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Policy Updates from September

S.No.	Topic
1.	Towards a Greener Future: National Policy on Geothermal Energy, 2025 Notified
2.	A Giant Leap for the Indian Space Sector: A Look Inside the 2025 Draft Space Activities Bill
3.	Biometric Governance and the Telecom Sector: Privacy, Proportionality, and the Expanding State Gaze
4.	When “Protection” Becomes Persecution: The Rising Danger of Steeper Anti-Conversion Laws

Towards a Greener Future: National Policy on Geothermal Energy, 2025 Notified

- Ishani Garg



Introduction

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has notified the [National Policy on Geothermal Energy \(2025\)](#), placing geothermal energy on the national renewable agenda for the first time. The policy sets out a national framework for exploration, demonstration and commercial development of geothermal resources across the country as part of our long-term strategy to meet the Net Zero 2070 commitment. The policy follows a period of extensive consultation with stakeholders, as well as the establishment of a [Task Force](#) in 2024 to review the draft of the policy.

The Backdrop

The policy has been introduced at a time when countries like Germany are rapidly [expanding](#) their geothermal capacity, and major technology companies in the United States are [seeking](#) low-carbon energy sources to power the growing demand from artificial intelligence. This development also aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of positioning India as a global hub for AI innovation. According to the [MNRE](#), India has an estimated geothermal potential of about 10 GW, with 381 identified hot springs and 10 geothermal provinces spread across regions such as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat.

About the Policy

The policy highlights several uses for geothermal energy, ranging from generating electricity to providing district heating, space cooling and heating through Ground Source Heat Pumps (GSHPs), and supporting agriculture, aquaculture, tourism, and desalination. It also encourages partnerships between geothermal developers and companies in the oil, gas, and mining sectors.

The policy gives priority to projects like geothermal-solar hybrid plants, using abandoned oil wells for geothermal energy, and advanced geothermal systems (EGS/AGS). To support this, the Ministry will offer funding for research and pilot projects through its Renewable Energy Research and Technology (RERT) Development Programme. The government already allows 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) in renewable energy, and this policy extends the same openness to geothermal projects. It also promises financial incentives such as concessional loans, import duty cuts, and property tax relief for users who adopt geothermal technology. These steps are meant to attract private investment, lower project costs, and help start commercial use of geothermal energy in India. This approach is similar to how [India promoted the solar sector](#), by reducing early risks to draw investment before moving toward a market based on tariffs and competition.

The policy supports geothermal projects for up to 30 years, with extensions based on resource availability. To reduce the principal barrier of exploration risk, the policy allows exploration permits and long-term leases for geothermal projects, and asks states to create single-window clearance systems to speed approvals. It also signals central-level support for pilot projects and research partnerships to lower technical risk before large investments are made. Together, these steps seek to make the upstream phase, which is costly and uncertain today, become more affordable.

Furthermore, the policy envisions the creation of a geothermal data repository through collaboration with the Ministry of Mines, the National Data Repository, and other relevant agencies. Reliable resource mapping is limited in India, hence most geothermal potential remains preliminary and site-specific. Drilling and reservoir testing carry high upfront costs with uncertain yields, so investors will need clear data, predictable permitting and credible cost-recovery models. State coordination will be essential because land, minerals and environmental clearances fall under state or local jurisdictions.

The issue of Implementation

For implementation, the MNRE will serve as the nodal ministry, working with international partners and multilateral institutions to establish pilot projects under the RERT Development Programme. If pilot outcomes remain fragmented or non-public, India risks repeating the slow adoption of the [bioenergy programme](#), following the early enthusiasm.

