elections showed 62% of respondents would sup-

US tariffs

The Wall Street Journal reported earlier that the probe's results could be unveiled as soon as this week.

The US Trade Representative's office and the White House did not immediately respond to Reuters queries about the pending tariff announcement. USTR launched the excess capacity probe in March, along with a separate probe into weak or lax enforcement of anti-forced labor laws in 59 countries and the European Union. In July, the Trump administration imposed import duties of 10% or 12.5% on goods from those 60 trading partners.

It was unclear what tariff rates would be charged on imports, or what exemptions may be granted, the people said.

The Trump administration has singled out China as the biggest source of excess industrial capacity, which it says is flooding global markets with steel, aluminum, EVs, appliances, solar products and other goods. China has rejected the accusations, saying its exports reflect competitive advantages.

The probe is partly directed at Chinese investment into countries in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, Indonesia and Cambodia, to manufacture goods for the US market and avoid tariffs.

Under a US-China trade truce due to expire on January 10, the Trump administration has capped second-term tariffs on Chinese goods at 20%, in addition to duties of about 25% imposed during Trump's first term. The US has already imposed a 12.5% anti-forced labor duty on all Chinese imports, leaving only 7.5% to reach the 20% cap.

One of the people said that the 20% cap would likely be maintained as long as the trade truce is extended.

The US and China also are working to cut tariffs on $30 billion of non-strategic imports from each side under a process known as the "Board of Trade." It is unclear how any new Section 301 duties would impact that process.

—REUTERS

1. US Section 301 Probe: Trump Plans New Tariffs on India and Other Countries

Source: Reuters
GS II: India–US Relations | **GS III:** International Trade and WTO

Context: The US is preparing additional tariffs on 16 trading partners, including India, following an investigation into alleged excess industrial capacity.

1. Section 301: Basic Understanding

1. A provision of the **US Trade Act, 1974** that allows the US to investigate allegedly unfair foreign trade practices.
2. Administered by the **United States Trade Representative (USTR)**.
3. Allows unilateral trade measures, including additional import tariffs and restrictions.

2. Reasons Behind the Investigation

1. **Excess Industrial Capacity:** Alleged overproduction, particularly in China.
2. **Unfair Competition:** Surplus goods may distort global markets and affect domestic industries.
3. **Trade Diversion:** Investigation into Chinese companies shifting production to third countries to avoid US tariffs.
4. **Targeted sectors:** Steel, aluminium, electric vehicles, appliances and solar products.

3. WTO Angle

1. **Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN):** Generally requires equal trade treatment among WTO members.
2. Unilateral tariffs may violate WTO obligations if inconsistent with its agreements.
3. Affected countries can challenge such measures through the WTO dispute settlement mechanism.

4. Implications for India

1. **Exports:** Additional US tariffs may reduce the competitiveness of Indian goods in the American market.
2. **Manufacturing:** Steel, aluminium, automobiles and solar-product exporters may face increased trade barriers.
3. **Supply Chains:** India could attract companies shifting manufacturing away from China.
4. **Trade Relations:** The investigation may complicate India–US trade negotiations and increase economic uncertainty.

Survey claims drop in anaemia prevalence

Among children, it has dropped to 41.8% from 64% reported in the NFHS-5; among women, it has declined to 56% from 57%, while among pregnant women, the prevalence is 44%, down from 52%; this is the first time anaemia data are being published, after the measure was withdrawn from NFHS

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

Data put out by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as per the latest SAMPADA (Survey for Assessment of Markers of Population Health, Activity, Diet and Anthropometry), claim a drop in prevalence of anaemia levels across age and gender groups.

Among children, it has dropped to 41.8%, as against the previous figure from the National Family Health Survey-5 data of 64%; among women it has dropped to 56% from 57%, and in pregnant women, the current survey puts it at 44% (down from 52%). Among men, SAMPADA says, anaemia has dropped to 19% (from 25% in NFHS-5).

Venous blood sampling

The Ministry has finally released the figures from SAMPADA 2023-2025, indicating prevalence of anaemia and micronutrient deficiencies across the life course. This is the first time anaemia data are being published, after the measure of anaemia was withdrawn from its usual source data - the National Family Health Survey - on the grounds that the government intended to conduct a gold-standard test of drawing venous blood, instead of the finger prick test that was being done. The government said venous blood sampling and using automated analysers for analysis would deliver a far sharper result, and a truer picture of the ground reality, when it comes to anaemia.

The study was conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Department of Health Research (DHR) in the Health Ministry covering over two lakh individuals from over 81,000 households across 183 districts in 35 States and Union Territories. In a statement, Rajiv Bahl, Secretary, DHR, and Director-General, ICMR, says: "It is encouraging that prevalence of anaemia is lower in SAMPADA compared to previous national surveys.



SAMPADA data put the prevalence of anaemia at 55% among adult women up to 59 years, and 58% among lactating women. FILE PHOTO

The comprehensive anaemia profiling in SAMPADA survey provides an evidence base to strengthen the ongoing national efforts towards Anaemia Mukt Bharat."

