

## FCRA NORMS TIGHTENED

There are no free lunches. This is more so in global interactions where all nations have their interests to further. Countries operate through trade and business in a straightforward manner in pursuit of their interests but there are other ways too. One way is the charity and aid to NGOs and developmental agencies. This apparently looks innocuous and humanitarian but often has a hidden purpose behind it. At times the long term interests of the agency of a donor country is to influence the policy of the other country. In some cases it's a way to push businesses and policies that suits the donor country. While in some cases, the recipient agencies are influenced to create trouble at home. The process is subtle and gradual and operated by the Deep State. In fact the funding NGOs and other charitable organizations is part of a psychological operation against the host country and the full scale of the outcome is seen only after the disaster.

India with a full-fledged democracy and open society has been the target of many countries and agencies. It was an open secret that many spy agencies have been working through some individuals and NGOs to, at times, discredit the Indian government and leaders and create mayhem in the country. With India rising as an economic powerhouse, these attacks are likely to increase and intensity. The purge is a must. So, it's in this context that the Narendra Modi government has tightened the norms for NGOs and civil agencies receiving the foreign aid under the provisions of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA). India cannot afford this tamasha of raising fifth columnist and keeping mum in the name of democracy and free speech. All the licenses under FCRA would be reviewed. Home Minister Amit Shah put it out appropriately by saying that the Narendra Modi government functioned on "high-accountability" and nation-first principles, not on the erstwhile UPA government's "low-trust policy" and is hence duty bound to regulate foreign funds.

## Restoring trust in India's examination system

JS Rajput

The successful conduct of the rescheduled NEET-2026 examination offered India a moment of relief after weeks of uncertainty triggered by a devastating paper leak. Yet the crisis, followed by the CBSE Class XII evaluation controversy and the tragic coaching centre fire in Lucknow, has exposed deeper structural flaws that extend far beyond administrative lapses.

India heaved a great sigh of relief in the evening of June 21 of 2026, as the media splashed reports of the successful conduct of the rescheduled NEET-2026 exam. Its earlier cancellation on account of the paper leak had cast a pall of widespread gloom not only on the young aspirants and their families but throughout the nation. It cast serious aspersions on our examination management systems, institutions and the expertise generated over several decades. The community of teachers felt greatly let down as details of the modus operandi used by the mafia and the anti-social elements emerged. The needle of suspicion moved swiftly to the paper setters, to teachers, academics and educators. The coaching centres were obviously there as the usual suspects. The union education minister has lately called it a great betrayal and one fully endorses his assessment. When a paper-setter in an examination of any level stoops to the level of leaking the paper, becoming a shameful part and parcel of the mafia involved in corrupting the education and examination system, the nation must get alerted and ponder over the inadequacies in preparing and recruiting its teachers at every stage. The system in spite of its vast magnitude, just can't afford to have even a single teacher bereft of moral and ethical conduct.

Consequently, India must also seriously audit its systems of teacher preparation, recruitment and procedures of ascertaining their continuous academic advancement and professional growth along with the critical contours of personality development. Teachers are supposed to nurture moral, ethical and humanistic values in their wards. They are supposed to scrupulously adhere to an exemplary work culture, which is quietly internalised by their students. Every teacher is a part-



ner in preparing the future of India. They are the role models with whom the child interacts as the child transitions to school. Others come only at a later stage.

As the nation was slowly coming out of the anguish and anxiety inflicted by the postponement of the NEET exam, the CBSE announced its Class XII results, and that created an unprecedented situation of gloom and despair. For the first time, the CBSE opted for the digital marking system popularly known as OSM (On-Screen Marking). It chose Class XII for it, a stage that determines the individual-specific future course of studies that the learner would like to pursue. The CBSE claims to have taken all the necessary steps to prepare its own system and train its evaluators to perform their job efficiently. The technical glitches, and probably also deficiencies, on the part of the outsourced agency let down the CBSE. The sufferings inflicted on the enthusiastic yet highly sensitive young people disrupted their future plans in numerous instances, as the results they received were far below their expectations. Standardized Admissions Tests

One expects the CBSE would be better equipped with technical expertise and conduct all of its future exams successfully. When even a single young person commits suicide, due to the inefficiency and greed of others, the entire nation needs to take note of the factors responsible for it. Responsibility must be fixed and stern actions taken wherever necessary. Unfortunately, it has not been the case in the past, the guilty are not behind bars.

As if the two exam fiascos referred to above were not enough to give a wake-up call to all concerned, the Lucknow coaching center fire that snatched away fifteen young lives comes as a thundering wake-up call. The Uttar Pradesh Government has responded swiftly, 18 engineers booked, four more arrested.

