

### INDIA NOTIFIES ONLINE GAMING RULES: KEY CHANGES

India has introduced a new regulatory framework for the online gaming sector by notifying the rules under the **Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025**.

Finalised by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the rules will come into force from May 1 and aim to establish a digital-first regulator for the sector.

The framework notably does not mandate prior registration or classification for most online social games, while **effectively curbing the real-money gaming segment**, impacting platforms like Dream11, PokerBaazi, WinZO, and Mobile Premier League.

The move comes amid rapid growth in India's online gaming market, which has seen millions of users and rising monetisation, alongside concerns over addiction, fraud, and inconsistent state-level regulations. The new rules aim to create a uniform national framework to regulate the sector more effectively.

#### **India's Online Gaming Sector**

- India's online gaming sector has experienced rapid and sustained growth, emerging as a major segment of the global gaming industry.
- As of 2025, around **591 million** Indians are online gamers—about 40% of the population and nearly 20% of global gamers.
- The industry contributes significantly to the new media ecosystem, accounting for 30% of its revenue (\$3.8 billion) and is considered the fastest-growing segment.

#### **India's Online Gaming Rules, 2026: Key Highlights**

- **Creation of a Central Regulator**
  - The rules establish the **Online Gaming Authority of India (OGAI)** under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology as the primary regulator.
  - It has wide powers to classify games as online money games, social games, or esports, issue directions, handle complaints, and impose penalties.
  - The authority is government-led, with representation from multiple ministries, ensuring a coordinated regulatory approach.

- **Flexible Determination and Registration System**
  - The framework introduces a selective “**determination and registration**” mechanism, meaning not all games require prior approval.
  - Formal classification is needed only in specific cases—such as regulator direction, esports offerings, or government-notified categories.
  - These determinations are **game- and provider-specific** and remain valid unless the game’s payment model changes.
- **Financial Intermediaries as Enforcement Gatekeepers**
  - A major feature is the inclusion of banks and payment gateways in enforcement.
  - They must **verify** a game’s regulatory status before processing transactions and comply with OGAI’s directions—especially in restricting payments linked to online money games, effectively making the payments ecosystem a key compliance tool.
- **Grievance Redressal and User Protection Mechanisms**
  - The rules mandate a **two-tier grievance system**: first at the platform level, and then escalation to OGAI, with further appeal to a government Appellate Authority.
  - Additionally, platforms must implement user safety features such as age verification, parental controls, time limits, reporting tools, counselling support, and fair-play monitoring.
- **Data Localisation and Future Regulatory Scope**
  - Gaming platforms offering social games or esports must store data within India, ensuring regulatory oversight.
  - OGAI is also empowered to issue future guidelines on advertising, safety, and operational compliance, allowing the framework to evolve with the sector.
- **Penalties and Enforcement**
  - Proceedings are to be conducted in digital mode unless physical presence is deemed necessary, and concluded within 90 days of receipt of a complaint.

### SAFER FIREWORKS ALTERNATIVES

#### Fireworks and Healthcare Risks: Impact of Noise Pollution on Hospitals

- **Noise Levels vs Safety Standards** - Fireworks noise levels can far exceed safe limits for sensitive areas. While ambient noise guidelines recommend 40–50 decibels in silence zones like hospitals, fireworks are legally allowed up to 125 decibels, creating a significant mismatch that exposes patients to harmful sound levels.
- **Risks to Patients and Critical Care Units** - Experts warn that high-decibel fireworks near hospitals—especially those with neonatal intensive care units (NICUs)—can adversely affect infant brain development and disturb critically ill patients.
- **Proximity Concerns and Infrastructure Gaps** - Concerns have been raised about festivals like Thrissur Pooram, where fireworks occur close to hospitals, sometimes just minutes away.
- **Broader Health Implications of Noise Pollution** - According to the World Health Organization, noise pollution is the third most harmful environmental threat, after air and water pollution.

#### Noiseless Fireworks Alternatives: Safer and Sustainable Innovations

- In the wake of safety concerns and accidents, experts are advocating a transition to **noiseless fireworks technologies**, which can deliver similar visual appeal without the risks of explosions, high decibel noise, or large-scale hazards.
- Noiseless fireworks present a **viable, safer, and eco-friendly alternative** to traditional pyrotechnics, but require scaling, affordability, and policy support to replace conventional practices effectively.
- **How Cold Spark Technology Works?**
  - A key alternative is **cold spark technology**, which uses fine metal alloy powders (such as titanium and zirconium) instead of explosive combustion.
  - Devices like cold sparkulars heat these powders and eject them into the air, where they react with oxygen to produce bright, sparkler-like effects without noise.

