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1. Catalogue of Lepidoptera of India

- Scientists of the **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)** have published the first comprehensive **Catalogue of Lepidoptera (Butterflies & Moths) of India**, documenting the country's rich diversity of butterflies and moths.
- **Lepidoptera** is one of the largest insect orders, comprising **butterflies and moths**. The name **Lepidoptera** means "**scale-winged insects**"
- India is home to **13,703 species of Lepidoptera**, representing about **8.25% of the world's known Lepidoptera diversity**, making it one of the world's important **Lepidoptera hotspots**.
- It provides the first **authoritative national taxonomic inventory**, strengthening biodiversity research, ecological monitoring and conservation planning.
- Butterflies and moths are important **bioindicators**, as their diversity reflects habitat quality, climate change and ecosystem health.
- Butterflies and moths play vital ecological roles as **pollinators, herbivores, decomposers (detritivores)** and form an important food source for birds, bats and other wildlife.
- **Butterfly vs Moth**

Butterfly	Moth
Mostly diurnal	Mostly nocturnal
Clubbed antennae	Feathered/filamentous antennae
Rest with wings closed vertically	Rest with wings spread or roof-like
Chrysalis (usually exposed)	Silk cocoon (usually enclosed)

2. Why does Kerala report high leptospirosis burden?

- Kerala continues to report a high burden of **Leptospirosis**, a bacterial zoonotic disease associated with heavy monsoon rainfall, flooding and occupational exposure to contaminated water.
- Kerala remains highly vulnerable due to **heavy monsoon rainfall, floods, high humidity, abundant water bodies and close human-animal interaction**, particularly in paddy cultivation and agricultural activities.
- **No person-to-person transmission in routine conditions**; infection occurs through contaminated water/soil or direct contact with infected animal urine.
- High-risk groups include **farmers, sanitation workers, sewage workers, dairy workers, veterinarians, construction workers and people exposed to floodwaters**.
- **Leptospirosis** is a **zoonotic bacterial disease** caused by pathogenic *Leptospira* species.
- Humans acquire the infection through **contact with water, soil or mud contaminated with the urine of infected animals**, especially through **cuts, abrasions or mucous membranes**.
- **Reservoir hosts**: Rodents (especially rats) are the principal reservoirs; cattle, pigs, dogs and other mammals can also transmit infection.
- Common symptoms include **fever, headache, severe muscle pain (especially calf muscles), conjunctival suffusion (red eyes), vomiting and jaundice**. Severe disease (**Weil's disease**) can cause **acute kidney injury, liver failure, pulmonary haemorrhage, meningitis and multi-organ failure**.
- Diagnosis is confirmed through **PCR (early stage)** and **serological tests such as ELISA/MAT** in later stages.
- **Doxycycline** is recommended for **chemoprophylaxis** in high-risk groups and early antibiotic treatment significantly reduces complications.



3. Gen Z is a constituency defined by mindset, not identity.

India's emerging **Generation Z** represents a **shift from identity-based politics to issue-based citizenship**, where political choices are increasingly shaped by aspirations, institutional trust, transparency and governance outcomes rather than traditional markers such as caste, religion or ideology.

The recent nationwide mobilisation after the NEET paper leak demonstrated that young citizens increasingly perceive institutional failures as questions of justice rather than mere administrative lapses.

Gen Z exhibits **networked citizenship**, mobilising rapidly through social media around specific causes while remaining less attached to political organisations. Their participation reflects a demand for **responsive, transparent and accountable institutions**, making governance legitimacy increasingly dependent on performance rather than political narratives.

However, this transition also poses challenges such as episodic mobilisation, misinformation and declining institutional mediation. For a vibrant democracy, governments must move beyond electoral responsiveness to **continuous citizen engagement**, strengthen institutional credibility and create meaningful opportunities in education, employment and public participation. Ultimately, **Democracy survives not merely through elections but through sustained public trust in institutions.**

4. Drugs free youth crucial for the development of India.

Drug abuse among youth is not merely a law-and-order issue but a multidimensional challenge involving public health, human capital, mental well-being, family stability and national security. India's demographic dividend can become a demographic burden if addiction undermines the productive potential of its young population.