Coaching Centers are being inspected throughout the state! It is well established that every fire tragedy is invariably a consequence of total neglect of fire safety norms, classes conducted in structures that brutally ignore the structural building norms. One wonders why these basic essentials are not checked at regular intervals. Extraordinary arrangements were made to ensure the proper conduct of the NEET re-examination on June 21. There were no reports of impersonators or solvers even making an attempt to trespass.

The planning worked, and the successful conduct brought a sigh of relief. One fervently hopes that the systems will gear themselves afresh, and in the coming years, no young individual shall encounter situations that could plunge him/her in continuous anxiety, uncertainty, a sense of fear, and underperformance. Every human being is touched to the core when the reports of the suicide note of a teenager: 'I just can't bear the tension already undergone once again'. One's heart goes out to the bereaved families; every sensitive soul mourns with them.

This probably does not include the mafia, and also the parents who encourage the purchase of 'leaked papers', spend vulgar amounts, and commit the sin of throwing away millions of other young people and their families in immeasurable agony and pain.

When even a single suicide takes place consequent upon anti-social and immoral machinations of rogue elements, the en-

tire nation must stand up to ensure that it's not repeated again. In a humane world, everyone who believes in "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" has a role to perform. The social system must take a serious note, expose them as the culprits who damage lives, kill young aspirations, and commit heinous social sacrilege. Computer Science

Apart from putting all our expectations of strict action against the mafia solely on government action, which have been mostly inadequate, lethargic and inefficient, time has come when institutions, teachers and academics, and non-political social activists also accept their role in bringing back the moral order in the world of education.

It is common knowledge that when it comes to the preparation of a child in the family for examinations like CBSE, NEET, JEE and others, it is the entire family that gears up to assist and inspire. No disturbance or distractions could be permitted. Think of the anxiety and hope of the parents of a brilliant child, educated in a government school, from a family with scant earnings, how life-transforming could be the success in such examinations.

The challenge before the nation is to restore the reputation of its schools and higher education organisations in their competence and capability to maintain the purity of the system of examinations and assessment at each stage. The uncertainty, anxiety and the tension must not be permitted to retard the enthusiasm and self-confidence of even a single child getting ready to compete. The community of teachers must come forward as one unit to keep the miscreants out.

The NEP-2020 has prominently assured the nation, "The teacher shall be at the centre of the fundamental reforms in education system." It commits to making teachers "as the most respected and essential members of our society. The teachers must feel empowered and enabled to perform their duty effectively." The present position of teachers is well known to the system and society. It would require Herculean efforts to bring it to the appropriate level indicated above. There is no escape but to strive hard as the system has to be reformed and transformed effectively.

## AMERICA @250: MIRED IN GLOBAL CHALLENGES

MR Dua

AS Americans celebrate the nation's glorious unique landmark, turning-point and milestone occasion, its 250th birthday, it's an established reality that the United States is a country that is currently striding though most trying internal strife and challenging global conundrums in which it's deeply involved. But at the same time, the fact is that the USA at its 250th birthday, is the world's greatest economy and a towering military might. That's why America's current President, Donald J. Trump, has put himself at the center of the nation's 250th birthday celebrations though he may be struggling to 'tip the scales' for building the America of the next 250 years. Trump has made plain his intent on doing a battle with the rest of the world from his unique position of unbeatable strength; he very often threatens and humiliates small entities; remember his one-to-one meeting with Ukraine's Vladimir Zelensky, the beleaguered, war-weary and fatigued from the nearly four-year old war with Russia, and to request for enhanced defence support in war with Moscow. Trump also openly insulted Canada's former prime minister Justin Trudeau when he visited Wash-

ington, suggesting Canada's 51st state. Trump also angered India's prime minister Narendra Modi when sarcastically branded India as 'dead economy,' knowing fully that India was being openly addressed as the 'world's fastest growing economy.'

Be that as it may, though America's spirited, powerful media outlets are lending their exuberant support to Trump, a battery of influential critics and naysayers don't let the Trump administration have it all a full-blooded top claim.

For example, the gusty financial-political national daily, The Wall Street Journal, da become America's says 'Americans are in a sour mood as they celebrate 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. President Trump is unpopular; real wages are flat, and many of the political left don't even think July Fourth is the real anniversary. They prefer 1619, the year when the first batch of slaves arrived and provided colossal, plentiful support in building up the then developing America from scratch.

As of today, Americans are angry, peeved and bitterly anguished at the greatest threats to (American) liberty from WITHIN the country, such as the cracking high school system that fails to educate half of its student

population to even minimal standards. Higher education becoming out of reach for the children of middle-class families.

