

# **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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## **Supreme Court of India Emphasises Urgent Need for a Practical, Time-Bound and Ground-Level Standard Operating Procedure to Effectively Combat Human Trafficking Cases Across the Country**

The Supreme Court of India has recently highlighted a critical gap in India's fight against human trafficking by directing authorities to formulate a practical, time-bound, and actionable Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that can be implemented effectively at the ground level. This direction comes in light of persistent failures in handling trafficking cases, particularly the delay in response and lack of coordination among enforcement agencies. The Court stressed that SOPs should not remain merely theoretical documents but must be operational at the level of local police stations, where the first response to missing persons and suspected trafficking cases originates.

One of the most crucial observations made was regarding the "golden hours" immediately after a person goes missing, which are often lost due to procedural delays, thereby increasing the risk of trafficking networks succeeding. The Court also underlined the necessity for active investigation, criticizing the tendency of authorities to treat such cases as routine paperwork rather than urgent criminal matters requiring immediate field action. Furthermore, it directed both the Central and State governments to engage with non-governmental organizations, field experts, and law enforcement agencies to ensure that the SOP is practical, inclusive, and effective.

The issue of human trafficking in India remains deeply concerning, with data from the National Crime Records Bureau indicating thousands of cases annually, although the real number is believed to be much higher due to underreporting. The problem is largely gendered and child-centric, with

women and children being the most vulnerable victims. Another major concern is the extremely low conviction rate, hovering around 10%, which reflects systemic weaknesses in investigation, prosecution, and judicial processes. Organized trafficking networks, often operating across state and international borders, further complicate enforcement efforts and require coordinated multi-agency responses. In terms of legal and policy frameworks, India already has several mechanisms in place, including Article 23 of the Constitution, which prohibits trafficking and forced labor, and statutory provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and laws like the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. Government initiatives such as the Ujjawala Scheme, Mission Shakti, and Anti-Human Trafficking Units have also been launched to address prevention, rescue, and rehabilitation. However, the Supreme Court's recent intervention underscores that implementation remains the weakest link, necessitating a shift from policy formulation to real-time execution. This development is significant as it reflects judicial activism aimed at strengthening institutional accountability and ensuring that legal protections translate into tangible outcomes for victims of trafficking.

### **Central Board of Secondary Education Introduces Major Curriculum Reforms Including Third Language Policy and Skill-Based Learning Under National Education Policy 2020 Framework**

The Central Board of Secondary Education has introduced significant curriculum reforms for secondary education as part of the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020, marking a major shift in India's schooling system from traditional rote learning to a more holistic, multidisciplinary, and skill-oriented approach. One of the most notable features of this reform is the introduction of a third language, aimed at promoting multilingualism and cultural integration while enhancing cognitive development among students. The reform aligns with the broader objectives of the National Education Policy, which seeks to transform the education system by making it more flexible, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of the 21st century.

Another key aspect of the new curriculum is the emphasis on skill-based learning, where students are encouraged to acquire practical knowledge and vocational skills alongside academic subjects. This includes integrating areas such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving into the core curriculum, thereby preparing students for real-world challenges rather than just examinations. The policy also allows for greater flexibility in subject choices, enabling students to pursue interdisciplinary learning paths instead of being restricted to rigid streams like science, commerce, or humanities.

This flexibility is expected to reduce academic pressure and allow students to explore their interests more freely. Additionally, the reforms aim to promote experiential learning, where teaching methodologies focus on understanding concepts through practical application rather than memorisation. The introduction of these changes reflects a broader recognition that the traditional education system, which heavily relied on rote learning, is no longer adequate in a rapidly evolving global environment. The CBSE's move is also expected to influence other educational boards in India, potentially leading to a nationwide transformation in teaching and learning practices. However, the successful implementation of these reforms will depend on several factors, including teacher training, infrastructure development, and the availability of resources for skill-based education. Critics have also raised concerns about the feasibility of implementing such changes uniformly across urban and rural areas, given the disparities in educational infrastructure. Despite these challenges, the reform represents a significant step towards aligning India's education system with global standards and equipping students with the skills necessary for future careers. Overall, this development is crucial as it reflects a paradigm shift in educational philosophy, moving from knowledge-based learning to competency-based education, thereby redefining the purpose and structure of schooling in India.