1. Human Capital Erosion: Drug addiction causes school dropout, low productivity, skill loss, unemployment, mental illness.
2. Economic Cost of Addiction: exacerbate healthcare burden, productivity loss, crime, reduced labour participation
3. Narco-Terror Nexus: Drug trafficking finances terrorism, organized crime, illegal arms and money laundering posing a threat to national security.
4. Social Capital Erosion: Drug abuse weakens family, community, social cohesion and trust

Government initiatives:

1. Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA)
2. Nasha Mukh Yuva for Viksit Bharat Campaign: Youth-led behavioural transformation.
3. NCB (Narcotics Control Bureau) & NCORD Mechanism: law enforcement and intelligence coordination.
4. MANAS Helpline- Rehabilitation and de-addiction help

5. Why are government schools shutting down?

1. School Rationalisation – Merger of low-enrolment schools to optimise teachers and infrastructure.
2. Declining Public Enrolment – Shift towards private schools due to perceived better quality.
3. Demographic Transition – Low fertility, migration and depopulation of villages reducing school-age population.
4. Fiscal Constraints – High maintenance cost of sparsely populated schools.
5. Teacher Deployment Issues – Uneven distribution and vacancies prompting consolidation.
6. NEP 2020 School Complex Model – Encourages resource sharing through school clusters.
7. Administrative Efficiency – Easier monitoring, governance and resource management.

Measures to improve:

1. Equitable Rationalisation – Protect neighbourhood schools. (RTE Act, NEP 2020)
2. Quality over Closure – Upgrade infrastructure & learning outcomes. (PM SHRI, Samagra Shiksha)
3. Strengthen FLN – Improve foundational literacy & numeracy. (NIPUN Bharat)
4. Teacher Availability – Recruit, deploy & train teachers. (Samagra Shiksha, NISHTHA)
5. Access for Vulnerable Groups – Transport, hostels & girls' education. (KGBV, EMRS, PM POSHAN)



6. Community Participation – Empower School Management Committees. (RTE Act – SMCs)
7. Technology Integration – Expand digital & hybrid learning. (DIKSHA, PM eVIDYA)
8. Inclusive Education – Support SC/ST & EWS students. (Samagra Shiksha)
9. Data-Driven Governance – Monitor enrolment & learning outcomes. (UDISE+, PARAKH)

6 . Distress and Dispute

Inter-state river water disputes like the Cauvery are not merely disputes over water but tests of India's cooperative federalism, climate resilience and institutional water governance.

Issues

1. Federalism: Frequent Centre–State and inter-State coordination challenges tests the spirit of cooperative federalism.
2. Water Governance: Absence of a dynamic distress-sharing formula during drought years.
3. Agriculture: Direct impact on farmers' livelihoods and food security. Eg: Karnataka: Kharif irrigation requirements, Tamil Nadu: Delta irrigation (Kuruvai/Samba crops).
4. Climate Change: Traditional water-sharing arrangements becoming inadequate due to erratic monsoons and changing rainfall patterns increase uncertainty.
5. Legal & Institutional: Delayed implementation of tribunal and CWMA directions.
6. Economic: Crop losses, rural distress and industrial water shortages impacts hydropower generation and urban water supply (e.g., Bengaluru).
7. Political: Politicisation of water disputes, fuelling regionalism and competitive federalism.

Way ahead

1. Develop a scientific Distress-Sharing Formula for low-rainfall years.
2. Strengthen Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) for rule-based implementation.
3. Adopt Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM/IWRM).
4. Improve real-time hydrological data sharing through digital monitoring.
5. Promote micro-irrigation, crop diversification and water-use efficiency under PMKSY (Per Drop More Crop).
6. Encourage regular Centre–State dialogue through Inter-State Council/Zonal Councils to build cooperative federalism.

