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THE HINDU
INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

Daily News Analysis

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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THE HINDU
INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

Daily News Analysis

Page 01 : GS II : Indian Polity / Prelims Exam

In a significant judicial observation on February 17, 2026, the Supreme Court of India emphasized that political leaders and constitutional functionaries have a foundational duty to foster fraternity.

Hearing a petition against "toxic" and "discriminatory" speeches by high-ranking officials, a three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant remarked that in a "75-year-old mature democracy," such behavior is unbecoming and erodes the constitutional commitment to equal citizenship.

Politicians, officials must foster fraternity: SC

| Top court takes note of statements that 'stigmatise' communities, legitimise 'discriminatory governance'

| It emphasises need for restraint in public comments by constitutional functionaries

| This is a more than 75-year-old mature democracy, we do not expect people to behave like this: CJI

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Political leaders must foster fraternity and high public office-holders should live up to the ideals of the Constitution, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday. The court was hearing a petition highlighting instances of Chief Ministers, senior bureaucrats, and police officers making public statements that stigmatise entire communities, legitimise discriminatory governance, and erode public confidence in the state's commitment to equal citizenship.

"We would like to impress upon all political parties to follow the principles of constitutional morality, values, mutual respect,

and self-respect. This is a more than 75-year-old mature democracy; we do not expect people to behave like this," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, observed orally.

Justice B.V. Nagarathna advocated the need to "restrain" discriminatory and communally divisive public speeches "from all sides".

'Control of thought'

"Political leaders must ultimately foster fraternity in the country," Justice Nagarathna remarked. However, she pointed out that the origin of speech was thought. "How can we control thought?" the judge asked.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal and advocate Fuzail

> **There is a need to restrain discriminatory and communally divisive public speeches from all sides**
> **B.V. NAGARATHNA**
> Supreme Court Judge

> **We would like to impress upon all political parties to follow the principles of constitutional morality**
> **SURYA KANT**
> Chief Justice of India

Ahmad Ayyubi, appearing for petitioner-activist Roop Rekha Verma, said the court could certainly control the "consequences of thought" by laying down guidelines to govern public speech by constitutional functionaries, so as to ensure fidelity to constitutional morality, without imposing prior restraint or

censorship. "We have to do something now," Mr. Sibal urged the court.

The court said it was keen to lay down guidelines but noted that the petition seemed to name personalities only from a particular political party. The Bench indicated that the court did not want to enter the political thicket,

following which Mr. Sibal sought two weeks to modify the petition.

Chief Justice Kant said the petition has raised a "very serious issue" even as Mr. Sibal pointed out that public statements have become increasingly "toxic".

Mr. Sibal highlighted the "normalisation of constitutionally unbecoming speeches by holders of high public offices". He said these statements were not merely political rhetoric, but have weaved their way into administrative and law enforcement establishments.

Chief Justice Kant asked whether party constitutions did not have any clauses to control public conduct and speeches of their leaders.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, the third judge on the Bench, said the public have an expectation that "democratic entities would live up to the constitutional ethos and values".

'Chilling effect'

The petition flagged statements of sitting Chief Ministers and holders of high public offices, which exemplify how constitutional and legal authority was used to legitimise discriminatory hostility. It drew attention to statements by senior bureaucrats and police officers that "reinforce exclusion, humiliation, or collective blame". It underscored that holders of public office and senior executive authorities who indulge in a continuing pattern of derogatory

speech were not ordinary speakers.

"Their words carry the imprimatur of the State, influence administrative action, shape public perception, and can have a chilling or exclusionary effect on vulnerable communities, even in the absence of direct incitement or hate speech... No structured guidance or framework clarifying how constitutional morality applies to the public speech of constitutional functionaries. This vacuum has allowed discriminatory and derogatory speech," it pointed out.

"Let this not be a populist exercise. It should be a contemplative and constitutional exercise. We need to take an objective approach," Justice Bagchi addressed Mr. Sibal.

Contextual Background

The petition, filed by activist Roop Rekha Verma and others, highlighted instances where Chief Ministers and senior officials made public statements that allegedly:

Stigmatized entire communities.

Legitimized discriminatory governance.

Vitiated the public atmosphere, creating a "chilling effect" on vulnerable groups.

The petitioners sought judicially framed guidelines to govern the public speech of constitutional functionaries, arguing that while ordinary citizens have free speech, the words of state officials carry the "imprimatur of the State" and influence administrative action.

Key Judicial Observations

The Principle of Fraternity : Justice B.V. Nagarathna noted that political leaders must ultimately foster fraternity. She described fraternity as the essential glue for a diverse nation, citing that the "origin of speech is thought" and emphasized the need to align public discourse with constitutional values.

Constitutional Morality: The Bench urged all political parties to adhere to Constitutional Morality—the idea that governance and public conduct should reflect the spirit of the Constitution, not just its literal text. This includes mutual respect and self-restraint.

Avoiding the "Political Thicket": The Court expressed hesitation about entering the "political thicket." CJI Surya Kant pointed out that the petition seemed to target individuals from a specific political party. The Court insisted that any exercise to frame guidelines must be objective, impartial, and non-populist.

Existing Guardrails: The Court questioned why political parties do not have internal codes of conduct to control their leaders' speech. It also noted that public servants (IAS/IPS) are already governed by rigorous Service Rules, suggesting that the vacuum lies primarily in the conduct of "public figures" (politicians).

Core Concepts

Concept	Description	Constitutional Basis
Fraternity	A sense of common brotherhood among all Indians; gives unity and solidarity to social life.	Preamble; Article 51A (e) (Fundamental Duties).
Constitutional Morality	Adherence to the core values of the Constitution (Justice, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) in both letter and spirit.	Derived from the Basic Structure doctrine & Preamble.
Hate Speech vs. Free Speech	The balance between Article 19(1)(a) (Free Speech) and reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2).	Article 19(2); Sections 153A, 295A of the BNS (formerly IPC).
Trinity of Democracy	Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's idea that Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity are inseparable.	Constituent Assembly Debates (1949).

Analysis for Mains

The "Imprimatur of the State"

The petition raises a crucial point for Ethics (GS Paper IV): public officials are not "ordinary speakers." Their statements are perceived as state policy. When a person in a high constitutional office makes a divisive remark, it:

Undermines Neutrality: Erodes the perception of the state as a neutral arbiter.

