



## The Hindu Editorial (01-Jan-2026)

### Descent into farce

Ad hoc changes and poor implementation mar the ECI's SIR

The Election Commission of India (ECI)'s Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls across 12 States and Union Territories (UT) is fast descending into a farce. Take the case of West Bengal, where furore over elderly residents having to attend eligibility hearings in remote locations even after submitting their enrolment forms forced the ECI to order home verification. Or, the fact that it had to conditionally halt hearings of "unmapped" voters (those whose names or parents' names were not mapped with the 2002 SIR). Summons were in the form of software notices, but this software was not used in Bihar. An association of civil servants complained that this "suo motu system-driven deletion of electors from the draft electoral rolls in West Bengal in the ongoing SIR process [bypassed] the statutory role of the [Electoral Registration Officers]". The procedural chaos could have been avoided had the ECI not rushed into the SIR just before Assembly elections in States/UTs such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry. Its ad hoc use of software – the ECI juked its de-duplication software in Bihar and told the Supreme Court why it was not using it, but reportedly used it alongside another software to flag "unmapped" voters without proper protocol – is creating confusion and distress. The suspicion that the ECI is using an exercise of updating electoral rolls as a de facto citizenship screening exercise seems to be confirmed by the manner in which it is going about things.

There are inconsistencies and anomalies in the draft electoral rolls, many of which have been flagged by The Hindu's data-driven investigations. The over 6.5 crore deletions, according to provisional numbers, suggest methodological problems in and poor implementation of the exercise. In Uttar Pradesh, provisional figures show that 2.89 crore names have been deleted, which could possibly explain why the ECI has postponed publication of the draft roll to January 6. In Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, which are relatively urbanised States with net in-migration of electors, 97 lakh and 73.7 lakh electors, respectively, have been taken off the draft rolls. That both States have since seen the furtive inclusion of lakhs of names – added incomprehensibly as fresh additions in another procedural flaw – suggests that the enumeration phase was concluded haphazardly. This situation could have been avoided had the Court gone beyond limited interventions – which were salves for Bihar electors – to properly vet the new SIR procedure for constitutionality. It is still not too late for the Court to take note of the infirmities and to decide firmly in favour of the electorate. The fate of the very idea of universal adult franchise hangs in the balance.

### Descent into Farce: Electoral Rolls

#### Revision

- **Syllabus:** GS Paper 2 (Polity and Governance; RPA Act, 1950 & 1951)
- **Context:** Critique of the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter lists.
- **Key Points:**
  - **Mass Deletions:** High number of voter deletions without adequate field verification.
  - **Constitutional Right:** Right to vote is a constitutional right; technical errors in SIR are leading to disenfranchisement.
  - **Role of Technology:** While digitalization is good, over-reliance on automated deletions is problematic.
- **UPSC Relevance:** Important for questions on "Electoral Reforms" and the "Independence of the Election Commission."
- **Detailed Analysis:**
  - **Procedural Gaps:** The editorial highlights that the standard operating procedure (SOP) for house-to-house verification is often ignored during 'intensive' revisions.
  - **Impact on Democracy:** In a vibrant democracy, the purity of the electoral roll is the foundation. Errors in the list can lead to allegations of 'voter suppression.'
  - **Way Forward:** It calls for a more transparent, participatory, and error-free mechanism where the ECI proactively informs voters before deleting their names.



# India's space programme, a people's space journey

**I**ndia's space journey has evolved beyond a string of spectacular missions. It has the national pulse and is a source of daily inspiration. In June 2025, when Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla displayed the Tricolour aboard the International Space Station (ISS) and spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it was a moment of pride for every Indian. The Prime Minister called it a "defining chapter" of *Amrit Kaal* ('era of nectar'), and for many, that moment felt like India's ascent was a part of their own heartbeat. It was not just science. It was identity being reshaped through vision and purposeful programmes.

That same spirit has been echoed earlier, on August 23, 2023, when Chandrayaan-3 made India the first nation to land near the lunar south pole. "India is now on the Moon," declared Mr. Modi – words which rippled through classrooms, villages and living rooms alike. India's lunar programme has been truly path breaking: Chandrayaan-1 (2008) confirmed the presence of water molecules; Chandrayaan-2 (2019) mapped the moon with high precision and prepared the ground for Chandrayaan-3 (2023), which achieved the world's first soft landing near the south pole. When the Vikram lander and Pragyan rover explored the lunar surface for a full moon day, this led children to draw depictions of lunar landscapes in notebooks, it left researchers feeling vindicated, and inspired citizens who saw India's story in space as also their own future.