## **Persistent Challenges in Combating Human Trafficking in India Highlight Structural Weaknesses Including Low Conviction Rates, Underreporting, and Organized Criminal Networks**

Human trafficking continues to remain one of the most serious and complex criminal challenges in India, reflecting deep-rooted structural issues within the legal, social, and enforcement systems. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, thousands of trafficking cases are reported annually, but experts widely agree that these figures represent only a fraction of the actual scale due to significant underreporting. One of the most concerning aspects of this issue is its gendered and child-centric nature, with women and children forming the majority of victims, often driven by socio-economic vulnerabilities such as poverty, lack of education, and limited employment opportunities.

Another major challenge is the extremely low conviction rate, estimated at around 10%, which undermines the deterrent effect of existing laws and allows traffickers to operate with relative impunity. This low conviction rate can be attributed to several factors, including weak investigation processes, lack of evidence collection, delays in judicial proceedings, and insufficient coordination among agencies. Furthermore, human trafficking in India is not limited to isolated incidents but is often carried out by organized criminal networks that operate across states and even international borders, making enforcement more complex and requiring coordinated efforts between multiple jurisdictions.

The role of technology has also added a new dimension to trafficking, with traffickers increasingly using digital platforms for recruitment and exploitation, thereby complicating detection and prevention efforts. In response to these challenges, the government has introduced several initiatives, such as the Ujjawala Scheme for rescue and rehabilitation, the establishment of Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs), and the integration of women safety measures under Mission Shakti. Additionally, agencies like the National Investigation Agency have been involved in tackling interstate and international trafficking cases. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of these measures remains limited due to gaps in implementation and

coordination. The legal framework in India, including constitutional provisions like Article 23 and various criminal laws, provides a strong foundation for combating trafficking, but the real issue lies in enforcement and execution. The recent focus by judicial authorities on strengthening operational mechanisms indicates a growing recognition that addressing human trafficking requires not only robust laws but also efficient institutional mechanisms, timely action, and a victim-centric approach. This issue remains critical as it touches upon fundamental human rights and reflects broader socio-economic inequalities that need to be addressed through comprehensive policy interventions.

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### **India Strengthens Legal and Policy Framework Against Human Trafficking Through Constitutional Mandates, Criminal Law Provisions and Targeted Rehabilitation Schemes for Victims**

India's approach to combating human trafficking is supported by a comprehensive legal and policy framework that combines constitutional mandates, criminal statutes, and welfare schemes aimed at prevention, prosecution, and rehabilitation. At the constitutional level, Article 23 of the Constitution of India explicitly prohibits trafficking in human beings, begar, and other forms of forced labour, thereby establishing a fundamental right against exploitation. This provision forms the backbone of India's anti-trafficking legal regime and is enforceable against both the State and private individuals.

In terms of criminal law, provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (which replaced the Indian Penal Code) criminalize various forms of trafficking, including recruitment, transportation, harbouring, or receipt of persons for exploitation. Additionally, specialized legislation such as the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act focuses specifically on trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, while the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act addresses trafficking-related sexual crimes involving minors. Beyond legal provisions, the government has launched several targeted schemes to support victims.

The Ujjawala Scheme, for instance, provides for the rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of trafficked women and children, while Mission Shakti integrates various women-centric initiatives under a unified framework to enhance safety and empowerment. Anti-Human Trafficking Units have been established across states to improve coordination and response mechanisms at the local level. Despite this robust framework, implementation challenges persist, including lack of awareness among enforcement agencies, inadequate training, and limited resources. The recent judicial emphasis on strengthening Standard Operating Procedures reflects the need to bridge the gap between law and practice. This development is important because it highlights that while India possesses strong legal tools to combat trafficking, the real challenge lies in ensuring effective enforcement, victim protection, and timely justice delivery.

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### **Role of Non-Governmental Organizations and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Becomes Crucial in Designing Effective Anti-Trafficking Strategies in India**

The fight against human trafficking in India increasingly recognizes the critical role played by non-governmental organizations and multi-stakeholder collaboration in addressing the complexities of this crime. Trafficking is not merely a law enforcement issue but a socio-economic problem that requires coordinated efforts across sectors, including government agencies, civil society, law enforcement, and international organizations. Non-governmental organizations often act as the first responders in many trafficking cases, particularly in remote or underserved regions where state machinery may be less accessible.

