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DAILY BRIEF

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Briefs, scans the best academic platforms, national newspapers & leading think tanks to pick the most relevant articles & research. It converts them into crisp, high-impact points you can directly use in your mains answers.

PSIR OPTIONAL BY

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From Hormuz to Maghreb - the geopolitical reach of a Gulf crisis

English

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ARTICLE · MALCOLM H. KERR CARNEGIE MIDDLE EAST CENTER

From Hormuz to the Maghreb: The Geopolitical Reach of a Gulf Crisis

Morocco and Algeria, each in its own way, are having to navigate the global economic fallout of the U.S.-Israeli military campaign against Iran.

Context The Gulf chokepoint reaches all the way to the Maghreb, forcing Morocco and Algeria into opposite but equally trapped positions on their green-energy transition.

Facts

- Morocco imports 90% of its energy needs; Moroccan diesel/petrol hit $ 1.60 per litre in April 2026.
- According to World Bank, urea prices to rise by nearly 60% in 2026; FAO: fertilizer prices 15-20% higher in the first half of the year.
- The EU's CBAM for fertilizers: an "emergency brake" to suspend it under severe damage to EU's internal market.

Analytical Crux

Global South economy cannot fence off its development choices from a great-power conflict it did not start. One chokepoint half a world away pushes Morocco & Algeria into mirror-image traps. Rabat scrambling to protect a phosphate industry hooked on Gulf Sulfur, Algiers cashing a hydrocarbon windfall that locks it deeper into the rentier model it keeps promising to outgrow. The "energy transition" is sold as a tidy planned sequence of targets and milestones, but in practice it bends or breaks every time a crisis lands. The energy sovereignty for a peripheral state is less a destination it can plan towards & more a moving target reshaped by shocks that begin in the core.

Verbatim Quotes

"The product of political choices by powerful state actors trap the entire Middle East & North Africa in forever wars, with repercussions far beyond."

— Yasmine Zarhloule

FCRA Bill 2026, a threat to civil society organisations

FCRA Bill 2026, a threat to civil society organisations

P.D.T. Achary
Former Secretary General, Lok Sabha

According to the government's legislative programme for the monsoon session of Parliament, the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, has been listed for consideration. Although the Bill was included in the legislative agenda during the previous session, its consideration was postponed following widespread protests, particularly from Christian organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGO). At the time, the government made it clear that it remained committed to passing the Bill. Nevertheless, some interpreted the postponement as a sign that the government intended to defer it indefinitely or even drop it altogether. Those expectations have now been dispelled.

The politics of foreign contributions

In India, foreign contribution has always been a controversial issue. Normally, foreign contributions are allowed to support humanitarian relief and sectors such as health care, education, and environmental protection.

However, the inflow of foreign funds is regulated in all countries that permit such contributions. In India, there was no statutory framework governing foreign contributions before 1976, when the government of Indira Gandhi enacted the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) for the first time. The Act established a regulatory framework to control the acceptance and utilisation of foreign contributions and foreign hospitality. In fact, the government of the day feared, whether real or perceived, the destabilisation of India's democratic system by foreign forces inimical to India's interests. The Emergency regime was quite paranoid about the inflow of foreign money through multiple channels, including NGOs operating in the country.

The most interesting aspect of the brouhaha often raised over foreign contributions in India is that such contributions were never prohibited in general; they were always permitted to come into India. Of course, their acceptance and utilisation came under regulation, which became progressively stricter with every amendment. In 2010, the existing law was replaced by the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010. As in the 1976 Act, the primary focus of regulation under the 2010 Act was the legislature and political parties. The government's concern was the possibility of a large-scale infusion of foreign money into politics. This concern was adequately addressed in the 2010 Act, wherein provisions were made to prohibit the receipt of any form of foreign contribution by candidates for election, media personnel, public servants, judges, government employees, members of the legislature, political parties and their office-bearers, as well as organisations of a political nature.

The Act also provided for the vesting of assets created out of foreign contributions in a prescribed authority under certain circumstances and situations. It was also laid down that any person or organisation engaged in definite cultural, economic, educational, religious, or social programmes must obtain a certificate of registration, without which no foreign contribution could be received. One point that deserves mention in the context of these laws is that, although they were regulatory in nature, they were not unduly harsh on the recipients. Foreign funds were allowed to flow into the country for a variety of humanitarian purposes, under the prescribed regulatory framework.