Most cases 'mild'

The report claims that a substantial portion of the anaemia in the country is mild, highlighting opportunities for early action. About half of anaemic women, including pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls and children have mild anaemia, indicating considerably lower risk of serious health consequences than moderate or severe anaemia.

Looking at disaggregated data, the survey puts the prevalence of anaemia at 31% in children between 5-9 years, 46% among adolescent girls, 55% among adult women up to the age of 59, 56% in women above 60 years, and 58% among lactating women.

Beating myths

"We must aim for lower numbers," says Jaishree Gajaraj, senior obstetrician and gynaecologist. The government has rolled out several schemes to counter anaemia and they are being stringently implemented in many States, particularly the southern States. The government has been reaching out to distribute iron and folic acid, and deworming tablets to women, as part of the Anaemia Mukt Bharat scheme. However, there are multiple aspects at play here, she adds.

"For instance," Dr. Jaishree explains, "it is debatable if women do take the pills that are handed over to them. Not all women tolerate iron supplements well. Vomiting, nausea, constipation and gastritis are common side effects, and women, especially those in rural areas, find it difficult to access solutions for them. Women and their families believe that if iron supplements are taken beyond 36 weeks, it might make the baby big, and there is this myth that is prevalent in our society - that taking iron tablets would make the baby dark."

Are there factors that make Indian women especially vulnerable to anaemia? "One of the main reasons is when young Indian girls have menorrhagia, or excessive bleeding during periods, it is not addressed, they are told to tolerate it. There is blood loss from that. There is also the factor of worm infestation, still extremely common in rural areas, which has a definite impact on haemoglobin. One more reason is our dietary patterns. There is enough evidence that wheat retards iron absorption; wheat is the staple diet of north Indians, and they will have to be counselled."

More research needed

"These findings support more targeted, population-specific and life-course approaches to anaemia prevention and management. The evidence can contribute, while also identifying areas where further research and improved surveillance are required," Bharati Kulkarni, Director, ICMR-NIN, advises in a statement.

2. Survey Claims Decline in Anaemia Prevalence in India

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II: Health, Nutrition and Social Justice

Context: The SAMPADA Survey (2023–25) reports a decline in anaemia prevalence among children, women and pregnant women in India.

1. SAMPADA Survey: Key Findings

Conducted by: Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Department of Health Research.

Population Group	NFHS-5	SAMPADA (2023–25)

Children	64%	41.8%
Women	57%	56%
Pregnant women	52%	44%
Men	25%	19%

Additional findings:

- Children aged 5–9 years: 31%.
- Adolescent girls: 46%.
- Lactating women: 58%.

2. Survey Methodology

1. Covered over 2 lakh individuals across 81,000 households in 183 districts and 35 States/ UTs.
2. Used **venous blood sampling** instead of the finger-prick method.
3. Automated analysers provide more reliable haemoglobin measurements.
4. Provides evidence on anaemia and micronutrient deficiencies across population groups.

3. Causes and Challenges

1. **Nutritional Deficiency:** Inadequate iron intake and poor dietary diversity.
2. **Menstrual Blood Loss:** Heavy menstrual bleeding among adolescent girls and women.
3. **Worm Infestation:** Intestinal parasites contribute to blood loss.
4. **Poor Iron Absorption:** Phytates in wheat reduce iron absorption.
5. **Treatment Barriers:** Side effects of iron supplements and lack of awareness affect adherence.

4. Government Initiatives

1. **Anaemia Mukt Bharat (2018):** Six-pronged strategy covering iron-folic acid supplementation, deworming, behaviour change, testing and treatment, delayed cord clamping and non-nutritional causes.
2. **POSHAN Abhiyaan:** Improves nutritional outcomes through inter-sectoral convergence.

3. **National Health Mission:** Strengthens maternal and child healthcare.
4. **Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation:** Targets children, adolescents and women.

5. UPSC Prelims PYQ – 2023

Consider the following statements in the context of interventions under the Anaemia Mukt Bharat Strategy:

1. It provides prophylactic calcium supplementation for pre-school children, adolescents and pregnant women.
2. It runs a campaign for delayed cord clamping at the time of childbirth.
3. It provides for periodic deworming to children and adolescents.
4. It addresses non-nutritional causes of anaemia in endemic pockets, with special focus on malaria, haemoglobinopathies and fluorosis.

How many of the above statements are correct?

(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) Only three
(d) All four

Answer: (c) Only three

The Bisleri case and regulatory gaps

Why has FSSAI sanctioned prosecution against Bisleri? What made the water sample unsafe? What are the health risks of bromate and PAHs? How is packaged drinking water regulated in India? What safety checks must bottled water manufacturers follow? What risks do plastic bottles pose to consumers?