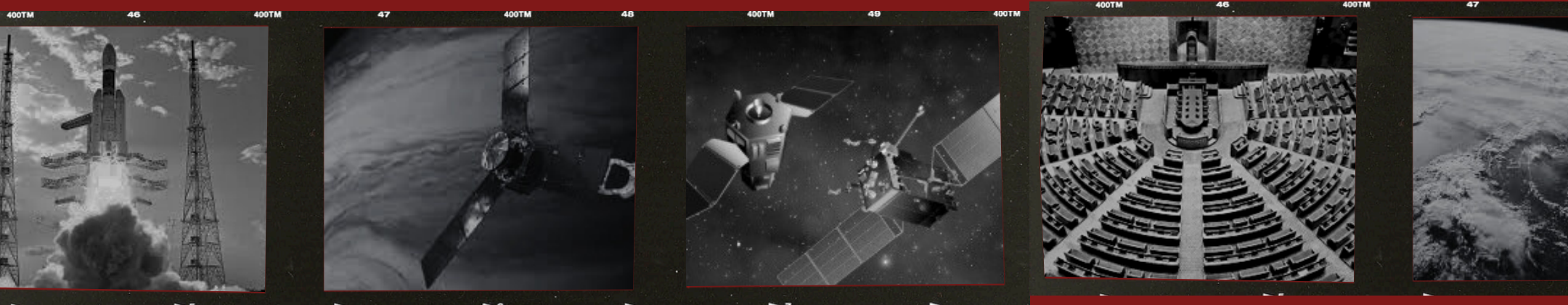
The Road Ahead

In the future, we will also see detailed guidelines and a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the implementation of geothermal projects by the government. As part of the rollout, MNRE has sanctioned five pilot projects and resource-assessment initiatives across different regions.

These projects will evaluate the viability and potential of geothermal sources in India before scaling up commercially. Overall, the policy is a significant and timely step that recognises geothermal's potential beyond power generation. Unlike solar and wind, geothermal energy can supply constant power, making it valuable for achieving energy security and supporting India's Net Zero 2070 goals. Since key approvals for land, mining, and environment lie with state governments, political disturbances like we see in non-BJP states must not hinder this progress.

A Giant Leap for the Indian Space Sector: A Look Inside the 2025 Draft Space Activities Bill

-Suchith Joshi



Introduction

Recently, the Government of India finalised the new draft of the Space Activities Bill, 2025. Mainly, the bill aims to grant statutory powers to the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (thereinafter IN-SPACe). This marks a landmark development in India's evolving space policy landscape, promoting a legal framework to allow companies and private entities to participate in related activities. This is the second such draft, as the first one, formulated in 2017, was circulated for public consultation, but was never introduced in the parliament. The increasing involvement of the private sector in space related activities, combined with a push for sustainable practices has urged the government to introduce a new draft of the Space Activities Bill. It facilitates a more structured, transparent, and investor-friendly ecosystem in India's rapidly expanding space economy. Further, it also addresses India's international treaty obligations while creating a regulatory mechanism aligned with the dynamic growth of space commerce and technology.

About IN-SPACe

IN-SPACe is an agency of the Department of Space, Government of India. It was founded in 2020 with the aim of promoting, enabling, authorising, and supervising space activities of non-governmental entities such as private companies, startups, and research institutions. IN-SPACe thus effectively acts as an interface between the ISRO and other private players, facilitating the use of space infrastructure, including launch vehicles and satellite facilities, and encouraging the development of new space infrastructure, and helps integrate private sector needs with the overall development in the field of space technology. With a growing private sector involvement, the need for a legal regime that enforces accountability, safety, and environmental safeguards became imperative.

International Obligations and Strategic Targets

As per [Article VI](#) of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (1967), India bears international responsibility for all space activities under its jurisdiction, by virtue of being a member of the Outer Space Treaty. This principle applies regardless of whether such activities are undertaken by government or non-government entities. Growing involvement of non-government entities in space-related ventures highlighted the urgent need for a legal regime that enforces accountability, safety and environmental safeguards. Further, India aspires to achieve a [\\$44 billion space economy](#) by 2033. In fact, the same provision of the Outer Space Treaty also mandates authorization and continuing supervision of non-government entities carrying out space ventures by the appropriate state party. The legislative gap setting up protocols for licensing, supervision, and compliance protocols, especially for private space operators, need to be filled.

