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India set to host FIDE World Cup 2025

Mayank Chaudhary

CHENNAI

India is set to host the FIDE World Cup 2025, marking the country's first major international chess tournament since the 2022 Chennai Chess Olympiad.

FIDE, the international chess governing body, initially listed India as the host in its 2025 calendar for the tournament scheduled from October 31 to November 27. ‘

However, the listing was

briefly retracted and replaced with “to be announced” on Monday.

Despite this, sources in All India Chess Federation (AICF) have confirmed to *The Hindu* that the hosting rights have been finalised.

“India will host the FIDE World Cup 2025, and we will soon announce it officially with the final dates,” said a senior AICF official.

The FIDE World Cup, a prestigious knockout tournament featuring over 200

players, also serves as a pathway to the Candidates Tournament, with three qualification spots up for grabs.

India's R. Praggnanandhaa made history in the 2023 edition, clinching the silver after losing to Magnus Carlsen in the final.

Viswanathan Anand remains the only Indian to have won the World Cup, achieving back-to-back titles in 2000 and 2002 when the format included a round-robin stage.



Trump: Western firms' Russia exit dilemma

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters

LONDON/MOSCOW

Hold or fold? That is the dilemma facing the hundreds of Western companies still operating in Russia as Donald Trump returns to the White House with a promise to end the Ukraine conflict while Moscow's tougher exit conditions make it costlier to leave. Many companies, including Renault, McDonald's and Heineken have left Russia since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022, usually taking hefty write-downs and selling their assets at steep discounts demanded by the Kremlin.

Others have stayed.

Makers of food and hygiene products, such as PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble and Mondelez have maintained a presence citing humanitarian reasons. European lenders Raiffeisen Bank International and UniCredit remain ensnared by profits stuck in Russia and the need for exit approval from Moscow. Russia tightened its exit terms in October to encourage businesses to stay, demanding discounts of at least 60% on exit transactions and a 35% "voluntary contribution" to Russia's Budget from the deal price, termed an "exit tax" by Washington. Reuters spoke to 15 lawyers, bankers, advisers and business people involved in dozens of Western corporate exits from Russia for this story. They



Horns of dilemma: Some firms could see prospects for potential sanctions relief as an opportunity to leave. REUTERS

said firms still present would be carefully watching what Mr. Trump, who will be sworn as President of the United States on Monday, can deliver and adjusting their plans accordingly. Some requested anonymity to speak freely.

"Mr. Trump's election

victory adds another layer of uncertainty for multinationals with assets in Russia," said Ian Massey, head of corporate intelligence, EMEA, at global risk consultancy S-RM.

"While the Kremlin continues to ratchet up the costs of leaving the Russian

market, Mr. Trump may reduce the costs of staying, creating a kind of stasis." It is far from clear what Mr. Trump can accomplish in his second term, with his advisers now conceding the conflict will take at least months to resolve.

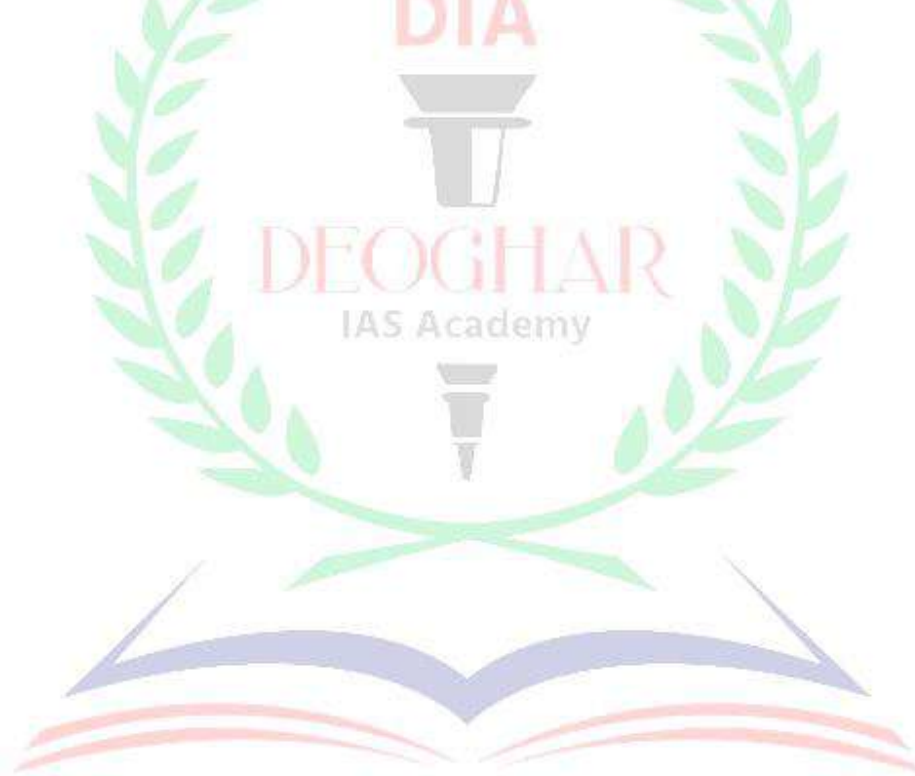
Political cover

Yet his mere arrival may give some companies the political cover to stay on in Russia, while others could see prospects for potential sanctions relief as an opportunity to leave.

