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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 15 July 2026

THE DANGERS OF BEING A COOL TEACHER

- A new kind of teacher has emerged in 2026, one celebrated by parents and students for explaining lessons through trending audio, going live on Instagram at night for "real talk," and replying to student DMs.
- While the intent behind such behaviour is often warm, being a "cool teacher" increasingly means becoming a content creator.
- This **shift from educator to influencer** is quietly eroding a crucial structure in a child's life: the boundary between adult and child.
- This article highlights the emerging challenges posed by the growing trend of teachers becoming social media influencers.

The Legal Architecture Around Teacher-Student Relationships

- India's legal framework around teacher-student interactions is not accidental:
 - The **POCSO Act, 2012** imposes specific statutory duties on teachers.
 - The doctrine of **loco parentis** imposes a judicially recognised duty of care on teachers.
 - The **Juvenile Justice Act, 2015** imposes general duties on persons in charge of a child, which can extend to teachers in some circumstances.
- Crucially, this duty of care does not come with a "digital off-switch."
- When a teacher follows a student on social media, sends late-night messages, or comments on personal posts, the adult-child boundary carefully maintained offline **dissolves online**.

The Grooming Risk

- Grooming doesn't usually start with obvious harm. It works slowly, by using access to a child, building trust, and gradually breaking down normal boundaries.
- Even if a teacher messages a student with no bad intention at all, this kind of behaviour can still create the same warning signs as grooming.
- That's why keeping clear boundaries matters, no matter how good teacher's intentions are.

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- Also, these casual chats don't always stay private. They can be saved, shared, or shown later as evidence in a POCSO case.

Teaching as Performance

- A subtler danger lies in how teaching, once turned into content, begins obeying the logic of social media algorithms, logic that rewards outrage, oversimplification, and para-social intimacy.
- The teacher transforms from a **symbol of institutional authority into a personal brand dependent on likeability**.
- In this environment, enforcing discipline or giving honest, critical feedback becomes a threat to one's online image.
- Recent research distinguishes genuine relational teaching from performative, institutionally-driven approaches, though this remains a conceptual distinction without confirmed data linking it to outcomes like grade inflation.
- Emotional "candid sessions" streamed live risk monetising student vulnerability rather than building authentic connection.

The Way Forward

- The solution is not a return to rigid, fear-based pedagogy, but a middle path with enforceable safeguards: no personal following of students, no DMs, no late-night Lives, and no classroom reels on personal accounts.
- Teachers must understand that engagement-driven digital platforms are **not neutral educational tools**.
- Equally, schools must protect teachers from being screen-recorded, misrepresented, or harassed online, recognising that vulnerability in this relationship runs both ways.

Conclusion

- A teacher's purpose has never been to be liked, but to be trusted.
- As classrooms increasingly meet algorithms, safeguarding the adult-child boundary must take precedence over online validation, protecting both students' dignity and the sanctity of the teaching profession itself.

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INDIA-U.S. DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY TIES — BIG AMBITIONS, LITTLE DELIVERY

- India–United States defence cooperation has expanded significantly over the past two decades, reflecting growing strategic convergence in the Indo-Pacific.
 - Since 2002, India has procured over \$22 billion worth of U.S. defence equipment, including Apache and Chinook helicopters, C-17 and C-130J transport aircraft, **P-8I** maritime patrol aircraft, and **M777 howitzers**.
 - These acquisitions have enhanced India's military capabilities and established the United States as a major defence supplier.
 - However, meaningful **technology transfer** and domestic manufacturing have remained limited, keeping the relationship largely transactional.

Vision, Stagnation & Other Challenges in US-India Defence Ties

- **Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI)**
 - Launched in 2012, the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) aimed to promote joint development and production of defence technologies.
 - Despite extensive consultations, it produced few tangible outcomes and gradually lost momentum.
- **Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)**
 - Introduced in 2022, iCET expanded cooperation to artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, semiconductors, biotechnology, telecommunications, drones, and resilient supply chains.
 - Nevertheless, several flagship defence projects, including the F414 engine programme, continue to face implementation challenges.
- **India–United States Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X)**
 - The India–United States Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), launched in 2023 to connect defence start-ups, academia, and industry, has yet to produce significant co-development outcomes.

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- **The Technology Transfer Divide**

- The core challenge lies in the contrasting approaches of both countries.
- India views defence partnerships as instruments for strengthening **indigenous manufacturing**, building domestic technological capabilities, and advancing **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
- In contrast, the United States considers advanced defence technologies strategic assets protected under the **International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR)**, which impose strict restrictions on transferring sensitive technologies and manufacturing expertise.

Future Prospects

- The proposed **Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA)** represents the next major opportunity to deepen industrial cooperation by granting reciprocal access to defence procurement markets.
- However, India's developing defence industry could face intense competition from larger and technologically superior American firms.
- Without adequate safeguards, such reciprocity may reinforce existing asymmetries instead of fostering balanced industrial collaboration.

Conclusion

- India–United States defence cooperation has made remarkable progress in **strategic partnership**, defence trade, military exercises, and logistics cooperation.
- However, initiatives such as **DTTI**, **iCET**, **INDUS-X**, and the **GE F414** programme demonstrate that political ambition has not yet translated into meaningful industrial outcomes.
- Bridging this gap requires greater policy alignment, mutual trust, and mechanisms that balance India's objective of **self-reliance** with U.S. security and export-control concerns.
- Only then can the partnership evolve from a buyer-seller relationship into a genuine **defence-industrial alliance** capable of supporting long-term strategic objectives.

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DRAFT NATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH POLICY 2026

- The Department of Health Research has released the Draft National Health Research Policy 2026, which represents the first attempt at a unified national framework spanning all areas of health research.
- The policy has been opened for public comments until 27 July, after which it will be finalised.
- The draft policy aims to:
 - Align scientific research more closely with disease burden and public health priorities
 - Promote indigenous innovation
 - Enable evidence-based policymaking
 - Ensure measurable outcomes
 - Address fragmentation and regional disparities
 - Speed up translation of research into healthcare and policy

Key Proposals of the Draft Policy

- **Massive Increase in Research Funding**
 - The draft proposes a six-fold increase in government spending on health research:
 - Current: 0.024% of GDP
 - By 2037: 0.072% of GDP
 - By 2047: 0.15% of GDP
 - While this would bring India closer to high-income countries' investment levels, it would still remain below their current weighted average of 0.27%.
- **Priority Research Areas**
 - The draft identifies key priority areas including: Tuberculosis, Antimicrobial resistance (AMR), Vector-borne diseases, Cancer, Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), Mental health, Anaemia, Child malnutrition, Women's health, Maternal and neonatal mortality, Primary healthcare and Emergency care

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- **Simplified Ethics and Regulatory Framework**
 - Simplified ethics approvals for multicentre studies.
 - Establishment of a National Research Integrity Office (NRIO).
 - Responsible use of artificial intelligence in health research.
 - Expanded shared access to laboratories, biobanks, and other publicly funded research facilities.
- **Bigger Role for States and Private Sector**
 - The policy seeks to expand health research beyond a few leading institutions by:
 - Strengthening research capacity in medical colleges.
 - Encouraging greater participation from private hospitals, startups, and industry.
 - Improving collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and healthcare providers.
 - Requiring states to prepare their own health research agendas based on local disease patterns.

Expert Views

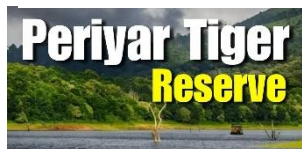
- According to experts in global health and bioethics, the draft is a step towards making health research more responsive to the country's needs.
- The draft covers the entire research pathway from identifying priorities to generating evidence, innovation, implementation, and measuring real-world impact.
- It places ethical and scientific integrity, community participation, and accountability at the centre.
- The proposal to expand research beyond a few institutions and involve states in setting priorities is welcome. However, the policy's goals will require sustained investment and effective implementation.
- It should help address challenges such as inadequate research infrastructure, research misconduct, delays in fellowship payments to research scholars, and timely implementation.