Key Provisions

IN-SPACe is now granted statutory powers under the new draft, promoting it to a legally empowered regulatory body from a policy enforcer. IN-SPACe now has the power to regulate space activities, including satellite launches, satellite operation, ground infrastructure, and space manufacturing hubs, under development mainly in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Karnataka. The new draft mandates licensing and registration of commercial space activities, and failing to comply with such a mandate could attract an imprisonment term of up to three years, and a fine of up to one crore rupees. Similar penalties were also present under section 13 of the [Draft Space Activities Bill, 2017](#). Although the bill acknowledges its international obligations under the Outer Space Treaty and consequently holds India responsible for any damage caused by any entity operating in space within its jurisdiction, it requires licensees to indemnify the government from such damages and to be protected from claims by third parties. Additionally, the bill transfers ownership of Intellectual Property developed through space activities to the Government of India. The bill also attempts to tackle the rising price and prohibitive nature of insurance for space assets by proposing insurance products that are affordable, thereby successfully removing a critical barrier to entry.

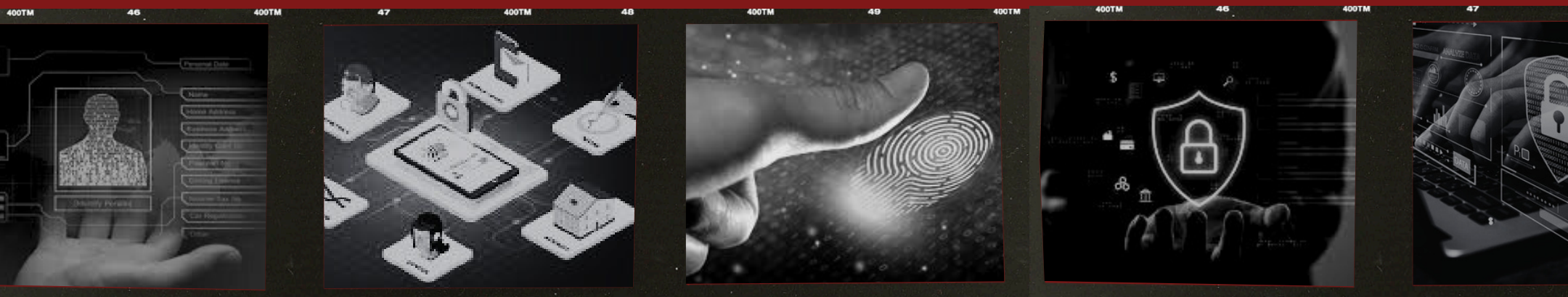
In consideration of the [Artemis Accords, 2020](#) and the Outer Space Treaty, 1967, the Bill requires compliance with environmental clearances and protocols approved by IN-SPACe, and requires operators to use due regard not to cause harmful interference to foreign space assets.

Conclusion

As of September 2025, the draft bill has been discussed extensively amongst the various appropriate Ministries, and stakeholders. Following this, it will then be publicly consulted broadly and/or inter-ministerial discussion before it gets approved by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet and gets tabled in Parliament. By providing a statutory authority for IN-SPACe, protecting against international compliance, while incentivising private investment and proposing affordable regulations and regulations, the bill lays a firm foundation for sustainable and accelerated growth in India's space sector, making the aspiration of a \$44 billion space economy, even more achievable. Stakeholders and experts have correctly remarked that the draft bill is expected to be a transformative moment for India's space sector, attracting investment, creating jobs, and driving scientific advancement. However, IN- SPACe's powers, including the ability to suspend and revoke private authorization at its discretion may create questions about transparency and add regulatory uncertainty, discouraging private investment due to unclear and unappealable processes. While it does leave gaps, the Draft Space Activities Bill, 2025 is setting the foundation for India's energetic ascent as a global leader in space technology.

Biometric Governance and the Telecom Sector: Privacy, Proportionality, and the Expanding State Gaze

-Aman Aryan



Introduction

With every ticking second, we are slipping more and more into a time that is overly dependent on technology, and the most notable of these advancements is the smartphone and the means of telecommunication. From an era of letters that had its own problems of being delayed and misplaced, this telecommunication epoch has fraud and misuse, making it a problem.