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Influences Bureaucracy: May signal to law enforcement and administrators that discriminatory action is permissible.

Threatens Social Cohesion: Weakens the "social capital" necessary for economic and social development.

The Challenge of Judicial Guidelines

As Justice Bagchi noted, "a court can only issue orders; implementation remains a challenge." Previously, in the Kaushal Kishor (2023) case, a Constitution Bench held that the state is not vicariously liable for personal statements made by ministers. The current Bench's call for a "fresh, objective plea" suggests the Judiciary is now looking for a more systemic way to enforce self-regulation among political entities.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's stance reaffirms that Fraternity is not a mere "ornamental" word in the Preamble but a functional requirement for democracy. While the Court is wary of overstepping into political territory, its emphasis on "Constitutional Morality" serves as a warning to functionaries that the privilege of public office comes with the burden of restraint. A mature democracy requires more than just laws; it requires a "public conscience" and a culture of mutual respect.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: The term "Constitutional Morality" has been emphasised by the Supreme Court of India in several judgments. It primarily implies:

(a) Following traditions and customs of society

(b) Adherence to majority opinion

(c) Strict obedience to executive instructions

(d) Commitment to constitutional values over popular morality

Ans : d)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Examine the role of the judiciary in preserving constitutional ethos without entering the 'political thicket'. **(250 words)**

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Daily News Analysis

Page 01 : GS II : International Relations

The meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Emmanuel Macron on February 17, 2026, marks a watershed moment in bilateral ties, elevating the relationship to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership." This visit, centered in Mumbai and Bengaluru, underscores a shift from a purely buyer-seller relationship to one of co-development, co-production, and shared global governance.

India, France renew defence cooperation for 10 years, call to boost military partnership

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

India and France renewed their defence cooperation agreement for another 10 years on Tuesday at the sixth India-France Annual Defence Dialogue in Bengaluru.

At the meeting, co-chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Minister of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs of France Catherine Vautrin, India asked France to increase "indigenous content" in the Rafale by up to 50%, and also expand the Rafale's maintenance, repair and overhaul facility in India.

The cooperation agreement was signed by India's Defence Secretary and France's Deputy Director General for International Relations and Strategy. Besides, both countries an-

Expanding ties: French Defence Minister Catherine Vautrin arrives at the HAL airport in Bengaluru on Tuesday. SUDHAKARA JAIN

nounced Reciprocal Deployment Officers at Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments.

The two Ministers discussed a range of bilateral security and defence issues, including priority areas for co-development and co-production of equipment.

The Defence Ministry said the two leaders emphasised the need for a closer defence partnership, connecting industries of both nations, especially in the field of niche technology.

It said they reaffirmed

India has asked France to increase 'indigenous content' in Rafale jets and expand MRO facility

the commitment to enhance military-to-military cooperation as a key pillar of the strategic partnership.

Mr. Singh said the recent India-EU Security and Defence Partnership marked a significant step in deepening the collective engagement.

"Both Ministers agreed to leverage this framework, both bilaterally and in the wider European context for tangible outcomes that will strengthen regional stability, enhance joint capabilities, and reinforce the enduring Indo-French strategic alignment," the Ministry said.

An MoU on Joint Venture was also signed for the manufacturing of Hammer missiles in India between the Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Electronics Limited and Executive Vice President, Safran Electronics and Defence.

Mr. Singh emphasised that India has been the first responder and net security provider for countries in the Indian Ocean Region and always extends assistance to them in the defence, security and maritime domains to augment their capabilities and ward off any adversary.

On terrorism, he said that Pakistan has a long history of nurturing, nourishing, and promoting cross-border terrorism to create disturbance and violence in India. "This has created a serious threat to peace in the region," he said.

Key Outcomes of the 2026 Summit

1. Defence & Security (The "Aatmanirbhar" Push)

10-Year Renewal: The Defence Cooperation Agreement was renewed for another decade.

Aviation Landmarks: Virtually inaugurated the Airbus H-125 Helicopter Final Assembly Line in Karnataka—the first for the private sector.

Rafale Indigenization: India requested increasing indigenous content in Rafale jets to 50% and expanding MRO (Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul) facilities in India.

Missile Manufacturing: MoU signed between Safran and BEL to manufacture Hammer missiles in India.

Reciprocal Deployment: Agreement for the reciprocal deployment of armed forces and exchange of officers between Land Forces.

2. Technology & Innovation

Horizon 2047 Roadmap: Established an annual Foreign Ministers' Dialogue to monitor this long-term blueprint.

New Centers of Excellence:

Indo-French Centre for AI in Health.

Indo-French Centre for Digital Science and Technology.

National Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Aeronautics.

Year of Innovation: Launched the India-France Year of Innovation to boost start-up ecosystems.

3. Diplomacy & Economy

DTAA Amendment: Amended the protocol on the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement to ease cross-border investments.

Anti-Hegemony Stance: Both leaders emphasized a world order based on the rule of law, specifically advocating for "transparent algorithms" in AI that respect diversity.

Why France is India's "Resident Power" Partner

Strategic Autonomy: France has historically been India's most reliable partner, often refusing to join international sanctions against India (e.g., after the 1998 nuclear tests). Both nations value Strategic Autonomy—the ability to make sovereign decisions without being tethered to superpower blocs (USA or Russia/China).

The Indo-Pacific Pillar: France is a resident power in the Indian Ocean due to its overseas territories (e.g., Reunion Island). The Reciprocal Deployment agreement is a "force multiplier" for the Indian Navy, allowing access to French naval bases, which is critical for monitoring the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) against maritime threats and piracy.

Combatting Hegemony: President Macron's comment on finding a "way against hegemony" signals a joint Indo-French vision for a multipolar world. It suggests that neither country wants the world to be polarized by a US-China rivalry, but rather governed by a "Third Way" that prioritizes international law and diverse cultural values.

Summary Table for Quick Revision

Sector	Key Highlight
Defence	10-year renewal; H-125 Helicopter assembly line; Hammer missile JV.
Economy	Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) protocol amendment.
Technology	Indo-French Centre for AI in Health; Digital Science partnership.
Diplomacy	Annual Foreign Ministers' Dialogue; "Special Global Strategic Partnership."
Regional	Focus on IOR stability and anti-terrorism (tribute to 26/11 victims).