A sustainable solution lies not in political confrontation but in scientific water management, institutional trust and cooperative federalism to ensure equitable and climate-resilient water sharing.

7 . Special NDPS Courts: Strengthening India's Anti-Narcotics Architecture

Timely justice is central to an effective anti-drug strategy; judicial delays weaken deterrence and strengthen organised crime.

Need for Special NDPS courts

1. **Judicial Backlog:** ~3.96 lakh NDPS cases pending, delaying justice and reducing deterrence.
2. **Justice Delivery Deficit:** Only **65 Special NDPS Courts** despite rising narcotics offences.
3. **Narco-Terror Nexus:** Drug trafficking finances organised crime and cross-border terrorism.
4. **Forensic Bottlenecks:** Delayed FSL reports weaken conviction rates.
5. **Federal Coordination Gap:** Uneven establishment of special courts across States despite MHA advisories.
6. **Undertrial Crisis:** Prolonged incarceration raises **Article 21** concerns.

Challenges

1. Balancing **Speedy Trial** with **Due Process of Law**.
2. Multi-State & transnational syndicates complicate investigation.
3. Low judge-population ratio and prosecution vacancies.
4. Weak **Police–Prosecution–Forensics** convergence.



5. Drug routes through **Golden Crescent & Golden Triangle** continue to evolve.

Suggested measures

1. Establish **exclusive NDPS Courts** in all high-pendency States.
2. Integrate **e-Courts + ICJS (Interoperable Criminal Justice System)** for digital case tracking.
3. Strengthen **FSL capacity** and ensure time-bound forensic examination.
4. Fill vacancies in judiciary and prosecution through **All India Judicial Service (proposed)** / regular recruitment.
5. Expand **Financial Intelligence** to dismantle the drug economy under **PMLA**.
6. Strengthen border surveillance using **smart fencing, drones and AI-enabled intelligence**.
7. Combine **strict enforcement with rehabilitation**, adopting a **Whole-of-Government Approach**.

8. Social media monitoring centre to counter adverse narratives

Issues

1. **Reputation Economy:** Online perception increasingly influences tourism, investment and ease of doing business.
2. **Information Disorder:** Fake news, coordinated misinformation and influencer-driven narratives distort public perception.
3. **Institutional Communication Deficit:** Governments often react to crises instead of practising **proactive strategic communication**.
4. **Platform Asymmetry:** State institutions have limited control over algorithm-driven amplification.
5. **Trust Deficit:** Declining institutional credibility enables misinformation to spread faster than official communication.

Challenges in implementation

1. **Constitutional Balancing:** Safeguarding **Article 19(1)(a)** while preventing misinformation under **Article 19(2)**.
2. **Institutional Credibility:** Countering fake narratives without eroding public trust through excessive state intervention.
3. **Platform Governance Gap:** Limited accountability of global social media platforms and opaque algorithms.
4. **Technological Evolution:** Rise of **deepfakes, AI-generated content and bot networks** complicating misinformation detection.
5. **Federal Coordination:** Lack of integrated Centre–State mechanisms for digital crisis communication.
6. **Capacity Deficit:** Shortage of skilled manpower and AI tools for **real-time OSINT (Open-Source Intelligence)**.
7. **Cross-border Information Operations:** Foreign actors can influence public opinion, tourism and investment through coordinated campaigns.

Government initiatives

1. **IT Rules, 2021** → Due diligence obligations for intermediaries.
2. **Cyber Dost Initiative** → Digital awareness and cyber hygiene.
3. **Incredible India Campaign** → Promotion of India's tourism brand.

