

DELIMITATION PUSH: RESHAPING STATES' REPRESENTATION IN LOK SABHA

- The government has proposed increasing the Lok Sabha strength from **543 to up to 850** seats (815 from States and 35 from Union Territories).
- The idea of proportional increase was aimed at protecting states with slower population growth from losing representation.
- **Major Constitutional Changes Proposed**
 - **Delinking Delimitation from Census** - The amendment removes the requirement of conducting delimitation after every Census. Delimitation can now be carried out whenever Parliament approves it.
 - **Flexible Use of Census Data** - Instead of using the latest Census, Parliament can decide which Census to use. This changes the definition of population from “last preceding Census” to “as determined by Parliament”.
 - **Enabling Immediate Delimitation** - The changes allow the government to conduct delimitation based on the 2011 Census, without waiting for the next Census (expected around 2027). This provides greater flexibility in seat allocation and timing.

Delimitation Debate: Balancing Representation and Vote Value

- **Uncertainty Over Seat Allocation** - The absence of a clear provision for a uniform 50% increase in seats across states has created uncertainty, potentially leading to political disagreements over seat distribution.
- **Trade-off: Proportionality vs Equality** - A flat increase in seats across states may preserve existing representation proportions, but it would undermine the principle of “one vote, one value”, as population differences remain unaddressed.
- **Unequal Value of Votes**
 - Currently, disparities already exist:
 - An MP in Himachal Pradesh represents ~17.16 lakh people
 - An MP in Haryana represents ~25.35 lakh people

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- This means a voter in Haryana has less representational weight than one in Himachal Pradesh.
- The goal of delimitation is to **minimise such disparities** by aligning constituencies closely with population size, ensuring more equal representation.
- **Impact of Population-Based Redistribution**
 - Strict population-based seat allocation could significantly alter state representation:
 - Uttar Pradesh seats may rise from 80 to around 140
 - Tamil Nadu may increase only marginally (39 to ~51)
 - This could lead to major shifts in political power among states.

Opposition Criticism and Government Response on Delimitation Bills

- Opposition parties argue that the Bills **do not guarantee** maintaining the existing proportion of seats across states, contradicting earlier government assurances.
- They contend that the proposals may benefit states with **higher population growth**, effectively “rewarding” those that did not successfully implement family planning.
- The Opposition has also criticised the idea of a **50% increase in seats for all states**, warning that it would **widen the absolute gap** between states with stabilised and growing populations.
- Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy proposed a **hybrid model** combining population with economic indicators like GSDP.
- **Government’s Response**
 - **Proposal to Add a Schedule** - The government has indicated it will include a Schedule in the Bill specifying the proportionate increase in seats for each state.
 - **Addressing Southern States’ Concerns** - This move aims to reassure southern states that their share of Lok Sabha seats will not decline.
 - **Greater Transparency in Allocation** - The Schedule is expected to provide clear details on seat distribution, helping reduce uncertainty and political opposition.

IMPLICATIONS OF INCREASING THE SIZE OF THE LOK SABHA

Implications of the Proposed Delimitation Reforms

- **Redistribution of Lok Sabha Seats Across States**
 - The freeze on seat allocation until the post-2026 Census is proposed to be removed. Seats will instead be based on the 2011 Census, altering the balance of representation.
 - MPs from states like U.P. and Bihar could hold greater influence (around 25% of seats), reshaping national policymaking.
- **Greater Flexibility for Parliament in Delimitation**
 - The amendment allows Parliament to decide:
 - When delimitation should occur?
 - Which Census data should be used?
 - This departs from the current constitutional mandate of delimitation after every Census.
- **Weakening of the Rajya Sabha's Relative Role**
 - While the Lok Sabha's size is proposed to increase, no change is planned for the Rajya Sabha. This widens the power gap between the two Houses:
 - Current ratio: Lok Sabha has 2.2 times Rajya Sabha strength
 - Proposed ratio: Could rise to 3.3 times
 - In joint sittings, this gives the Lok Sabha a decisive advantage, enabling governments to pass Bills even with weaker support in the Rajya Sabha.
 - It also affects elections for President and Vice-President, where all MPs have equal votes.
- **Expansion of the Council of Ministers**
 - The Constitution caps the Council of Ministers at 15% of Lok Sabha strength.
 - With Lok Sabha expanding (e.g., to ~815 members), the Cabinet size could increase from 81 to around 122 ministers.

- **Reduced Participation Opportunities for MPs**

- A larger Lok Sabha reduces individual MPs' chances to:
 - Ask questions
 - Raise issues during Zero Hour
- Since these opportunities are often allocated by lottery, increased membership lowers the probability of selection.

Global Comparisons and Lessons for India

- **Large Legislatures: International Practices**

- Countries like the United Kingdom have large legislatures; the House of Commons has 650 members.
- To ensure effective participation, the U.K.:
 - Holds over 150 sittings annually
 - Uses a strong parliamentary committee system to enhance deliberation

- **Role of Parliamentary Committees**

- In the U.K., every Bill is examined by committees of both Houses.
- In contrast, in India less than 20% of Bills are referred to committees.
- This indicates weaker institutional support for detailed legislative scrutiny.

Need for Wider Deliberation

- The Bills are being introduced with minimal public discussion, despite their far-reaching implications.
- There is a strong case for referring these Bills to a Parliamentary Committee to:
 - Engage experts
 - Gather public input
 - Ensure informed decision-making

Conclusion

- Expanding the Lok Sabha may improve representation but risks weakening federal balance, reducing deliberative quality, and concentrating power unless supported by stronger institutions and broader consultation.

JAN VISHWAS BILL 2026 - INDIA'S MAJOR DECRIMINALISATION REFORM

- The Jan Vishwas Bill, 2026, is a major legislative reform aimed at rationalising criminal provisions across various laws. It builds upon the earlier Jan Vishwas Act, 2023, which amended 183 provisions across 42 laws.
- The 2026 Bill significantly expands the scope by:
 - Amending 784 provisions across 79 Central laws.
 - Decriminalising or rationalising 1,018 offences.
- The reform reflects a shift from punitive criminal enforcement to a more balanced regulatory approach.

Key Features of the Bill

- **Decriminalisation**
 - A total of 805 offences are decriminalised.
 - Criminal penalties such as imprisonment are replaced with civil penalties or warnings.
 - These offences are removed from the criminal justice system.
- **Omission of Offences**
 - 125 obsolete or redundant offences are removed.
 - Some offences are omitted because they are already covered under general criminal law, such as BNS.
- **Compounding of Offences**
 - 35 offences are made compoundable.
 - This allows settlement through payment, reducing litigation burden.
- **Rationalisation of Punishments**
 - 53 offences see reduced or revised penalties.
 - Disproportionate punishments such as life imprisonment are removed.

Shift from Criminal to Civil Enforcement

- A key conceptual change is the distinction between fines and penalties.
 - **Fines** are imposed by courts and involve criminal proceedings.
 - **Penalties** are civil in nature and imposed by adjudicating officers.
- This shift aims to:
 - Reduce burden on courts.
 - Enable faster resolution of minor violations.
 - Improve regulatory efficiency.

Types of Offences Addressed

- **Outdated and Minor Offences**
 - Removal of trivial offences such as minor public nuisances.
 - Elimination of obsolete provisions from colonial-era laws.
- **General Contraventions**
 - Omnibus provisions criminalising any violation are reduced.
 - Example: Under the Motor Vehicles Act, first violations may now attract warnings instead of criminal action.
- **Procedural Defaults**
 - Minor compliance failures such as filing delays are decriminalised.
 - Example: Failure to furnish returns under the Tea Act now attracts civil penalties.
- **Obstruction-Related Offences**

Vaguely defined offences like “obstruction of public servants” are rationalised or removed.

Significance of the Bill

- The Jan Vishwas Bill represents a structural shift in governance philosophy.
 - Promotes **ease of doing business**.
 - Reduces **overcriminalisation** in regulatory laws.
 - Enhances **trust-based governance**.
 - Improves the **efficiency of legal enforcement mechanisms**.
- It reflects a move from a control-based state to a facilitative regulatory framework.

NHAI FASTAG RULES

The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has directed FASTag-issuing banks to verify and validate vehicle registration numbers (VRNs) linked to FASTags.

This follows complaints of mismatches between scanned and actual license plates. Banks have

Multi-Lane Free Flow (MLFF) Tolling

- MLF tolling is a barrier-less, electronic system that allows vehicles to pay tolls at highway speeds (100+ kmph) without stopping or slowing down.
- It uses overhead gantries with RFID readers, ANPR cameras, and GNSS to automatically identify vehicles and deduct charges via FASTag.
- **Advantages of MLFF Tolling**
 - **Seamless and Faster Toll Collection** - The MLFF system enables vehicles to pass through toll points without stopping or slowing down, unlike the current system that requires halts at toll plazas. This significantly improves traffic flow and reduces congestion, especially on busy highways.
 - **Improved Efficiency for Commuters and Transporters** - By eliminating manual checks and physical barriers, MLFF ensures quicker transit for both private and commercial vehicles, saving time and fuel while enhancing overall travel efficiency.

Additional Measures to Strengthen MLFF Tolling

- To ensure smooth implementation of the MLFF system and prevent misuse, the government has introduced **new toll enforcement rules**.
- In cases of unpaid toll, commuters must **pay double** the fee, but if payment is made within 72 hours, only the original amount is charged.
- An e-notice system has been introduced, detailing vehicle information, location, and payable fee.
- Additionally, a grievance redressal mechanism allows users to challenge notices within 72 hours; if unresolved within five days, the toll claim is cancelled.

Rollout of MLFF Tolling in India

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has awarded tenders for 16 toll plazas to implement the MLFF system.
- These include key locations across multiple states such as Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
- The initiative aims to eliminate queues, reduce congestion, save travel time, and improve fuel efficiency and toll collection.
- **First Barrier-Free Toll Plaza**
 - The Choryasi toll plaza in Gujarat is set to become India's first fully barrier-free toll plaza, marking the beginning of MLFF implementation in the country.
 - The government has already invited bids for **an additional 36 toll plazas**, indicating a phased expansion of MLFF across the national highway network.
 - Major toll plazas selected include:
 - Haryana: Gharaunda, Badarpur Faridabad
 - Gujarat: Choryasi, Boariach
 - Rajasthan: Daulatpura, Manoharpura, Shahjahanpur
 - Delhi: Mundaka
 - Tamil Nadu: Nemili, Chenasamudram, Paranur
 - Andhra Pradesh: Kasepalli, Amakathadu, Marur
 - Maharashtra: Chalakwadi, Hiwargaon Pavsa
- **Scale of FASTag-Based Tolling**
 - Currently, FASTag-enabled tolling on national highways is already substantial:
 - Average daily collection: ~₹186 crore
 - Average daily transactions: ~1.05 crore (FY 2025–26 till December 2025)

Conclusion

- The phased rollout of MLFF marks a major shift towards fully digital, high-speed tolling infrastructure, with significant potential to enhance efficiency, reduce congestion, and modernise India's highway ecosystem.



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ANDAMAN SEA



- It is a **semi-enclosed marginal sea** in the **northeastern Indian Ocean**.

Borders:

- It lies between the **eastern coast of India** and the **Malay Peninsula**, with Myanmar to the north and the **Indonesian island of Sumatra** to the south.
- The **Bay of Bengal** bounds the Andaman Sea to the **west** and the **Strait of Malacca** to the east.
- It is a complex geological region with a **tectonically active plate boundary**.
- It is part of the **larger Sunda Plate**, which the Indian Plate borders to the northwest and the Australian Plate to the southeast.

Climate: The climate of the Andaman Sea is **tropical**, with **two distinct seasons**: the southwest monsoon (May-September) and the northeast monsoon (November-February)

Biodiversity: It is home to **extensive coral reef systems**, seagrass meadows, and mangrove forests, which provide critical habitats for a multitude of marine organisms.