Conclusion

The India-France partnership has transcended traditional diplomacy to become a "future-building platform." By moving into niche areas like AI ethics, critical minerals, and helicopter manufacturing, the two nations are creating a blueprint for how a developed and a developing economy can collaborate without hierarchy. As PM Modi noted, this partnership is indeed a "force for stability" in an increasingly volatile global landscape.

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UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: India–France relations have evolved from transactional defence trade to transformational strategic collaboration. Discuss. **(250 words)**

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THE HINDU
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Daily News Analysis

Page 07 : GS II : Social Justice

This news report highlights a critical public health gap in India: despite being the world's second-largest tobacco producer and consumer, India's taxation policy remains significantly below global benchmarks, rendering tobacco products affordable and undermining cessation efforts.

Taxes prove futile to burn out cigarette use in India

As the world's second-largest consumer and producer of tobacco, India's recent cigarette taxes account for only 53% of the retail price, a figure well below the WHO's 75% benchmark for significantly deterring consumption, especially among young and low-income users; meanwhile, the GST rate on beedis, has been reduced to 18%

Divya Gandhi
BENGALURU

One puff of a cigarette, within seconds, infuses the human bloodstream (via the lungs) with nicotine, the acutely addictive and carcinogenic chemical in tobacco. Nicotine binds to the brain's cellular receptors, sparking the dopaminergic reward system to keep smokers hooked. And then there are additives in cigarettes, such as menthol, which gets nicotine to linger longer in the body, affecting the central nervous system.

Tobacco use, one of the major causes of death and disease in India, kills 1.35 million people every year, from cancer, lung disease, cardiovascular disease and stroke, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). India happens to be the world's second largest consumer and producer of tobacco. A huge source of revenue for the country, cigarettes aren't banned, but every Budget, raises the price of a stick.

The additional excise duty, starting February 1, pushed up the price of cigarettes by 15-30% yet still fell short of the WHO's benchmark on how much taxes should make up the retail price.

"We have strong evidence globally about the effectiveness of tax hikes in reducing tobacco consumption in India," Upendra Bhojani, senior fellow, and the lead, Centre for Commercial Determinants of Health, at the Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru, told *The Hindu*. But he added that the challenge is that historically, especially until the last couple of years, tax increase on tobacco products "was not significant," and especially did not keep pace with the consumer inflation index.

"This makes tobacco products affordable rather than costly," Dr. Bhojani said.

He pointed to a 2017 peer reviewed paper that studied the association between State-level VAT rates and tobacco use in India. It showed that every 10% increase in cigarette VAT rates was associated with a decrease of 0.9% or 17.2% in cigarette smoking by men, and a decrease of 6.5% or 21.6% in the dual use of cigarette and beedi smoking among men. "The Tobacco Control Policy India survey showed lower decline, the Global Adult Tobacco Survey showed an even steeper decline," said Dr. Bhojani.

Low income users
The recent taxes on cigarettes in India account for only 53% of the retail price. That is well below the 75% benchmark recommended by WHO as the level at which tobacco taxes begin to significantly deter consumption, especially among young and low-income users.

The last couple of years have seen government efforts to raise taxes on tobacco, said Dr. Bhojani, citing the example of a significant upward revision of excise duties as well as GST rate revision to 40% for cigarette and smokeless tobacco. There is also a cess now on smokeless tobacco. "These are certainly positive moves from the public health perspective. However, they are still lower than international best practice of upto 75%."

The GST rate on beedis, however has been reduced to 18%, he pointed out. "Beedis are more prevalent than cigarettes, and the second most prevalent form of tobacco use after smokeless tobacco." They are consumed by the lower income strata, "so its a lost opportunity as it will worsen the inequities in tobacco use and burden." The GST rate on beedis could be made 40%, he added.

Not just lobbying
With strategies varying from lobbying to outright attempts to manipulate delegations, the tobacco industry's tactics are a cause for serious concern, Andrew Black, acting head of the secretariat of the the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), said in a release.

In October last year, the FCTC alerted governments and the public that the tobacco industry is intensifying efforts to interfere with the work of the Conference of the Parties (COP), the treaty's decision-making body, to weaken global tobacco control measures.

> All sectors of the tobacco industry have been shown to influence tobacco control-related policy in their favour in India
>
> **UPENDRA BHOJANI**
> Senior fellow, Centre for Commercial Determinants of Health, Institute of Public Health

"This is not just lobbying; it is a deliberate strategy to try to derail consensus and weaken measures to further the treaty's implementation. The tobacco industry's interference is one of the biggest constraints and barriers to the implementation of the Convention," said Dr. Black. He cautioned vigilance against the industry's tactics and misinformation.

"All sectors of the tobacco industry – cigarette, beedis, and smokeless tobacco companies – have been shown to influence tobacco control-related policy in their favour in India," said Dr. Bhojani. We have seen this through the India tobacco industry Interference Index, he added. "India is a party to the FCTC and the tobacco Industry's Interference Index shows that the country has reduced marginally over the years."

Industry's pollution
In November 2025, the 11th session of the COP, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland, brought together Parties to the Convention to make necessary

decisions to achieve the objectives of the FCTC, "including the discussion of measures to prevent nicotine addiction, and for the protection of the environment and human health, among others."

During the COP, 160 Parties gathered for six days and made decisions on tobacco control and the environment; increasing sustainable resources for tobacco control; forward looking tobacco control measures; and issues relating to the liability of the tobacco industry for the damage it causes.

"These important decisions made by Parties to the Convention will contribute towards saving millions of lives in the years to come and protecting the planet from the environmental harms of tobacco," said Dr. Black.

Among the themes discussed were protecting the environment and human health from the harms of tobacco, including measures to prevent and manage the waste produced by tobacco and nicotine products and related electronic devices. "Trillions of cigarette butts containing plastic filters and leaching harmful chemicals pollute the environment each year," another WHO release stated.