EXPLAINER

Kartikey Singh

The story so far:

On November 22, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the country's apex food-safety regulator, sanctioned prosecution against packaged drinking water manufacturer Bisleri International Pvt. Ltd. after a sample of its water was found to be non-compliant with prescribed safety standards, with the regulator declaring it unsafe under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

The public-health stakes are significant. In 2023, bottled water was the principal source of drinking water for 15% of urban and 6% of rural households, as per Data For India. For consumers buying it at railway stations, airports, highway eateries and neighbourhood shops, a sealed bottle is often taken as an assurance of safety. Yet, the data submitted in Parliament in February 2025 revealed that 333 of 1,300 enforcement samples of packaged drinking water tested in 2023-24 failed to meet prescribed standards. Similarly, in 2022-23, 650 of 1,776 samples had been found non-compliant.



Sanction for prosecution against Bisleri is not a finding of guilt or a conviction. REUTERS

What triggered the legal action?

According to the FSSAI, a sample of packaged drinking water (other than mineral water) collected from Bisleri's premises was found to be non-compliant with the prescribed limits for "bromate" and was declared unsafe under the 2006 Act. Following an appeal by the food business operator (FBO), the sample was referred to a Referral Food Laboratory for further examination, which also declared the sample unsafe, citing the detection of "polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons" (PAHs).

In its response, Bisleri has maintained that its water is safe for consumption, saying the matter concerned a batch manufactured at its Goa facility in September 2025, one of 143 manufacturing plants in its network. In a statement issued on November 23, the company said the FSSAI had collected six samples from its Goa facility on September 30, 2025. While five samples met the prescribed standards, the sixth recorded a "bromate" level of 12 micrograms per litre, against the prescribed limit of 10 micrograms per litre. Further, Bisleri said it appealed on November 22, 2025, following which the sample was sent to a referral laboratory for retesting. The laboratory, as claimed, found the bromate level within the prescribed limit but separately detected PAHs. Citing the divergent test findings, the company reportedly arranged an independent examination of the same sample at an FSSAI-approved laboratory, which, according to Bisleri, also found the bromate level within limits. The company said it submitted these results to FSSAI's Western Regional Office on February 2, 2026, but received no further communication and understood that the matter had been closed.

What are the health concerns from "bromate" and "PAHs"?

Water is essential for digestion, blood circulation, temperature regulation and kidney function, but its safety cannot be judged by its appearance, taste, odour or sealed packaging alone. Contamination may be microbiological, causing illnesses such as diarrhoea, cholera and typhoid, or chemical, with some substances posing risks through prolonged exposure. In India, packaged water broadly falls into two categories: (1) "packaged drinking water", which may be sourced from surface water, groundwater or seawater and treated through processes such as filtration, decantation, reverse osmosis (RO) and disinfection; and (2) "natural mineral water", drawn from protected underground sources and characterised by a relatively stable mineral composition. Both must meet prescribed chemical and microbiological safety standards.

Notably, the two contaminants detected in the Bisleri sample differ in their chemical composition, potential health effects, and the routes through which they can enter water. Bromate is an inorganic compound that can generally form as an unintended by-product of water treatment, particularly when ozone used for disinfection reacts with naturally occurring bromide in the source water. Its presence is a concern because the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies bromate as possibly carcinogenic to humans (Group 2B), based largely on animal studies that have linked prolonged exposure to tumours, particularly in the kidneys and thyroid. At high exposure levels, bromate can cause acute poisoning, with effects ranging from gastrointestinal distress and kidney injury to nervous-system depression, haemolytic anaemia and hearing loss, as per the World Health Organisation (WHO). Accordingly, the WHO has prescribed a provisional guideline value of 10 micrograms per litre for bromate in drinking water.

PAHs, by contrast, are a group of organic compounds produced mainly through the incomplete combustion of coal, oil, wood and other organic matter. They can enter water through industrial emissions, contaminated soil and, in some cases, through leaching from older coal-tar or bituminous linings in water-distribution pipes and storage tanks. Their health effects vary across the group: while some PAHs pose limited risks, others are carcinogenic. Benzo[a]pyrene, for instance, is classified by IARC as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1); its metabolites can bind to DNA and cause cellular mutations. The WHO has prescribed a drinking-water guideline of 0.7 micrograms per litre specifically for benzo[a]pyrene.

What is the legal framework governing packaged drinking water?

In India, food safety is governed by the 2006 Act, which established the FSSAI as the statutory national regulator. Packaged drinking water is expressly included within the definition of "food" under Section 3(1)(j) of the 2006 Act. The Act empowers FSSAI under Section 16 to prescribe science-based food standards, while enforcement is undertaken in coordination with the State Food Safety Authorities. Every FBO must obtain the requisite licence under Section 31 and ensure compliance at every stage of production, processing, distribution and sale under Section 26; Section 27 specifically fixes liability on manufacturers and packers for non-compliant products. The Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011 prescribe separate standards under Regulations 2.10.8 for "packaged drinking water" and 2.10.7 for packaged "natural mineral water". These cover permissible sources, treatment and disinfection processes, sealed containers, and microbiological and chemical parameters.