They are involved in identifying victims, conducting rescue operations, providing legal aid, and facilitating rehabilitation and reintegration. The recent observations by the Supreme Court have underscored the importance of involving such organizations in the formulation of Standard Operating Procedures to ensure that policies are grounded in practical realities rather than theoretical assumptions. NGOs also play a vital role in

awareness generation, educating vulnerable communities about the risks of trafficking and methods of prevention.

Additionally, they contribute to capacity building by training law enforcement officials and assisting in data collection and research, which helps in understanding trafficking patterns and trends. Collaboration between different stakeholders enhances the effectiveness of anti-trafficking measures by ensuring better coordination, information sharing, and resource utilization. For instance, partnerships between police, NGOs, and social welfare departments can lead to faster rescue operations and more comprehensive victim support systems. International cooperation is also essential, particularly in cases involving cross-border trafficking, where coordination with foreign governments and international agencies becomes necessary. However, challenges remain in terms of standardizing collaboration mechanisms, ensuring accountability, and avoiding duplication of efforts. There is also a need to provide adequate funding and institutional support to NGOs to sustain their work. Overall, the emphasis on multi-stakeholder collaboration reflects a shift towards a more holistic and inclusive approach to combating human trafficking, recognizing that no single entity can address this issue in isolation.

### **Importance of Immediate Response Mechanisms and the Concept of Golden Hours in Missing Persons and Human Trafficking Investigations Highlighted by Judiciary**

The concept of “golden hours” has emerged as a critical factor in the investigation of missing persons and human trafficking cases, with the judiciary emphasizing the need for immediate and proactive response mechanisms. The term refers to the crucial initial period after a person goes missing, during which prompt action can significantly increase the chances of recovery and prevent victims from being trafficked across regions or borders. The Supreme Court has recently expressed concern over delays in registering complaints and initiating investigations, noting

that valuable time is often lost due to bureaucratic procedures and lack of urgency at the ground level.

This delay can be particularly detrimental in trafficking cases, where organized networks act swiftly to move victims, making rescue operations more difficult as time passes. The Court has therefore called for the development of Standard Operating Procedures that prioritize immediate action, including rapid registration of First Information Reports, deployment of search teams, and coordination between different law enforcement agencies. The use of technology, such as surveillance systems, mobile tracking, and centralized databases, has also been highlighted as a means to improve response times and enhance investigation efficiency.

Additionally, there is a need for better training of police personnel to handle such cases with sensitivity and urgency, recognizing the high stakes involved. Public awareness also plays a role, as timely reporting by families and communities can aid in early intervention. The emphasis on golden hours reflects a broader shift towards preventive and proactive policing, rather than reactive approaches that come into play after significant harm has already occurred. This development is significant because it underscores the importance of time-sensitive action in safeguarding human rights and improving the effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts.

### **Judicial Activism in India Reinforces Institutional Accountability by Directing Executive Authorities to Implement Effective Mechanisms for Protection of Fundamental Rights**

Judicial activism in India continues to play a pivotal role in strengthening governance and ensuring that constitutional guarantees translate into real-world protections for citizens. The recent directions issued by the Supreme Court in the context of human trafficking highlight how the judiciary actively intervenes when there is a gap between law and implementation. By emphasizing the need for a functional Standard Operating Procedure and accountability at the ground level, the Court has

reinforced the principle that fundamental rights are not merely theoretical but must be effectively enforced.

The judiciary's role becomes especially crucial in cases where executive agencies fail to act promptly or efficiently. This aligns with the broader constitutional framework, where the judiciary acts as the guardian of fundamental rights under provisions such as Articles 32 and 226. Over the years, judicial activism has expanded the scope of rights through progressive interpretations, including the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21. In the present context, the Court's intervention underscores the need for institutional accountability, ensuring that police authorities, administrative bodies, and welfare agencies perform their duties effectively.

It also reflects the Court's willingness to engage with policy issues when they directly impact human rights and social justice. Critics of judicial activism often argue that it may lead to overreach into executive functions; however, supporters contend that such intervention is necessary in situations where governance mechanisms fail to deliver justice. The current development illustrates a balanced approach, where the judiciary does not create new laws but ensures the effective implementation of existing ones. This trend is significant as it strengthens democratic governance by holding institutions accountable and ensuring that constitutional promises are fulfilled in practice, particularly for vulnerable sections of society.