Prashanth N. Srinivas, senior fellow at the Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru, goes beyond tobacco: "The experiences with tobacco industry interference and tobacco-related regulation need to be transferred to other health-harming industries, including the alcohol industry and the food processing industry," he told *The Hindu*.
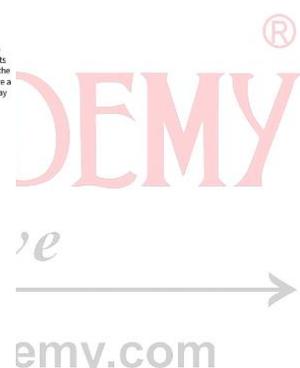
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THE GIST

■ The last couple of years have seen government efforts to raise taxes on tobacco, however they still fall short of international best practice of 75%

■ Beedis which are more commonly used than cigarettes in India had their GST rates lowered to 18%

■ With strategies varying from lobbying to outright attempts to manipulate delegations, the tobacco industry's tactics are a cause for serious concern, say experts

Fighting the killer: Tobacco use, one of the major causes of death and disease in India, kills 1.35 million people every year, from cancer, lung disease, cardiovascular disease and stroke, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). FILE PHOTO

Core Issues: The Tax Gap

1. Falling Short of WHO Benchmarks

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that taxes should constitute at least **75% of the retail price** of tobacco products to effectively deter consumption.

India's Status: Current taxes on cigarettes account for only **53%** of the retail price.

Impact: Because tax hikes haven't kept pace with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), cigarettes remain affordable for youth and low-income groups.

2. The "Beedi" Paradox

While cigarettes face higher duties, **Beedis**—the most common form of smoking in India—enjoy a lower GST rate of **18%**.

> **The Inequity:** Since beedis are primarily consumed by lower-income strata, the lower tax rate worsens health inequities, as this group bears a disproportionate burden of tobacco-related diseases but faces fewer financial barriers to consumption.

Health and Environmental Impact

The Biological Hook

Nicotine reaches the brain within seconds, triggering the dopaminergic reward system. Additives like menthol allow nicotine to linger longer, increasing dependency.

> **Annual Mortality:** 1.35 million deaths in India due to cancer, lung disease, and stroke.

Environmental Degradation

Beyond human health, the tobacco industry is a major pollutant.

> **Waste:** Trillions of cigarette butts containing plastic filters leach harmful chemicals into the soil and water.

> **COP11 Decisions:** The 2025 Geneva Conference (COP11) specifically focused on the liability of the tobacco industry for environmental damage.

Obstacles to Regulation

1. Industry Interference

The **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)**, to which India is a party, warns against "Tobacco Industry Interference." This includes:

> **Lobbying:** Influencing policy to keep taxes low.

> **Economic Argument:** Highlighting tobacco as a massive source of state revenue and employment (India is a top producer).

> **Illicit Trade Myth:** The industry often argues that high taxes lead to smuggling, a claim often used to derail tax hikes.

2. Commercial Determinants of Health (CDH)

This article touches upon a rising theme in GS Paper II (Health) and Paper IV (Ethics): Commercial Determinants of Health. This refers to private sector activities that affect people's health positively or negatively. Experts suggest that the regulatory framework used for tobacco (like the FCTC) should be expanded to:

The Alcohol Industry.

The Ultra-processed Food Industry (High Fat, Sugar, and Salt - HFSS foods).

Summary Table for Quick Reference

Metric	WHO Recommendation	India's Current Status
Cigarette Tax Share	75% of Retail Price	~53%
Beedi GST Rate	Recommended 40%+	18%
Annual Deaths	-	1.35 Million (India)
Global Rank	-	2nd (Consumer & Producer)

Conclusion

For India to achieve its public health goals and reduce the burden on its healthcare infrastructure, tobacco taxation must move beyond a "revenue-generating" exercise to a "public health" tool. Aligning with the 75% WHO benchmark and removing the tax leniency for beedis are essential steps to protect vulnerable populations and the environment from the "commercial determinants" of disease.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Taxation is one of the most effective tools to reduce tobacco consumption, yet its implementation in India remains suboptimal. Critically examine. **(250 words)**

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Daily News Analysis

Page 10 : GS II : Indian Polity

In a vibrant democracy, satire serves as a "mirror to the absurd," using ridicule and irony to critique those in power. However, recent government actions—including the blocking of satirical content and the notification of the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2026—have sparked a debate on whether lampooning can truly be a threat to national security. As the Supreme Court observes, a "75-year-old mature democracy" must be robust enough to withstand a "bee sting of scorn."

On the importance of satire

Can satire, comedy or a work of art be a threat to national security or defence of the nation? The Supreme Court has consistently held that satire is one of the most effective art forms revealing the absurdities, hypocrisies and contradictions of life

LETTER & SPIRIT

Krishnadas Rajagopal

If lampooning was a threat to national security, defence, reputation and India's foreign relations, the first Prime Minister of the country, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru would have desisted from telling cartoonist K. Shankar Pillai – "Don't spare me, Shankar".

Recently, access to a 52-second video reportedly featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi was blocked from the social media handles of *The Wire*, an online news portal. The portal reported that one of its editors was "informed orally.... that the grounds for blocking the cartoon were that it spread rumours/unverified information that would affect the defence, security, reputation of the country and India's relations with foreign countries".

The Editors Guild of India issued a statement that the incident was yet "another example of the rising intolerance to comment and scrutiny on the part of the government and its representatives... and serves to tarnish India's credentials as an accommodative democracy that gives space to media, including satire and humour".

Legal precedents

The Guild drew attention to the government's "unsheathing" of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules of 2026, which is poised to come into effect from February 20, the day the Global AI Impact Summit ends in New Delhi. The amended rules give social media platforms three hours, a sharp reduction from the 24-36 hours under the 2021 Rules, to take down content, including synthetically-generated ones, deemed illegal by a court or an "appropriate government".

Meanwhile, the Karnataka High Court has recently upheld the 'Sahyog' content-blocking portal, a government platform to automate the process of sending notices to intermediaries in order to facilitate the removal or disabling of access to any information, data or communication link being used to commit an unlawful act.

The High Court had rejected a petition by X (formerly Twitter) that the portal bypassed procedural safeguards which need to be mandatorily followed by government authorities before blocking public access to online content under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000. The social media platform had argued that the government was using the "safe harbour" regime to nudge social media intermediaries into blocking content and restricting free speech and expression.

On the other hand, the Supreme Court, in its March 2015 judgment in *Shreya Singhal versus Union of India*, held that not only the social media intermediary but also the 'originator' of the online content must be heard before a blocking is passed by the government.