Packaging is governed by the Food Safety and Standards (Packaging) Regulations, 2018, while the Labelling and Display Regulations, 2020 require declarations of the brand owner and manufacturer, FSSAI logo and licence number, batch or lot identification, manufacture or packaging date, expiry or use-by date, net quantity, retail price and consumer-care details. Section 23 of the Act also prohibits false or misleading labelling and presentation.

The regulatory regime was further strengthened after FSSAI removed the mandatory BIS certification requirement for packaged drinking water and mineral water in October 2024. Rather than dispensing with product standards, FSSAI subsequently classified both categories as "high-risk food" products, requiring inspection before the grant of a licence or registration, annual inspections and yearly third-party food-safety audits for centrally licensed manufacturers. Its testing scheme, effective from January 1, 2026, requires manufacturers to test source water before use, maintain records of all conformity tests, conduct microbiological tests monthly, specified chemical tests quarterly and pesticide-residue tests every six months; all parameters prescribed under Regulation 2.10.8 for packaged drinking water, and under Regulation 2.10.7 for natural mineral water, must be tested at least once every six months in an FSSAI-notified, NABL-accredited laboratory conforming to ISO/IEC 17025. Non-compliance in the six-monthly tests triggers monthly testing until three consecutive batches comply.

Under Sections 38 and 47 of the 2006 Act, Food Safety Officers can inspect premises and collect samples, which are ordinarily divided into four parts for analysis and safe custody. Where the Food Analyst's report is disputed, whether through independent testing sought by the FBO or an appeal under Section 46(4), the sample is referred to a Referral Food Laboratory notified under Section 43(2), whose finding is final. Section 42 then provides the prosecution route: the Designated Officer scrutinises the analyst's report and, where imprisonment is attracted, recommends prosecution to the State Commissioner of Food Safety for sanction. Penalties for "unsafe food" are prescribed under Section 59 and vary according to whether the contravention causes no injury (imprisonment up to six months and a fine up to ₹1 lakh), non-grievous injury (up to one year and up to ₹3 lakh fine), grievous injury (up to six years and a fine up to ₹5 lakh) or death (imprisonment not less than seven years, extendable to life and a fine of at least ₹10 lakh).

What is next for Bisleri and consumers?

Sanction for prosecution against Bisleri is not a finding of guilt or a conviction. It is the statutory approval to initiate criminal proceedings before the competent court. The company will have the opportunity to contest the allegations and laboratory findings, with its criminal liability ultimately determined by the court after trial.

Moreover, the case also brings into focus wider risks associated with bottled water that extend beyond microbial and chemical contamination. These include microplastics (particles smaller than five millimetres) and nanoplastics, which are even smaller in size and considerably harder to detect and measure. Plastic packaging itself can introduce contaminants: substances such as antimony, phthalates and other plasticisers may migrate into water, particularly when exposed to heat, sunlight or prolonged storage during transportation, warehousing and retail display.

While avoiding bottles stored in heat and using suitable point-of-use filters capable of removing fine particulate matter can help reduce exposure, these are only interim precautions. A lasting response requires stronger municipal water infrastructure, affordable household filtration, publicly accessible water-quality reports and wider access to refill stations and public dispensers. Equally important is updating regulatory frameworks to include routine testing for microplastics and plastic-derived contaminants currently absent in FSSAI and BIS standards. After all, the only question a consumer should have to ask about a bottle of water is whether it is chilled, not whether it is safe.

(Kartikey Singh, lawyer, and currently working as a Law Clerk-cum-Research Associate at the Supreme Court of India; views expressed are personal)

THE GIST

- FSSAI sanctioned prosecution against Bisleri after a packaged drinking water sample from its Goa facility was found unsafe for bromate and PAH contamination, a finding the company has contested
- The case shows health risks from chemical contaminants, the regulatory framework governing packaged drinking water, and FSSAI's testing, inspection, and enforcement mechanisms
- Beyond chemical and microbial contamination, bottled water also poses risks from microplastics and chemicals leaching from plastic packaging, underscoring the need for stronger safety standards and monitoring

3. The Bisleri Case and Regulatory Gaps in Packaged Drinking Water

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper II: Health Governance, Consumer Protection and Regulatory Bodies
GS Paper III: Environmental Pollution and Plastic Waste Management

Context: FSSAI sanctioned prosecution against Bisleri after a packaged drinking water sample was found non-compliant with prescribed safety standards, raising concerns about chemical contamination and regulatory enforcement.

1. The Bisleri Case

1. A sample collected from Bisleri's Goa facility in February 2025 was found non-compliant with prescribed standards.
2. **Bromate:** Detected at 12 micrograms per litre against the permissible limit of 10 micrograms per litre.
3. **Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs):** Further testing also detected these chemical contaminants.
4. Bisleri disputed the findings and sought independent laboratory examination.
5. FSSAI sanctioned prosecution; this does not itself amount to a final conviction.