India has become a trusted global partner in space. Over 400 foreign satellites have been launched aboard Indian rockets. In 2014, India became the first Asian nation and only the fourth in the world to reach Mars orbit – and on its maiden attempt, with the Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan). The Aditya-L1 mission (2023), built through multi-institutional collaboration, is providing unprecedented insights into the sun's corona and its impact on space weather. XPOSat (2024) is studying black holes, while SpaceX (2024) has demonstrated in-orbit docking for future space stations and lunar missions.

## A new space vision

These milestones are reshaping policy, culture, and aspiration. The road map is bold: continuation of the Gaganyaan programme for human spaceflight, Chandrayaan-4 and 5 for deeper lunar exploration, a dedicated Venus mission, a Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) by 2035, and an Indian human landing on the Moon



**S. Somanath**

was Secretary, Department of Space, and Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). He is now Distinguished Visiting Professor, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, and Adviser (Space Technology), Government of Andhra Pradesh

by 2040. These are not distant dreams but national goals, aligned with the spirit of *Amrit Kaal*.

The Prime Minister has called for building a pool of 40 to 50 trained astronauts for future missions. On National Space Day 2025 (August 23), he urged young citizens to see themselves as participants in India's human space programme. Gaganyaan, with an approved outlay of over ₹20,000 crore, is advancing steadily. Four Indian Air Force test pilots are undergoing training, and a series of uncrewed and crewed flights will culminate in India's first indigenous human space mission, presently targeted for 2027.

Space technology today is woven into the fabric of governance and daily life. Satellites deliver disaster warnings, guide fishermen, assess crop yields and insurance claims, enhance railway safety, and power the geospatial backbone of the PM Gati Shakti programme. Space is no longer a distant luxury but a democratic utility – accessible to every citizen.

At the same time, space exploration fuels Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education, advanced research, and workforce development. Future-ready technologies in space operations autonomy, robotics, in-space manufacturing, surveillance and interplanetary travel are being developed, ensuring that India retains leadership in this strategic frontier.

The transformation of India's space sector is deliberate and ambitious. The opening of the field to private players, creating a thriving ecosystem of more than 350 startups building satellites, launch vehicles, and ground systems. The space budget has nearly tripled – from ₹5,615 crore in 2013-14 to ₹13,416 crore in 2025-26 – and has been augmented by nearly ₹5,000 crore in user funds. India's space economy, currently valued at \$8 billion, is projected to grow to \$44 billion in the years ahead, creating jobs, industries and innovations that orbit around this sector.

## Inspiring the next generation

The Prime Minister has challenged the ecosystem to deliver five space unicorns within the next five years and to scale up annual launches, nearly ten-fold, to 50 a year. With private participation, India is advancing technologies related to semi-cryogenics, electric propulsion, quantum communication and in-orbit servicing.

Youth are at the heart of this vision. The

International Olympiad on Astronomy and Astrophysics hosted in India (August 2025) drew nearly 300 participants from over 60 countries, with Indian students winning medals. Initiatives such as the ISRO Robotics Challenge and Indian Space Hackathon/Bharatiya Antariksh Hackathon are bringing school and college students into direct contact with rovers, satellites and rockets, building confidence that the laboratories and launchpads of tomorrow are theirs to claim.

At the policy level, the National Meet 2.0 held just before National Space Day produced 5,000-plus pages of documentation across 300 user interactions. This 15-year road map aligns every mission with the vision of *Viksit Bharat* 2047.

## Global collaborations and leadership

Space has been consistently projected as a global commons, where India's leadership translates into shared progress. The South Asia Satellite has provided neighbours with communication capacity, while during India's G-20 Presidency in 2023, India announced a "G20 satellite" for climate and environmental monitoring with data shared with all nations. Collaborative missions such as NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Thermal InfraRed Imaging Satellite for High-resolution Natural resource Assessment (TRISHNA) with CNES (French space agency), Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX) with Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), and India's participation in the European Space Agency (ESA)'s Proba-3 demonstrate India's rise as a global partner, guided by the ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* ('the world is one family').

India's space journey is more than rockets and satellites. It is about a nation discovering new ways to see itself. The salute of Shubhanshu Shukla aboard the ISS, the landing of Chandrayaan-3, 350 startups from small towns designing space systems, young students competing in Olympiads, and satellites quietly serving national security and citizen services are all part of the same story.