In an attempt to push the brakes on such illegal practices and build a robust surveillance and security infrastructure in this space, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) came up with certain tweaks in the user registration and data sharing rules.

About the Rules

DoT, on 19 September 2025, issued the Draft Telecommunications (User Identification) Rules, 2025 under the powers conferred by the Telecommunications Act, 2023. The government is trying to push towards a biometric surveillance infrastructure under the guise of this proposed telecom regulation, which has suggested a new framework for the biometric-based identification of all users of notified telecommunication services in India. It mandates the establishment of a Biometric Identity Verification System (BIVS) and seeks to replace the fragmented operator-specific verification process with a unified, centralized system.

These new rules transform the existing telecom verification process into a permanent, interlinked biometric identity infrastructure, which is similar in spirit to a national telecom identity register. From a one-time authentication process via biometric verification for SIMs, the new rules propose a continuous, government-supervised biometric identity ecosystem.

The rule is expected to simplify tracking of illegal or grey-market SIMs used in crimes or spam operations. This envisions a process whereby every individual seeking to obtain or update telecom services will undergo either an Aadhaar-based e-KYC or a digital KYC process involving live photographs and other biological attributes. Also, every user will be assigned a unique user ID within the BIVS, creating a single, interoperable identity record linked to telecom activity.

Potential Misuse and Colouring over Established Precedents

While the proposed framework claims to enhance national security and prevent misuse of telecommunication services, it also raises pressing concerns relating to privacy, data protection, and proportionality. The necessity of such invasive data collection is questionable, as existing KYC mechanisms already provide effective means of identity verification without resorting to a centralised biometric system. The proportionality test, on the other hand, demands that any restriction on privacy must be the least intrusive measure already available to achieve a legitimate aim. Collecting and storing the live photographs and full Aadhaar numbers of all telecom users—without clear limitations on purpose or retention—cannot reasonably be considered the least restrictive means of achieving the stated objectives, as the existing rules already mandate the telecom service providers to maintain their user database.

This approach not only contradicts the Supreme Court's judgment in the Puttaswamy case, which limited Aadhaar usage to specific welfare and tax-related purposes, but also exposes users to grave risks of identity theft and data misuse. The new rules might lead to over-intrusion by the government. Private telecom companies will become extensions of the state's biometric infrastructure, tasked with maintaining massive databases that the government can access without judicial oversight.

These draft rules are deeply inconsistent with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, which emphasised purpose limitation, data minimisation, and the right of individuals to consent and withdraw consent. However, the rules prescribed by the DoT override these principles by mandating comprehensive data collection, and the mention of consent in the notification is merely procedural.

Internet Freedom Foundation has warned that these rules represent an alarming expansion of the state's biometric governance regime, and by embedding Aadhaar-like identification mechanisms into the telecommunications sector, the government is extending the Aadhaar infrastructure beyond its original legislative scope.

Conclusion

Although the objective of preventing telecom fraud and enhancing national security is valid, the means proposed through these draft rules seem intrusive. They may potentially harm basic rights at some point. And, unless these rules are revised to incorporate privacy safeguards, limited data collection, independent oversight, and genuine user choice, they risk establishing a biometric surveillance architecture in a democratic State.

When “Protection” Becomes Persecution: The Rising Danger of Steeper Anti-Conversion Laws

-Reyansh Thakur



Introduction

Recently, the **Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religious Bill, 2025** was passed in the state assembly, which further reignited the debate on the limits of religious freedom in the country. The main objective of this legislation is to curb fraudulent or forced conversions nationwide, but the steep penalties, and the procedural hurdles in the bill have raised quite a few alarms among the legal scholars, activists and minority communities. It is pertinent to note that, the pattern of such legislation emerges more predominantly from some states, which has given rise to concerns over the ideological motivations, and constitutional implications this carries.