Sledgehammer effect

But when we look at the present Bill, it gives us a different picture. It in fact has a sledgehammer effect on NGOs and religious and cultural organisations.

The Act of 2010 contains provisions for the registration of applicants and the grant of certificates to receive foreign contributions. There are different conditions under which such a certificate is issued. One of these conditions is that the applicant has not been prosecuted, convicted, or found to have indulged in activities aimed at religious conversion through inducement or force, either directly or indirectly, from one faith to another. Another condition is that the applicant has not been prosecuted or convicted for creating communal tension, disharmony, or similar disturbances. Under the Bill of 2026, if such a certificate is cancelled, the foreign contribution received by the applicant, along with all assets created out of that foreign contribution, shall vest in a designated authority.

Section 16A(2) makes it clear that even if an asset has been created only partly out of foreign contributions, the whole asset shall vest in the designated authority. Initially, such vesting shall be provisional. However, if the applicant fails to obtain a fresh certificate or to have the certificate renewed or restored within the prescribed time frame, the foreign contribution and the assets created from it shall vest permanently in the designated authority. The authority may then transfer such assets to any ministry, department, or agency of the central government, a State government, or a local authority. It may also dispose of the assets through sale, auction, or any other prescribed method, and credit the sale proceeds, together with any unutilised foreign contribution, to the Consolidated Fund of India.

Thus, the cancellation of a certificate becomes a crucial factor in completely ruining an organisation that functions primarily on the strength of foreign contributions. It is, therefore, instructive to examine the circumstances under which a certificate authorising the receipt of foreign contributions can be cancelled by the government.

Clause (1)(c) of Section 14 of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, provides that a certificate may be cancelled if, in the opinion of the central government, it is necessary, in the public interest, to do so. The consequence of such cancellation is that the organisation loses its authority to receive foreign contributions, its assets created out of such contributions may be taken over, and its activities may effectively come to a halt. This provision confers unfettered powers on the government to cancel a certificate at any time. The term "public interest" is vague. As the government is the custodian of public interest, it can readily justify its actions on that ground. Cancellation of the certificate would result in the vesting of the foreign contribution and the assets created out of it in the designated authority. Depending on the nature of the organisation, such assets could even include places of worship.

Cancellation of a certificate may also result if an individual or organisation is prosecuted in connection with a case alleging religious conversion through force or inducement. Experience suggests that it is very easy for a person determined to have the certificate of a religious organisation cancelled to file a complaint in a police station or in a court alleging forcible religious conversion. Consequently, this provision has immense potential for misuse, particularly against minority religious groups.

A rather unusual provision in this Bill is that if a person surrenders a certificate of registration, the entire foreign contribution remaining with the person, along with all the assets created out of such contribution, will vest in the designated authority. It is difficult to understand the rationale behind this provision. A person or organisation that has availed of foreign contributions and created assets from them may, after some time, decide that it no longer requires any further foreign contributions and may therefore surrender its certificate. However, under Clause 16A(1)(b) of the Bill, all the assets created out of the foreign contribution, together with any unutilised portion of such contribution, shall vest in the authority.

Exemption clause

Finally, Clause 16L exempts any organisation, class of organisations, or person from the operation of this Bill if the government considers such an exemption to be in the public interest. Although the purpose of this clause appears to be obvious, the concern is that it may be vulnerable to challenge under Article 14 of the Constitution, which guarantees equality before the law. The clause neither identifies any intelligible differentia that distinguishes the favoured class of organisations or persons from those to whom the law applies in its entirety, nor establishes a rational nexus between such differential treatment and the object sought to be achieved by the legislation. The exemption of individuals or organisations is left entirely to the government's opinion that such action is expedient in the public interest. It is clear from the overall scheme of these amendments that the state seeks to eliminate organisations active in the educational, cultural, environmental, and charitable sectors on account of certain deep-seated prejudices.

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 expands state control over NGOs and civil society

Context

FCRA bill 2026 changes FCRA's character from a law that regulated foreign money in politics into one that can financially cripple NGOs & religious or cultural bodies.

