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Current Affairs - 23 December 2025

RIGHT TO DISCONNECT: DRAWING THE LINE AFTER WORK

- The introduction of the Right to Disconnect Bill as a private member's bill marks a **significant moment in Indian labour law**, particularly in the context of the recent consolidation of labour regulation through the four labour codes.
- These codes govern **working hours, overtime, and employer control**, reflecting a framework designed primarily for physical workplaces.
- The Bill responds to the growing reality of digital work, where technological connectivity has blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life.

Definitional Gaps in the Concept of Work

- A central limitation of the Right to Disconnect Bill lies in **the absence of a definition of work in the context of the digital economy**.
- Indian labour law has traditionally been grounded in physical presence and fixed working hours.
- While the Bill grants employees the right to refrain from responding to work-related communications beyond prescribed working hours, **it does not clarify whether after-hours digital engagement constitutes work**.

Comparative Perspectives on Employer Control and Working Time

- Comparative analysis highlights these shortcomings more clearly. In the European Union, judicial interpretations of working time have evolved to focus on **employer control rather than physical activity alone**.
- Decisions such as SIMAP, Jaeger, and Tyco adopted an expansive understanding of working time, including on-call duties, standby periods, and other forms of availability where the employer **exercises control**, even in the absence of active work.
- This jurisprudence reflects the principle that an employee's time belongs to the employer **whenever autonomy is constrained**.
- France adopts a similar approach by clearly demarcating **working time and rest time**, treating periods of availability under employer control as working time.



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- **Digital communication is integrated through collective bargaining**, allowing sector-specific flexibility while maintaining statutory protection.
- Germany likewise enforces **strict limits on working hours and mandatory rest periods**.
- These jurisdictions illustrate a shared engagement with a fundamental question: **when does an employee's time become the employer's time?**

Scope and Enforceability of the Right in Indian Labour Law

- Within the Indian context, this question remains unresolved.
- The labour codes combine **mandatory statutory provisions**, such as limits on working hours, with contractual terms negotiated through employer policies and agreements.
- The Right to Disconnect Bill does not clarify **whether the right is a mandatory labour standard** or one that can be modified through contract.
- This ambiguity weakens the normative force of the right and risks **uneven application across sectors and workplaces**.
- Without clear statutory grounding, the right may remain dependent on employer discretion rather than legal obligation.

Constitutional Dimensions of the Right to Disconnect

- The Bill also raises important constitutional concerns.
 - **The freedom to disengage** from work bears a clear relationship with **Article 21** of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty.
 - The ability to disconnect directly implicates **individual autonomy, dignity, and mental well-being**, all of which have been recognised as components of Article 21.
 - However, **the Bill does not articulate this constitutional foundation** or explain how such guarantees are to be realised within the employment relationship.
 - Consequently, it remains unclear **whether the right to disconnect is purely statutory** or reflective of a deeper constitutional commitment to personal autonomy at work.
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WHAT IS THE FINANCIAL FRAUD RISK INDICATOR (FRI)?



- It was launched by the **Department of Telecommunications (DoT's) Digital Intelligence Unit (DIU)**.
- It is a **risk-based metric** that **classifies mobile numbers** into three categories: **Medium, High, and Very High Risk** based on their **likelihood of involvement in financial fraud**.
- The classification draws from a comprehensive analysis using **inputs from various platforms**, including the **Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre's National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP)**, **DoT's Chakshu platform**, and intelligence shared by **banks and financial institutions**.
- By flagging high-risk numbers early, the tool **enables banks**, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), and **UPI service providers** to take appropriate **measures for customer protection** and transaction validation.
- **How Advance Notification Helps Prevent Fraud?**
 - The **DoT's Digital Intelligence Unit (DIU)** regularly disseminates the **Mobile Number Revocation List (MNRL)**, which details mobile numbers disconnected due to involvement in cybercrime, failed verification, or exceeding permissible usage limits.
 - These numbers **often surface in financial fraud activities**.
 - Given that **fraudulent mobile numbers are often short-lived** and **verification processes can take time**, a preemptive indicator such as the **FRI becomes highly effective**.
 - Thus, **as soon as a suspected mobile number is flagged** by a stakeholder, it **undergoes multidimensional analysis**, and **classifies it** into Medium, High, or Very High financial risk associated with it.
 - It then **shares this assessment** about the number immediately with all stakeholders **through DoT's Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP)**.