In this *Amrit Kaal*, India is not simply participating in the space age. It is shaping it. With ambition, confidence, and purpose, Bharat looks to the stars knowing that the horizon belongs to it too.

The views expressed are personal

## India's Space Programme; A People's Space Journey

- **Syllabus:** GS Paper 3 (Science & Technology; Awareness in Space; Indigenization of Technology)
- **Context:** Commemorating India's transition from a nascent space-faring nation to a global leader shaping the rules of the "New Space" era.
- **Key Points:**
  - **Strategic Transformation:** India has moved from "resource-constrained exploration" to "ambitious leadership" with missions like Gaganyaan and the Moon landing.
  - **Commercialization:** The shift from ISRO being the sole player to a collaborative ecosystem involving 350+ private startups.
  - **Diplomatic Tool:** Space is now a pillar of India's soft power and strategic diplomacy (e.g., Artemis Accords).
- **UPSC Relevance:** Essential for questions regarding "India's Achievements in S&T," "Private Sector in Space," and "International Space Governance."



- **Detailed Analysis:**

- **From Participant to Shaper:** The editorial notes that India is no longer just following global trends but setting them. By joining the Artemis Accords, India now participates in crafting the laws for lunar and deep-space exploration.
- **The Startup Revolution:** With the establishment of IN-SPACe, the barrier for private entry has broken. Startups are now building their own launch vehicles (like Vikram-S) and specialized satellites, reducing the burden on the national exchequer.
- **Future Milestones:**
  - **2035:** The launch of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), which will be a hub for microgravity research.
  - **2040:** The "Moon Mission" for an Indian astronaut, marking the pinnacle of the Gaganyaan program.
- **Global Economy:** India aims to capture 10% of the \$400 billion global space market by 2030, leveraging its "low-cost, high-efficiency" model.





# The U.S. tariff shock, India's pharma future

In September 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump's sweeping announcement imposing a 100% tariff on branded and patented pharmaceutical imports from October 1, 2025, saw India's pharmaceutical industry, which has long been hailed as the "pharmacy of the world", standing at a crossroads. The U.S.'s move, ostensibly aimed at bolstering domestic manufacturing, threatens to disrupt supply chains that have saved the U.S. health-care system billions of dollars while also fuelling India's export-led growth.

Yet, as tariffs ripple through global markets, India's dominance in generics offers a vital buffer, even as it underscores the urgent need for diversified partnerships and domestic reforms. With pharma exports to the U.S. alone reaching close to \$9 billion in fiscal 2025 – a 14.29% surge year-on-year – the stakes could not be higher for India's \$50 billion pharmaceutical sector, which contributes nearly 1.72% to the nation's GDP.

## A global perspective

Global pharmaceutical exports, valued at over \$850 billion in 2024, thrive on aging populations, chronic diseases, and post-COVID-19 pandemic innovation. Germany (\$19.85 billion), Switzerland (\$99.08 billion), and the U.S. (\$90.30 billion) were lead exporters in 2023-24, while the U.S. (\$22.67 billion in imports in 2024), Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and China top importers. The European Union (EU)'s €313.4 billion in medicinal exports in 2024, up 13.5%, reflects resilience amid geopolitical tensions. India, the third-largest exporter by volume, shipped \$27 billion in 2023, rising to \$30.47 billion in FY25.

Generics dominate, with 70% of exports to the U.S. and Europe. However, \$5 billion in annual imports, mainly active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) from China (72% share), exposes supply chain risks. The sector's 10%-12% CAGR adds 0.5%-1% to GDP growth annually, bolstering



R.H. Pavithra

Is Professor, Department of Studies and Research In Economics, Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru, Karnataka

For India, its strength in generics acts as a buffer, but diversification and reforms are a necessity

forex reserves. The U.S. tariff, which has spared generics for now, targets branded drugs unless made domestically. India supplies 40% of U.S. generics, saving payers \$219 billion in 2022. Yet, the market jitters were immediate with the shares of pharma majors falling and erasing millions in market cap. An escalation to generics could cut export revenues by 10%-15%, trimming GDP growth by 0.2%-0.3% in FY26. Some firms with over 30% U.S. exposure, face rerouting costs, regulatory hurdles, API inflation (up 5%-7%), and stalled research and development. This could spur "China-plus-one" strategies, redirecting exports to Africa and Southeast Asia, potentially raising India's regulated market share from 3% to 3.5% by 2030.

