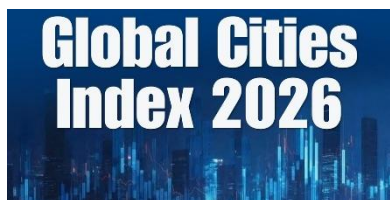


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GLOBAL CITIES INDEX 2026



- It is an **annual report** published by **Oxford Economics**, a leading global economic advisory firm.
- The index **ranks 1000 cities** across the world based on five major factors: **Economics, Human Capital, Quality of Life, Environment and Governance.**
- **GCI 2026 Highlights:**
 - **New York** has taken the **top spot** in the index.
 - **London** has been ranked **second**, followed by **Paris** at third, **Seattle** at fourth, and **San Francisco** at fifth.
 - **India Specific Findings:**
 - **Around 100 Indian cities feature** among the 1,000 major cities evaluated worldwide.
 - **Delhi** has the **highest overall ranking** at **268**, followed by **Bengaluru** at **311**, **Mumbai** at **330**, **Chennai** at **381**, **Hyderabad** at **421**, and **Pune** at **427**.
 - **55 Indian cities** have secured spots among the **world's top 100 fastest-growing city economies.**
 - **Delhi** is currently the world's **63rd-largest city economy.** Oxford Economics projects that it could become the **14th-largest** by 2050, with economic output exceeding **USD 2 trillion.**
 - **Delhi's strongest performance** came in the **Human Capital** category, where it **ranked 13th** globally, ahead of **Toronto, Seoul, and Beijing.**
 - **Mumbai** is India's **leading city for corporate headquarters**, ranking **23rd** globally on that measure.
 - **Indian cities** rank **very low** in terms of **income equality.**
 - **Delhi** ranks **second** globally for having the **worst air quality.**

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DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY RATING PLATFORM



- It is an **integrated digital platform** designed for **rating of digital connectivity** of properties across residential, commercial, and government properties.
- It was launched by the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India**.
- **Objective:** To encourage **property managers to build digitally connected** and future ready smart properties and assess whether properties are equipped with **robust digital infrastructure**, enhancing user experience for tenants, residents, and businesses.
- The **platform provides a public interface** for consumers to view the properties rated for **digital connectivity**.
- It **brings Property Managers (PMs) registered Digital Connectivity Rating Agency (DCRA) and consumer onto a common digital interface**.
- **Features**
 - **Property Managers**
 - They can register their properties in category of **Public, Government, Commercial, Private** etc. The platform supports both **constructed and under-construction properties**.
 - **Registered DCRA's**
 - They can **access assigned applications**, undertake assessments, record observations and test results, manage supporting documentation and **complete the rating process** according to the prescribed framework.
 - **Consumers:**
 - They can **search for a rated property** by property name, certificate ID or location.
 - They can **view the property's digitally signed rating certificate** and verify its authenticity through the **QR code provided on the certificate**.

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ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA - DECISION-MAKING, DISSENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CHECKS

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) is a constitutional body established under Article 324 of the Constitution.
- **Article 324** vests the ECI with the “superintendence, direction and control” of the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President.
- The Constitution provides for a **Chief Election Commissioner** (CEC) and such number of other Election Commissioners (ECs) as the President may determine, subject to legislation.
- The ECI was permanently expanded from a single-member body to a three-member commission in 1993, comprising the CEC and two Election Commissioners.

How Does the Election Commission Take Decisions?

- The decision-making process is currently governed by the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.
- Section 18 provides that:
 - The Commission should, as far as possible, conduct its business unanimously.
 - If the members differ in their opinions, the matter is decided by majority.
 - Since the Commission has three members, two members can decide a matter when unanimity is not achieved.
 - The CEC chairs the Commission, but all three members have one vote each.
- Thus, the CEC does not possess a casting vote that can override the other Commissioners.

Judicial Clarification on Equality of Commissioners

- The principle of equality among the three members was clarified by the Supreme Court in **T.N. Seshan v. Union of India (1995)**.

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- Then CEC T.N. Seshan had challenged the appointment of two Election Commissioners, M.S. Gill and G.V. Krishnamurthy.
- The Supreme Court upheld the appointments and established that the three members of the Commission have equal status in decision-making.
- This is important for understanding the institutional structure of the ECI: although the CEC is the chairperson, the Commission functions as a multi-member body rather than a hierarchy in which the CEC has greater voting power.

