

MINIMUM GOVERNMENT, MAXIMUM GOVERNANCE

The mantra of "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance" has become a defining philosophy in contemporary public administration, especially in India. Coined and popularized in recent years, this concept calls for a streamlined, efficient, and accountable government that minimizes unnecessary interference and maximizes service delivery and governance outcomes for its citizens. It emphasizes reducing red tape, promoting transparency, fostering innovation, and ensuring that government machinery works for the people rather than becoming a cumbersome hurdle.

Governments worldwide, particularly in developing countries, have often been accused of being overly bureaucratic, inefficient, and laden with excessive regulation. Such governments tend to create bottlenecks, delay processes, and increase the cost of doing business and accessing services for the common man. This not only stifles economic growth but also erodes public trust in institutions.

India's own experience has demonstrated the challenges posed by a large, complex, and often inefficient bureaucracy. Legacy systems, outdated processes, and excessive governmental intervention have hampered development, innovation, and entrepreneurship. It has also often resulted in corruption, inefficiency, and delays in public service delivery. This scenario called for a new approach - one that reduces the government's footprint without compromising its role in ensuring law, order, and public welfare.

Minimum Government does not imply reducing the government's size to the point of inefficiency or neglecting its responsibility towards citizens. Instead, it refers to a government that intervenes only where necessary - acting as a facilitator rather than a regulator - and leaves maximum space for private enterprise, civil society, and market forces to thrive.

The core idea is to eliminate unnecessary regulatory burdens, reduce overlapping jurisdictions, automate processes, and cut down procedural delays. This means simplifying laws, deregulating sectors where government control is redundant, and enabling a business-friendly environment that encourages investment, job creation, and innovation.

While Minimum Government focuses on reducing unnecessary interference, Maximum Governance emphasizes improving the quality, effectiveness, and accountability of government functions. Good governance means delivering public services efficiently, transparently, and equitably.

This includes adopting modern technology such as digital platforms for governance, which allow easy access to services, real-time monitoring of projects, and data-driven policymaking. For instance, initiatives like the Digital India campaign have enabled millions of people to access government services online, reducing the need for physical visits and thereby minimizing opportunities for corruption.

Furthermore, Maximum Governance stresses decentralization and empowering local governments and institutions. This brings decision-making closer to the people and enables tailored solutions that address local challenges more effectively.

India's recent governance reforms provide practical illustrations of this philosophy. The implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) simplified the indirect tax regime, eliminating multiple levies and making compliance easier. Similarly, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) has streamlined the resolution of distressed assets, enhancing the ease of doing business.

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) has revolutionized welfare distribution by transferring subsidies directly into beneficiaries' accounts, minimizing leakages. The push for self-certification and reducing inspections under the Ease of Doing Business reforms reflect the trust the government places in businesses, signaling a shift towards minimum interference.

At the grassroots level, digital platforms such as the e-Municipality services, online land records, and digital grievance redressal mechanisms have improved transparency and accountability, directly benefiting citizens.

WAVES OF AMBITION

Khelo India Water Sports: Charting a Pan-India Voyage from Kashmir to Kanyakumari

From serene lakes to majestic rivers, India's youth are poised to make waves on the Olympic stage

■ DR. SHAHID ALI KHAN



India is steadily making its mark on the global sports map and water sports are emerging as a key avenue for nurturing talent and achieving Olympic glory. The recent Khelo India Water Sports festival held in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir from August 21-23, 2025 marks an important milestone in the journey of this country toward realizing this vision. By choosing Dal Lake as the venue for this first-ever water sports edition under the Khelo India program, the Government of

Jammu & Kashmir, working closely with central sports authorities, has demonstrated its commitment to advancing sports while promoting tourism simultaneously. This initiative is a clarion call to young athletes across India to embrace water sports as a professional pursuit, while leveraging the abundant natural resources of India.

The festival showcased a range of disciplines, including kayaking, canoeing, and rowing, bringing together participants from multiple states. The presence of eminent sports authorities from both the Union and the State Government lent credibility and direction to the event, ensuring that planning, execution and athlete support were of the good standard. The proactive approach of Jammu & Kashmir Government in selecting such a prestigious platform for water sports has provided the perfect stage to highlight the scenic lakes and rivers of Kashmir, demonstrating how natural landscapes can be converted into sporting arenas that inspire both athletes and spectators. The central sports authorities' involvement further affirms the significance of this first-ever national-level event, reflecting a vision that goes beyond regional considerations and positions India as a unified sporting nation with the potential for Olympic success.