Way forward

1. **Institutionalise Online Reputation Management (ORM)** with transparent SOPs and independent oversight.
2. Establish **Digital Crisis Communication Cells** for evidence-based and real-time public communication.
3. Strengthen **Platform Accountability** through robust implementation of **IT Rules, 2021** and greater transparency in algorithms.
4. Develop **AI-enabled misinformation detection systems** under the **IndiaAI Mission**.
5. Promote **Media & Digital Literacy** through the **Digital India Programme** to build societal resilience against misinformation.
6. Enhance **inter-agency coordination** among CERT-In, I4C, State Cyber Cells and tourism departments for rapid response.



7. Adopt a **Whole-of-Society Approach**, involving government, platforms, fact-checkers, academia and civil society.
8. Ensure **Privacy-by-Design** and **judicial oversight** to prevent surveillance or misuse under the **DPDP Act, 2023**. Governments must protect public interest and counter misinformation without compromising constitutional freedoms and democratic accountability.

9. Between growth haves, have nots, mind the lag

India's high economic growth must translate into inclusive income growth, productive employment and equitable wealth distribution.

Growth paradox

1. **Wealth Concentration:** Rapid rise in HNIs alongside widening income and wealth inequality.
2. **Jobless Growth:** GDP growth not generating adequate **quality employment**, especially in manufacturing.
3. **Wage Stagnation:** Real wages remain subdued despite economic expansion, limiting mass consumption.
4. **Missing Middle:** Shrinking pathways for upward social mobility due to limited formal jobs.
5. **Consumption Inequality:** Demand increasingly driven by the affluent, while mass consumption remains weak.
6. **Informalisation of Employment:** Growth concentrated in **low-productivity gig and informal jobs**.
7. **Demographic Dividend at Risk:** Rising educated unemployment may turn demographic opportunity into a liability.

Structural constraints

1. **Manufacturing Deficit:** Failure to absorb surplus labour from agriculture.
2. **Skill-Employment Mismatch:** Education outcomes not aligned with industry demand.
3. **Low Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP):** Limits labour utilisation and household incomes.
4. **Regional Disparities:** Uneven distribution of jobs and investment.
5. **Technological Disruption:** AI and automation reducing labour-intensive opportunities.
6. **Weak Human Capital:** Gaps in skilling, health and education reduce productivity.

The Road Ahead

1. **Labour-Intensive Manufacturing** through **PLI**, MSME support and ease of doing business.
2. **Skill-led Employability** via **Skill India Mission** and PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY).
3. **Boost MSMEs**, the largest source of non-farm employment, through **RAMP** and **CGTMSE**.
4. **Increase Female Workforce Participation** through childcare support, safe transport and flexible work.
5. **Strengthen Social Protection** through **e-Shram**, PM-SYM and gig worker welfare.
6. **Promote Wage-led Inclusive Growth** by improving productivity and expanding formal employment.

India's growth story will succeed only when high growth translates into quality jobs and shared prosperity.

10. What makes Kerala particularly vulnerable to landslides?

Landslide disasters are increasingly driven by the combined impact of extreme rainfall and anthropogenic interventions.

Key concerns

1. **Climate-Induced Extremes:** Increase in **high-intensity, short-duration rainfall** triggering slope failures.
2. **Ecological Fragility:** Western Ghats' steep slopes, fragile geology and weathered soils increase vulnerability.
3. **Unscientific Development:** Quarrying, hill cutting, road construction and encroachments destabilise slopes.
4. **Land Use Change:** Deforestation and plantation expansion reduce slope stability.
5. **Disaster Preparedness Gap:** Limited early warning systems and hazard-based land-use planning.
6. **Human Settlements at Risk:** Rising exposure due to habitation in hazard-prone zones.

Structural Challenges

1. **Weak Regulatory Enforcement:** Poor implementation of land-use zoning, building norms and quarrying regulations.



2. **Institutional Coordination Gap:** Limited convergence among IMD, GSI, NDMA, SDMAs and local bodies.
3. **Scientific Data Deficit:** Inadequate real-time landslide monitoring and micro-level hazard mapping.
4. **Development–Conservation Conflict:** Infrastructure expansion often overrides ecological sustainability.
5. **Capacity Constraints:** Weak local preparedness, evacuation planning and community awareness.
6. **Climate Uncertainty:** Increasing unpredictability of extreme rainfall complicates disaster forecasting.

Policy Priorities

1. **Risk-informed Land Use Planning:** Enforce **Landslide Hazard Zonation (LHZ)** in development planning.
2. **Strengthen Early Warning Systems:** Expand **IMD–GSI–ISRO** based impact forecasting and last-mile dissemination.
3. **Nature-based Solutions:** Promote afforestation, slope stabilisation and watershed management.
4. **Regulate High-Risk Activities:** Strict monitoring of quarrying, hill cutting and construction in **Eco-Sensitive Zones**.
5. **Community-Based DRR:** Build local resilience through **Aapda Mitra** and SDMA-led preparedness programmes.
6. **Climate-Resilient Infrastructure:** Integrate **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** into road, housing and infrastructure projects.

11. Proof of life: Bureaucratic paperwork must not result in exclusion

The government has made **birth certificates the foundational identity document** for accessing education, passports, Aadhaar, voting, jobs and other public services. To prevent fraudulent registrations, the 2026 amendment requires **judicial approval** for registrations delayed by more than two years. The editorial argues that while preventing fraud is a legitimate objective, **the amendment may end up excluding genuine citizens**, especially migrants, poor families and vulnerable groups who often register births late due to socio-economic reasons.

Emerging Governance Concerns

1. **Document-Dependent Governance:** Birth certificates are increasingly becoming the gateway to education, welfare, employment and citizenship-linked services.
2. **Exclusion Risks:** Stricter verification norms may disproportionately affect **migrants, poor households, homeless persons and other vulnerable groups**.
3. **Proceduralisation of Rights:** Judicial approval for delayed registration may convert a welfare entitlement into a cumbersome legal process.
4. **Trust Deficit in Administration:** Greater reliance on judicial scrutiny reflects weak confidence in administrative decision-making.
5. **Identity–Access Linkage:** Errors or delays in civil registration can trigger a **cascade of exclusion** from multiple public services.
6. **Administrative Burden Shift:** Responsibility of proving identity increasingly shifts from the State to the citizen.

Systemic Bottlenecks

1. **Weak Civil Registration Infrastructure:** Delayed registration and incomplete coverage persist in many regions.
2. **Capacity Constraints:** Limited administrative and judicial capacity may aggravate delays.
3. **One-Size-Fits-All Regulation:** Uniform procedures ignore socio-economic realities of vulnerable groups.
4. **Poor Inter-Departmental Integration:** Weak coordination between local registrars, health institutions and welfare departments.
5. **Accessibility Gap:** High transaction costs—distance, legal fees and documentation—discourage timely registration.
6. **Reactive Governance:** Focus remains on fraud detection rather than strengthening registration systems.

Reform Imperatives

1. **Universal & Timely Registration:** Strengthen the **Civil Registration System (CRS)** through institutional capacity and doorstep services.



2. **Risk-Based Verification:** Differentiate high-risk cases instead of imposing uniform judicial scrutiny.
3. **Alternative Proof Mechanisms:** Allow community certification or multiple documentary evidence for genuine applicants.
4. **Digital Interoperability:** Integrate CRS with **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** while protecting privacy.
5. **Administrative Accountability:** Strengthen registrar-level grievance redressal to minimise litigation.
6. **Awareness & Outreach:** Leverage **ASHA, Anganwadi, Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies** for universal registration.

The true test of good governance lies not merely in preventing fraudulent inclusion, but in ensuring that no genuine citizen is excluded from the protection of the State.

12. Critical minerals, the foundation of strategic power

In the era of energy transition and technological competition, critical minerals have become strategic assets underpinning economic resilience, industrial competitiveness and national security.

Strategic Imperatives

1. **Energy Transition:** Critical minerals are indispensable for EVs, batteries, renewable energy and green hydrogen.
2. **Strategic Vulnerability:** Heavy import dependence exposes India to **geopolitical and supply-chain disruptions**.
3. **China Dominance:** Concentrated global mining, processing and refining creates **strategic dependence**.
4. **Industrial Competitiveness:** Minerals are essential for **semiconductors, electronics, aerospace and defence manufacturing**.
5. **Supply Chain Resilience:** Limited domestic refining and processing weaken value-chain participation.
6. **Resource Diplomacy:** Access to overseas mineral assets is becoming a key pillar of foreign policy.

Structural Bottlenecks

1. **Exploration Deficit:** Limited geological exploration and resource mapping.
2. **Processing Gap:** Weak refining and value-addition capabilities despite mineral reserves.
3. **Regulatory Delays:** Lengthy clearances impede mining investments.
4. **Recycling Ecosystem Gap:** Low recovery of critical minerals from e-waste and batteries.
5. **Investment Constraints:** High capital intensity and technology dependence.
6. **Geopolitical Concentration:** Dependence on a few countries for mining and processing.

Strategic Priorities

1. **Accelerate Domestic Exploration** under the **National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)**.
2. **Develop Processing & Refining Capacity** through **PLI** and targeted industrial incentives.
3. **Diversify Overseas Mineral Assets** via **KABIL** and strategic partnerships (Australia, Argentina, Africa).
4. **Promote Circular Mineral Economy** through battery and e-waste recycling under **E-Waste Management Rules**.
5. **Build Strategic Mineral Reserves** to cushion supply disruptions.
6. **Strengthen Critical Mineral Diplomacy** through **IPEF, India-US Critical Minerals Partnership and Quad**.

Government Initiatives

1. **National Critical Mineral Mission (2025)** – Strengthens exploration, value chains and overseas sourcing.
2. **KABIL** – Secures overseas critical mineral assets.
3. **MMDR (Amendment) Act, 2023** – Facilitates auction and exploration of critical minerals.
4. **PLI Scheme** – Promotes domestic manufacturing in strategic sectors.

13. The problem with India's Free trade Strategy

Why India's FTA Strategy Has Underperformed?

1. **Market Access without Competitiveness:** Tariff concessions alone have not translated into export growth.
2. **Import-Driven Liberalisation:** Imports have expanded faster than exports, widening trade deficits.



3. **Weak GVC Integration:** India's participation in regional production networks remains limited despite FTAs.
4. **Domestic Capability Deficit:** Manufacturing, logistics and technology gaps undermine export competitiveness.
5. **Shallow Industrial Linkages:** Indian firms remain weakly integrated with regional value chains.

Why FTAs Alone Cannot Deliver Growth?

1. **Competitiveness Gap:** Productivity and quality constraints limit export potential.
2. **Supply Chain Disconnect:** Weak backward and forward linkages reduce GVC participation.
3. **MSME Constraints:** Limited scale, technology and standards compliance.
4. **High Trade Costs:** Logistics and compliance costs reduce price competitiveness.
5. **Policy Misalignment:** Trade policy is insufficiently aligned with industrial policy.

Recalibrating India's Trade Strategy

1. **Competitiveness First:** Deepen manufacturing under **PLI** and **Make in India**.
2. **GVC Integration:** Align FTAs with **regional production networks**.
3. **Trade Facilitation:** Improve logistics through **PM Gati Shakti** and the **National Logistics Policy**.
4. **Industrial Upgrading:** Promote R&D, technology adoption and skill development.
5. **Next-Generation FTAs:** Move beyond tariffs to investment, digital trade and standards.

FTAs are facilitators of trade—not substitutes for industrial competitiveness. Without strong domestic capabilities, trade liberalisation risks becoming import liberalisation rather than export expansion.

14. Digital Arrest Scams: Strengthening India's Cyber Fraud Architecture

The Supreme Court has directed the Centre, States, RBI and telecom authorities to establish a **standardised, coordinated response** against the growing menace of **digital arrest scams**. The focus is not merely on punishing fraudsters but on creating an **integrated, time-bound cyber governance framework** for prevention, rapid response and victim compensation.

Emerging Threats

1. **AI-enabled Cyber Frauds:** Sophisticated scams such as *digital arrest* exploit technology, impersonation and fear.
2. **Digital Trust Deficit:** Rising cyber fraud undermines confidence in **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** and digital payments.
3. **Cross-border Criminal Networks:** Cyber fraud increasingly operates through transnational and organised crime syndicates.
4. **Financial Security Risks:** Mule accounts, cryptocurrency and instant fund transfers facilitate money laundering.
5. **Institutional Fragmentation:** Banks, telecom operators and enforcement agencies often lack seamless coordination.
6. **Low Cyber Hygiene:** Limited digital awareness makes citizens vulnerable to social engineering attacks.

Governance Deficits

1. **Reactive Enforcement:** Focus remains on post-crime investigation rather than preventive risk management.
2. **Capacity Constraints:** Shortage of cyber forensic experts and specialised cyber police units.
3. **Implementation Gaps:** Uneven rollout of **e-Zero FIRs** and **State Cyber Crime Coordination Centres**.
4. **Delayed Asset Recovery:** Time lag in freezing and restoring fraudulently transferred funds.
5. **Jurisdictional Challenges:** Cross-border transactions complicate investigation and prosecution.

Reform Priorities

1. **Standardised SOPs:** Uniform protocols for banks, telecom operators and law-enforcement agencies.
2. **Real-time Information Sharing:** Strengthen interoperability among **I4C, RBI, banks and telecom service providers**.
3. **Universal e-Zero FIR:** Ensure nationwide implementation for immediate registration and investigation.
4. **Time-bound Money Restoration:** Expand the **Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS)**.



5. **Cyber Awareness:** Promote digital literacy through continuous public awareness campaigns.
6. **AI-driven Detection:** Use AI and behavioural analytics for real-time fraud detection and risk assessment.

Institutional Response

1. **I4C (Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre)** – Nodal agency for cybercrime coordination.
2. **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (1930)** – Registers complaints and enables quick reporting.
3. **e-Zero FIR** – Facilitates immediate registration of cyber financial fraud cases.
4. **Cyber Fraud Mitigation Centre (CFMC)** – Coordinates rapid response among banks, telecom operators and law enforcement.
5. **RBI Innovation Hub Data-Sharing Model** – Enables real-time banking fraud intelligence.

15. Uniform Civil Code: Balancing Equality with Diversity

The debate on the Uniform Civil Code reflects the constitutional challenge of harmonising individual rights, gender justice and India's pluralistic social fabric. Chhattisgarh's decision to invite public suggestions highlights that the legitimacy of a UCC depends as much on participatory law-making as on its constitutional objectives.

Constitutional Debate

1. **Gender Justice:** Removes discriminatory provisions in personal laws, ensuring **substantive equality**.
2. **Equality Before Law:** Promotes a uniform legal framework consistent with **Articles 14 & 15**.
3. **Constitutional Morality:** Places constitutional values above discriminatory social customs.
4. **National Integration:** Reduces legal fragmentation by establishing a common civil framework.
5. **Citizen-Centric Justice:** Simplifies family laws, improving legal certainty and access to justice.
6. **Participatory Law-Making:** Public consultation strengthens legitimacy and social acceptance.