"We might see some sanctions being dialled down if the new administration is able to negotiate a settlement of the conflict in Ukraine," said Alan Kartashkin, partner at Debevoise and Plimpton. That could unfreeze some fo-

reign-owned assets stuck in Russia, unlocking another wave of exit deals, he said. Companies already reluctant to leave may be more likely to wait things out, said an M&A investor who has worked on dozens of deals. Another person, who has advised on over 100 exits, said Mr. Trump's return may also cause those looking to cut ties with Russia to change plans and decide to stay.

Alexei Yakovlev, director, Finance Ministry's financial policy department, told Reuters in December talks on exit deals were ongoing, without naming specific companies. Asked if Mr. Trump's arrival may cause exits or see some firms return, he said: "It's beyond our understanding."



How does welfare politics translate into votes?

When welfare is the new normal, credit monopolisation through branding and centralisation may not necessarily fetch electoral rewards if people struggle to access welfare services

G. Sampath

Kailash, KK (2024), 'The Politics of Welfare: The BJP and the Discerning Voter,' *Studies in Indian Politics*, 12 (2) 228-250, 2024, Lokniti, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

Right from the time of its independence, India has had to contend with extreme inequality and a large population of poor people. While there have been improvements since 1947, the twin challenges of high inequality and widespread indigence remain. This has made social welfare an integral element of electoral politics.

But what is the exact dynamic that determines how welfare initiatives translate into votes, if and when they do? This paper by political scientist K.K. Kailash attempts to answer these questions using voting studies data from the National Election Studies post-poll survey in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Kailash's key contention is that voters do not "cast their votes only on whether they received private (welfare) benefits but also consider factors such as their experience and well being while accessing those goods and services." One cannot assume that those who received the benefits will necessarily vote for their benefactor party. What the paper describes as "individual-level processes" – such as how easy or tough it was to access these benefits, and the overall economic well being of the voter – are also factors that influence voter choices.

Background of welfare politics

The paper starts off with an overview of the scholarship on welfare politics in India, grouping them into two broad streams. One set of studies have focussed on the programmatic elements: the design, implementation, delivery, outcomes, etc. The other set has looked at the influence of welfare policies on two related elements: credit attribution and voting behaviour. While the two sets of studies have bridged the gap between politics and public policy, "they do not necessarily talk to each other." This paper brings together the two strands to examine if the experience of accessing welfare matters for vote choices, and in the process, nuances long-standing debates on social service delivery and its relation to vote choice.

Before coming to the electoral impact of what has come to be described, sometimes derisively, as 'revdi politics', it might be useful consider how welfare politics has evolved in India.

Initially, the imperative to address socio-economic inequality drove the conception of welfare programmes as part of planned economic growth. The state perforce had to play a significant role because "social forces were status quoist and would not let change happen." This paradigm changed when India switched to a market-led growth strategy. Welfarism, from being a good in itself, began to be seen as "an antidote to the limitations of the market". Welfare provisioning became an "appendage to the process of economic reforms" – a tool to ensure that reforms remained sustainable in the face of the rising



Daily grind: MGNREGA workers register their work attendance in Kancheepuram in 2024. FILE PHOTO

inequalities and insecurities it created.

But with the advent of a dogmatic adherence to fiscal discipline and concomitant budgetary constraints, States struggled to increase investments in welfare understood in its traditional sense of public goods. For instance, investments in public healthcare and education began to stagnate. Apart from resource constraints, there was another reason why welfare policies conceived as capacity-building investments took a backseat – the outcomes "do not conveniently materialise with the rhythm of the electoral calendar," and made credit-claiming difficult.

Around this time, welfare witnessed another paradigm shift – to a more 'responsive' strategy, where "provisioning had to meet internationally accepted, supposedly more efficient and equitable norms and delivery mechanisms". In other words, "all government spending had to cope with the demands for market-compatible forms of state intervention". This paved the way for an extreme reliance on technology, cash subsidies, and direct income transfers – all aimed at making the outputs more tangible. Welfare delivery was reduced to "putting money in people's hands", ostensibly to bestow on them the freedom to choose what they want to do with it. Kailash argues that this reorganisation of public welfare as per market principles did two things – one, it recast citizens as 'consumers', and two, it turned welfare provisioning into an opportunity for political parties seeking to mobilise voter support.

Not only did this end up degrading welfare as a policy intervention, it also had a negative impact on long-term economic thinking and strategic provisioning of resources for capacity-building. Schemes that offered cash transfers, housing, and gas connections were 'tangible' and could be easily connected to a singular benefactor, enabling the "brand identification of parties". Thus, welfare, having started out

as a policy instrument to reduce inequality, provide a safety net and build national capacity for equitable growth, has dwindled into a handy tool to offset the limitations of the market, and today serves as a "key component of the electoral arithmetic of political parties."

Centralisation, monopolising credit

Though most sectors in which schemes are implemented are in State or Concurrent lists, the paper notes that the incumbent BJP "has gone big" on centrally sponsored schemes. This "centralising thrust", accompanied by "monopolising credit through branding", as evident from the nomenclature of various centrally funded schemes, are the other key features of the current welfare regime.