While speaking with Bilquis Mir about the event, she highlighted India's immense potential in water sports. A pioneer in the field and a jury member at the Paris 2024 Olympics, Bilquis observed the festival as Competition Manager and shared her insights on athlete development, training methodologies and infrastructure needs. She noted that India's abundant natural water resources and

youthful population could produce world-class athletes. With professional training programs, regular exposure to international competitions and expert coaching, she emphasized, the nation could emerge as a strong contender in multiple water sports disciplines at the Asian Games and Olympics. Her observations reinforce the notion that events like the Khelo India Water Sports festival are foundational long-term sporting strategy to India.

The festival also serves as a model for other states across the country. India is blessed with a wide variety of natural water bodies, lakes, rivers, reservoirs and coastal stretchesthat remain largely untapped for sports development. From Chilika Lake in Odisha, the expansive Vembanad backwaters in Kerala, and the Brahmaputra in Assam, to the Pong Dam in Himachal Pradesh, the Ganga in Rishikesh and the coastal waters of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, every region offers a unique environment for water sports training and competitions. By creating a pan-India ecosystem where multiple water bodies are developed as sporting hubs, the central government and state authorities can ensure sustained talent growth and competitive excellence.

Central to this initiative is the vision of involving youth from all corners of India. The Olympic dream requires a national pool of athletes, and the strategy is clear: identify, train and expose young talent to international standards. By moving beyond singular events and expanding the reach of water sports to every state, India can cultivate a culture of excellence and instill a competitive spirit that aligns with global benchmarks.

The role of government authorities, both at the state / UT and central levels, is crucial in providing infrastructure, training programs and financial support. Their coordinated efforts exemplify how strategic planning and execution can transform natural resources into arenas for national achievement.

The foresight of Jammu & Kashmir Government in hosting this event in Srinagar exemplifies how regional strengths can be leveraged for national gain. Dal Lake's calm waters provided an ideal venue for athletes to hone their skills, while its scenic surroundings elevated the festival's profile, attracting media coverage and public interest alike. The central sports authorities decision to actively support and supervise the event illustrates their recognition of the festival's broader significance. This synergy between UT and national entities demon-

strates a shared commitment to nurturing talent, building infrastructure and inspiring a generation of athletes who can aspire to international success.

Athlete development is at the core of this initiative. Structured training programs, as highlighted by Bilquis Mir, are essential to transform potential into performance. Her emphasis on expert coaching, exposure to competitive environments and disciplined practice highlights the importance of a systematic approach. India's water sports landscape is evolving rapidly, but sustainable growth requires meticulous planning, investment in infrastructure and continuous monitoring. Government support, coupled with expert guidance, ensures that young athletes have the tools and opportunities necessary to excel at national and international levels.

Moreover, the festival sends a message about the transformative power of sports in uniting the country. By involving participants from across India, it promotes cultural exchange, teamwork and shared learning. Athletes from different regions can learn from each other's experiences, adapt to diverse water conditions, and cultivate resilience and adaptability, qualities indispensable for international competitions. The pan-India nature of this initiative strengthens the foundation for a competitive sports culture, reinforcing the idea that excellence is achieved through collective effort, planning and continuous practice.

Water sports also offer broader societal benefits. They encourage environmental awareness, promote physical fitness and create opportunities for tourism and local economies.

Kashmir, with its pristine lakes and rivers, has the potential to become a hub for both national and international water sports events. Similar possibilities exist across India, from Kerala's backwaters to Odisha's coastal lagoons. By prioritizing water sports and investing in infrastructure, governments can simultaneously achieve sporting, economic and cultural objectives.

The success of this festival is a testament to planning, supervision and the enthusiasm of participants.

The central sports authorities' involvement ensured adherence to national standards.

Their guidance reinforced the importance of structured talent pathways, while the Jammu & Kashmir Government provided the logistical support necessary to create a sporting environment.

Together, they have set a benchmark for future water sports initiatives, demonstrating how state and national collaboration can yield exceptional results. As India looks toward the Olympics, the Khelo India Water Sports festival serves as a stepping stone. It signals the nation's intent to harness its natural resources, engage its youth and provide opportunities for athletes to compete at the highest level.

Looking forward, the challenge is to replicate this model across the country. States with untapped water bodies must be encouraged to develop facilities, train athletes and host competitions. By creating a network of regional hubs, India can ensure continuous talent development, while offering athletes diverse experiences across different water conditions.

The festival also emphasizes the importance of visibility and recognition. Media coverage, public engagement and government acknowledgment elevate the profile of water sports, motivating young athletes to pursue these disciplines seriously. By highlighting achievements, providing role models and creating aspirational pathways, the authorities inspire the next generation to dream big and work diligently. Water sports, once considered niche, are now emerging as a priority within India's national sports agenda.

