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BEYOND MARRIAGE: SC EXTENDS DOMESTIC CRUELTY PROTECTION TO LIVE-IN COUPLES

The Supreme Court, in a judgment delivered by Justices Sanjay Karol and N Kotiswar Singh, ruled that protection against domestic cruelty under criminal law — ordinarily available to married women under **Section 498A** of the erstwhile IPC — now extends to women in live-in relationships, provided the couple shares an "**intent to marry**."

Since the IPC has been replaced by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the ruling will likely apply to the corresponding provision, **Section 85 of the BNS**.

The Legal Position Until Now

- Section 498A, IPC penalises a husband or his relatives for subjecting a woman to cruelty.
- Since the provision explicitly uses the word "husband," its application was traditionally limited to legally valid marriages.
- Over the years, the Supreme Court had expanded this to **cover men** who induced a woman into a legally void or voidable marriage (e.g., by concealing a prior subsisting marriage) — holding that such men cannot escape prosecution by claiming they were never a "husband."

Background: The Case That Triggered the Ruling

- The accused man sought to quash a **Section 498A case** filed by his partner, arguing his marriage to her was invalid since he was already married to someone else.
- The Karnataka High Court rejected this, ruling that a man who induces a woman to believe she is lawfully married to him cannot evade criminal responsibility merely because no valid marriage existed in law.
- This led to his appeal before the Supreme Court.

Why the Domestic Violence Act Isn't Sufficient?

- Both the petitioner and the Union government argued that unmarried women are already protected under the **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (DV) Act, 2005**, which covers relationships "in the nature of marriage."

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- The Court rejected this, distinguishing the two laws:
 - The DV Act is primarily civil legislation, offering remedies like maintenance and protection orders.
 - Section 498A is a criminal provision, backed by the force of criminal deterrence.
- Equating the two would be a "misstatement of law" given their fundamentally different legal character and consequences.

Why "Intent to Marry" Is the Key Qualifier

- To determine which live-in couples qualify for this protection, the Court borrowed the concept of a "**relationship in the nature of marriage**" from the DV Act — a narrower subset of general live-in relationships.
- Drawing on a 2013 judgment, the Court reiterated the features of such a relationship: pooling financial resources, shared domestic arrangements, a sexual relationship, and holding themselves out to society as spouses.
- Crucially, the recent ruling added a new requirement: the couple must also possess an "intent to marry."
- **Rationale**
 - Many relationships may satisfy all criteria of being "in the nature of marriage," yet the partners may never intend to marry.
 - Without this intent, the relationship cannot be equated with marriage for invoking a penal provision with serious consequences.
 - The Court held: "Those relationships that are in the nature of marriage and also have the requisite intent to marry are the closest to marriage itself" — and only these qualify for Section 498A protection.
- **Burden of proof**
 - The initial burden to establish "intent to marry" lies on the female partner seeking protection.
 - The judgment, however, did not specify concrete parameters for legally establishing this subjective intent.

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HOW INDIA AVERTED A FERTILISER CRISIS AMID THE WEST ASIA WAR

Despite the US-Israel-Iran war and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz since February 28, 2026 — triggering arguably the greatest global energy supply shock in history — India has avoided major fertiliser shortages in the ongoing kharif season.

However, while urea supply remains comfortable, the situation is more precarious for DAP (di-ammonium phosphate) and complex fertilisers.

Initial Shock: Urea Production Dip

- India's urea production **fell** to 17.5 lakh tonnes (lt) in March 2026, down from 24.7 lt in March 2025.
- **Cause:** Disruption in liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply — the primary feedstock for urea.
- Before the war, 53-54% of India's LNG imports came from Qatar and the UAE via long-term contracts, which couldn't be honoured due to shipping blockades and damage to liquefaction infrastructure from Iranian missile/drone strikes.

Recovery Through Government Action

- **Diversifying LNG Sources**
 - Domestic urea output recovered sharply: 21 lt (April) → 25.2 lt (May) → 25.4 lt (June).
 - Cumulative April-June 2026 production at **71.5 lt** was 5.4% higher than 67.9 lt in the same period last year.
 - The government pushed GAIL and Indian Oil Corporation to **diversify LNG sourcing** — pivoting to spot market purchases from the **US, Oman, Nigeria, Angola, Congo, Indonesia, Trinidad, and Norway** as Qatar/UAE's share fell to near-zero.