2. Health Risks of Contaminants

Contaminant	Source and Health Risks
Bromate	May form during ozonation of bromide-containing water; associated with cancer risk and kidney damage
PAHs	Produced through incomplete combustion; certain compounds are carcinogenic
Microplastics	Plastic particles below 5 mm; potential health and environmental risks

Nanoplastics	Extremely small plastic particles, generally below 1 micrometre; their long-term health impacts are still being studied

Important: WHO guideline value for bromate in drinking water is 10 micrograms per litre.

3. Regulatory Framework in India

1. **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006:** Establishes FSSAI and the legal framework for food safety.
2. **FSS (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011:** Prescribes quality and safety standards for packaged drinking water and natural mineral water.
3. **Testing Requirements:** Chemical and microbiological testing, along with periodic pesticide-residue testing.
4. **FSSAI:** Sets standards and monitors compliance in coordination with State Food Safety Authorities.
5. **Section 59:** Provides penalties for manufacturing, storing or selling unsafe food.

4. Regulatory Challenges and Way Forward

1. **Testing and Monitoring:** Strengthen independent laboratory testing and regular inspections.
2. **Emerging Contaminants:** Improve monitoring of microplastics and plastic-derived chemicals in drinking water.
3. **Packaging Safety:** Strengthen quality checks on plastic bottles and food-contact materials.
4. **Accountability:** Ensure transparent disclosure of test results and effective enforcement.
5. **Consumer Protection:** Improve access to safe drinking water and reliable quality information.

5. UPSC Prelims PYQs

PYQ 1 – UPSC 2019: Microbeads

Why is there a great concern about the ‘microbeads’ that are released into the environment?

(a) They are considered harmful to marine ecosystems.
(b) They are considered to cause skin cancer in children.
(c) They are small enough to be absorbed by crop plants in irrigated fields.
(d) They are often found to be used as food adulterants.

Answer: (a) They are considered harmful to marine ecosystems.

PYQ 2 – UPSC 2022: Nanoparticles

Consider the following statements:

1. Other than those made by humans, nanoparticles do not exist in nature.
2. Nanoparticles of some metallic oxides are used in the manufacture of some cosmetics.
3. Nanoparticles of some commercial products which enter the environment are unsafe for humans.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 3 only
(c) 1 and 2
(d) 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 2 and 3.

The internationalism of Putin and the revival of Russian messianism



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

FOR GENERATIONS, India's political classes shared political values espoused by the 1917 Russian Revolution, including anti-imperialism and socialism. But the Indian elite is far less familiar with the internationalism of Vladimir Putin's Russia, which draws on the pre-Soviet heritage of Orthodox Christianity and Slavic solidarity.

A good place to start exploring this unfamiliar terrain is the interview the Russian President gave last week to Emir Kusturica, the Serbian filmmaker who has twice won the Palme d'Or at Cannes. Born into a secular Muslim family in Sarajevo, Kusturica was baptised into the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2005. He has long championed Moscow's Orthodox and Slavic traditions.

The interview, released on November 20, was recorded for a documentary marking the 80th birthday of Patriarch Kirill, who has headed the Russian Orthodox Church since 2009. Kirill has backed Putin's war in Ukraine as a defence of Russia's spiritual world. In 2024, a Church-led council he chairs went further. It called the conflict a "holy war" in which Russia resists a collective West that has fallen to Satan.

Kusturica's central question was simple, aimed at probing the tension between the fact that Russia and Ukraine share faith and ethnicity but are locked in a costly, suicidal war. Kusturica wanted to know how a Russian victory served the people of Ukraine.

Let us step back and look at a bit of history. In 988 CE, Kyivan Rus', whose heritage both Russia and Ukraine claim, adopted Christianity from Constantinople, today's Istanbul. In 1054, the church split between the Latin West, centred on Rome, and the Greek East, centred on Constantinople. Russia inherited the eastern, Orthodox tradition.

An arresting moment in Putin's interview was the President's invocation of an old Russian belief: "Moscow is the Third Rome; there will be no fourth." The idea is attributed to Filofei, a monk of the Yelizarov monastery near Pskov. He wrote in the early 16th century to Vasily III, the Grand Prince of Moscow. The first Rome had strayed from the true faith. Constantinople, the second, fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Moscow alone remained guardian of Orthodoxy. Filofei was reminding his ruler of his duty to protect the faith. But later generations gave the idea a more expansive and expansionist meaning.

Putin, however, made clear that the theology was not the main point; what mattered was the present. Asked whether Russia could be an ark to shelter all believers in Christ, he answered without hesitation that it could. He spoke of Europeans who had moved to Russia to raise their children in traditional religious values.

The idea of Moscow as the "Third Rome" is very much part of Russian messianism — the conviction that Russia carries a spiritual mission beyond its borders. However, this idea always had to compete with the persistent belief that Russia's future lay in modernisation alongside the West.

> Ukraine is where Putin's universalist claim breaks down, for Moscow's spiritual authority is contested within Orthodoxy itself

The Bolsheviks, who brought the radical Western trend to Russia, tried to stamp out the nation's religious inheritance with official atheism. But Soviet Russia also adopted a new universal mission of freeing humanity from capitalism. Nikolai Berdyaev, the philosopher the Bolsheviks expelled in 1922, argued that the old Russian messianism presented itself in new communist clothes. In his reading, the "Third International" had replaced the Third Rome. The Third International refers to the Moscow-led Comintern, which guided communist parties worldwide, including India's.