The Khelo India Water Sports festival in Srinagar represents a significant step in India's journey toward Olympic excellence. It exemplifies how collaboration between the Jammu & Kashmir Government and central sports authorities can transform natural resources into platforms for national achievement. With insights from the experts and the enthusiastic participation of youth from across the country, the initiative promises to cultivate a culture of water sports excellence. By harnessing India's diverse water bodies from Kashmir's serene lakes to Kerala's vast backwaters and beyond, the nation is charting a course that not only nurtures athletes but also inspires the country to aspire toward global sporting success.

The festival is a model for pan-India engagement, a showcase of visionary planning and a testament to what India can achieve when talent, opportunity and strategic support converge. It is a celebration of youth, nature and ambition and a clear statement that India is ready to ride the waves toward Olympic glory.

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Chasoti Cloudburst Tragedy: A testament to resilience and Administration's Response

■ KALASH NATH



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ays after the devastating Chasoti cloudburst, the scene remains grim and haunting, with shattered homes and scarred landscapes testifying to the massive destruction. Grief-stricken families, weary rescuers, and the lingering stench of devastation paint a heart-wrenching and chaotic picture of the aftermath.

On the afternoon of August 14, 2025, a sudden cloudburst struck Chasoti Village in Block Paddar of District Kishtwar, Jammu and Kashmir, triggering massive flash floods and landslides. The intense downpour washed away lives, homes, and vital infrastructure within minutes, leaving the region in ruins.

According to official records, 69 bodies have been recovered so far. Several remain missing, and many others are injured. The toll is feared to rise further as search and rescue operations continue in the difficult terrain.

The district civil and police administration, in coordination with locals, NGOs, the Indian Army, NDRF, SDRF, and allied agencies, immediately launched a large-scale rescue operation. Despite hostile conditions, rescue teams have been working round the clock, often risking their own lives to evacuate survivors, retrieve bodies, and provide relief.

One of the most severe setbacks was the washing away of the nearly completed Chasoti Bridge, a crucial link on the Machail Road. This loss temporarily cut off the affected area, complicating relief efforts. However, the Indian Army, in a remarkable feat of determination, constructed a temporary Bailey bridge within five days, restoring essential connectivity for relief teams and residents.

On the day of the disaster, as soon as the news reached district headquarters, Hon'ble LOP/MLA Paddar-Nagseni Sh. Sunil Sharma, Deputy Commissioner Sh. Pankaj Kumar Sharma (JKAS), and SSP Nareish Singh (JKPS) rushed to the site. They have remained stationed in Chasoti for the past seven days, personally supervising rescue and relief operations.

The following day, Divisional Commissioner

Jammu Sh. Ramesh Kumar (IAS) and DIG DKR Sh. Shridhar Patil (IPS) visited the site. Notably, DIG DKR has remained stationed in Paddar for the past seven days, overseeing ground-level efforts.

Under the directions of the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor, the ground-level situation has been closely monitored.

Senior IAS and IPS officers visited the affected areas as per a pre-decided roster, ensuring continued administrative oversight and coordination of relief efforts.

Among the key figures in the crisis response was the silent worker, Sub-Divisional Magistrate Paddar, Dr. Amit Kumar (JKAS), whose swift action and calm leadership proved critical in the initial hours of the disaster.

Despite extremely limited access and collapsing infrastructure, the SDM mobilized local resources, established communication links between agencies, and coordinated the first line of rescue with the help of village volunteers and disaster response teams. His presence at the epicenter of the tragedy not only ensured administrative control but also reassured terrified villagers-many of whom had lost everything.

The SDRF was the first to begin opera-

tions, braving debris-filled terrain to evacuate the injured and recover the deceased. Soon after, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was deployed with specialized dog squads, significantly strengthening the ongoing search for those buried under rubble and mud.

Amid the chaos, local villagers and NGOs-including Sewa Bharti, Ababeel, and others-emerged as true first responders: guiding rescue teams, offering shelter, distributing food, and standing beside grieving families. The Health Department, assisted by volunteers, has been delivering urgent medical aid, medicines, and psychological support to both survivors and affected families.

The role of bikers during this natural disaster cannot be overlooked, as they were among the first responders-bravely rescuing people and transporting patients to hospitals when every second counted.

To ensure better coordination, 24x7 control rooms were established at the District Headquarters in Kishtwar and the Sub-Divisional Headquarters in Paddar, serving as command centers for rescue coordination, public information, and logistics.

As of today, the focus remains on retrieving missing persons and providing immediate

relief to victims.

The next-and more challenging-phase will be the resettlement and rehabilitation of affected families, which will require close coordination between the district administration, the UT Government, and supporting agencies.