Escalating Punishments and Legal Overreach

The most important yet striking feature of the Rajasthan Bill, is its unprecedented harsh punishment regime. The law authorizes non-bailable offences and prison sentences, which may range from 7 years to life imprisonment, also linked with steep fines up to several lakhs. The penalties might even extend up to 20 years with fines of Rs 25 lakh or more, for the so-called “mass conversions”. The punishment is even more severe and harsh for cases which involve minors, women, or SC/ST communities.

Such escalation in the form of punishment may risk turning the legislation into a tool of fear rather than a mechanism for justice. The Bill has reversed the burden of proof – the accused would have to demonstrate the absence of coercion or fraud. This inversion contradicts the foundational principle of criminal law that presumes innocence until proven guilty. It opens the door to misuse, where mere accusations can lead to arrests, property seizures, and prolonged detention without conviction.

Vague Definitions and Targeting of Minorities

The law's broad definitions of "allurement," "coercion," or "undue influence" leave enormous interpretive discretion in the hands of law enforcement. Activities such as offering food, shelter, education, or even participation in charitable missions could be construed as attempts to convert. Faith-based organisations, particularly those run by Christian and Muslim communities, may find their humanitarian work criminalised under such expansive language.

This not only chills legitimate religious and charitable activities but also reinforces social suspicion toward minorities. As several rights groups have noted, these laws create a climate where the expression of faith itself becomes suspect — a sharp departure from India's pluralist ethos.

Political Geography of Anti-Conversion Laws

Equally concerning is the political pattern underlying these legislative developments. The Rajasthan law adds to a growing number of similar enactments introduced in several northern and central Indian states, while many others have refrained from pursuing comparable measures. This contrast reveals a deeper ideological alignment rather than a uniform policy need across regions.

The rhetoric accompanying these laws often invokes the notion of safeguarding certain communities from so-called "coercive" or "deceptive" conversions, particularly those framed in the context of interfaith relationships. However, official records tell a different story. Rajasthan's Home Department has itself acknowledged that no cases of "forced conversions" linked to interfaith marriages have been recorded in recent years, and that only a handful of alleged illegal conversion cases were filed over the past five years. These statistics indicate that such laws are not a response to widespread or demonstrable harm, but rather stem from a political and ideological narrative that seeks to reinforce existing social divisions and anxieties under the guise of protection.

Erosion of Constitutional and Human Rights

At the constitutional level, these laws risk eroding the guarantees enshrined in Article 25, which protects the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion. For a restriction on this right to be valid, it must be narrowly tailored and proportionate. However, by imposing life sentences, reversing burdens of proof, and introducing procedural barriers such as mandatory prior approval from district authorities, the new legislation effectively makes the right to convert or be converted a privilege controlled by the State.

Internationally, such measures conflict with India's commitments under human rights treaties, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which upholds the individual's freedom to adopt a religion or belief of choice. When the State criminalises such personal choices through exaggerated penalties, it risks undermining both domestic constitutional morality and international credibility.

A Dangerous Precedent for the Future

The cumulative impact of these developments is deeply troubling. Steeper penalties and selective enforcement create an ecosystem of fear where religious identity becomes a ground for surveillance and suspicion. By granting sweeping powers to police and local officials — including property seizure and freezing of institutional accounts — the State positions itself as the arbiter of legitimate belief.

This sets a dangerous precedent. It transforms the secular State into a regulator of faith, jeopardising India's long-standing pluralism. As critics have rightly observed, the most significant threat posed by these laws is not their immediate misuse but the gradual normalisation of coercive control over conscience.

Conclusion

The Rajasthan anti-conversion bill represents more than a legislative response to alleged coercion; it reflects a broader ideological project that seeks to discipline belief under the guise of protection. The growing trend of such laws in BJP-ruled states underscores how religion and politics are increasingly intersecting in ways that challenge India's secular fabric.

If unchecked, these statutes could erode the foundational principle that faith is a matter of personal choice, not governmental sanction. Upholding India's constitutional promise of liberty, equality, and secularism will require vigilant public discourse, judicial scrutiny, and collective resistance against the quiet legitimisation of religious control.

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