Soviet persecution, however, could not abolish Russia's spiritual inheritance. The Church revived after the Soviet collapse, and Putin has made it a pillar of the state. Remarkably, he told Kusturica that socialism had been akin to Christianity in its promise of brotherhood, before it degenerated into repression and camps.

Putin's explicit political turn to Christian internationalism dates to at least 2013. At the Valdai forum that September, he accused many Euro-Atlantic countries of rejecting their roots, including the Christian values on which Western civilisation rests. Within days, Pat Buchanan, the veteran American conservative, asked in his column whether Putin was "one of us" in the culture war for mankind's future.

That question has echoed across the Western right ever since. American evangelicals and Russian Orthodox hierarchs have made common cause against abortion and same-sex marriage. Popular conservative podcasters cast Russia as the last bastion of Christian values.

In Europe, too, some on the far right see Russia as the "Christian Bear" that must be accommodated rather than fought in the bigger battle against Western woke decadence. But Ukraine is where Putin's universalist claim breaks down, for Moscow's spiritual authority is contested within Orthodoxy itself. In 2019, the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul, first among equals in the Orthodox world, recognised an independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine. After the 2022 invasion, even the Ukrainian Church long tied to Moscow declared its independence and distanced itself from Kirill's blessing of the war.

Putin told Kusturica that unity with Ukrainians need not mean a single state, thereby leaving space for a compromise on territory provided several other contentious issues could be resolved. He urged Ukrainian soldiers to cross over to the "right side of history". But shared faith and ethnicity, as modern history tells us, cannot easily overcome competing claims of sovereignty.

The Indian elite, which once related deeply to Soviet internationalism, must now pay serious attention to Russia's renewed idiom: The Third Rome. It is rooted in the old Russian self-image that will shape Moscow's contemporary relations with Europe and America long after the guns fall silent in Ukraine.

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4. The Internationalism of Putin and the Revival of Russian Messianism

Source: The Indian Express – Raja Mandala
GS Paper II: International Relations – Russia and the Changing World Order
GS Paper I: World History – Russian Revolution and Historical Ideologies

Context: Vladimir Putin is reviving Russia's historical and religious identity, particularly the idea of Moscow as the "Third Rome", to justify its distinct civilisational identity and global role.

1. Understanding Russian Messianism

1. **Meaning:** The belief that Russia has a special historical and spiritual mission to protect and guide civilisation.
2. **Third Rome Concept:** Moscow is viewed as the successor to Rome and Constantinople as the guardian of Orthodox Christianity.
3. **Origin:** Associated with the 16th-century monk Filofei, who argued that Moscow was the final centre of Orthodox Christianity.
4. **Russian Identity:** Combines Orthodox Christianity, Slavic traditions and national identity.
5. **Modern Revival:** Putin uses this historical narrative to strengthen national unity and justify Russia's independent geopolitical role.

2. Historical Evolution

1. **988 CE:** Kievan Rus' adopted Christianity from Constantinople.
2. **1054:** The Great Schism divided Christianity into Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions.
3. **1453:** Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire strengthened Moscow's claim as the centre of Orthodox Christianity.
4. **1917 Russian Revolution:** Bolshevik rule promoted atheism and communist internationalism, challenging religious traditions.
5. **Post-Soviet Period:** The Russian Orthodox Church regained influence, particularly under Putin.

3. Putin's Political and Geopolitical Strategy

1. **Religious Nationalism:** Uses Orthodox Christianity and traditional values to strengthen national identity.
2. **Anti-Western Narrative:** Presents Russia as a defender of traditional values against Western liberalism.
3. **Geopolitical Influence:** Seeks to restore Russia's historical influence and status as a major global power.
4. **Ukraine Conflict:** Putin's civilisational claims face resistance because Ukraine asserts its independent national and religious identity.
5. **Orthodox Church:** The Russian Orthodox Church has become an important pillar of the state's national narrative.

4. Significance for International Relations

1. **Russia–West Relations:** Civilisational differences deepen political and ideological tensions.
2. **Ukraine:** Historical and religious claims complicate questions of sovereignty and national identity.
3. **Global Order:** Russia's worldview challenges Western political and ideological influence.

4. **India's Strategic Interest:** India must understand Russia's evolving identity and geopolitical outlook while maintaining its strategic autonomy.

Indian private space firms sign 'largest-of-its-kind' B2B deal on satellite systems

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Indian space companies GalaxEye and Bellatrix Aerospace on Tuesday signed a multi-year contract in which Bellatrix Aerospace will supply in-space propulsion systems for the next 30 satellites GalaxEye is building.

This made the deal the "largest business-to-business order" one Indian private space company has placed with another since the space sector opened to private players in 2020, a press release noted. While private companies have participated in India's space sector since inception, it has usually been as suppliers to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The GalaxEye-Bellatrix deal was unveiled at the 5th India International Space Conclave, organised by the Indian Space Association (ISpA). The financial details of the contract were not disclosed.