To ascertain whether welfare provisioning helps bring credit and votes to the incumbent, Kailash divides voters into beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and further divides the former into those who benefited from one or two schemes, and those who benefited from three or more schemes. Were voters who benefited from more schemes more likely to vote for the incumbent (in the context of this study, the BJP)? Data from 2024 and preceding elections suggest, in general, they do, while non-beneficiaries and those who benefited from fewer schemes preferred the Opposition. A closer examination of the data, however, shows a more complex picture.

Votes don't always follow credit

In 2024, there was a 30-point increase in the number of people crediting the Centre compared to 2019 for the five major schemes they were asked about: the public distribution system (PDS), Ujjwala (free gas connection with cylinder), MGNREGA, Ayushman Bharat, and the housing scheme. "Given the branding and the constant reminder through advertisements in multiple spaces that these programmes were personal 'guarantees' of the prime

minister, this attribution is not surprising," notes the paper. But did the credit get translated into votes? Not necessarily.

First of all, when welfare becomes the new normal, with every party competing to promise similar schemes, voters' expectations – especially about the nature of service delivery and quality of services – go up. As a result, voters tend to be more discerning about their expectations from the government. So the incumbent must "not only have a reasonable basket of programmes but also ensure their quality" and easy access for citizens. Without quality and access, claim-making could prove counter-productive. As Kailash argues, "Credit monopolisation and centralisation may not bring imagined electoral rewards if people struggle to access welfare services."

Kailash also tests the hypothesis that a 'double engine' government – the same party in power in the State and Centre – with greater welfare offerings would enable the incumbent to monopolise credit and create more partisan voters. He creates two categories of States: those ruled by the incumbent (the BJP or its allies) and those under the Opposition. The survey reveals that while the central government did get credit for welfare programmes across the country, irrespective of the party government at the State level, the incumbent at the Centre "did not get the votes even in the states ruled by the incumbent".

However, in States ruled by the Opposition, "when the voter gave credit to the state government for welfare schemes, the vote also followed." And in States with 'double-engine' governments, "the votes were split between the Opposition and the incumbent when the voter credited the state government." Where voters credited the local government, chances of voting for the opposition were higher. "The voter acknowledges but is not necessarily beholden to the scheme provider."

So why does the incumbent at the Centre, which designs and partly funds the welfare schemes, and even gets credit for them, not get the vote also? Well, "it is not the Centre that implements these programmes; the state and local governments do." When there are last-mile delivery issues, unfair exclusions and access problems, citizens "are more likely to hold those claiming credit responsible for their woes." As the paper notes, "the discerning voter is more concerned about the nature of the service rather than who provides it."

The voter's personal financial condition was another critical factor. When individuals were satisfied with their financial condition, easy access to welfare translated into votes for the incumbent (15-point advantage over the Opposition). But when the individual was unhappy with their financial condition, it did not matter if the access was easy or difficult – the Opposition benefited. Those who were unhappy with their financial condition, and found it tough to access welfare, were most likely to vote for the Opposition.

In conclusion, it would be fair to say there are limits to credit-claiming and welfare branding. As the paper concludes, "welfare beneficiaries are no longer passive recipients but have become discerning consumers." If welfare provisioning is now an integral element of voter mobilisation, then governments will have to focus more on improving access as well as other dimensions of the economy that impact personal economic well being.

A more discerning voter thus creates space for the Opposition by seeking accountability from the credit-claiming incumbent.

UGC regulations or State university laws?

The crux of the dispute is whether UGC regulations framed by the UGC's Chairman, Vice-Chairman and 10 other members can supersede provisions of State University Acts which are plenary laws passed by State legislatures and assented to by the Governor or President

LETTER & SPIRIT

K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty

Six of Tamil Nadu's State universities are at present without a Vice Chancellor (VC). Some of these posts have been vacant from a few months to over a year. This impasse is due to a disagreement between the Governor and the State government regarding the composition of the search committee for selecting VCs.

The Governor (as ex-officio Chancellor of State universities under the University Acts) insists on including a nominee of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the search committee as per Regulation 7.3 of the UGC Regulations, 2018. Conversely, the State government insists on adhering to the respective State University Acts, which generally require the search committee to consist of one nominee each from the Chancellor, the syndicate, and the senate. It opposes UGC involvement due to concerns over erosion of State autonomy in university governance.

Conflicting Supreme Court rulings have complicated the situation. One set of judgments support the Governor's stance that UGC regulations are mandatory and can override the State University Acts in cases of conflict. Another set of judgments back the State government, holding that UGC regulations are merely recommendatory for State universities. The controversy has been exacerbated by the UGC's Draft Regulations, 2025 which are seen to erode State autonomy further. There is a somewhat similar stand-off in Kerala and Punjab where numerous universities also face leadership vacancies. This has led to serious deterioration in university administration, including delays in staff appointments and award of degrees.

A constitutional question

UGC regulations are a subordinate legislation framed under Section 26 of the UGC Act, 1956. The crux of the dispute is whether UGC regulations framed by the UGC's Chairman, Vice-Chairman and 10 other members can supersede provisions of State University Acts which are plenary laws passed by State legislatures and assented to by the Governor or President. This is part of a larger question of law dealing with Centre-State relations – "can delegated legislation (rules, regulations, notifications, etc.) framed by the Union Government and its agencies under a Central law override the provisions of a plenary State law?"

It underlines a critical constitutional issue regarding the scope of delegated legislation with potential for eroding the separation of powers, and federalism – both considered 'basic features' of the Constitution.