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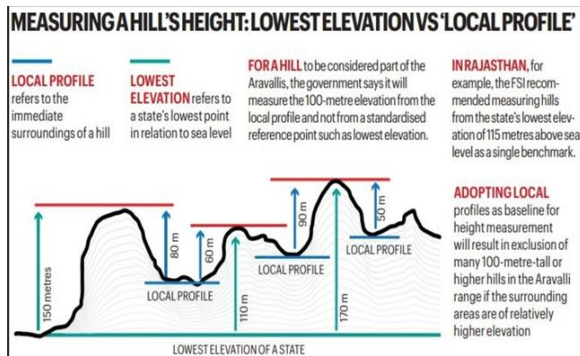
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REDRAWING THE ARAVALLIS



- A new definition of the Aravalli Hills, approved by the Supreme Court in November 2025, classifies only landforms rising 100 metres or more above local relief—along with their slopes and adjoining areas—as part of the range.
- Critics argue that using local profile instead of a standard baseline could exclude large

stretches of the Aravallis from protection.

- The Environment Ministry has said that no new mining leases will be granted until a detailed study is completed under the court's order.

What the New Aravalli Definition Excludes?

- The new parameters exclude large areas earlier identified as Aravalli under the Forest Survey of India (FSI) 3-degree slope formula, which classifies land as Aravalli if it lies above a state's minimum elevation (115 m in Rajasthan) and has a slope of at least 3 degrees.
- Rajasthan—home to nearly two-thirds of the Aravalli range—faces the biggest exclusions.
- **Entire Districts Dropped from the Aravalli List**
 - Several districts earlier counted among the 34 Aravalli districts across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi are now excluded. Notably below mentioned areas are missing from the updated list submitted to the Supreme Court:
 - Sawai Madhopur (Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve; Aravalli–Vindhya convergence),
 - Chittorgarh (UNESCO World Heritage fort on an Aravalli outcrop),
 - Nagaur (where FSI mapped 1,110 sq km as Aravalli),



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- **Overstated Extent and the Mining Claim**
 - While the government cited mining as limited to 0.19% of a 1.44 lakh sq km Aravalli expanse, this figure effectively covers the entire landmass of the 34 listed districts, not the actual hill range.
 - Under the FSI method, the Aravallis span 40,483 sq km across 15 districts of Rajasthan—about 33% of those districts’ area.
- **Scale of Exclusion Under the 100-Metre Benchmark**
 - Applying the new 100-metre local relief definition would exclude 99.12%—1,17,527 of 1,18,575—of the Aravalli hills (including slopes and surroundings) identified by the FSI in these 15 districts, dramatically shrinking the range’s officially recognised footprint.

Inclusion vs Exclusion: The Core of the Aravalli Debate

- **Limits of the Mining Argument**
 - The government has highlighted that only a small fraction of the Aravallis would be legally open to mining.
 - However, concerns persist about illegal mining, the future expansion of mining in areas excluded by the 100-metre definition, and the cumulative ecological impact of individual mining blocks on surrounding landscapes.
 - **Environmental Risks Beyond Mining**
 - Mining is not the only threat.
 - By de-recognising large hilly tracts, especially in the Delhi NCR, where Aravalli ranges taper in height, the new definition could open vast areas to real estate and infrastructure development, posing serious environmental risks.
 - **Committee’s Rationale: Avoiding ‘Over-Inclusion’**
 - The ministry-led committee told the Supreme Court that not every hill is Aravalli and not every part of Aravalli is hilly, warning against “inclusion errors” if slope alone is used to define boundaries.
 - It argued for caution in wrongly categorising non-Aravalli land.
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INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA - NITI AAYOG'S ROADMAP UNDER NEP 2020

- In 2024, for every 1 international student studying in India, 28 Indian students went abroad (1:28 ratio).
- As of 2022, India hosted only about 47,000 international students, despite a 518% increase since 2001.
- Forecasts suggest 7.89–11 lakh international students by 2047, depending on policy intensity.
- Internationalisation is seen as crucial for **knowledge diplomacy**, talent circulation, reducing brain drain, and economic sustainability.

Key Findings of the Report:

- **Economic and strategic concerns:**
 - Outward remittances under RBI's Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) increased by about 2000% in the last decade.
 - Indian students' overseas education expenditure is projected at ₹6.2 lakh crore by 2025 (~2% of GDP).
 - This spending equals about 75% of India's trade deficit (FY 2024–25).
 - **Concentration** of 8.5 lakh out of 13.5 lakh outbound students in high-income countries (USA, UK, Australia).
 - Over 16 lakh Indians renounced citizenship since 2011, indicating **long-term talent loss**.
- **Perception and institutional gaps:**
 - 41% of institutes cited limited scholarships/financial aid as a key barrier.
 - 30% institutes flagged perception of education quality in India.
 - **Other constraints** include inadequate international infrastructure, limited global programme offerings, weak international student support systems, and cultural adaptation challenges.

