

# SC bans Class 8 textbook, orders seizure of copies

Top court initiates contempt action over a section on 'corruption' in judiciary in the NCERT textbook; remarks 'calculated move' to instil bias in children, 'heads must roll', says the Bench

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**

NEW DELHI

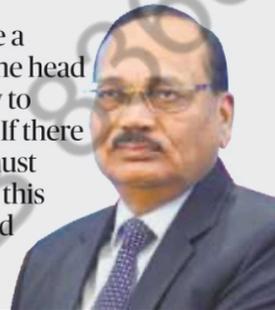
**T**he Supreme Court on Thursday said there was a “deep-rooted conspiracy” behind the “very, very calculated move” to portray the judiciary as a venal institution in a Class 8 social science textbook with “selective reference” about “corruption” in it. The top court ordered a “blanket and complete” ban on the book and the immediate seizure and sealing of each and every copy, both in digital and physical form.

The textbook was published by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Education, in February.



I would like to have a deeper probe. As the head of the judiciary, it is my duty to find out who is responsible. If there are more than one, heads must roll... I am not going to close this proceedings till I am satisfied

**SURYA KANT**  
Chief Justice of India



A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, in a *suo motu* case hearing, said the “reckless, irresponsible, motivated, contemptuous conduct and manner” of the textual depiction was meant to instil a bias against the judiciary in the “impressionable minds” of young students, and through them, to society at large and even future generations.

The Bench said that

“heads must roll” and initiated contempt action.

“All of us are holding our heads in shame,” Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said and offered the court an unconditional and unqualified apology.

The court would not let the issue fade into oblivion after a word of apology from the government or the NCERT, Chief Justice Kant said.

“This is a well-orches-

## Modi calls for accountability

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for fixing accountability over the chapter on “corruption” in judiciary in NCERT’s textbook. » **PAGE 15**

trated and planned move. I would like to have a deeper probe. As the head of the judiciary, it is my duty to find out who is responsible. If there are more than one, heads must roll. I am not going to close this proceeding till I am satisfied,” the Chief Justice told the Union government.

**CONTINUED ON**

» **PAGE 14**

**‘RSS-DRIVEN EXERCISE’**

» **PAGE 15**

# SC bans Class 8 textbook, orders seizure of copies

The Solicitor-General said the people who worked on the textbook would never be assigned the task again by the Education Ministry. If he had his way, Mr. Mehta added, they would not be employed by any other Ministry either.

Initiating contempt action, the court issued a show cause notice to both the Secretary of the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, and the NCERT Director, Dinesh Prasad Saklani, whom the court said had “defended” the “offensive content” even when the Supreme Court Secretary General, on the instruction of Chief Justice Kant, had sought an explanation.

“They fired the gun and the judiciary is bleeding today,” Chief Justice Kant said.

The court said that, *prima facie*, an examination of the book’s contents and the response from the director, seemed like a calculated move to undermine the institutional authority and demean the dignity of the judiciary. The Bench said, in its order, that the publication “washed off with one stroke of the pen the illustrious history associated with the Supreme Court, the High Courts” and their substantive contributions towards the preservation of democratic values.

“The text fails to mention the imperative role of the judiciary in upholding constitutional morality and basic structure which is the lifeblood of the Indian citizenry. The narrative of the book chooses not to delve into any of the transformative measures or initiatives to overhaul even the legal aid and streamline the ease of access to justice mechanism,” the Bench noted.

Senior members of the Bar, including senior advocates Kapil Sibal, A.M. Singhvi, and Supreme Court Bar Association president Vikas Singh, agreed that the content was “definitely deliberate”.

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# I&B Minister asks online platforms to take responsibility for content

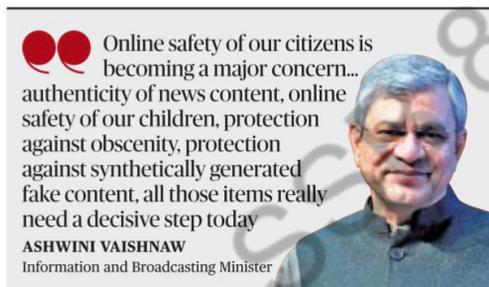
Vaishnaw flags major threats from deepfakes and synthetically generated content; urges platforms to take proactive actions against cybercrime, and ensure revenue sharing with original content creators, including conventional media, journalists

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday said online platforms must take responsibility for the content they host, act proactively against cybercrimes, and ensure online safety of citizens. They should share revenue fairly with original content creators, including the conventional media, he said.