Beyond material loss, the psychological impact on survivors is immense. Providing emotional support, counseling, and a sense of security is now as crucial as rebuilding homes and infrastructure.

The administration has emphasized the need for mutual trust, confidence-building measures, and active participation of locals and NGOs in the recovery process.

The district administration, with full support from the UT Government, is leaving no stone unturned-from retrieving the last missing person to ensuring food, shelter, safety, and long-term rehabilitation.

This tragedy, while catastrophic, has also become a testament to resilience, collective efforts, and the unwavering commitment of the administration, armed forces, and citizens in the face of nature's fury.

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Criminalisation of Politics: Will the 130th Amendment Finally Draw the Red Line?

■ GIRDHARI LAL RAINA

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riminalisation of politics is one of the most pressing challenges confronting Indian democracy. Despite seven decades of constitutional democracy, regular elections, and strong institutions, the political system has been unable to insulate itself from the steady entry of individuals with criminal backgrounds. The problem is not new, but its scale and persistence have reached alarming levels. Unless addressed decisively, it risks corroding the moral foundation of public life and eroding the credibility of democratic institutions.

What began as stray aberrations has now assumed the proportions of a systemic rot. Nearly half of today's lawmakers in Parliament face criminal cases-some accused of heinous crimes such as murder, rape, and kidnapping. The cancer of criminalisation has spread so deeply that it threatens to hollow

out the very credibility of India's democratic institutions.

It is against this troubling backdrop that the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 20. The Bill is not just another legislative proposal-it is an attempt to reassert moral clarity in politics. . It is a long-overdue attempt to draw a line of moral accountability in politics.

It stipulates that Prime Ministers, Chief Ministers, and Ministers must vacate office if arrested and detained for serious offences carrying a minimum punishment of five years. They can return once released or acquitted, but the message is clear: governments cannot and must not be run from prison cells.

This is not vendetta politics; it is constitutional morality. It is about drawing a civilisational red line-those entrusted to make laws must

not simultaneously live under the shadow of breaking them.

Yet, ironically, this move has triggered sharp opposition from sections of the political spectrum. The divergence reflects not just differences in policy but a deeper unwillingness among many to break the nexus between power and impunity.

The Normalisation of Criminal Politics

The statistics are chilling. In 2009, 30% of MPs had criminal cases pending. By 2014, the figure rose to 34%. In 2019, 43% of MPs (233 members) faced charges, with 29% accused of serious crimes. The 2024 Lok Sabha set a new record: 46% of winning candidates declared criminal cases, including 170 charged with grave offences.

The story at the state level is even bleaker. In some assemblies, more than half of the legislators face pending criminal cases. Democracy, in many states, has been taken hostage by money power, muscle

power, and entrenched networks of patronage.

What is particularly alarming is that voters often reward such candidates, sometimes with overwhelming margins. Local influence, coercion, and the ability to mobilise resources frequently outweigh questions of morality and legality. It is not just a failure of law-it is a failure of collective conscience.

The Scale of the Problem

The extent of criminalisation in Indian politics can be gauged from hard data.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), which has consistently analysed the affidavits of candidates, has revealed a disturbing upward trajectory:

In the 2009 Lok Sabha, 30% of members of Parliament had pending criminal cases. In the 2014 Lok Sabha, this rose to 34%. By 2019, 233 MPs - 43% of the House - faced criminal charges.

The 2024 Lok Sabha set a new

record: 251 winning candidates, or 46% of the total strength, declared criminal cases against themselves. Out of these, 170 (31%) faced serious charges such as murder, attempt to murder, rape, kidnapping, and crimes against women.

The picture at the state level is equally bleak, often worse. State assemblies across the country have an even higher percentage of members with criminal records, suggesting that the problem is deeply entrenched in local politics. In some states, more than half of the legislators have pending criminal cases.

Paradoxically, while citizens often express outrage at corruption and criminalisation, electoral outcomes show that candidates with criminal backgrounds continue to win - sometimes with overwhelming margins. Money, muscle power, and local influence frequently outweigh issues of morality and legality in the calculus of electoral politics.

Why Criminalisation Persists

The persistence of criminalisation is not accidental.

It is the outcome of structural incentives and systemic weaknesses.

Elections are prohibitively expensive. Candidates with criminal connections often command vast financial and coercive resources that make them formidable. Politicians provide protection to criminal actors in exchange for electoral muscle, while criminals acquire legitimacy by entering politics themselves.

Judicial delays guarantee impunity. Criminal trials often drag on for decades, allowing accused leaders to contest, win, and even govern without fear of timely conviction. Witnesses are intimidated, cases are delayed, and legal loopholes exploited to perpetuate a cycle of evasion.

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