Bengaluru-based firms

Both companies are based in Bengaluru.

GalaxEye is building the world's first OptoSAR satellite constellation. OptoSAR



GalaxEye and Bellatrix Aerospace representatives pose with the signed MoU

demonstration. Our thrusters have already fired in orbit on ISRO missions, and we have built the production lines to deliver that same performance at constellation scale," Rohan M. Ganapathy, co-founder and CEO of Bellatrix Aerospace, said in a statement. Bellatrix makes electric and green propulsion systems for satellites and orbital transfer vehicles.

Mission Drishti, launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 on May 3, 2026, became the world's first OptoSAR satellite in orbit. It validated GalaxEye's spacecraft deployment, attitude control, onboard computing and in-house mission operations before contact was lost after a geomagnetic storm, the company stated. In September, the Department of Science and Technology's Technol-

every critical system on a satellite has to be one we can see, test and improve up close," Suyash Singh, co-founder and CEO of GalaxEye, said in a statement.

'Private sector crucial'

ISRO chairman V. Narayanan said that private industry was now indispensable to India's space ecosystem.

"Today, we are extremely happy that 440 start-up companies are working in the space area. Whenever a launch vehicle lifts off or we place a satellite, 70-80% of the budget is pumped into the Indian industry. Without the support of Indian industry, we would not have reached the present level."

Other officials, however, pointed out while India was putting in place a system to increase capacity, it had to work towards increasing demand for products from the private space ecosystem.

"The first phase of India's space reforms opened the sector and created an institutional framework for private participation. Now India has to work on generating heavy demand. I have less concern about capacity being created; I see a bigger need for demand

5. Indian Private Space Firms Sign Major Deal on Satellite Systems

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper III: Science & Technology – Space Technology, Private Sector Participation and Space Economy

Context: Bengaluru-based GalaxEye and Bellatrix Aerospace signed a multi-year agreement under which Bellatrix will supply propulsion systems for GalaxEye's next 30 satellites.

1. About the Agreement

1. **GalaxEye:** Developing the world's first OptoSAR satellite constellation.
2. **Bellatrix Aerospace:** Will supply in-space propulsion systems for 30 satellites.
3. **Propulsion Systems:** Enable satellites to manoeuvre and maintain or change their orbits.
4. The agreement represents a major business-to-business order between Indian private space companies.

2. Important Technologies

1. **OptoSAR:** Combines optical imaging and Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), enabling observation through clouds, smoke and darkness.
2. **Mission Drishti:** Launched aboard SpaceX Falcon 9 in May 2026; demonstrated satellite deployment and onboard computing.
3. **Electric Propulsion:** Uses electrical energy to accelerate propellant for spacecraft movement.
4. **RDI Support:** The Research, Development and Innovation Fund committed ₹63.84 crore to GalaxEye's next multi-sensor satellite.

3. India's Private Space Ecosystem

1. **Space Reforms (2020):** Opened the space sector to private participation.
2. **IN-SPACe:** Authorises and facilitates private-sector participation in space activities.
3. **NSIL:** Commercialises ISRO technologies and provides space-related services.
4. **ISRO:** Continues to undertake major research, development and space missions while supporting the wider ecosystem.

4. Significance and Challenges

1. **Self-Reliance:** Reduces dependence on foreign space technologies.
2. **Commercialisation:** Expands India's space economy and global market presence.

3. **Innovation:** Encourages indigenous satellite manufacturing and advanced propulsion systems.
4. **Challenges:** High investment requirements, limited market demand, technology development and the need for stable regulations.

5. UPSC Prelims PYQ – 2026

Consider the following statements with regard to involvement of private entities in India's space programme:

1. The Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) is an autonomous agency formed to facilitate participation of private entities.
2. Agnikul Cosmos launched the world's first flight using a 3D-printed rocket engine.
3. Skyroot Aerospace has developed liquid fuel for GSLV.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 2 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c) 1 and 2 only

Explanation: IN-SPACe facilitates private participation. Agnikul achieved the first flight using a single-piece, fully 3D-printed rocket engine. Skyroot develops its own launch vehicles and engines, not liquid fuel for GSLV.

Revisiting monthly frequency of PLFS



G.C. Manna

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To meet the growing demand for employment-unemployment statistics at a more frequent interval, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation introduced the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) with its first round conducted in 2017-18.

The PLFS was launched primarily with two objectives: one, to produce detailed annual estimates of important labour force parameters based on a longer reference period of one year and a shorter reference period of one week (popularly known as the Current Weekly Status (CWS) approach) preceding the date of survey for both rural and urban areas of States and UTs; and two, publishing quarterly estimates of three key labour force indicators – the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), the Worker Population Ratio (WPR), and the Unemployment Rate (UR) – as per the CWS for urban areas of 22 major States as well as all-India. These parameters have significantly strengthened India's labour market database.