“I will request all the platforms to rethink your revenue sharing policies because that is also one of the major concerns that the entire society today is raising. And if this is not done voluntarily, then there are so many coun-



tries which have shown the path to get it done in a legal way,” Mr. Vaishnaw said.

At the Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA) Conclave, Mr. Vaishnaw identified deepfakes and the spread of disinformation through synthetically generated content as major threats to the trust in institutions,

and a democratic way of coming together and deciding things.

“That is the inflection point where we are standing today...online safety of our citizens is becoming a major concern...authenticity of news content, online safety of our children, protection against obscenity, protection against synthet-

ically generated fake content, all those items really need a very decisive step today,” he said.

Stating that online safety of all citizens was a duty of the platforms, he said: “Non-adherence to these principles will definitely make them responsible because the nature of content has changed now, and synthetic content should not be generated without the consent of the person whose face or voice or personality has been used to create the content.”

The Minister said the platforms should check whether they were allowing any content that was illegal, causing harm to the citizens or inciting the commission of a crime. Pointing out that the virali-

ty of platform-generated/hosted content was such that completely false information could spread to millions, he said the platforms “must take the responsibility for the hosted harmful content”.

Mr. Vaishnaw said the platforms should also take proactive actions on cybercrimes. “In the recent past, we passed a law by which crores of families are saved from becoming absolutely bankrupt by losing out their money to the online money games...,” he said.

Mr. Vaishnaw stressed that the platforms must also share revenue in a fair way with original content creators, including the conventional media, journalists, influencers, professors, and researchers.

CARMAKERS, CITY GAS DISTRIBUTORS RAISE CONCERNS

# CAQM panel may back only EV registrations in Delhi-NCR by '30

ENS Economic Bureau  
New Delhi, February 26

THE LIKELY recommendation of an expert panel set up by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) that only electric cars be registered in Delhi-NCR by 2030 to tackle air pollution in the region has spooked city gas distributors and carmakers. They have called for a technology-neutral energy transition, flagging a potential increase in infrastructure costs.

Pollution from transport, including private cars and taxis, accounts for 23% of PM 2.5 concentrations, making it the largest primary source in winters, as per the CAQM's panel report, titled 'Identification of the causes for worsening AQI in Delhi-NCR'.

In its submission to CAQM, gas distributor Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL) suggested a "dual pathway" — CNG for medium and heavy vehicles and electric mobility for two-wheelers, arguing that it will offer a "balanced,

*Delhi lacks charging infra, grid capacity, and consumer financing for an all-EV mandate within 4 yrs despite being a major PV market*

cost-effective, and operationally feasible strategy for Delhi-NCR. It also suggested diesel vehicles in Delhi-NCR be phased out, and converted to CNG. "...it is important to note that CNG emits negligible particulate matter compared to other fuels... Real-world emission performance of many two-wheelers, especially those who have completed the life or poorly maintained ones shows high levels of NOx, CO, VOCs. This indicates that AQI improvement is not possible unless two-wheeler emissions are targeted through stricter testing, better compliance mechanisms, and a structured transition strategy," IGL said.

Association of Citygas Distribution Entities (ACE) said CNG is uniquely positioned as an immediately scalable, afford-

able, and reliable clean transport fuel, urging the CAQM to recognise CNG as a "distinct low-emission fuel category in regulatory communications alongside EVs as low carbon and sustainable mobility," and push EVs and CNG vehicles "through equal incentives and policy support". Queries sent to the CAQM, IGL and ACE did not elicit a response until publication.

Carmakers are concerned over the pace of transition. Industry voices warn that Delhi, despite being one of India's significant passenger vehicle markets, lacks charging infrastructure, grid capacity, and consumer financing ecosystems needed for an all-EV mandate within four years.

FULL REPORT ON

[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

# Voters go to the polls in a crucial byelection test for U.K.'s Starmer

Anything other than a victory for Labour could make it very difficult for Prime Minister Starmer to serve out his full term; a recent poll on voting intentions showed Labour at 28%, Greens at 28% and the far-right Reform UK just behind at 27%

**Sriram Lakshman**

LONDON

Voters went to the polls in the Gorton and Denton constituency in south Manchester, to choose a new MP in a three-way contest that has become a crucial test for U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Anything other than a victory for Labour's Angeli Stogia on Thursday could make it very difficult for Mr. Starmer to serve out his full term as Prime Minister. Reform's candidate for the race is a former academic and GB News presenter, Matt Goodwin, and the Green Party's can-