Judicial precedents

Article 254(1) of the Constitution addresses conflicts between central and State laws. It states that if a State law is repugnant to a central law on matters in the Concurrent List, the central law will prevail, and the conflicting part of the State law will be void. The plain wording of Article 254(1) indicates that it applies only to plenary laws enacted by Parliament and State legislatures, and not to delegated legislation. The Supreme Court has consistently upheld this interpretation in several landmark judgments.

The leading case on the subject is *Ch. Tika Ramji versus State of Uttar Pradesh* (1956). The Supreme Court ruled that the Centre's Sugarcane Control Order, 1955



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issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, could not repeal the provisions of the U.P. Sugarcane Act, 1953. It held: "The power of repeal, if any, was vested in Parliament, and Parliament alone could exercise it by enacting an appropriate provision in regard thereto. Parliament could not delegate this power of repeal to any executive authority. Such delegation, if made, would be void..."

In *Indian Express newspapers (Bombay) versus Union of India* (1984), the Supreme Court ruled: "Subordinate legislation may be questioned on any of the grounds on which plenary legislation is questioned. In addition, it may also be questioned on the ground that it does not conform to the statute under which it is made. It may further be questioned on the ground that it is contrary to some other statute. That is because subordinate legislation must yield to plenary legislation." In *J.K. Industries versus Union of India* (2007), the Supreme Court again ruled: "(Subordinate legislation) may further be questioned on the ground that it is inconsistent with the provisions of the Act or that it is contrary to some other statute applicable on the same subject matter. Therefore, it has to yield to plenary legislation." These rulings make it clear that the Central Government and its agencies cannot use subordinate legislation to override plenary State laws; any changes require a plenary central law passed by Parliament.

An overreach by the UGC

There is no repugnancy between the provisions of the UGC Act, 1956 and Tamil Nadu's University Acts because no provision of the UGC Act addresses the appointment of VCs. According to the UGC, its power to form Regulation 7.3 relating to VCs is derived from Section 26(d)(e), which allows the UGC to define qualifications for university teaching staff, and Section 26(d)(g), which permits regulation of standards and coordination of work or facilities in universities, of the UGC Act, 1956. But the VC is not a 'teaching staff' within the meaning of S.26(d)(e). In all University Acts – Central and State – the VC is an "officer of the university" along with the Chancellor, Registrar, Controller of Examinations, Finance Officer and Directors. So, the above two provisions do not apply to VCs. Moreover, the UGC's powers under

Section 12(d) of the Act are only recommendatory. While the UGC can advise on standards in higher education, it cannot enforce compliance, except by withholding grants under Section 14. The Supreme Court has affirmed this interpretation in *University of Delhi versus Raj Singh* (1994), ruling that UGC regulations are advisory, not mandatory. Universities can choose whether or not to follow them, albeit at the risk of losing funding. Thus, UGC's regulation 7.3 on VCs is a classic case of executive overreach in delegated legislation and is *ultra vires* the UGC Act, 1956.

Additionally, the UGC's shifting stance – no regulation on VCs till 2010; introducing a UGC nominee on the search committee in 2010; withdrawing this requirement in 2013; reinstating it in 2018; and expanded control in the 2025 draft regulations – reflects an agenda driven more by administrative control than a genuine effort to improve academic standards.

Inconsistencies in judgments

Recently, some conflicting Supreme Court judgments have created confusion.

In *Annamalai University versus Secretary, Information & Tourism* (2009), *State of West Bengal versus Anindya Sankar Das* (2022), *Gambhiran K. Gadhi versus State of Gujarat* (2022) and *Professor Sreejith P.S. versus Dr. Rajasree M.S.* (2022), the Supreme Court held, without articulating reasons, that once UGC regulations are laid before both Houses of Parliament, they become part of the UGC Act, invoking Article 254(1) and rendering any VC appointments contrary to these regulations void.

However, in *Kalyani Mathbhanan versus K.V. Jayaraj* (2015), the Supreme Court used the same rationale but confusingly ruled that UGC Regulations are not mandatory for State Universities unless adopted by the State. In *P.J. Dharmaraj versus Church of South India* (December 2024), the Supreme Court held: "If the State Government itself has not adopted the amended regulations, the same cannot be applicable to the (institute)." In other words, UGC regulations apply only if adopted by the State.

The interpretation that UGC regulations lose their subordinate character and automatically become part of the parent Act merely by being laid

before Parliament is not supported by the Constitution or the General Clauses Act, 1897. It contravenes a significant precedent ruled in *Chief Inspector of Mines versus Karan Chand Thapar* (1960) where the Supreme Court held: "(Rules) continue to be rules subordinate to the Act, and though for certain purposes, including the purpose of construction, they are to be treated as if contained in the Act, their true nature as subordinate rule is not lost." In other words, they retain their character as subordinate legislation and do not become integral to the parent Act.

There are three recognised procedures for laying subordinate legislation before a legislature – (i) without further procedure; here the subordinate legislation takes effect immediately and is for information only; (ii) negative resolution procedure; here legislation takes effect immediately but can be annulled or modified by the legislature within a limited period (as in the case of UGC regulations under Section 28(1)); (iii) affirmative resolution procedure; here resolution takes effect only after receiving prior approval from the legislature.

Courts should recognise only rules and regulations laid under the affirmative resolution procedure as part of the parent Act, because the other two procedures have nil or limited legislative oversight and allow executive overreach.