Since January 2025, the PLFS sampling methodology was revamped to produce monthly estimates of LFPR, WPR, and UR as per CWS for both rural and urban areas at the national level, apart from expanding the coverage of quarterly estimates to rural areas as well. This necessitated a substantial increase in sample size. During PLFS-2025, around 2.7 lakh households were visited for data collection as compared to about one lakh households which used to be visited under the old design. Similarly, the total number of sample locations (villages/urban blocks) increased from about 12,700 earlier to 22,594 during PLFS-2025. Importantly, the cited figures represent only the 'first visit' samples and do not include a large proportion of these samples covered under 're-visits'. Under the revamped design, the monthly PLFS collects data from nearly 4,100 villages and 3,400 urban blocks, gathering data from about 49,000 rural and 40,000 urban households.

Analysis clearly shows that the revamped PLFS design with a substantial increase in sample size produces monthly estimates which do not differ significantly across most months

Static monthly numbers

Given the substantial increase in sample size, it would be of interest to examine the month-to-month changes in key indicators. This will help assess whether the observed changes reflect ground reality or whether they are likely due to sampling fluctuations.

For brevity, this article examines two indicators – the WPR and UR, considering all persons aged 15 years and above, with rural and urban areas taken together. Further, the scope of this analysis is confined to the latest 10-month period from January 2026 to October 2026, reflecting the most recently released estimates.

For the 10 consecutive months till October 2026, the released estimates of UR are 5%, 4.9%, 5.1%, 5.2%, 5.5%, 5.5%, 5.1%, 5%, 5%, and 4.9% respectively while the corresponding WPR estimates are 53.1%, 53.2%, 52.6%, 52.2%, 51.4%, 51.4%, 52.5%, 52.8%, 52.7%, and 53%. Statistically, whether these estimates – and more importantly the observed month-to-month changes – reflect actual ground realities can be assessed by estimating 'Confidence Limits' (CLs) for each month within which the true values are likely to fall with a pre-specified probability. For any two selected months, the observed change in the indicator is not statistically significant if their 'Confidence Intervals' (CIs) overlap. Under such a situation, while the estimates may suggest an increase or decline, the true underlying trend in the population could be different.

Importantly, none of the nine monthly changes in the UR from February to October 2026 have been statistically significant compared to their preceding months. For example, consider April 2026 and May 2026, with published URs as 5.2% and 5.5%, respectively. The CIs – with a probability of 0.95 (that is, with a 95% chance) – for the UR are 5%-5.4% for April 2026 and 5.3%-5.7% for May 2026. These ranges overlap and it is possible that the true URs were 5.4% in April and 5.3% in May. Therefore, the actual UR might have declined in May 2026, despite the published estimates indicating an increase. A similar pattern applies to the WPR, where monthly changes are statistically significant only for the two months of May and July 2026.

The analysis clearly shows that the revamped PLFS design with a substantial increase in sample size produces monthly estimates which do not differ significantly across most months. Detecting real changes in these monthly indicators would require overhauling the sampling strategy and further expanding the sample size. Given the high resource costs with no significant difference noticed in the monthly estimates, a practical alternative is to release only quarterly and annual estimates, tailored to appropriate sample size requirements.

6. Revisiting Monthly Frequency of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

Source: The Hindu
GS Paper III: Indian Economy – Employment and Labour Market

Context: Since January 2025, PLFS has introduced monthly employment estimates with expanded coverage and a larger sample size, raising questions about the reliability of short-term changes in employment indicators.

1. About PLFS

1. Launched in **2017–18** by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
2. Provides estimates of employment and unemployment across India.
3. Measures three key indicators: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR) and Unemployment Rate (UR).
4. Earlier, it provided annual employment estimates and quarterly urban estimates; the revamped design introduced monthly estimates for both rural and urban areas.

2. Major Changes Since January 2025

1. Monthly estimates of LFPR, WPR and UR for rural and urban India.
2. Expanded rural coverage at the national level.
3. Increased sample size from approximately 1 lakh to 2.7 lakh households.
4. Improved geographical coverage and frequency of labour-market data.

3. Key Findings and Analytical Concerns

1. **Unemployment Rate:** Monthly estimates ranged between 4.9% and 5.5% from January to October 2026.
2. **Worker Population Ratio:** Estimates ranged between 51.4% and 53.2%.
3. **Limited Monthly Variation:** Most month-to-month changes were not statistically significant, suggesting that small fluctuations may not represent actual changes in employment.
4. **Confidence Intervals:** Overlapping intervals indicate that apparent changes may arise from sampling variations rather than genuine labour-market shifts.
5. **Policy Implication:** Increasing survey frequency alone does not guarantee better understanding of employment trends; statistical reliability and adequate sample design are equally important.

4. Way Forward

1. Strengthen sampling methodology and statistical reliability.
2. Publish confidence intervals alongside monthly estimates.
3. Avoid drawing policy conclusions from insignificant short-term fluctuations.
4. Use appropriately designed quarterly and annual estimates to identify meaningful employment trends.