Facts

- Clause 16 A (1) (b) : all assets created from foreign contribution, plus any unutilised portion, vest in the authority.
- Section 14 (1) (c) : the centre can cancel a certificate merely on its opinion that it is necessary in public interest.
- Section 16 A (2) : an asset only partly built from foreign contributions vests wholly in the state.

Analytical Crux

A law built to keep foreign money out of elections & parties has been reworked so that it can financially strangle NGOs & religious bodies by vesting their assets, even assets only partly foreign-funded in the state. The deliberately loose i.e. "public interest" trigger for cancellation, and an exemption clause that lets the government hand-pick who the law spares. Regulations is a legitimate state function, but once regulatory discretion becomes unfettered and open-ended, it chills associational freedom & can be aimed selectively, minorities first. That is the old tension between the state's claim to guard "public interest" and the autonomy a democratic civil society needs to breathe.

Verbatim Quotes

"The term 'public interest' is vague. As the government is the custodian of public interest, it has a sledgehammer effect on NGOs & religious & cultural organisations.

— P.D.T. Achary

An 850 seat Lok Sabha means more MPs, less Parliament

An 850-seat Lok Sabha means more MPs, less Parliament

THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

THE GOVERNMENT'S seeming determination to proceed with a revised delimitation that drastically increases the size of the Lok Sabha to 824 or 850 seats marks a disastrous watershed in India's institutional architecture. The underlying justification offered by the government is purely mathematical: The size of the Lower House cannot remain frozen at the 543-seat limit established in 1972, since when the nation's population has more than doubled. Yet, beneath this seemingly democratic argument lies a profound hazard.

Amid all the other major challenges of the looming delimitation exercise — notably the severe political and federal friction caused by penalising southern states for successful population control, while disproportionately rewarding the northern Hindi heartland for its failures — a basic question remains unaddressed: Does it make any sense to have a legislature so massive and structurally unwieldy? No established democracy does.

Every mature democratic system recognises that a Parliament must be capped at a size that permits genuine legislative scrutiny, cohesive debate, and individual member participation. By choosing to push the Lok Sabha towards 850 seats (a size no other democratic legislature has), India is charting an anomalous and dangerous course. Democratic theory and global practice consistently show that beyond a threshold, a legislature ceases to function as a deliberative body and deteriorates into a chaotic colosseum where only a select few can speak, while the rest are reduced to passive spectators, mere numbers on voting machines.

After all, the United States House of Representatives was legally capped at 435 in 1929, when the United States population stood at 120 million. Today, the American population has tripled to over 335 million, yet the size of the House remains at 435. Americans recognise that increasing the number of representatives to match population growth would paralyse the legislative process. Instead, each member simply represents a larger number of voters, relying on robust local staff, modern communication, and a highly organised committee system to bridge the governance gap. Indian MPs can do that too.

The realities of an 850-member Lok Sabha are devastating for individual legislators. In a standard parliamentary session, time is an unyielding, scarce resource. Consider the daily Question Hour or a standard legislative debate on a complex bill. If a debate is allocated four hours, and time is distributed according to party strength, at most 15-20 MPs out of 850 will be able to participate. In practice, backbenchers and members of smaller parties will be mostly silenced.

With an oversized Parliament, a vast majority of MPs will never get to ask a question, initiate a private member's bill, or participate in a substantive debate during their entire five-year tenure. They will be transformed into silent placeholders, raising their hands when the party commands. This will worsen an already distressing trend in Indian governance: The shrinking role (and systemic degradation) of Parliament. In recent years, the number of days Parliament meets annually has steadily declined, bills have been passed via voice vote within minutes without standing committee scrutiny, and the Opposition is frequently sidelined. Flooding the chamber with hundreds of additional members will accelerate this marginalisation, burying quality under the sheer weight of quantity.

An oversized legislature where the vast majority of members have no voice suits an executive that prefers compliance over scrutiny. When a Parliament becomes too large to debate, it naturally cedes its oversight power to the executive cabinet. The individual lawmaker loses leverage, and the House is reduced to a notice board and a rubber stamp.