India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) rationalisation, effective September 22, 2025, provides domestic ballast. Drug and medicine rates dropped from 12% to 5%, with 36 essential items at nil, saving consumers \$1.2 billion annually. Medical device rates fell from 18% to 5%, easing \$5 billion in imports. No re-labelling for pre-September stocks minimises disruptions. Aligned with Ayushman Bharat, this boosts consumption by 8%-10%, insulating markets from tariff-driven hikes.

## On eastern scale

Global trade pits western innovation against eastern scale. Under the U.S.-EU pact, EU exports of medicinal and pharmaceutical products to the U.S. (\$65.7 billion from Ireland in 2024), prioritises supply chain security. China's 2025 agreements, capturing 32% of Q1 global biotech deals, and \$2.5 billion in U.S. molecule licensing in H1 2025, signal eastern strength. India's diplomacy has seen the signing of six memoranda of understanding (MoU) with Trinidad and Tobago in July 2025 (it includes cooperation in pharmaceuticals), a Singapore API pact, and Serum Institute's dengue treatment collaboration for low-middle-income nations. These, alongside

IPHEX (the international pharmaceutical exhibition) could double exports to Africa significantly. With 35% of pharmaceutical exports U.S.-bound, eastern alliances could offset 20%-25% of tariff risks.

## Bullish forecasts

Forecasts paint a bullish canvas: India's pharma market, valued at \$50 billion in 2023-24, has a goal of reaching \$130 billion by 2030 (11%-12% CAGR), with exports surging to \$120-\$130 billion. Globally, spending could hit \$1.5 trillion by 2029, fuelled by biosimilars and precision medicine. India's API sector could grow to \$1.82 trillion by 2030 (\$22 billion), with PLI schemes reclaiming 20% domestic production.

Challenges such as IP disputes and API dependency persist, but resilience shines through initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Partyojana (PMBJP). Under the PMBJP, a total of 16,912 Jan Aushadhi Kendras have been opened (June 2025), with 2,110 medicines and 315 surgicals, medical consumables and devices under the scheme product basket.

Tariffs threaten affordability, with U.S. cancer therapy costs potentially rising \$8,000-\$10,000 for a 24-week course, mirroring India's 60% out-of-pocket burden. Generics, 80% cheaper, enable 20 million treatments yearly, though quality concerns and disruptions risk delaying surgeries by 15%-20%. PMBJP's oncology basket, cutting costs by 70%, proves that domestic buffers work.

U.S. tariffs risk causing shortages if India's 40% generic supply falters. India must leverage MoUs, invest \$10 billion in APIs via PLI 2.0, and push WTO reforms. With global pharma eyeing \$450 billion for India by 2047, collaboration in the form of east-west hybrids, innovation, and equitable access is key. Policymakers must diversify boldly, reform swiftly, and secure India's pharma supremacy.

## The U.S. Tariff Shock, India's Pharma Future

- **Syllabus:** GS Paper 3 (Indian Economy; Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth).
- **Context:** Discusses the implications of the U.S. administration's 100% tariff proposal on branded drugs and its impact on Indian pharma.
- **Key Points:**
  - **Market Vulnerability:** India is the largest supplier of generic drugs to the U.S.; high tariffs threaten this export dominance.
  - **The China Factor:** India's dependency on China for APIs (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients) remains a bottleneck.
  - **Innovation Push:** The need to shift from 'volume' to 'value' (specialty drugs and biosimilars).
- **UPSC Relevance:** Critical for "International Trade," "Effect of Liberalization," and "Indigenization of Technology."

- **Detailed Analysis:**

- **Tariff Impact:** If a 100% tariff is imposed, Indian generic companies like Sun Pharma and Dr. Reddy's might lose their competitive price edge in the American market.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** The editorial suggests that India must fast-track its Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for Bulk Drugs to reduce dependence on China.
- **Strategic Diversification:** India should explore markets in the EU, Latin America, and Africa to reduce over-reliance on the U.S. market.





## Hold the centre

Bangladesh needs a leader who can keep extremists at bay

The death of Khaleda Zia, Bangladesh's first woman Prime Minister, on December 30, closes one of the most consequential chapters in the South Asian country's turbulent political history. Zia, who entered politics after her husband, Gen. Ziaur Rahman, was assassinated in 1981, played a pivotal role in ending the military dictatorship in 1990. She initially joined hands with Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina in the struggle to restore democracy, but their subsequent feud, the 'Battle of the Begums', came to define Bangladesh's politics for decades. With Zia's passing and Ms. Hasina, deposed in an uprising in 2024 and now in exile in India, Bangladesh is poised for a generational shift as it prepares to hold elections on February 12, 2026. But this transition is unfolding amid chaos and uncertainty. Tarique Rahman, Zia's 60-year-old son and the acting chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), returned after over 17 years of self-imposed exile. His immediate task is to unify the party's fractious factions and articulate an inclusive vision for the electorate. In a massive rally in Dhaka, he avoided the language of vendetta and stressed unity and inclusivity, but the BNP's violent past and Bangladesh's present instability cast a doubt on the prospects of any swift turnaround in the country's fortunes.