Second, the current prevailing progressive elite university system that sees America corrupt and exploitative. The young generation of the 2026 Gen-Z has been 'taught' to 'dislike' their country and to believe that socialism is superior to the free-market system that made their affluence possible. They often quote an Independent Senate member, Bernie Sanders, and Zohran Mandani, the Indian-origin newly-elected mayor of America's biggest city of New York, who was recently elected with a whopping electoral majority.

Three, America's current deep, razor-sharp political divisions heightened by strong, continual presence of a plethora of omnipotent, omnipresent social media with their dominant and electrifying influence through the hungry media outlets. Social media's unusually expanding and deep pressures, particularly over the Gen Z, amply demonstrate the 'signs of devolving into fundamental disputes' that can prove suicidal. Politics

Fourth, the people's multiplying demands for government free benefits are too large to

afford, but too politically entrenched to reform. Moreover, with public debt held by the public at 100% of GDP and growing, sooner or later financial markets will rebel, cautions the WSJ's noted economist, the late Mancur Olson, described the danger that, in democracies, interest groups proliferate that cause the government to calcify until it's unable to act. There are signs of the failure of Congress, America's Parliament consisting of both legislative chambers, the Senate and the House of Representatives, in this century to address the problems of the welfare-entitlement states, according to the late professor.

Meanwhile, it's important to remember that America's political influence, respect and reputation, besides its monetary and moral image, have been on the wane, particularly during its current Donald Trump's presidency.

Even a casual look at the US's leverage in international affairs, can't miss its rapid downward surge. America's European friends, the Arab world, the South-East Asian block besides Russia or China, care two hoots for American viewpoint. Trump's general trade tariffs deemed an unreasonable and arbitrary policy, have further broadened the gulf.

## Safeguarding Gen Z from the digital addiction trap

Santanu Mishra

India's digital revolution has reshaped how the country learns, works, pays and unwinds, powered by cheap data, smartphones, digital payments and online entertainment. But the next phase of Digital India must confront a harder problem: how the very ecosystem that expanded opportunity is now eroding attention, mental well-being, and productivity.

This is the backdrop to the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Rules, 2026, which came into effect on May 1, 2026. The rules mark a shift from a fragmented gaming landscape to a structured one built around user protection, age verification, time limits, parental controls, grievance redressal and a new Online Gaming Authority of India.

They also distinguish between esports, educational games, social games and online money games - the last of which is now prohibited.

From Access to Discipline India's youthful population has long been seen as its greatest economic asset. But a demographic dividend depends on more than numbers; it requires young people who can concentrate, learn, self-regulate and work productively. That capacity is under strain. Online gaming in India grew to roughly 488 million players in 2024, up 33 million from the year before - a scale at which even a small share of problematic use becomes a major public concern.

Compulsive gaming functions as a hidden tax on the demographic dividend, one that GDP figures don't capture. It shows up first as poor sleep, shrinking attention spans,



anxiety, mood swings, falling academic performance and financial strain - then spreads into classrooms, workplaces and homes. This is not speculative; government estimates presented in the Rajya Sabha

while introducing the online gaming bill put the number of people affected by online money games at nearly 45 crore, with losses exceeding Rs 20,000 crore.

The Economic Survey 2025-

26 flagged digital addiction as a drag on both mental health and productivity, framing the Online Gaming Regulation Act 2025 as a response to its impact on children and young people. The stakes are ampli-

fied by scale: India's population is around 1.46 billion, according to UNFPA's 2025 dashboard, with the 15-64 age group anchoring its future workforce, innovation and consumption.

Whether that generation stays healthy and focused, or slides into addiction, disrupted sleep and poor concentration, will shape whether the dividend becomes a growth engine or a liability. Other countries have already moved on this front - China restricts gaming for minors, South Korea once enforced a shutdown rule for under-16 users, and Vietnam caps gaming time for those under 18. Substance-Abuse

None of this means gaming itself is the enemy; esports, educational and social gaming all have real value. Notably, the WHO's ICD-11 already recognises gaming disorder, marked

by loss of control, prioritising gaming over other activities, and continuing despite harm.

Building a Culture of Responsible Gaming

Rules alone can't teach judgment. Digital wellness needs to be treated as a life skill - alongside financial literacy and civic education - covering how attention works, how apps are designed to be persuasive, and why sleep, exercise and offline relationships matter. One survey found 47% of urban Indian parents of 9-17-year-olds reported over three hours of daily screen time. Just as road safety needed public awareness beyond traffic rules, and financial inclusion needed literacy beyond bank accounts, digital wellness needs behavioural education beyond compliance. Attention and self-regulation are now economic assets - worth protecting as much as highways or data centres.