The *Shreya Singhal* verdict had held that any blocking of content under Section 69A could be done by the Union government only for reasons prescribed in Article 19(2) of the Constitution, such as threatening the security or defence of the country, friendly relations with foreign nations, and in order to maintain public order or prevention of incitement.

The reasons for the blocking order have to be given in writing and it can be subject to review by a committee.

Defining satire

However, the question is whether satire, comedy or a work of art is a threat to national security or defence of the nation. The Supreme Court has consistently held that satire was basically an exaggeration of a particular situation or event beyond normal bounds that it becomes ridiculous, inducing laughter, and in the process exposes certain ills or shortcomings.

The Supreme Court in *Indibly Creative (P) Ltd. versus State of West Bengal*, a 2019 judgment, quoted senior advocate Madhavi Goradia Divan that "satire is a literary genre where topical issues are held up to scorn by means of ridicule or irony". The top court went on to note that satire was one of the most effective art forms revealing the absurdities, hypocrisies and contradictions of life. The judgment highlighted satire's "unique ability to quickly and clearly make a point and facilitate understanding in ways that other forms of communication and expression often do not".

Justice K. Ramaswamy, speaking for the Supreme Court Bench in the 1997 caselaw of *D.C. Saxena versus Chief Justice of India* cautioned the government that "prohibition of freedom of speech and expression on public issues prevents and stifles the debate on social, political and economic questions which in the long term endangers the stability of the community and maximises the source and breeds for more likely revolution". The Supreme Court, in the *Indibly Creative* caselaw, had even quoted Albert Camus to defend the freedom of artistic expression through satire and comedy, noting that "art, by virtue of that free essence I have tried to define, unites whereas tyranny separates. It is not surprising, therefore, that art should be the enemy marked out by every form of oppression".

In *Kama versus M. Jothisvrupan*, a 2018 judgment of the Madras High Court, the single judge Bench termed a cartoon as a close relation of caricature, implying a deliberate exaggeration intended to produce satirical effect. The Bench termed a satirical cartoon as "intrinsically a weapon of ridicule". The judgment explained that the appeal of the political cartoon or caricature was often based on exploitation of unfortunate physical traits or politically embarrassing events – an exploitation often calculated to injure the feelings of the subject of the portrayal. The High Court said the political cartoon was a "weapon of attack", a bee sting of scorn, ridicule and satire. Something which would be least effective if it tried to "put some politician on the back".

The right to poke fun

Globally, courts in democracies have entitled cartoons and satire with greater latitude, tolerating them as an essential ingredient of public life and opinion.

The Madras High Court referred to how there was an "early cartoon portraying George Washington, the father of USA, as an ass".

The Supreme Court has, time and again, underscored that the art of satire and cartoons have to be evaluated through the eyes of a reasonable person who could laugh it off, unlike a "touchy and hyper-sensitive individual". The Delhi High Court, while dismissing a plea for injunction against Netflix for streaming online content derogatory to lawyers, had championed the liberty of a creative artist to "project the picture of the society in a manner he perceives". It termed satire as one of the prime forms of exposing the ills of the society. It underscored the value of stand-up comedians in society as they use satire and exaggerate the ills to an extent that it becomes ridiculous.

The top court, in a March 2025 verdict, said "75 years into our Republic, we cannot be seen to be so shaky on our fundamentals that a mere recital of a poem, or for that matter, any form of art or entertainment, such as, stand-up comedy, can be alleged to lead to animosity or hatred amongst different communities". The observation was part of a judgment which found Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi innocent of spreading communal hate and communal discord through his poem on "suffering injustice with love".

The same month saw the Supreme Court issue notice to the Union government on a petition filed by Software Freedom Law Center (SFLC) challenging provisions of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009. The petition has argued that Rules 8 and 9 make it optional for the government to inform the original creator of the online content about the proposed blocking action. The petition, argued by senior advocate Indira Jaising, said the government could use Rule 9 as an "emergency" provision to block content with hardly a word to the creator of the information. It contended that Rule 16 facilitated a blanket confidentiality regarding requests, complaints and actions taken for blocking information.

A similar petition filed by actor Sushant Singh challenging the 2009 Rules has been tagged with the SFLC petition. The Supreme Court has also issued notice in a third petition filed by senior journalist Sanjay Sharma, editor of the digital news platform '4PM', against the blocking of his YouTube channel by the government on grounds of national security and public order.

THE GIST

Recently, access to a 52-second cartoon video reportedly featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi was blocked from the social media handles of *The Wire*, an online news portal.

The Supreme Court, in its March 2015 judgment in *Shreya Singhal versus Union of India*, held that not only the social media intermediary but also the 'originator' of the online content must be heard before a blocking is passed by the government.

Globally, courts in democracies have entitled cartoons and satire with greater latitude, tolerating them as an essential ingredient of public life and opinion.

GETTY IMAGES

The New Regulatory Landscape (2026)

1. The 3-Hour Takedown Rule

The **IT Amendment Rules 2026** (effective February 20, 2026) significantly tighten the government's grip on digital content:

Time Compression: Social media platforms now have only three hours to remove content deemed illegal or harmful by the government, a sharp drop from the previous 24–36 hour window.

Synthetic Content: The rules explicitly cover AI-generated or "synthetically-generated" content, reflecting concerns raised at the Global AI Impact Summit.

2. The 'Sahyog' Portal

The Karnataka High Court recently upheld the 'Sahyog' portal, an automated government system for sending blocking notices to intermediaries. While the government argues this streamlines law enforcement, platforms like X (formerly Twitter) contend it bypasses the mandatory procedural safeguards of Section 69A of the IT Act.

Judicial Philosophy on Satire

The Indian Judiciary has consistently protected satire through several landmark judgments:

Case Law	Judicial Stance
Shreya Singhal (2015)	Held that the 'originator' of content must be heard before blocking; reasons for blocking must fall strictly under **Article 19(2)**.
Indibily Creative (2019)	Defined satire as an "exaggeration beyond normal bounds" to expose social ills. Noted that art unites while tyranny separates.
Kama v. M. Jothisorupan (2018)	Termed a cartoon a "weapon of ridicule" that is least effective if it tries to "pat a politician on the back."
Imran Pratapgarhi Case (2025)	Stated that the Republic is not so "shaky" that a poem or stand-up comedy can trigger communal hatred.