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PERIYAR TIGER RESERVE (PTR)



- It is located in **Kerala**.
- It is set high at **Cardamom Hills** and **Pandalam Hills** of the **Western Ghats**, adjacent to the border with Tamil Nadu.
- It surrounds the **Periyar Lake**, which was created in **1895** by building a **dam** across the **Periyar River**.
- **Rivers**: Two major rivers, namely **Periyar** and **Pamba**, drain the area.
- **Dams**: **Mullaperiyar Dam** is located within the PTR.
- **Tribes**: It is home to many tribal communities, including the **Mannans** and the **Palians**.

Vegetation: It mainly comprises **tropical evergreen forests**, **semi- evergreen forests**, **moist deciduous forests**, **transitional fringe evergreen forests**, **grasslands**, and **eucalyptus plantations**.

Flora: It includes **Banyan**, **Sacred Fig**, **Teak**, **Royal Poinciana**, **Kino**, **Sandalwood**, **Rosewood**, **Mangoes**, **Bamboos**, **Jacarandas**, **Jamun**, **Tamarind**, **Gloriosa lily**, and many more.

Fauna:

- Several species of mammals are found here like **Tiger**, **Gaur**, **Elephant**, **Sambar**, **Barking Deer**, **Indian Wild Dog**, **Mouse Deer**, **Wild Pig**, **Indian giant squirrel**, **Jungle cat**, **sloth bear**, **Nilgiri Tahr**, ETC.
- The **major four species of primates** are also found at Periyar – the rare **lion-tailed macaque**, the **Nilgiri Langur**, **Gee's Golden Langur**, **Common Langur**, and **Bonnet Macaque**.
- It is also being considered as the habitat of the elusive **Nilgiri Tahr**.

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INDIAN GREY HORNBILL



• The Indian gray hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) is a **tropical bird** that can be found on the Indian subcontinent.

- It is **commonly sighted in pairs**.
- These birds **are known to be arboreal**, e. spend most of their time on tall trees, but may descend for food and to collect mud pellets for nesting.
- **Habitat:** Occurs in **deciduous forests**, open woodlands and thorn forest as well as rural cultivation and urban gardens and parks.
- **Distribution:** Indian subcontinent; found from **north-east Pakistan and south Nepal** east to north-west Bangladesh and south **throughout most of India** except in **Assam**.
- **Behaviour:** They have various social activities, including **bill-grappling and aerial jousting**. Indian grey hornbills are quite noisy producing squealing calls.
- **Diet:** The food is mainly **fruits, particularly figs**.
- **Ecological Role:** They play an essential role in the ecosystem as **prime dispersers of seeds**, helping regenerate forests by transporting seeds of fruit-bearing trees across large areas.
- **Conservation status:**
 - **IUCN:** Least Concern.

NEW SPECIES OF BEES



Elaphropoda Triangulata and Habropoda Adi:

- They are two new species of **solitary bees**.
- They were discovered in **Arunachal Pradesh**.

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- **Elaphropoda triangulata** is named after the **triangle-shaped markings** on its **abdomen**.
- **Habropoda adi** is named after the **Adi indigenous community of Arunachal Pradesh**, which inhabits the region where the bees were collected.
- They belong to the bee **subfamily Anthophorinae**, which consists largely of **ground-nesting solitary bees**.
 - Solitary bees are **important pollinators** that help maintain healthy ecosystems and support agriculture.
 - **Unlike honeybees, they do not live in colonies** and usually **nest alone**.
- These bees were **collected using Malaise traps**, a **passive sampling method** that **captures flying insects over extended periods** and is particularly effective in detecting elusive or low-density species that conventional netting often misses.

MALDIVES



- **Location:** It is an **island country of South Asia** located in the **Arabian Sea region of the Indian Ocean**.
 - It is located to the **southwest of India**.
- **Capital City:** Male
- **Geographical Features of Maldives:**
 - **Topography:** The topography of each of the islands vary from mostly sand to marshy wetlands.
 - It is **separated from Lakshadweep** by the **Eight Degree Channel**, a crucial sea route for India's maritime movement.
 - **Coral Reefs:** It is home to the **7th largest coral reef system** in the world.
 - **Gan** is the country's largest island and is **located in the Laamu Atoll**.