The interim government led by Muhammad Yunus has struggled to restore stability. Mobs continue to rule the streets, as evidenced by a recent lynching of a Hindu youth and arson attacks on two newspaper offices. Local reports also suggest that operatives of the banned Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh may be becoming active again, heightening security risks. Mr. Yunus has also banned the Awami League, one of the country's two largest parties, from political activity – this renders the legitimacy of the election deeply contentious. The BNP is the other major force but its leaders and operatives have been accused of extortion rackets and political violence. The National Citizen Party, which emerged from the 2024 student uprising, promising a break with traditional politics, has formed an electoral alliance with the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami. If the Jamaat, which sided with the genocidal Pakistani military in 1971, emerges as a major political player or a power broker after the elections, it would mark a seismic shift, with uncertain implications for Bangladesh's secular constitutional order. What Bangladesh needs is a leader who can break the cycle of chaos, rebuild public trust, restore law and order and keep fundamentalist groups at bay. The responsibility for rebuilding the centre of Bangladesh's political spectrum rests largely with Tarique Rahman and the BNP. Whether he can shoulder that burden effectively will shape the country's near future.

## Hold the Centre: Bangladesh's Political Transition

- **Syllabus:** GS Paper 2 (International Relations; India and its Neighborhood)
- **Context:** Discusses the political volatility in Bangladesh following the death of Khaleda Zia and the challenges for India's foreign policy.
- **Key Points:**
  - **Political Vacuum:** The transition period before the February 12 polls is critical as extremist elements like 'Jamaat-e-Islami' gain ground.
  - **Security Stakes:** For India, a stable Bangladesh is non-negotiable for the security of its North-Eastern states and the 'Chicken's Neck' corridor.
  - **Diplomatic Balance:** India needs to engage with a broad political spectrum in Dhaka beyond the traditional Awami League alliance.
- **UPSC Relevance:** Useful for topics on "Neighborhood First Policy" and "Regional Security Architecture."
- **Detailed Analysis:**
  - **The Rise of Radicalism:** The editorial notes that Jamaat-e-Islami is eyeing a strong electoral performance. This poses a risk of radicalization along India's 4,096 km border.
  - **Economic Connectivity:** Projects like the Akhaura-Agartala rail link and use of Chittagong port are vital. Any disruption due to political regime change could impact India's 'Act East' targets.
  - **Regional Stability:** The editorial suggests that India should act as a supportive neighbor without appearing to interfere in their internal democratic process, ensuring a smooth transition that doesn't favor anti-India sentiments.



# Ensuring that the value of all lives is the same

**E**very year, on New Year's Eve, a revelry results in a number of road accidents across India. Some of these result in fatalities.

John Donne wrote, "Each man's death diminishes me, for I am involved in mankind." His words remind us that every death carries a weight greater than its statistics. Yet, when a family loses someone in a road accident, the language of justice turns into the language of arithmetic. The Motor Accident Claims Tribunal multiplies income by an age-based factor, adds modest sums for love, care, and funeral expenses, and announces the result as 'just compensation'.

What begins as a legal exercise often ends as a moral puzzle. A doctor and a homemaker may lose their lives in the same accident, yet the law values their absence differently. The doctor's family receives several lakhs of rupees more than the vendor's, and the homemaker's loss is often measured in token figures. The problem lies not in the intent of the law but in its method. A welfare statute that was meant to bring relief has quietly absorbed the habits of the marketplace, where worth is measured by earning, not by being.

## The arithmetic of loss

Section 168 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, empowers tribunals to award compensation that "appears to be just." To bring consistency, the Supreme Court in *Sarla Verma v. DTC* and later in *National Insurance Co. v. Pranay Sethi* introduced the multiplier method. The formula multiplies a victim's annual income by an age-based factor and adds fixed sums under standard categories such as loss of consortium, loss of estate, and funeral costs. The goal was fairness through uniformity.