What next?

Given the constitutional significance of the dispute and doctrinal ambiguities, a definitive ruling by a Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court is imperative. Such a ruling would hopefully reaffirm that Article 254(1) of the Constitution applies only to conflicts between plenary Central and State laws; clarify that delegated legislation does not automatically become part of the parent Act unless laid under the affirmative resolution procedure; and emphasise the advisory nature of UGC regulations for State universities unless adopted by the State.

Such clarity is essential not only to restore the normal functioning of State universities across the country, but also to preserve the delicate balance of legislative powers between the Centre and States.

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THE GIST

Conflicting Supreme Court rulings have complicated the situation. One set of judgments support the Governor's stance that UGC regulations are mandatory and can override the State University Acts in cases of conflict. Another set of judgments back the State government.

There is a somewhat similar stand-off in Kerala and Punjab where numerous universities also face leadership vacancies.

Given the constitutional significance of the dispute and doctrinal ambiguities, a definitive ruling by a Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court is imperative.

Prioritising IMEC is in America's best interest

The United States-India relationship has evolved into an increasingly vital strategic partnership ever since the Clinton administration laid the foundation for a new direction in the 1990s. Today, broad bipartisan consensus supports building upon these ties even further, driven by converging interests in economic growth, regional security, and democratic values. As global dynamics shift, the importance of this relationship for the Trump administration becomes even more pronounced.

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) agreement presents a tremendous opportunity for President Donald Trump to solidify this multilateral partnership while advancing both the strategic interests of the U.S. and India. By leading the effort to secure cooperation among the participating nations, the U.S. can help create a robust economic corridor to ensure free and open trade routes, with enhanced energy security and technological innovation, which, in turn, will also benefit American companies.

More conceptual now

Announced in 2023, IMEC represents an ambitious vision to forge an integrated network spanning three vital regions through advanced physical and digital infrastructure. The corridor must develop efficient transportation routes, including railways, shipping networks, and maritime connections, while also establishing cross-border electricity and hydrogen pipelines and digital communication cables. The end goals should be to enhance trade connectivity and reduce transportation costs, while diversifying global supply chains and promoting deeper economic integration among participating countries (India, the U.S., the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Italy, France, Germany, and the European Commission).

At the moment, it is reasonable to suggest that IMEC is more conceptual than concrete. Meeting its lofty goals requires extensive planning and cooperation. The Trump administration's leadership on this matter could enhance his legacy on the international stage. By supporting IMEC, the U.S. and India can establish a



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The U.S. and India must ensure the completion of this project, which represents a fundamental reimagining of regional economic cooperation

compelling alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), creating a more balanced global economic architecture that aligns with western democratic values and market principles.

IMEC was never destined to be a straightforward endeavour. Each participating nation faces a complex calculus of investment, political will and economic strategy. The corridor demands substantial infrastructure investments that directly compete with other national priorities. Moreover, private sector engagement introduces another layer of complexity. Corporate investors require clear pathways to return on investment; and without active engagement from the private sector, it is unlikely that the project could succeed.

Several countries, such as Greece and Italy, have shown substantial initiative on IMEC. France has distinguished itself by appointing a special envoy in Gérard Mestrallet, who is not a traditional diplomat. France's President Emmanuel Macron has chosen a proven business leader from France to head this geopolitical and economic initiative, as he recognises its economic potential for France. The UAE and Saudi Arabia appreciate the role IMEC can play in advancing relationships with the West, and have spearheaded efforts for its implementation. Without regular, strategic engagement, there is a significant risk of creating an uneven economic landscape that could breed tension and political friction among participating nations. The corridor offers transformative economic opportunities not just for coastal regions and primary ports but also for inland areas that could become crucial nodes in this expansive trade network. Even within the region, we have already seen countries such as Iraq and Türkiye initiate trade agreements to compliment IMEC.

As an alternative to China's BRI

IMEC promises substantial economic advantages for India by dramatically reducing trade costs and transforming maritime logistics. This strategic network reduces vulnerability to potential disruptions such as those that might occur in the Suez Canal, but also creates compelling opportunities for increased foreign direct

investment. By positioning itself as an alternative to the BRI, the corridor allows India to strengthen diplomatic ties with West Asian and European countries.

Better for the environment

There are implications to this deal that could impact the earth's climate health. India has emerged as a significant player in green hydrogen development, positioning itself as a potential global leader in this emerging clean energy technology. The country has launched ambitious initiatives to develop green hydrogen as a strategic component of its energy transition and decarbonisation efforts.

India is collaborating with international partners such as Germany and Japan, and developing infrastructure for green hydrogen production, storage, and transportation. This will help reduce carbon emissions, decrease dependence on fossil fuel imports and create new job opportunities in emerging green technology sectors.

The Trump administration's role in facilitating the Abraham Accords proved instrumental in creating the diplomatic conditions that made IMEC possible. Former U.S. President Joe Biden has been a strong proponent of IMEC. Looking ahead, questions remain about IMEC's future under potential new U.S. leadership. One intriguing factor is Mr. Trump's warm personal relationship with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This rapport could prove significant to ongoing relations. Now that there is a peace agreement between Israel and Hamas, both leaders could facilitate the much needed (and required) meeting of IMEC participants to discuss the next steps.

This endeavour transcends traditional infrastructure development; it represents a fundamental reimagining of regional economic cooperation that requires unprecedented levels of coordination among diverse stakeholders. The U.S. and India, as key architects of the corridor, must work closely to shepherd this project to completion, recognising both its economic significance and environmental implications for all participating countries.



UGC's draft regulation has serious constitutional issues

The draft regulation by the University Grants Commission (UGC) on the selection and appointment of vice chancellors of universities has evoked protests by non-Bharatiya Janata Party-headed State governments. Their main objection against this regulation is that it constitutes a violation of the federal principles enshrined in the Constitution of India. The State governments concerned have demanded its withdrawal.

The UGC has sought to amend Regulation 2010 that relates to the selection and appointment of vice chancellors by widening the area of selection. Under the existing regulations, a vice chancellor can be selected only from among academicians who have a minimum experience of 10 years as professor. Through this amendment, the UGC declares that professionals with 10-plus years of experience in industry, public administration or public policy, shall also be considered.

The draft regulation raises serious constitutional issues which need to be examined by separating the political context of protest and a possible political reaction from the UGC or the party in power.

The objective of the UGC Act

The University Grants Commission Act, 1956 was enacted by Parliament to make provision for "the co-ordination and determination of standards in Universities and for that purpose, to establish the University Grants Commission". The Act, therefore, mandates the UGC to take all steps as it thinks fit for the promotion and the coordination of university education, and for the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research in universities. For performing these functions the UGC can allocate funds to the universities essentially for the maintenance and development of the universities, recommend measures necessary for the improvement of university education, advise the Union or State governments on the allocation of grants to universities for any general or specific purpose, collect information on all matters relating to university education in India and other countries and make them available to any university, regulation of fees.....

Section 26 of the UGC Act empowers the UGC to make regulations for implementing the mandate of the Act. But it is made clear in this section that these regulations need to be consistent with the Act and the rules made there under. The most important among these regulations relate to defining the qualifications required of a person to be appointed to the teaching staff in a university, the minimum standards of instructions for the grant of any



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The problem arises when the UGC begins to regulate an area which is not a part of the parent Act — namely the selection and the appointment of university vice chancellors

degree by a university, and regulating the maintenance of standards and the coordination of work or facilities in universities.

It is not the job of the UGC

The crucial point that needs to be considered here is whether the regulation made by the UGC in respect of the selection, qualification and appointment of vice chancellor is consistent with the provisions of the UGC Act. As a matter of fact, the Act does not contain any provisions relating to the selection and the appointment of vice chancellors. The fundamental objective of the Act is to determine standards in universities and the promotion and the coordination of university education. To lay down the standards of teaching and to prescribe the qualifications of teaching staff whose job is to give instructions, is the main function of the UGC — which it does by making periodic regulations. But the problem arises when this statutory body begins to regulate an area which is not a part of the parent Act. Rules, and regulations are technically called subordinate legislation. The subordinate legislation can be made only in consonance with the provisions in the Act. If the regulation goes outside the scope of the Act, it will be *ultra vires* the Act, and hence invalid.

A close reading of the Act would show that it was not meant to prescribe the qualifications or mode of selection of vice chancellors. All universities, whether under the Union or the States, are established under a statute made by the respective legislature. Therefore, it is the legislature which prescribes the qualifications, mode of selection, and conditions of service of vice chancellors. It is not the job of the UGC. The selection and the appointment of vice chancellors cannot be considered to be an exercise connected with maintaining the standards of education or promotion and coordination of university education. The Bombay High Court in *Suresh Patilkhede vs The Chancellor Universities of Maharashtra and Others* (2011) corroborates this view in the following words "we are of the view that qualifications and method of appointment of Pro-Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of the University cannot be treated as satisfying the 'direct impact' test [on the standards of education]". Therefore, it is safe to assume that under Section 26 of the UGC Act, the UGC has no mandate to make any regulation in respect of the selection and the appointment of vice chancellors.

An interesting constitutional question which arises in the context of the UGC's regulations is whether a regulation can over-ride an Act passed by a State legislature. This question came up in the context of the termination of the appointment

of some vice chancellors in the past. The Bombay High Court in the *Suresh Patilkhede case (supra)* took the view that "Regulation 7.3.0 of UGC Regulations, 2010 being a subordinate legislation under an Act of Parliament cannot override plenary legislation enacted by the State Legislature...." However, the Supreme Court of India, in *Kalyani Mathivanan vs K.V. Jeyaraj and Ors (AIR 2015 SC1875 para 22)* overruled it by holding "we hold that the U.G.C. Regulations through a subordinate legislation has binding effect on the Universities to which it applies...." The reason given by the Court for reaching this conclusion is that "it is only when both the Houses of the Parliament approve the regulation, the same can be given effect". It may be clarified here that Parliament does not formally approve any rule or regulation laid in the House. It can only amend a rule which has already come into effect before it is so laid; if Parliament amends the rule, it will, thereafter, be effective in the amended form. With due respect to their lordships, the observation of the Court does not correctly reflect the parliamentary procedure relating to the laying down of rules and regulations in the Houses of Parliament.

The question whether the UGC regulations override a State law can be answered only in terms of Article 254 of the Constitution which deals with repugnancy. Under this Article, if a State law is repugnant to the central law, the State law, to the extent of repugnancy, be void. But is a regulation made by the UGC, a central law within the meaning of Article 254? Clause (2) of this Article says that if the law made by the legislature of a state has been reserved for the consideration of the President and has received his assent, it shall prevail in the State. In this clause the word 'law' simply means the Bill passed by the legislature and sent to the President. It does not include the rules and regulations which are framed only after assent is received. So, what overrides a State law is a Bill passed by both Houses of Parliament and assented to by the President, and certainly not the subordinate legislation.

A key ruling

In any case, the Court made a significant ruling on the question of mandatory application of Regulation 7.3.0 of the UGC relating to the selection and appointment of vice chancellors in the *Kalyani Mathivanan case (supra)* it says: "However, the finding of the Bombay High Court that Regulation 7.3.0 has to be treated as recommendatory in nature is upheld in so far as it relates to Universities and Colleges under the State Legislation." This ruling may perhaps help resolve the present controversy.





Water is dropped on the Palisades Fire in Mandeville Canyon on January 11 in Los Angeles. AP

Satellite projects aim to head off future wildfires

Agence France Presse

As Los Angeles firefighters battle the remaining hotspots more than a week into deadly blazes, scientists and engineers hope the growing availability of satellite data will help in the future.

Tech-focused groups are launching new orbiters as space launches get cheaper, while machine learning techniques will sift the torrent of information, fitting it into a wider picture of fire risk in a changing environment.

Satellites "can detect from space areas that are dry and prone to wildfire outbreaks, ... actively flaming and smoldering fires, as well as burnt areas and smoke and trace gas emissions," said Clement Albergel, head of actionable climate information at the European Space Agency.

Different satellites have different roles depending on their orbit and sensor payload.

Low-earth orbit is generally less than 1,000 km above the surface. Satellites here offer high-resolution ground images, but see any given point only briefly as they sweep around the planet.

Geostationary satellites orbit at around 36,000 km, remaining over the same area on the earth's surface, allowing for continuous observation but usually at much lower resolution.

As climate change brings more wildfires encroaching on human-inhabited areas, the resolution can be crucial.

Based on satellite observations of Los Angeles, "it's very hard to determine" if a particular house is on fire, WKID Solutions' Natascha Stavros, a wildfire expert who has also worked at NASA, said.

Brian Collins, director of Colorado-based nonprofit Earth Fire Alliance, plans a new low-orbit satellite "constellation" to complement existing

Geostationary satellites orbit at around 36,000 km, remaining over the same area on the earth's surface, allowing for continuous observation but usually at much lower resolution

resources.

It will sport a sensor with a resolution of 5 m, much finer than ESA's current Sentinel-2 satellites that can see objects only 10 m wide.

This means "we're going to learn very quickly that there is more fire on the earth than we know about today, we're going to find very small fires," Collins predicted.

EFA aims to launch four satellites by the end of 2026 at a total cost of \$53 million.

It would take the whole planned swarm of 55, costing a total \$400 million, to reach Collins's aim of imaging every point on the earth at least once every 20 minutes.

Dozens of satellites in orbit could "both detect and track fires ... at a cadence that allows decisions to be made on the ground," Collins said.

Less grandiose efforts include Germany-based OroraTech, which on January 14 launched the first of at least 14 FOREST-3 nanosatellites.

The system will "deliver ultra-fast wildfire alerts and high-quality thermal data," chief executive Martin Langer said in a statement.

Additional data from all these new satellites would be "fantastic", ESA's Albergel said, but the large volume of information could prove problematic.

ESA's Sentinel-2 alone sends down one terabyte of data - the storage capacity of a modern high-end laptop - every day.

Collins said finding fire signs in such reams of data "is an excellent machine learning" problem. The data could ultimately help both predict new fire outbreaks and their progression, he added.



Newfound nerve-muscle crosstalk shows exercise helps neurons grow

The conventional concept of nerve-muscle interaction emphasises the nerve's control over muscles. However, Ritu Raman and her colleagues at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology started to wonder if the reciprocal could be true: if stimulating muscles could encourage nerves to form

Sayan Tribedi

Regular exercise is proven to be beneficial for our overall well-being. It strengthens our muscles, improves cardiovascular health, helps to maintain a healthy body weight, and can be considered an effective stress buster.

But what if there is more? What if the benefits of exercise go beyond general health?

A recent study by engineers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), published in *Advanced Healthcare Materials*, has revealed that exercise may also stimulate the growth of neurons through its physical and biochemical effects.

This finding can pave new pathways for reparative therapies and perhaps even cures for neurodegenerative disorders.

Nerve-muscle crosstalk

While the effects of exercise on our physical health, like strengthening muscles and supporting the immune system, are widely recognised, researchers haven't explored the specific impact of exercise on neurons (nerve cells).

Given the nerves control the movements of muscles and carry vital information all over the body, understanding the effects of neurons can lead to the development of plausible therapies for nerve injuries.

In a November 2023 paper in the journal *Biomaterials*, researchers established a hint of a biochemical connection between muscle activity and nerve health. Ritu Raman, the Eugene Bell Career Development assistant professor of mechanical engineering at MIT, and her colleagues discovered that they could restore the mobility of mice by implanting muscle tissue at the site of a severe muscle injury and stimulating the new tissue using light.

While examining the graft, the researchers found the grafted muscle had produced certain biochemical signals that induced the growth and development of nerves and blood vessels.

The conventional concept of nerve-muscle interaction emphasises the nerve's control over the muscles. However, Raman and her colleagues started to wonder if the reciprocal could be true: i.e. if stimulating muscles could encourage the formation of nerves.

This hypothesis was initially met with skepticism from the scientific community. Critics argued that the biological environment was complex and that it would be hard to attribute nerve growth to stimulation by muscles because of the variety of other cell types and contributing factors within the organism, including the immune system.

Biochemical benefits of exercise

The new study by Raman & co. concentrated solely on muscle and nerve tissue and aimed to find whether training muscles directly could influence the way nerves grew.

The researchers grew mouse muscle cells into long fibers, which they weaved together to create a small sheet of mature muscular tissue slightly larger than a one-rupee coin.

Using well-known genetic modification techniques, the team was able to use a



The movement of muscles was found to exert mechanical forces on neurons' structure because of the physical contact between neurons and muscles. JULIEN TROMEUR/UNSPLASH

flashing light to cause the muscles to contract.

In the past, Raman had come up with a brand-new gel mat for building and exercising the muscle. While the researchers stimulated the muscle to exercise, they allowed the muscle tissue to hold its shape and structure instead of peeling off.

The scientists then collected samples of the fluids surrounding the muscle, believing it should contain myokines like growth factors, RNA, and other proteins. Myokines, Raman said, are a biochemical soup of proteins secreted by muscles, some of which may be useful to neurons.

"Myokines are secreted by muscles nearly all the time, but they produce more when you exercise them," she added.

The researchers transferred the myokine solution to a separate dish containing motor neurons — nerves found in the spinal cord that control muscles involved in voluntary movement. They grew the neurons from stem cells derived from mice. As with the muscle tissue, the neurons were grown on a similar gel mat.

After the neurons were exposed to the myokine mixture, the team observed that they began to grow quickly; about four-times faster than neurons that didn't receive the biochemical solution.

The research group also performed a genetic analysis to find out more about the neuronal changes mediated by exercise.

Initially, they isolated RNA from a small cluster of neurons. Cells transcribe instructions on how to make a protein from a gene to RNA first. By measuring the level of gene transcription, they were able to estimate the extent of genetic action in the formulation of those instructions. This enabled them to figure out whether myokines exercised any influence over the activity of certain

neuronal genes.

They found many of the more actively expressed genes were involved in some fundamental processes of neural growth, maturation, neuronal connectivity (including the ones with muscle cells), and axon growth.

The result suggested exercise didn't only stimulate neuronal growth; it also enhanced the maturity of neurons and their functional abilities.

The team, therefore, wanted to investigate whether the physiological response to exercise could also augur well for neuronal function.

Effect of physical stress on nerves

Because of the physical contact between neurons and muscles, the movement of muscles exerts mechanical forces on the neurons' structure.

To check whether these forces could also affect the growth of neurons, the researchers set up mechanical stimulation experiments that tracked neurons' growth in the absence of myokines.

This time, the team cultured another set of motor neurons on a gel matrix containing small magnetic particles. When an external magnetic field was applied, the particles' movement mechanically stretched the neurons, reproducing the conditions in which they might experience mechanical forces during a workout.

They performed this test for 30 minutes every day.

The results were quite surprising. The researchers found that this mechanical stimulation greatly enhanced neuronal growth: the growth level of the mechanically exercised neurons was, on average, equivalent to those exposed to myokine stimulation.

Both groups of exercised neurons also grew significantly more than a set of control neurons that experienced no

The researchers found that mechanical stimulation greatly enhanced neuronal growth: the growth level of the mechanically exercised neurons was, on average, equivalent to those exposed to myokine stimulation

exercise at all.

Exercise as medicine

The findings have tremendous implications for developing exercise-based therapies to repair nerves, especially as they relate to nerve injuries and neurodegenerative diseases such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). By exploiting the crosstalk between muscles and neurons, researchers could develop innovative treatment strategies to promote the recovery of nerve cells and promote their healing by activating the muscles surrounding them.

The investigators stated in their paper that, in their understanding of the bi-directional signalling between muscles and nerves, their finding has practical implications in developing novel approaches for treating nerve injuries in which the nerve and muscle tissue are no longer communicating properly.

The team plans to explore the possibility of using targeted muscle stimulation to regenerate and grow neurons in a clinical setting, which could help redefine the role of exercise in medicine and general health promotion to precise therapeutic intervention for nerve repair. According to Raman, this is their first step towards understanding and controlling exercise as medicine.

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Flamingo Festival concludes in A.P.

The Hindu Bureau

TIRUPATI

The three-day Flamingo Festival in Andhra Pradesh came to an end on Monday, with speakers putting forward a request to protect the biodiversity in Pulicat lake and Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary.

Ministers Anam Ramanarayana Reddy and Anagani Satya Prasad participated in the closing ceremony and thanked Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for reviving the event.

Tourists from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu thronged the region. Visitors, especially bird watchers and photographers enjoyed the festival.





Top Congress leaders to attend Belagavi 'Gandhi Bharat' event

Belagavi city is decked up for the grand celebration of 'Gandhi Bharat' event on Tuesday to commemorate the centenary of the lone Congress session, which was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi in Belagavi in 1924. Themed as *Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan*, the Congress is intending to send across the message its commitment to protect the Gandhian ideology as well as the Constitution. Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other senior party functionaries would attend the function. PTI