The Conflict of Interest

Satire vs. National Security: The government often invokes "security of the state" or "friendly relations with foreign states" (Article 19(2)) to block content. However, the Supreme Court warns that using these provisions to stifle political debate breeds "revolution" in the long term. For a "reasonable person," satire is a joke; for a "hyper-sensitive" state, it is perceived as a threat.

Procedural Propriety: A major legal concern is Rule 16 of the 2009 IT Rules, which maintains "blanket confidentiality" over blocking orders. This prevents the creator from knowing why their content was removed, making judicial review nearly impossible. The recent petition by the Software Freedom Law Center (SFLC) challenges this "emergency" power.

The "Chilling Effect" : The 3-hour takedown requirement may force intermediaries to over-censor content to avoid legal liability (the loss of Safe Harbour). This leads to a "chilling effect" where artists and journalists self-censor to avoid the "automated" wrath of portals like Sahyog.

Conclusion

The legacy of Indian democracy, from Nehru's "Don't spare me, Shankar" to current judicial protections, suggests that satire is a sign of a healthy, "thick-skinned" polity. While AI and synthetic media present new challenges, the fundamental right to poke fun at the powerful remains a cornerstone of free speech. As the Supreme Court continues to hear challenges to the 2026 Rules, the focus must remain on ensuring that "national security" does not become a convenient shroud for "political discomfort."

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the constitutional and procedural concerns surrounding the 3-hour takedown rule and the Sahyog portal. **(150 Words)**

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THE HINDU
INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

Daily News Analysis

Page 11 : GS I : Modern History / Prelims Exam

The 1946 Royal Indian Navy (RIN) Revolt, also known as the Naval Mutiny, stands as one of the most significant yet under-discussed chapters of India's freedom struggle. Occurring just a year before Independence, it represented a rare moment of complete breakdown in colonial military authority and an extraordinary display of communal unity.

KEYWORD

The Naval uprising memorial in Colaba, Mumbai. PUBLIC DOMAIN

The 1946 Royal Navy revolt: solidarity amid sharpening polarisation

Characterising the revolt as a mere localised breakdown of military discipline and insubordination by naval ratings, colonial officials often described the insurrection as a mutiny. However, a brief account of the events that unfolded would help one understand the scale of the 'mutiny'

Robert Rahman Raman

February 18 marks the 80th anniversary of the Royal Indian Navy's (RIN) revolt of 1946, a brief armed uprising that began at the naval barracks in Bombay and quickly spread to the streets, gaining popular support.

Eighty years later, one must reassess the significance of this short-lived uprising amid these turbulent years, where South Asia is experiencing a worsening of inter-communal relations.

Mutiny or revolt?

Characterising the revolt as a mere localised breakdown of military discipline and insubordination by naval ratings, which lacked both centralised leadership and coordination, successive colonial officials often described the insurrection as a mutiny. However, a brief account of the events that unfolded between February 18-22 would help one understand the scale of the 'mutiny'.

The 'mutiny' started on February 18, 1946 when hundreds of ratings of the Royal Indian Navy at HMIS Talwar in Bombay went on a hunger strike. These ratings protested against poor food quality, low wages, and racial discrimination by British officers. As news of their strike spread, shore establishments across the castle and fort barracks, along with 22 ships anchored in the Bombay harbour, also refused to work. The naval ratings organised a procession in the city, carrying a portrait of Subhas Chandra Bose, and raised the flags of the Congress, the Muslim League, and the Communist Party on their ships. A naval central strike committee, formed shortly after the hunger strike, combined their grievances with broader national issues, such as the release of Indian national army soldiers.

On February 21, a more or less peaceful hunger strike transformed into a brief armed uprising in the city. It reached its climax when naval ratings inside the barracks waged a pitched battle with firearms against British military forces after they opened fire on the naval ratings. The threat of a full-scale military conflict hung over the city as the rebel ships, in response, manned guns, intending to defend their fellow ratings on shore. Over the next five days, the uprising spread to other naval establishments, ranging from Karachi and Bombay on the western coast to Madras, Cochin, the Andaman Islands, and Vishakhapatnam and Kolkata on the eastern coast. At its height, 78 naval ships from these naval establishments, 20 shore establishments, including one in Delhi, and nearly 20,000 naval ratings participated in this revolt.

Such a momentous event and a flashpoint in India's decolonisation journey has, however, left so few traces in public memory. It was soon submerged in the abyss of communal polarisation and in the violence of the Partition.

Moment of solidarity

While assessing the importance of the revolt, one often overlooks the broader context of the growing communal discord in the country since the breakdown of the Shimla Conference in September 1945. Bombay was no exception; it experienced communal rioting during this period but also saw an unprecedented, though short-lived, display of communal unity during the RIN revolt in February, 1946. After clashes between the British military and the RIN ratings, Hindu-Muslim protesters jointly took to the streets, urging people to observe a hartal in lieu of the firing on the rebels. That afternoon, the crowd raided post offices, dug up tram tracks, set up obstructions, and lit bonfires on the roads, bringing the city to a standstill. The Muslim neighbourhood of Bhendi Bazar and the mill district became sites of stone-throwing and street fights between workers and police.

On February 22, this popular fraternisation took the shape of a popular uprising against colonial rule. Workers, students, and poorer inhabitants came out on the streets in support of the naval ratings to defy the colonial authority's power to govern the city. They took out processions, barricaded various localities with boulders and barrels and torched buses and military vehicles to disrupt transport services. Muslim localities, which had been relatively quiet during the previous Congress's protests, emerged as focal points of this popular uprising. Muslim neighbourhoods were barricaded and patrolled by socially diverse groups. These processions crisscrossed various Hindu-Muslim localities, where citizens moved around carrying the tricolour, the League flag, and the Communist flags.

Bombay's mill district emerged as the epicentre of this uprising. All the textile mills, along with the railway workshops and other factories, were closed. Schools and colleges followed suit. Workers took control of the mill district, torched police stations, and indulged in pitched street battles with the patrolling police parties and British soldiers, leading to several casualties. To suppress this popular uprising, the British government left no stone unturned, mobilising army battalions and armoured vehicles to restore order.