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- Unlike traditional fireworks that rely on high-energy explosions, this method is controlled and significantly safer.
- **Safety Advantages Over Traditional Fireworks**
  - Noiseless alternatives operate at much lower temperatures (60–100°C) compared to conventional sparklers (around 1,200°C), greatly reducing the risk of burns and fire accidents.
  - They also eliminate loud sounds, making them safer for humans, animals, and sensitive environments like hospitals.
- **Cost and Manufacturing Challenges**
  - Despite their benefits, these alternatives are currently costlier and not widely scaled in India, with many products being imported.
  - However, experts highlight strong potential for domestic production, especially since the underlying technology is well understood.
- **Expanding Creative Possibilities**
  - Modern stage technologies demonstrate that noiseless systems can create visually rich displays, including coordinated spark fountains, light patterns, and sequential effects.
  - These systems can be arranged in clusters or mounted on structures to simulate large-scale aerial fireworks, offering equal or even superior visual experiences without the environmental and safety risks.

#### Way Forward: Transitioning to Safer, Noiseless Fireworks

- Experts recommend a phased shift toward noiseless technologies like cold spark systems, especially in high-risk and high-profile events.
- Cities like Delhi and festivals such as Thrissur Pooram can serve as pilot grounds for large-scale adoption, gradually replacing traditional fireworks.
- This transition would require institutional responsibility, particularly from local authorities, along with testing, scaling, and policy support to ensure safer and environmentally sustainable celebrations.

### THE EIGHTH PAY COMMISSION - TOWARDS PERFORMANCE-LINKED GOVERNANCE AND FISCAL PRUDENCE

- Amid the political noise of Trump's foreign policy moves, India's domestic debates around delimitation, and the SIR by the Election Commission, a critically important administrative exercise has been flying under the radar — the Eighth Central Pay Commission (**8th CPC**).
- The CPC is constituted periodically by the Government of India to review and recommend -
  - **Salary structure** of Central government employees
  - Pensions and allowances
  - Service conditions
  - **Compensation reforms** in line with economic realities
- Its recommendations significantly influence: State government pay structures, public sector salaries, and government expenditure patterns.

#### **Way Forward - What the 8th CPC Must Do Differently:**

- **Move beyond generic recommendations:** The 7th Pay Commission matrix consists of 18 levels (pay grades) and 40 cells (annual increments). The 8th CPC must -
  - Encourage high performers, validated through an RFD-style or equally rigorous measurement system. This could be accelerated through cells within their pay level.
  - Include fewer cells to navigate means reaching the grade ceiling faster, which triggers earlier eligibility for promotion.
- **Steps needed:** For this to work, the Commission must also push for -
  - Reviving and strengthening the RFD with political ownership and budgetary integration.
  - Reforming APARs to make them outcome-linked rather than procedural.
  - Designing a system with concrete implementation guidelines, not platitudes.

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### Conclusion:

- The Eighth Central Pay Commission presents an opportunity to **transform** India's **bureaucracy** from a seniority-driven structure into a performance-oriented governance system.
- However, meaningful reform requires more than salary adjustments—it demands credible metrics, political commitment, institutional redesign, and fairness in implementation.
- If designed well, performance-linked pay can ensure that public expenditure on salaries translates into **better governance** outcomes.
- The real challenge before the 8th CPC is to **reconcile efficiency, equity, and fiscal sustainability** in India's administrative state.

### KENDU LEAF



- Kendu leaf (Tendu Leaf, *Diospyros Melanoxylon*) is also called “**Green Gold of Odisha**”.
- It is a **nationalized product** like Bamboo and Sal seed.

Kendu leaf is one of the most important **non-wood forest products of Odisha**.

- **Characteristics:**
  - It has matching aroma with Tobacco.
  - It has **hygroscopic in nature** which helps drying leaves to withstand crack.
- **Primary use:** Used to roll tobacco into bidis (local cigarettes); also holds medicinal value.
- **Key Producer States:** Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat.
- **Odisha is the third-largest producer** after MP and Chhattisgarh.
  - The uniqueness of Odisha Kendu leaves is **its processed form**. No state produces processed kendu leaves except Odisha.
- **Legal Status:** Kendu Leaf is covered under **Minor Forest Produce (MFP)** as per **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**.