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- **Proactive Urea Imports**

- Indian Potash Ltd (IPL) and National Fertilizers Ltd floated tenders, securing 25 lt and 17 lt of imported urea at \$935-959 and \$444.9-449.3 per tonne respectively.
- A third tender for 17 lt (10 lt to western ports, 7 lt to eastern ports) was issued by Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers.
- **Total urea imports during April-June 2026 reached 25.1 lt**, sharply up from just 8.4 lt in April-June 2025.
- The government has also **absorbed higher import costs** rather than passing them to farmers, impacting the fertiliser subsidy bill.

The El Niño Factor: Demand-Side Relief

- Beyond supply management, **subdued fertiliser demand** has also helped avert shortages, driven by El Niño-induced monsoon rainfall deficiency.
- All-India rainfall during June-July was 12.6% below normal, and kharif sowing area was 4.7% lower than last year.
- This contrasts with 2024 and 2025 (surplus monsoon years), when ample soil moisture drove farmers to plant aggressively and queue for fertilisers, causing supply-demand mismatches and long queues.
- This year, a slowdown in fertiliser offtake, combined with better government preparedness, has meant no significant shortages despite the war.

Conclusion

- India's proactive diversification of LNG and urea import sources helped avert a nitrogen fertiliser crisis despite an unprecedented West Asia-driven energy shock.
- However, persistent sulphur and phosphoric acid shortages continue to threaten DAP and complex fertiliser supply, underscoring the need for sustained government intervention — particularly with the politically sensitive rabi season and upcoming state elections ahead.

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NATO ENTERS A NEW STRATEGIC ERA OF TRANSFORMATION

- For the first time since NATO's creation in 1949, Washington is asking Europe not just to spend more on defence, but to take primary responsibility for its own security.
- This marks a fundamental shift in the transatlantic compact, signalling that the real question today is not whether NATO survives, but how it adapts to a changing strategic landscape.

America's Shifting Priorities

- The **US National Security Strategy** (November 2025) retains NATO as America's principal alliance but signals **reduced US commitment** as Europe's primary security guarantor.
- It endorses raising defence spending to 5% of GDP as the new burden-sharing benchmark, while the US repositions itself as the Alliance's strategic enabler, nuclear guarantor, and political convener — not its sole military backbone.
- **Objective:** A self-reliant Europe, freeing Washington to focus more on the Indo-Pacific.

Evidence of Rebalancing

- US troop strength in Europe, which rose to ~1,00,000 after Russia's 2022 Ukraine invasion, has since been scaled back.
- During 2025-26: 5,000 troops withdrawn from Germany, a planned 4,000-troop deployment to Poland cancelled, and Brigade Combat Teams reduced from four to three — bringing US presence down to 75,000-80,000 troops, near pre-war levels.

NATO's Evolution: Three Phases

- **NATO 1.0** (1949-1991) - Relied overwhelmingly on American military and nuclear power to deter Soviet aggression.
- **NATO 2.0** (1991-2022) - Eastward expansion, incorporation of former Warsaw Pact members, operations in Balkans/Afghanistan; declining European defence spending and rising US dependence.

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- **NATO 3.0** (Post-2022) - A more balanced partnership — Europe takes primary responsibility for conventional defence; US retains nuclear deterrence, intelligence, and global power projection
- As Lord Ismay (NATO's first Secretary General) once put it, the Alliance's original purpose was to "**keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.**"
- Today's phase can be summarised as keeping **Russia deterred, America engaged, and Europe prepared.**

Europe's Response and Its Limits

- At the **2025 Hague Summit**, NATO members committed to raising core defence spending to at least 3.5% of GDP by 2035 (progress reviewed in 2029).
- **Germany** has doubled defence spending since 2023, aiming for the same 2029 target while rebuilding capability to deter Russia.
- **Russia**, meanwhile, has reorganised its western military posture with new headquarters, formations, and bases facing NATO.
- The real challenge: Not spending, but replacing the American military ecosystem. Europe remains heavily dependent on the US for intelligence, satellite support, command-and-control systems, strategic airlift, missile defence, and the nuclear umbrella.
- As Poland's Foreign Minister noted, Europe doesn't need to match American power — it simply needs to be stronger than Russia.