A fierce battle erupted at Kamatipura and Madanpura, where Hindu and Muslim mill workers erected barricades and hurled stones along with petrol bombs at the advancing British forces. The stone-throwing crowd was then indiscriminately shot at by the British troops armed with machine guns and bayonets. In this intense and unequal street fight, around 200 working poor were killed, and hundreds more were injured. Despite this overwhelming use of brute force and violence, the military was unable to take control of the mill district and the city for a couple of days, even after the naval ratings surrendered on February 23.

Enduring legacy

The remarkable unity this historic event fostered was short-lived, as from August 1946, the failure of the Cabinet Mission and the call for direct action led to widespread communal violence. In retrospect, however, the uprising was part of a broader post-war anti-colonial radicalisation that represented alternative possibilities for popular mobilisation in our nation's life. While the revolt was undeniably a catalytic moment of insurrection aboard naval warships and in barracks, it was also a moment of popular fraternisation on the streets of Bombay.

Amid the spiralling communal discord, the RIN revolt of 1946 remains a moment of remarkable Hindu-Muslim unity, which the famous progressive poet Sahir Ludhianvi termed as "a flower of hope amidst a garden- scorched and desolate" (*jhulse hue viraan gulshan me, ek aas-umeed ka phool khila*). The RIN revolt was part of a series of localised, often militant and united, popular mass actions by soldiers, workers, and peasants in the final years of colonial rule that cut across the hardened boundaries of communal polarisation.

Today, 80 years later, this historic event serves as a reminder that the potentialities of popular solidarities did not entirely diminish under the weight of the spiralling communal frenzy of the postwar era.

Robert Rahman Raman is assistant professor, history, SRM University, AP

The Spark: February 18, 1946

The revolt began at HMIS Talwar in Bombay (now Mumbai) when nearly 1,100 naval ratings (non-commissioned sailors) went on a hunger strike. Their grievances were rooted in both professional and nationalistic concerns:

Racial Discrimination: Grossly unequal treatment compared to British counterparts.

Poor Living Conditions: Substandard food (often described as "inedible") and low wages.

Political Context: The ongoing trials of the Indian National Army (INA) soldiers had radicalized the armed forces.

Scale and Spread of the Uprising

What started as a localized strike quickly transformed into a pan-India insurrection. The scale was unprecedented for a military revolt:

Participation: Nearly 20,000 ratings joined the revolt.

Geography: It spread to 78 ships and 20 shore establishments across Bombay, Karachi, Madras, Vishakhapatnam, Calcutta, and even Delhi.

Symbolism: In a powerful display of political unity, the ratings hoisted three flags on the masts of their ships: the Tricolour (Congress), the Green Flag (Muslim League), and the Red Flag (Communist Party).

The People's Revolt: Unity on the Streets

The significance of the 1946 revolt lies in the Popular Fraternisation—the bridge between the military and the common citizens.

Communal Harmony: Despite the sharpening communal polarization of the mid-1940s, Hindu and Muslim workers, students, and residents fought side-by-side.

Bombay as the Epicenter: The mill districts and Muslim neighborhoods like Bhendi Bazar became fortresses of resistance. Protesters set up barricades, disrupted transport, and engaged in street battles with British troops.

Casualties: The British response was brutal. In the street fights of Bombay alone, approximately 228 to 250 people were killed and over 1,000 injured by machine-gun fire and bayonets.

Analysis for UPSC: Historical Significance

1. The "Last Nail" in the Colonial Coffin: The revolt proved to the British that they could no longer rely on the Indian military to maintain their hold over the colony. As Clement Attlee (the then UK PM) later admitted, the erosion of loyalty in the Royal Indian Navy and Army was a primary reason for the hurried British exit.

2. Comparison with 1857: Unlike the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, which was largely confined to Northern and Central India and led by displaced royalty, the 1946 revolt was urban, proletarian, and highly politicized, involving modern military technology and global anti-colonial ideologies.

3. The Role of National Leadership: Interestingly, the mainstream leadership (Congress and Muslim League) was wary of the revolt. Sardar Patel and Muhammad Ali Jinnah eventually persuaded the ratings to surrender on February 23, 1946, fearing that a violent military uprising might lead to anarchy just as the transfer of power was being negotiated.

Legacy: The "Flower of Hope"

The poet Sahir Ludhianvi described the event as a "flower of hope." It remains a testament to the fact that even at the height of communal frenzy, a common anti-imperialist goal could unite the diverse Indian populace.

Feature	Details
Duration	February 18 – February 23, 1946
Core Demand	Better conditions, end to racialism, release of INA prisoners.
Key Location	HMIS Talwar (Bombay).
Turning Point	Surrender following advice from Patel and Jinnah.

Conclusion

The 80th anniversary of the RIN Revolt (2026) serves as a reminder of the "potentialities of popular solidarities." For UPSC aspirants, this event is a crucial study in the Civil-Military relationship and the Final Phase of the Freedom Struggle (1942-1947).

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: **Which feature distinguished the 1946 RIN Revolt from the Revolt of 1857?**

(a) Leadership by displaced royalty

(b) Predominantly rural base

(c) Urban, industrial and ideologically politicised character

(d) Absence of military participation

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: "The 1946 RIN Revolt was the last major shock that convinced the British of the untenability of colonial rule in India." Examine. **(250 words)**

India's aviation is in need of data-driven oversight

Prerna Rakheja

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IndiGo, India's largest airline, faced an operational crisis in December 2025, leading to a surge in fares across the country. This episode underscored a broader issue: India is becoming the world's third-largest aviation market without building the data systems required to oversee it.

In this case, regulators quickly stepped in to protect consumer interests. The Ministry of Civil Aviation imposed temporary price caps on domestic flights and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), prompted by the Competition Commission of India, requested average fare data from IndiGo, Air India, SpiceJet and Akasa between December 1-15, 2025, to investigate potential abuse of market dominance.

While this reactive approach protects air passengers in the short term, it highlights a larger regulatory gap. Even with the requested data, regulators may still lack the visibility needed to act effectively. Without a consistent, analytical framework to study fares over time, it becomes difficult to distinguish between a legitimate, demand-driven spike and a surge that crosses into an abuse of market power.

Airline data in the U.S. creates a digital trail
These events are an opportunity to shift the DGCA's role from crisis response to steady oversight by learning from examples of the more mature airline market in the United States. Specifically, the way the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) collects and publishes airline data.