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### SUSTAINABLE AVIATION FUEL



- It consists of specially processed **aviation grade hydrocarbons** that are chemically similar to ATF and fully compatible with aircraft engines.

- SAF **does not alter the fundamental nature**, safety, or performance of aviation fuel.
- **Source:** It is a biofuel, also known as **bio-jet fuel produced from sustainable feedstocks**.
- It has chemistry similar to conventional aviation turbine fuel (ATF) or jet fuel, which is derived from crude oil.
- This means that existing aircraft engines can easily use the SAF-ATF blend.
- It is made from renewable biomass and waste resources have the potential to deliver the performance of petroleum-based jet fuel.
- **Production:**
  - It can be produced from a number of sources (feedstock) including waste oil and fats, green and municipal waste and non-food crops.
  - It can also be **produced synthetically via** a process that captures carbon directly from the air.



**NAMASTE**  
Scheme

### NAMASTE SCHEME

- The **National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) Scheme** is a critical initiative addressing the dire challenges **faced by Sewer and Septic Tank Sanitation Workers (SSWs)** in India.
- It aims to transform their occupational safety, health, and dignity through systemic interventions.
- **Target Groups:** Sewer and septic tank sanitation workers (SSWs) and waste pickers in urban areas of India

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- **Ministries involved:** It is jointly being implemented by the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE)** and the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)**.
- **Implementing agency:** It is implemented by the **National Safai Karmacharis Finance Development Corporation (NSKFDC)** under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE)
- **Duration:** It would be implemented for three years **from FY 2023-24 to FY 2025-26**.
- **The scheme targets**
  - Zero fatalities in sanitation work
  - Eliminates direct contact with human faecal matter
  - Ensures all **cleaning is done with safety devices** by skilled workers
  - **Strengthens Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs)**, and empowers workers through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and entrepreneurship.

#### NEW SPECIES OF DRAGONFLIES



- Two of the newly described species—the **Clouded Boghawker (Sarasaeschna nuboides)** and the **Siang Boghawker (Sarasaeschna sigotaayo)**—were observed around a **small, shallow forest pond** in **Arunachal Pradesh's Siang Valley**, where dragonflies were seen flying rapidly and perching close to water.
- The **third species**, the **Long-tailed Boghawker (Sarasaeschna dosdewaensis)**, was discovered in **Assam's Karimganj district**, an area increasingly recognised as an **odonate diversity hotspot**.

#### **Key Facts about Dragonflies:**

- Dragonflies are **insects** in the **order Odonata**.
- Insects in this group are characterized by **large multifaceted eyes**, **two pairs of wings**, and an **elongated body**.

- Their eyes provide them with **excellent vision** due to their very **unique structure**.
- Dragonflies are **among the fastest insects known** and are **voracious predators** of flying insects such as **mosquitoes and flies**.
- They are most commonly **found near freshwater habitats** throughout most of the world.

### KEY FACTS ABOUT HONEY BADGER



- The honey badger, or **ratel**, is a **small mammal** that is **very strong and tough**.
- It is a member of the **weasel family**, which includes **skunks**.
- Scientific Name: *Mellivora capensis*.
- **Habitat and Distribution:**
  - The honey badger has a wide, **extensive historical distribution range**, which extends through **most of sub-Saharan Africa**.
  - It occurs from the **Western Cape to southern Morocco** and **southwestern Algeria**.
  - In addition, it also **occurs in Arabia, Iran, and western Asia**, as well as the **Indian peninsula**.
  - They live **mainly in dry areas** but are also found in **forests and grasslands**.
  - They live **in holes**, which they dig with their **strong front legs**.

### **Key Facts about Kheoni Wildlife Sanctuary:**

- It is located in **Madhya Pradesh**.
- It is **connected to Ratapani Tiger Reserve** through corridors.
- **Flora:** The **dry deciduous forest** consists of **teak, tendu, and bamboo**.
- **Fauna:** Its wildlife includes **jackals, palm civets, Leopards, Sloth bears, Hyenas, Nilgai**, and many bird species.