People arrive at a polling station at St. Peter's Church to vote in the Gorton and Denton byelection, in Manchester on Thursday. REUTERS

didate is local councillor and plumber Hannah Spencer. In the Runcorn and Helsby election in May last year, the former Conservative-turned-Reform

candidate managed to snatch the seat from Labour. A recent poll by Opinion on voting intentions showed Labour at 28%, the Greens at 28% and the far-

right nativist Reform UK party just behind at 27%. A total of 11 candidates are running for the seat, which was most recently held by Labour but became vacant after MP Andrew Gwynn had resigned on health grounds. The MP was also under parliamentary investigation for the alleged sharing of inappropriate comments on fellow lawmakers and voters on a WhatsApp group.

Since Labour won the general election in July 2024, there have been repeated skirmishes within the party over policies from welfare spending to tax reforms and a split in the vote, with progressives

voting for the Greens – instead of tactically supporting Labour – could result in a victory for Reform.

Last month, party leaders on Labour's governing body, including Mr. Starmer, had blocked the popular Greater Manchester mayor Andrew Burnham from resigning his post to contest the byelection. One of the arguments was that it would be a needless use of resources to conduct another election for the vacated mayoral seat but critics had argued that Mr. Starmer was wary of clearing a path to Westminster for Mr. Burnham and a potential challenge to his leadership.

AMERICAN FORCES GATHER IN MIDEAST; LAST CHANCE FOR DIPLOMACY

# Amid war hysteria, Iran & US hold new round of talks

Associated Press

Geneva, February 26

IRAN AND the United States were holding another round of indirect talks in Geneva on Thursday to try to reach a deal on Tehran's nuclear program and potentially avert another war as the US gathers a massive fleet of aircraft and warships in the Middle East.

US President Donald Trump wants a deal to constrain Iran's nuclear program, and he sees an opportunity while the country is struggling at home with growing dissent following nationwide protests.

Iran also hopes to avert war, but maintains it has the right to enrich uranium and does not want to discuss other issues, like its long-range missile program or support for armed groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.

If America attacks, Iran has said US military bases in the region would be considered legitimate targets, putting at risk tens of thousands of American service members. Iran has threatened to attack Israel, meaning a regional war could erupt across the Middle East.

"There would be no victory for anybody - it would be a devastating war," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told *India Today* in an interview filmed Wednesday just before he flew to Geneva.

"Since the Americans' bases are scattered through different



Oman's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi (right) with US envoy Steve Witkoff (center) and Jared Kushner, in Geneva, Switzerland, on Thursday. AP

places in the region, then unfortunately perhaps the whole region would be engaged and be involved, so it is a very terrible scenario."

The two sides held multiple rounds of talks last year that collapsed when Israel launched a 12-day war against Iran in June and the US carried out heavy strikes on its nuclear sites, leaving much of Iran's nuclear program in ruins even as the full extent of the damage remains unclear.

Araghchi is representing Iran at the talks. Steve Witkoff, a billionaire real estate developer and friend of Trump who serves as a special Mideast envoy, is heading up the US delegation with Trump's son-in-

law Jared Kushner.

The talks are again being mediated by Oman, an Arab Gulf country that's long served as an interlocutor between Iran and the West.

Araghchi met Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi after arriving in Geneva on Wednesday night. The men "reviewed the views and proposals that the Iranian side will present to reach an agreement," a report from the state-run Oman News Agency said. Al-Busaidi will pass along Iran's offer to the US on Thursday, it added.

Al-Busaidi also met with the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog.

## CIA targets Iran with recruitment drive in Farsi on social media

Washington: The US Central Intelligence Agency has posted on social media new Farsi-language instructions for Iranians wishing to securely contact the spy service.

The CIA recruitment effort comes amid a massive buildup of US military forces in the Middle East that President Donald Trump could order to attack Iran if talks with the US set for Thursday fail to reach a deal on Tehran's nuclear program.

The CIA posted its Farsi-language message on Tuesday on its X, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram and YouTube accounts.

The message is the latest in a series by the CIA aimed at enlisting sources in Iran, China, North Korea and Russia.

The agency urged Iranians wishing to make contact to "take appropriate action" to protect themselves before doing so and avoid using work computers or their phones.

The message added: "Use a new, disposable device, if possible" and "be aware of your surroundings and who may be able to see your screen or see your online activity."