Dissent Notes and Observations

- A distinction exists between an observation recorded during deliberations and a final dissent against a Commission decision.
- Election Commission officials have stated that differing views on electoral or administrative matters are a normal part of internal deliberation. Commissioners can record their disagreement on files, while the final decision can still be unanimous or based on majority opinion.
- For instance, before the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in 2025, Election Commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu recorded an observation emphasising that vulnerable groups such as elderly persons, persons with disabilities and poor citizens should not face harassment.
- According to the ECI, such observations formed part of the internal deliberative process, while the final SIR decision was unanimous.

Why Institutional Dissent Matters?

- Dissent within a constitutional body can function as an internal check and balance.
- Recording alternative views creates an institutional record of deliberation and can help identify administrative, legal or operational concerns before a final decision is taken.
- At the same time, the statutory framework gives the Commission a clear mechanism for resolving disagreements through majority decision-making.
- This balances two requirements: collective decision-making and individual institutional accountability.

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STANDARDISING INDIA'S EXPRESSWAYS: WHAT NHAI'S NEW HIGH-SPEED CORRIDOR RULES SAY

In a move to ensure uniformity and consistency in the construction of high-speed corridors — also known as access-controlled national highways or expressways — the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has issued detailed guidelines covering design, standards and specifications for such projects.

Until now, consultants prepared Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for these corridors based on varying standards and specifications, leading to inconsistency across projects.

The Bigger Picture: Vision 2047

- The move gains significance because India targets 50,000 km of high-speed corridors by 2036–37 under Vision 2047.
- These corridors are special sections of national highways providing uninterrupted, end-to-end travel.
- The total length of high-speed corridors stood at just **3,052 km** as of **December 2025** — showing the scale of expansion planned ahead.

How Traffic Will Be Assessed

- NHAI has mandated a more rigorous approach to traffic assessment for these projects.
 - Assessment must include existing, generated, induced, and diverted traffic, based on proper traffic modelling.
 - Freight growth rate must be analysed considering economic development.
 - Traffic data must be validated from secondary sources such as toll transactions.
 - For freight traffic and determining the Vehicle Damage Factor (VDF), data from GST portals, mining departments and other sources must be cross-validated.

Lane Configuration Norms

- The guidelines set clear, traffic-based thresholds for how many lanes a corridor should have.

Present Traffic (PCU*)	Required Configuration
Up to 15,000 PCU	Four-lane highway with four-lane structure
15,000–25,000 PCU	Four-lane highway with six-lane structures
25,000–40,000 PCU	Six-lane highway with six-lane structures

*PCU = Passenger Car Unit, a standard traffic measurement unit.

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Access Control and Design Standards

- Access must be planned so that through traffic can move at the speed set by the main highway flow — not slowed by local, access, or cross traffic.
- There shall be no at-grade intersection of any road with the project highway.
- Access to the highway must be through **properly designed ramps** at planned locations.
- **Underpass height:** In areas with frequent operation of heavy agricultural machinery — harvesters and laden tractors — underpass height may be set at **4.50 metres**, accommodating farm vehicle movement.
- **Service roads:** These must be provided in **built-up and urban sections on both sides**, along with a **drain-cum-footpath**, ensuring local connectivity and pedestrian safety alongside the high-speed corridor.

Signage and Road Marking Standards

- Full overhead gantries (carrying direction signs) shall be placed 5 km and 2 km ahead of an exit.
- Lane and other markings must be 150 mm wide.

Barrier-Less Tolling and Corridor Protection

NHAI is shifting towards a Multi-Lane Free Flow (MLFF) system — essentially a barrier-less tolling mechanism that allows vehicles to pass through toll points without stopping.

Green and Sustainable Design Elements

Drip irrigation will be provided in the median for watering plants.

Tree plantation will be made an integral part of project design at the DPR stage itself.

Conclusion

NHAI's new rules replace guesswork with a uniform rulebook — from lane width to tree plantation. As India races toward 50,000 km of high-speed corridors, consistency in design will matter as much as the pace of construction. Standardisation today prevents costly retrofits tomorrow.

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THE CASE FOR ACCOUNTABLE LOTTERY REGULATION IN INDIA

- The debate over lotteries reflects a **broader policy dilemma**: whether socially harmful activities should be prohibited or regulated.
- Experiences with tobacco, alcohol and gambling suggest that prohibition cannot always eliminate persistent demand. It may instead create black markets, increase enforcement costs and deprive governments of revenue.
- Lotteries therefore require a balance between **individual choice**, consumer protection, social welfare and fiscal interests.