### **Integration of Skill-Based and Experiential Learning Signals a Paradigm Shift in Indian Education System Towards Practical Knowledge and Employability**

The recent curriculum reforms introduced by the Central Board of Secondary Education reflect a significant transformation in India's education system, moving away from rote memorization towards skill-based and experiential learning. This shift is rooted in the vision of the National Education Policy 2020, which aims to make education more

holistic, flexible, and aligned with real-world requirements. Skill-based learning focuses on equipping students with practical competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and digital literacy, which are essential in today's rapidly evolving global environment.

Experiential learning, on the other hand, emphasizes understanding concepts through hands-on activities, projects, and real-life applications rather than passive memorization. This approach is expected to enhance student engagement, improve retention of knowledge, and foster creativity and innovation. The reforms also encourage interdisciplinary learning, allowing students to combine subjects from different streams and pursue diverse interests. This flexibility marks a departure from the traditional rigid structure of education, where students were confined to predefined academic paths.

Additionally, the integration of vocational education into the mainstream curriculum aims to bridge the gap between education and employment, addressing the issue of skill mismatch in the job market. However, the success of these reforms depends on effective implementation, including teacher training, curriculum development, and infrastructure support. There are concerns regarding the readiness of schools, particularly in rural areas, to adopt these changes due to limited resources. Despite these challenges, the reform represents a forward-looking approach that aligns India's education system with global standards and prepares students for future opportunities. This development is important as it reflects a fundamental shift in the purpose of education, from knowledge acquisition to capability building, thereby redefining the learning experience for students across the country.

**Flexible Subject Choices and Multidisciplinary Approach in School Education Aim to Reduce Academic Pressure and Encourage Holistic Development of Students**

One of the most transformative aspects of the recent education reforms is the introduction of flexible subject choices and a multidisciplinary approach in school education. Traditionally, students in India were required to choose between rigid streams such as science, commerce, and humanities, often limiting their ability to explore diverse interests. The new framework under the National Education Policy 2020 seeks to eliminate these rigid boundaries, allowing students to select subjects across disciplines based on their preferences and career aspirations.

This flexibility is expected to reduce academic pressure by enabling students to pursue subjects they are genuinely interested in, rather than being forced into predefined categories. The multidisciplinary approach also encourages a more holistic form of learning, where students develop a broader understanding of various fields and their interconnections. For example, a student interested in both science and arts can now combine subjects from both streams, fostering creativity and innovation.

This approach aligns with global educational practices, where interdisciplinary learning is considered essential for addressing complex real-world problems. Furthermore, the reforms aim to promote student-centric education, shifting the focus from standardized testing to overall development, including cognitive, emotional, and social skills.

However, implementing such flexibility requires significant changes in school infrastructure, teacher training, and assessment systems. Schools must be equipped to offer a wider range of subjects, and teachers need to be trained to handle interdisciplinary teaching methods. There is also a need to ensure that evaluation systems are adapted to assess diverse learning outcomes rather than relying solely on traditional examinations. Despite these challenges, the move towards flexible and multidisciplinary education represents a progressive step that empowers students and enhances the quality of education in India.

## **Concerns Over Unequal Implementation of Education Reforms Highlight Urban-Rural Divide and Need for Infrastructure, Teacher Training and Resource Allocation**

While the recent education reforms mark a progressive shift in India's schooling system, concerns have been raised regarding their uneven implementation across different regions, particularly between urban and rural areas. The success of initiatives such as skill-based learning, experiential education, and flexible subject choices depends heavily on the availability of adequate infrastructure, trained teachers, and educational resources. Urban schools, especially private institutions, are generally better equipped to adopt these changes due to access to technology, funding, and trained staff.

In contrast, many rural schools face significant challenges, including lack of basic facilities, shortage of qualified teachers, and limited access to digital tools. This disparity raises the risk of widening the existing educational gap between different sections of society. Effective teacher training is a critical factor in the implementation of these reforms, as educators need to adapt to new teaching methodologies and assessment techniques.

Without proper training, the intended shift from rote learning to experiential and skill-based education may not be fully realized. Additionally, there is a need for substantial investment in infrastructure, including classrooms, laboratories, and digital resources, to support the new curriculum.

Policymakers must also ensure that reforms are implemented in a phased and inclusive manner, taking into account the diverse conditions across states and regions. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to assess the effectiveness of these changes and address any gaps in implementation. This development is significant because it highlights that policy reforms alone are not sufficient; their success depends on equitable execution and resource distribution, ensuring that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, benefit from the transformation in the education system.