The BTS maintains the Airline Origin and Destination survey, more commonly known as the DB1B database. Unlike the DGCA, which primarily tracks passenger volumes and freight traffic, the DB1B database publishes ticket-level data, including fares, for a 10% random sample of all domestic tickets sold each quarter since 1995.

This is not a mere academic exercise. By collecting data on actual prices paid, itinerary details such as route flown, and carrier information, the BTS creates a usable digital trail. For India, adopting a similar 10% sampling framework would signal a new era of transparency, expanding the DGCA's role from tracking volumes to monitoring market behaviour. Much like a speed camera on a highway, the objective is not necessarily to issue penalties, but to encourage long-term compliance and maintain market hygiene.

The effect of transparency on pricing
Greater transparency also pushes airlines to self-regulate their pricing algorithms. When fare data are open to the public or regulatory scrutiny, carriers are more likely to build ethical guardrails into their revenue management systems, preventing both opportunistic and algorithm-driven price spikes that can trigger public backlash and legal challenges, such as the ongoing Public Interest Litigation before the Supreme Court of India.

The availability of historical pricing data can also strengthen research and policy. For example, over 30 years of US airline data is publicly available through the DB1B database. Academic researchers have used these data to identify the "Southwest Effect" – a phenomenon in the U.S. where the entry of Southwest Airlines, a low-cost U.S. carrier, into a new route leads to a drop in average fares and a corresponding spike in average passenger traffic.

A similar dataset in India can allow regulators to observe competitive behaviour, or the lack of it, across routes, time periods and market structures.

First, comparing fares on different routes. If routes dominated by a single airline consistently show higher fares than those with multiple players, it may indicate market power.

Second, tracking fare changes when competitors enter or exit a route. A sharp rise in fares after a competitor exits, or a drop when one enters, signals that the remaining carriers can exercise market power.

Third, assessing fare behaviour during demand spikes. If an airline raises prices more aggressively on routes where it has a larger market share during holidays or peak periods, it may be leveraging its dominance.

The usual resistance to data transparency stems from concerns over proprietary information, claims that data sharing creates a technical load, and fear of implicit coordination among competitors.

A 10% random sample is reasonable
Airlines might argue that their revenue management algorithms are their "secret sauce" and should be protected. A 10% random sample is a practical middle ground. By design, this framework collects a fraction of the data. This helps to protect the "how", i.e., the proprietary logic and code behind the algorithms while monitoring the "what", i.e., the price at which tickets were sold in the marketplace. And given the limited size of the sample, supplying this data should not pose a significant technical burden.

Critics may also fear that transparency allows airlines to track each other's prices. In the age of real-time data scraping, this is simply the status quo, as airlines already have a good sense of what their competitors are charging. By releasing the 10% sample on a quarterly delay, regulators can reduce the chance of immediate fare alignment while preserving the dataset's usefulness for long-term policy planning.

Thus, the DGCA must pivot from ad hoc fare caps and investigations to a data-first framework. It is time to let the algorithms compete but also let the regulator and the public keep score.

The views expressed are personal

> The December 2025 IndiGo crisis highlights India's lack of a data-driven aviation framework and a regulatory gap

GS Paper III : Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Discuss how data transparency can improve competition and consumer welfare in network industries like aviation. **(250 Words)**

Context :

The Indian aviation sector reached a tipping point in late 2025 when an operational crisis at IndiGo triggered a massive spike in airfares. While the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the DGCA intervened with temporary price caps and data requests, these measures remain reactive. To transition from a "firefighting" mode to a "preventative" oversight role, India must adopt a systematic, data-rich framework—similar to international standards—to distinguish between legitimate supply-demand fluctuations and the abuse of market dominance.

The Core Problem: A Regulatory Information Gap

Currently, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) primarily tracks passenger volumes and freight traffic. However, it lacks granular visibility into:

Actual Ticket-Level Fares: Data on what passengers are specifically paying across different routes.

Long-term Trends: A consistent analytical framework to study fare behavior over time.

Algorithmic Transparency: Monitoring how airline pricing engines behave during peak periods or when competition is low.

Without this "digital trail," regulators cannot objectively prove when a price surge crosses the line into predatory or monopolistic behavior.

The Proposed Solution: The US "DB1B" Model

The analysis suggests that India should emulate the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) and its Airline Origin and Destination Survey (DB1B).

Feature	US DB1B Model	Current Indian Model
Data Scope	10% random sample of all domestic tickets.	Aggregate passenger/freight volumes.
Granularity	Ticket-level (fares, routes, carriers).	General traffic data; ad hoc fare requests.
Utility	Long-term trend analysis and academic research.	Crisis-driven reactive investigations.

Feature	US DB1B Model	Current Indian Model
Transparency	Publicly accessible (with a quarterly delay).	Data largely held by private airlines.

Strategic Benefits of Data Transparency

1. Market Hygiene & Self-Regulation

Much like a highway speed camera, the presence of a monitoring system encourages airlines to build ethical guardrails into their pricing algorithms. Knowing the data is subject to scrutiny prevents opportunistic price gouging.

2. Assessing Competitive Behavior

A robust dataset allows regulators to identify specific patterns:

The "Southwest Effect": Analyzing how the entry of a low-cost carrier affects fares and traffic on a specific route.

Market Power: Identifying if routes dominated by a single airline have disproportionately higher fares than competitive routes.

Post-Exit Spikes: Tracking if fares rise unfairly after a competitor leaves a specific flight path.

3. Evidence-Based Policy

Decades of data can help the government move away from blunt instruments like price caps, which can distort market dynamics, and move toward targeted antitrust actions.

Addressing Counter-Arguments

The aviation industry often resists transparency citing "proprietary information" or "technical loads." The analysis counters these by proposing:

A 10% Random Sample: This protects the "how" (the secret algorithms) while revealing the "what" (the final market price).

Quarterly Delay: Releasing data with a time lag prevents airlines from using the information for real-time price coordination, thus maintaining competitive tension.

Conclusion

For India to sustain its position as a global aviation leader, its regulatory infrastructure must evolve alongside its passenger numbers. Shifting from ad-hoc interventions to a data-first framework—where the DGCA and the public can "keep score"—will ensure a fairer marketplace. Transparency is not just about catching bad actors; it is about creating an environment where competition thrives, algorithms are ethical, and the consumer is protected by facts rather than just emergency mandates.