# Afghanistan launches retaliatory attacks on Pakistan border posts

Earlier this week, the Taliban warned of an “appropriate and a measured response” to Pakistani airstrikes

Reuters

Kabul, February 26

PAKISTANI AND Afghan border forces clashed on Thursday night after the Taliban launched what it called retaliatory strikes on Pakistani installations, sharply escalating tensions after days of cross-border hostilities.

Afghan forces opened fire on posts in Pakistan's mountainous northwest, sparking more than two hours of fighting before Pakistani troops retaliated, Pakistani officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Both Islamabad and the Taliban administration said they had destroyed or seized opposing posts along the frontier, claims that Reuters could not independently verify.

Videos shared by Afghan security forces showed Humvees driving through dark, mountainous terrain at night, lit by flashes of gunfire. Sustained bursts of automatic fire could be heard in the background.

Separate footage released by Pakistani security sources appeared to show tracer rounds arcing across a similar barren, mountainous landscape, with sustained bursts of automatic



Local residents stand next to a damaged house at the site of a cross-border Pakistani army strike in the Behsud district of Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, on Sunday. FILE

fire echoing through the valleys.

Reuters was not immediately able to independently verify the location, timing or authenticity of the footage.

Pakistan was responding to “unprovoked fire” by Afghan forces at multiple locations along the border, the information Ministry in Islamabad said in a post on X.

It said troops delivered an “immediate and effective response”, inflicting casualties and destroying multiple posts and equipment, adding that Pakistan would take all necessary measures to safeguard its territorial integrity and citizens.

The clashes along the 2,600-km (1,615-mile) are the latest flare-up to threaten a fragile ceasefire following deadly

clashes last October.

Earlier this week, the Taliban warned it would make an “appropriate and measured response” to airstrikes launched by Pakistan over the weekend on what Islamabad said were camps of militants from Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State in Khorasan Province in eastern Afghanistan. Islamabad says TTP leaders operate from Afghan territory and use it as a safe haven to plan attacks inside Pakistan, a charge Kabul denies.

“In response to repeated provocations, large-scale offensive operations have been launched against Pakistani military positions along the Durand Line,” Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said on X.

● SEMICONDUCTOR COMPANIES RUN LOW ON SCANDIUM, 5G CHIPS AT RISK; U.S. PRESIDENT TRUMP SET TO VISIT BEIJING IN MARCH

# 'Rare earth shortages worsen in US despite trade truce'

Reuters

Montreal/Beijing/  
Washington, February 26

SUPPLIERS TO US aerospace and semiconductor firms face worsening rare earth shortages, with two turning away some clients, industry insiders said, weeks before US President Trump is expected to meet his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for a summit in Beijing.

The shortages center on rare earths such as yttrium and scandium, niche members of the family of 17 elements, which play tiny but vital roles in defence technology, aerospace and semiconductors and are almost entirely produced in China.

While Beijing has allowed many rare earth exports to resume since it imposed restrictions in April, shipments of these materials still rarely make it to the U.S. despite the October detente with Washington, Chinese customs data show. That easing of trade tensions, premised in part on China pausing its critical mineral export restrictions, will be on the table when Trump and Xi meet in Beijing in March.

A key pain point is yttrium, used in coatings that keep engines and turbines from melting at high temperatures. Without regular application of these coatings, engines can't be used.

Since Reuters first reported about yttrium shortages in No-



Semiconductor chips seen on a printed circuit board.

REUTERS

vember, prices have jumped 60% and are now about 69 times as high as a year ago. Some coatings manufacturers are also now starting to ration material, as per firm executives and traders.

Executives at two North

American firms that buy yttrium to make coatings told Reuters they have needed to temporarily pause production due to shortages. One is also now turning away smaller and offshore customers in order to conserve

supply for larger clients, which include certain engine makers.

While shortages of yttrium and scandium have not weighed on production of jet engines or chips yet, a US government official told Reuters some US manufacturers now face "shortages" of certain rare earths from China.

China exported 17 tonnes of yttrium products to the US in the eight months after controls were introduced last April versus 333 tonnes in the eight months before the measures.

Reuters spoke with two US government officials, 14 company executives and staff, traders and analysts across aerospace and semiconductors. All of them spoke to Reuters on con-

dition of anonymity except the analysts named in the story. The North American executives did not want to be named discussing internal production challenges in public. China's Ministry of Commerce did not respond to questions.

In addition to yttrium, US semiconductor makers are running low on scandium, putting production of next-generation 5G chips at risk, said Dylan Patel, founder and CEO of research firm SemiAnalysis. US chipmakers have experienced delays in receiving new scandium export licenses from China in recent months and have reached out to Washington for help, said two industry sources.