This structural transformation bears an ominous resemblance to the authoritarian legislative model in Beijing or Pyongyang. Specifically, an 850-seat Lok Sabha risks becoming a desi version of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference or the North Korean Supreme People's Assembly — enormous, unwieldy bodies designed to look grand, representative, and pluralistic, but reduced to applauding set speeches by the Great Leader. Their sheer size guarantees they cannot engage in real legislative negotiation or challenge the ruling executive. They exist to perform consensus, not to build it through debate. If India builds a massive legislature where MPs are stripped of their voices due to the arithmetic of time constraints, it will have successfully hollowed out its democracy, replacing a vibrant deliberative body with a performative pageant. Far better to save the extra expenditure on salaries, accommodation, travel and pensions for 300 more MPs and instead build a serious office building for the existing MPs near Parliament, as every other democracy provides its legislators.

An oversized legislature where the vast majority of members have no voice suits an executive that prefers compliance over scrutiny

The government's primary defence — that a single MP cannot effectively represent 2 to 3 million citizens — is a fallacy that misinterprets the role of a national lawmaker. An MP's constitutional duty is national legislation, foreign policy, macroeconomic governance, and holding the Union executive accountable. They are not municipal councillors or MLAs. If India established a sharp, institutional demarcation between the roles of Members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs), a smaller, focused group of MPs could easily represent large constituencies. Local grievances, municipal infrastructure, and civic amenities fall squarely within the domain of state legislatures and local panchayats or municipal corporations under the 73rd and 74th Amendments; as population increases, expand the number of MLAs! If local governance frameworks are empowered, the local citizen does not need to look to an MP for everyday civic needs. By keeping the Lok Sabha compact and focused on national governance, and leaving localised representation to state and municipal levels, India could maintain a highly efficient, effective, and truly participative federal structure, without ruining the functionality of Parliament.

The proposal to expand the Lok Sabha to 850 would create a House that is not a forum for governance but an echo chamber for the government. As we contemplate the future of our democracy, we must realise that true representation lies in the quality of debate, the rigour of legislative committee scrutiny, and the empowerment of local levels of government — not in creating an unwieldy mega-chamber that replaces democratic discourse with empty theatre.

The writer is a fourth-term Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram

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Context

Expanding the Lok Sabha to 824-850 seats through delimitation would hand still more power to the executive, rather than deepen representation.

Facts

- 543 seat size was established in 1972 : revised delimitation that raises the Lok Sabha to 824 or 850 seats.
- U.S. population over 335 million : U.S. House capped at 435 since 1929 and members backed by staff and a strong committee system.
- Oversized legislatures : led to executive dominance, likening an 850-seat House to China's People's Political Consultative conference & North Korea's Supreme People's assembly.

Analytical Crux

More MPs does not mean more democracy, it means less parliament. In a chamber of 850, only a handful can ever speak, the majority become silent voting-fodder & the House slides from a deliberative body into a rubber stamp for the executive. The danger is institutional, not numerical: an oversized legislature naturally surrenders oversight to the cabinet, echoing the performative assemblies of Beijing & Pyongyang. There should be division of labour i.e. MPs for national legislation, foreign policy & executive accountability; MLAs & local bodies for everyday civic needs. The representation is judged by the quality of scrutiny and not the size of the chamber.

Verbatim Quotes

"True representation lies in the quality of debate, the rigour of legislative committee scrutiny & the empowerment of local levels of government - not in creating an unwiedly mega-chamber that replaces democratic discourse with empty theatre."

UPSC LINK

GS PAPER II, 2025: "Civil Society Organizations are often perceived as being anti-State actors than non-State actors. Do you agree? Justify."

PSIR PAPER II, 2025: "Parliamentary committees are indispensable to the legislative process. It provides for the opportunity for cross-pollination between the two chambers of the Parliament. Discuss."

GS PAPER II, 2025: "In contemporary development models, decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities are not located close to the source of information and execution defeating the objectives of development." Critically evaluate.

PSIR PAPER I, 2024: "Deliberative democracy seeks to promote democratic decision making about public issues among the citizens." Discuss.

PSIR PAPER II, 2023: "Critically examine the impact of Globalisation on the developing countries of the world."

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