The Limits of Prohibition

- The U.S. experience with alcohol prohibition from 1920 to 1933 demonstrates the limitations of banning activities with sustained demand.
- Although legal supply was suppressed, **bootlegging and organised crime** expanded, public institutions were corrupted and governments lost excise revenue.
- Repeal in 1933 reflected recognition that a **regulated and taxed market** could be more manageable than an unenforceable ban.
- When demand persists, consumers may shift towards **illegal and unregulated markets**, where there are fewer safeguards and greater opportunities for fraud and exploitation.

The Case for Regulating Lotteries

- Lotteries can impose serious social costs, particularly on **low-income households**.
- Instant games, rapid draws, large jackpots, aggressive advertising and loss-chasing can encourage compulsive gambling and distort perceptions of risk.
- However, prohibition may drive consumers towards **matka, satta**, illegal lotteries and offshore platforms, where age restrictions, transparent odds, audited prize funds and grievance mechanisms are often absent.
- Legitimate vendors may also lose livelihoods, while governments lose **GST and lottery revenue**.

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Paternalism and Consistency

- The regulation of lotteries also raises questions of **policy consistency**.
- Adults are permitted to participate in risky activities such as day trading and derivatives.
- Financial markets remain legal because risks are disclosed, intermediaries regulated and fraud punished. Lotteries differ because they are games of chance rather than instruments serving functions such as capital formation or hedging.

India's Legal and Fiscal Framework

- Government-organised lotteries fall under **Entry 40** of the Union List.
- The **Lotteries (Regulation) Act, 1998** establishes conditions governing State lotteries and permits restrictions on lotteries that violate statutory requirements.
- The Supreme Court has treated gambling, including State lotteries, as **res extra commercium**, outside the ordinary constitutional protection of trade.

Reforming the Legal Framework

- **Section 5** could be amended to permit a State to prohibit lotteries from other States whether or not it operates its own lottery, provided the rule is applied uniformly.
- A State could either admit all qualifying outside lotteries or exclude all of them.
- A new **Section 4A** could permit two or more States to establish common lotteries through formal agreements, pooling players, prizes, technology and administrative costs.

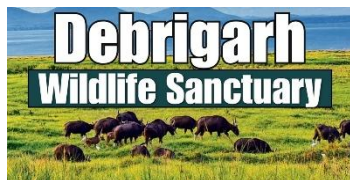
Reform should also emphasise audits, age restrictions, responsible marketing, transparent prize structures, digital monitoring, anti-money-laundering safeguards and grievance mechanisms.

Conclusion

- The central issue is whether prohibition produces better outcomes than **effective regulation**. Persistent demand can survive bans and migrate towards illegal markets, weakening consumer protection and increasing enforcement burdens.
- India can consider a framework combining **consumer protection, fiscal responsibility, State autonomy and individual choice**.
- Effective policy must account for **human behaviour, institutional capacity and unintended consequences**, rather than relying exclusively on prohibition.

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DEBRIGARH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



- **Location:** It is situated in the Bargarh district of Odisha.
- It is located near Hirakud Dam (the longest dam in India and the longest earthen dam in the world) on the Mahanadi River.
- It finds a special mention because of noted freedom fighter **Veer Surendra Sai**.
- During his rebellion against the British, his base at Barapathara was located within the sanctuary.
- **Vegetation:** Most of the plant sanctuary is covered with mixed and dry deciduous forest.
- **Flora:** Major trees found here are Sal, Asana, Bija, Aanla, Dhaura, etc.
- **Fauna:**
 - Indian leopards, sloth bears, **chousingha** (four-horned antelope), sambar deer, **gaurs (Indian bison)**, wild boars, and Indian wild dogs (dholes) are among the notable animal residents.
 - It is one of the most flocked wintering grounds of migratory birds crested serpent eagle, Flower Peckers, **red-vented bulbul**, **tree pie**, **drongo**, and **white eye oriental**.

Key Facts about Indian Gaur

- It is the largest species among the **wild cattle and the Bovidae**.
- It is considered as **flagship species**.
- **Distribution:** Gaurs are indigenous to the **South and Southeast parts of Asia**.
- **Habitat:** These are primarily found in **evergreen and semi-evergreen forests** along with moist deciduous forests with open grasslands.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:**
 - **The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule-I.