In practice, uniformity has produced hierarchy. When a victim has no formal income, tribunals assign a "notional income," often a symbolic amount detached from real contribution. Children, homemakers, and



**Shubham Kumar**

Academic, lawyer and public policy consultant

When road accidents occur, the law insists on knowing one's income before assigning value to one's life. This violates the promise of equality and dignity

Informal workers are thus treated as marginal lives in the eyes of arithmetic. The Supreme Court, in *Kkriti v. Oriental Insurance*, recognised unpaid domestic work as genuine labour and sought to correct the imbalance, but the structure remains tethered to income. In a system that counts only what can be measured, those who build, teach, care, and nurture are often valued least.

Article 14 of the Constitution promises equality before the law, yet a system that compensates the salaried more generously than the self-employed or the unwaged risks violating that promise. Equality cannot depend on economic visibility. Article 21, which protects the right to life with dignity, faces a similar tension. Dignity is intrinsic, not conditional. When compensation fluctuates with income, dignity becomes a privilege rather than a principle. The mason who built the city and the child who never drew a salary deserve recognition beyond their wage potential.

The contrast with other modes of transport is revealing. Under the Railways Act, 1989, the death of any passenger attracts a fixed sum of ₹8 lakh. Under the Carriage by Air Act, 1972, airlines pay a uniform amount for every deceased passenger. On the road, however, the law insists on knowing one's income before assigning value to one's life.

Even the notion of unlimited liability offers little comfort. Section 147 of the Motor Vehicles Act requires insurers to cover "the amount of liability incurred" for death or bodily injury. There is no statutory ceiling. In theory, the liability is unlimited. In reality, it remains bounded by income. The absence of a cap matters little when the base figure is drawn from an unequal scale.

The difficulty is not only procedural but philosophical. The American philosopher, Lon Fuller, described the inner morality of law as its duty to be coherent and fair. A formula that equates life with livelihood cannot satisfy

either. The American legal philosopher and jurist, Ronald Dworkin, envisioned law as Integrity, a system that treats every person with equal concern and respect. When tribunals attach greater value to some lives over others, they move from Integrity to inequity. For the American philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, dignity lies in capability – the real freedom to live, love, and flourish. Income may enlarge these freedoms, but it cannot define them. The law, by tying worth to wages, narrows the meaning of both justice and life.

## Towards a fairer formula

A fairer design must begin with a universal baseline. Every life should attract a fixed "dignity floor," an amount payable in every case of fatality or grievous injury, irrespective of income. Beyond that, income-linked additions can address actual financial loss, preserving fairness without eroding equality. The law should also carve out a separate category of "dignity damages" to recognise grief, companionship, and emotional harm. These amounts must evolve with inflation and social conditions. Equally important is the need for process reform. The Delhi High Court's Motor Accident Claims Annuity Deposit model, which integrates police, hospitals, and banks, shows that technology can deliver compensation swiftly and transparently.

Defenders of the current model often argue that compensation must restore dependents to their previous standard of living and that income is a neutral measure of loss. This reasoning fits private contracts better than public welfare. The goal of social law is not to mirror the market but to correct its distortions. A universal floor can guarantee recognition for all, while proportional increments can accommodate differences. In this balance between equality and equity lies the true meaning of 'just compensation.'

## Ensuring that the value of all lives is the same

- Syllabus:** GS Paper 2 (Social Justice; Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services) & GS Paper 4 (Ethics and Human Interface).
- Context:** A critical analysis of the legal and moral principles behind calculating compensation for victims of road accidents.



- **Key Points:**

- **Economic vs. Human Value:** Current compensation laws often favor those with higher incomes, implying a higher 'value' of life for the wealthy.
- **Constitutional Morality:** The article argues that the Right to Life (Article 21) should not be weighed by a person's bank balance.
- **Need for Reform:** Advocates for a standardized 'Universal Life Value' for compensation.
- **UPSC Relevance:** Highly useful for Ethics case studies on "Equality" and "Distributive Justice," and GS 2 questions on "Vulnerable Sections."

- **Detailed Analysis:**

- **The Inequity:** The editorial highlights that motor accident tribunals use the "multiplicand method" (based on future income). This results in a CEO's life being valued much higher than a daily-wage laborer's.
- **Ethical Standpoint:** It invokes the 'Social Contract' theory, suggesting that the State must treat every citizen's life as an end in itself (Kant's Categorical Imperative), not as a means to economic output.
- **Legal Precedents:** It calls for the Judiciary to revisit the *Sarla Verma vs. DTC* case principles to ensure that the "Dignity of Life" remains the primary yardstick for justice.

# IAS PCS Prep