Implications for India

- NATO's transformation matters to India primarily through the redistribution of American strategic attention toward the Indo-Pacific, reinforcing regional balance amid China's assertiveness.
- A more capable Europe could become an important partner for India in defence manufacturing, advanced technologies, AI, cybersecurity, semiconductors, and space.
- New Delhi should view these shifts as a strategic opportunity, not alliance politics — closer cooperation with both the US and Europe can complement, not compromise, India's strategic autonomy.

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SUPREME COURT STEPS IN TO CURB DIGITAL ARREST SCAMS

- A "digital arrest" scam is a form of cyber-enabled financial fraud in which scammers impersonate law enforcement officials, such as police, the CBI, or the Enforcement Directorate, to intimidate victims into transferring money.
- **How the Scam Works?**
 - Fraudsters contact victims via phone, video, or messaging platforms.
 - They falsely claim the victim is involved in a crime such as money laundering or drug trafficking.
 - Victims are placed under a fake "digital arrest" and kept under continuous audio or video surveillance.
 - Scammers use forged documents, including fake court and agency orders, to appear legitimate.
 - Victims are coerced into transferring large sums to avoid "arrest."

Supreme Court's Directions

- A bench led by the Chief Justice of India passed a detailed order directing the Centre, states, the RBI, and telecom authorities to strengthen the fight against digital arrest scams.
- **Standard Operating Procedure for Banks**
 - The RBI was directed to prepare and circulate within four weeks an SOP for banks to place temporary debit holds on suspicious amounts and mule accounts.
 - The SOP must additionally incorporate a grievance redressal mechanism, a money restoration module, and public awareness measures.
- **e-Zero FIR and State Coordination**
 - States and UTs were directed to adopt the e-zero FIR mechanism in consultation with I4C.
 - States were asked to notify and operationalise State Cyber Crime Coordination Centres within the time period.

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- **Grievance Redressal and Money Restoration**

- States and UTs were directed to frame grievance redressal and money restoration modules as per the Ministry of Home Affairs' SOP within four weeks.
- The Registrar Generals of all High Courts were asked to bring the grievance mechanism to the attention of courts and adjudicating authorities dealing with the freezing of bank accounts.

- **Victim Compensation and CBI Threshold**

- The Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) was asked to consider a shared liability and victim compensation framework.
- The IDC was told to examine reducing the existing Rs 10 crore monetary threshold for CBI investigation, for example, by aggregating fraud involving the same organised network.

- **Telecom Measures**

- Given the misuse of telecom services, the bench asked MeitY, the Department of Telecommunications, and I4C to examine whether time-based restrictions on audio and video calls are feasible.
- The Telecommunications (Radio Equipment Possession Authorisation) Rules, 2025, had been notified, while the Telecommunications (User Identification) Rules, 2025, were at the final stage of notification.

Significance of the Directions

- Victim-centric approach: Focus on grievance redressal, money restoration, and compensation.
- Prevention through banking action: Temporary debit holds on mule accounts can stop money from flowing to fraudsters.
- Faster justice: e-Zero FIRs and quicker disposal of complaints reduce delays.
- Inter-agency coordination: Involving RBI, I4C, CBI, telecom authorities, and states ensures a comprehensive response.
- Public awareness: Emphasis on educating citizens to prevent them from falling victim.

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CLOUDED LEOPARD



- It is a wild cat inhabiting dense forests of the **Himalayas** through mainland Southeast Asia into South China.
- There are two species of clouded leopards:
 - The **clouded leopard** (*Neofelis nebulosa*), found on the mainland of southeastern Asia, and the **Sunda clouded leopard** (*Neofelis diardi*), found on the islands of Sumatra and Borneo.
- **Distribution:**
 - It is found from **Nepal, Bangladesh, and India** through Indochina to Sumatra and Borneo, and northeastward to southern China.
 - **In India**, it is found in Sikkim, northern West Bengal, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Habitat:**
 - They prefer to live in **lowland tropical rainforests**.
 - However, they can also be found in **dry woodlands and secondary forests**, and in Borneo.
- **Features:**
 - It is named after the **distinctive 'clouds' on its coat** – ellipses partially edged in black, with the insides a darker colour than the background colour of the pelt.
 - It has an **exceptionally long tail for balancing**, which can be as long as the body itself, thick with black ring markings.
- They are **arboreal and nocturnal inhabitants**.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable