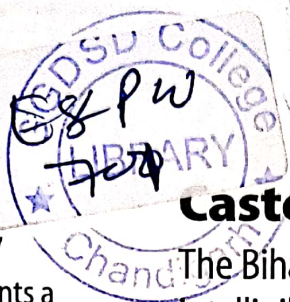


Economic & Political WEEKLY

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CURRENT STATISTICS

Caste as a Perilous Promise

The Bihar caste survey vindicates caste as a socially intelligible category while also exposing the "class character of caste" and questioning the political purchase of caste-funnelled governance. page 65

Weaponised Finance

With punitive tariffs, secondary sanctions, and control over payment networks forming a continuum of coercive statecraft by the United States, India should combine cautious de-dollarisation with active engagement in global financial governance. page 14

Delimitation and Representation

Proportional political representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been undermined by the delimitation freeze imposed in 1976, in what is a continuous constitutional subversion. page 42

Crisis in the WTO

The failure of the 14th ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization is symptomatic of the crisis facing the multilateral trading system, which is under renewed pressure from Donald Trump's unilateralism. page 36

Health Insurance Coverage

The poorest deciles remain disproportionately under-covered, departing from the traditional missing-middle thesis, and an overlap of beneficiaries across multiple schemes suggests resource inefficiencies. page 48

Looking for Public Transport Alternatives

- 10 For 15 years, Indian cities have favoured metro rail over buses, although buses are cheaper, faster to implement, space-efficient, and deliver far higher ridership per unit of investment. — *Ashok Datar*

Weaponised Finance and the Tariff War

- 14 Punitive tariffs, secondary sanctions, and control over payment networks form a continuum of coercive statecraft. India's options to reduce exposure may present themselves through alternative payment systems and bilateral currency arrangements. — *Anoop S Kumar*

Mangroves in India

- 18 Mangroves are critical carbon sinks, yet changes in their extent and density complicate the assessment of their carbon sequestration potential. — *Priti Agarwal, Akanksha Narayan & Aaina Dutta*

Digital Consumption

- 22 Using HCES 2022–24, the rapid expansion of India's digital consumption across rural and urban households via online purchases and payments is shown, with rural catch-up but at lower levels. — *Balu Pawde*

Welfare Fees, Welfare Boards and Platform Capture

- 27 While Karnataka's Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2025 aims to formalise precarious labour and guarantee insurance, pensions, and grievance mechanisms, its real-world impact remains uncertain. — *Sushanta Kumar Mahapatra, Madan Meher*

Shereen F Ratnagar (1944–2026)

- 30 Shereen F Ratnagar's peerless scholarship, her commitment to research and the way she moulded it as it also moulded her, and her care for the world she inhabited lives on. — *Ajay Dandekar*

Failure of MC14: Deepening WTO's Crisis

- 36 At the 14th ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization that ended in failure, member states failed to agree on a work programme that could have proved that the multilateral trading system is still relevant. — *Biswajit Dhar*

The Frozen Constituency

- 42 The Indian Constitution's promise of proportional political representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been systematically undermined by the delimitation freeze imposed in 1976. A mere unfreezing of the process is insufficient. — *Kishan Narayan, Anagha Pradeep*

Determinants of Health Insurance Coverage

- 48 Despite the significant increase in health insurance coverage, socio-economic and regional factors condition inclusion. A significant overlap of beneficiaries across multiple schemes suggests resource inefficiencies and highlights the need for rationalisation. — *Sekhar Bonu, Indu Bhushan*

Early Childhood Care and Education in India

- 57 The role of regulation in six critical areas of early childhood care and education programmes and its interlinkages with quality are examined. The public sector lags in implementation, despite high policy aspirations. Private sector regulations are either absent or weak and insufficient to address the heterogeneity and diversity of institutions. — *Sreeparvathy G*

Caste as a Perilous Promise?

- 65 The Bihar caste survey report achieves two seemingly contradictory feats. One, it vindicates caste as a socially intelligible category in Bihar, which captures certain aspects of under-representation and maldistribution. Two, it questions the analytical and political purchase of caste and caste-funnelled governance by exposing the massive substratum of the Bihari "underclass" across castes. — *Asha Singh, Nidhin Donald*

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