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- **Strategic and financial measures:**
 - **Bharat Vidya Kosh:** As a national research sovereign wealth fund (suggesting a \$10 billion corpus, of which 50% can be raised from diaspora/philanthropy + 50% from Centre).
 - **Vishwa Bandhu scholarship:** To attract foreign students.
 - **Vishwa Bandhu fellowship:** To attract foreign research talent and faculty.
 - **Bharat ki AAN (Alumni Ambassador Network):** To leverage diaspora Indians who have studied at top India universities into acting as ambassadors for Indian higher education.
- **Regulatory and governance reforms:**
 - Easier entry–exit norms for foreign students and faculty.
 - Fast-track tenure pathways for foreign faculty.
 - Competitive, internationally benchmarked salaries.
 - **Single-window clearance** system for visas, bank accounts, tax IDs, housing and administrative needs.
 - Alignment with non-binding internationalisation frameworks under the proposed **Manak Parishad** (Standards Council).
- **Branding, rankings and outreach:**
 - Expansion of **NIRF** parameters to include outreach and inclusivity, globalisation and partnerships.
 - **Bharat ki AAN:** Mobilising Indian diaspora alumni as global ambassadors of Indian HEIs.
- **Curriculum and academic culture:** Updated and globally relevant curricula. Emphasis on international research collaboration and cross-cultural learning ecosystems.

Conclusion:

- India can transform from a net exporter of students to a **global knowledge hub**, in line with the aspirations of NEP 2020 and Viksit Bharat 2047.
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GHOST PAIRING

- GhostPairing is a **type of WhatsApp attack** where hackers secretly link their own device to a victim's WhatsApp account.
 - It gives hackers almost full **access without the victim noticing**.
 - GhostPairing' **allows cybercriminals** to take **complete control of WhatsApp accounts** without requiring passwords or SIM swaps.
 - The threat actors can **take over WhatsApp accounts without authorisation** by tricking potential victims into entering the pairing codes.
 - By following a sequence of steps, victims unknowingly grant attackers full access to their WhatsApp accounts.
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RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT IN INDIA

- India faces recurring environmental crises, particularly during winter months, when air pollution levels in Delhi-NCR deteriorate sharply due to vehicular emissions, industrial activity, fossil fuel use, construction dust, waste burning, and agricultural residue burning.
- These conditions severely affect public health, leading to respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and reduced life expectancy.
- The persistent nature of such crises has highlighted gaps in policy enforcement and raised questions about the legal responsibility of the State to protect environmental health.

Particulate Matter and Health Risks

- Among various pollutants, particulate matter is considered the most harmful. **PM10** particles can enter the respiratory system, while finer **PM2.5** particles penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream.
- Diesel particulate matter, a sub-category of PM2.5, is especially toxic and poses serious risks to children and vulnerable populations.



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Role of Judiciary and Public Interest Litigation

- Since the mid-1980s, rapid industrialisation and liberalisation have intensified environmental degradation, prompting judicial intervention.
- The judiciary has played a proactive role by using Public Interest Litigations (PILs) under **Articles 32 and 226** to address environmental harm.
- Courts have consistently balanced development needs with environmental sustainability, reinforcing the idea that economic growth cannot come at the cost of ecological destruction.
- The **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, further strengthens this framework by defining the environment as an interconnected system of air, water, land, and living beings.
- Judicial rulings have clarified that the right to live with dignity includes the right to pollution-free air and water, making environmental protection an enforceable legal concern.

Public Trust Doctrine and State Responsibility

- The public trust doctrine reinforces the idea that natural resources are held by the State in trust for the people.
 - Under this doctrine, the State cannot exploit environmental resources for private or commercial gain at the cost of public interest.
 - Constitutional provisions under **Article 39** further support community ownership of material resources and equitable distribution for public welfare.
 - Recent judicial recognition of climate change impacts has expanded environmental rights further.
 - The Supreme Court's acknowledgement of protection against adverse climate effects as part of **Articles 21 and 14** reflects the evolving nature of environmental constitutionalism in India.
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