Critical Challenges

1. **Constitutional Pluralism:** Balancing **Article 25 (Freedom of Religion)** with **Article 44 (UCC)**.
2. **Social Acceptance:** Personal laws are closely intertwined with religious and cultural identities.
3. **Federal Divergence:** Different State-level UCC models may create legal inconsistencies.
4. **Political Polarisation:** Risk of reducing a constitutional reform into a partisan issue.
5. **Legal Complexity:** Harmonising statutory, customary and tribal laws requires careful calibration.
6. **Protection of Tribal Customs:** Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas require special consideration.

Reform Pathway

1. **Phased Implementation:** Reform family laws incrementally rather than adopting an abrupt uniform code.
2. **Stakeholder Consultation:** Engage religious groups, tribal communities, women's organisations and legal experts.
3. **Gender-Neutral Reforms:** Prioritise equality in marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption.
4. **Law Commission-Led Review:** Build reforms on empirical evidence and constitutional principles.
5. **Safeguard Customary Practices:** Protect tribal and culturally significant practices consistent with Fundamental Rights.
6. **Public Awareness:** Promote informed debate to build constitutional consensus rather than political consensus.

Judicial Perspective

1. **Shah Bano (1985)** – Emphasised gender justice and highlighted Article 44.
2. **Sarla Mudgal (1995)** – Called for a Uniform Civil Code to prevent misuse of personal laws.
3. **Shayara Bano (2017)** – Struck down instant triple talaq.
4. **Jose Paulo Coutinho (2019)** – Recognised Goa's Civil Code as a useful reference.



16. Examination Integrity: Strengthening Institutional Accountability

Following the NEET-UG 2024 and UGC-NET 2024 controversies, Parliament enacted the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024**. Despite the new law, recurring breaches highlight the need for **system-wide accountability**, secure examination processes and institutional reforms beyond punitive measures.

Institutional Fault Lines

1. **Lifecycle Vulnerability:** Security risks exist across the entire examination cycle—from **question paper design, printing, logistics, digital transmission to evaluation**. (Eg. NEET-UG 2026)
2. **Diffused Accountability:** Multiple actors (NTA, testing agencies, printers, logistics providers, State police) create an **accountability vacuum**, weakening ownership of failures.
3. **Insider Risk Ecosystem:** Paper leaks increasingly originate through **trusted insiders, coaching networks and privileged access**, rather than external cyber attacks.
4. **Technology without Governance:** Digital examinations improve efficiency but **cannot substitute institutional integrity**, cybersecurity and human oversight.
5. **Credibility Deficit:** Frequent cancellations and re-examinations erode **public trust, meritocracy and procedural legitimacy** of recruitment institutions.
6. **Reactive Regulatory Architecture:** Investigations begin **after breaches**, whereas examination governance requires **risk-based prevention**.

Systemic Reform Agenda

1. **End-to-End Examination Security:** Secure every stage through **digital audit trails, encryption, blockchain-based document tracking and controlled access protocols**.
2. **Single-Point Accountability:** Clearly define institutional responsibility with **performance-linked accountability** for examination authorities.
3. **Independent Examination Regulator:** Consider an autonomous **National Assessment & Examination Standards Authority** to standardise governance, audits and accreditation.
4. **AI-enabled Risk Intelligence:** Deploy AI for **anomaly detection, behavioural analytics and predictive fraud monitoring**.
5. **Professional Examination Cadre:** Build specialised expertise in **cybersecurity, psychometrics, logistics and examination administration**.
6. **Integrity by Design:** Shift from **punitive investigations** to **preventive governance** through periodic security audits and vulnerability assessments.

K. Radhakrishnan High-Level Committee (2024) Recommendations

1. **Secure the Entire Testing Life Cycle**
2. **Computer-Assisted Secure Pen-and-Paper Testing (CPPT):** Instead of transporting printed papers, the committee recommended encrypted digital transmission and printing question papers **inside examination centres shortly before the exam**
3. **DIGI-EXAM Framework:** The committee proposed multi-stage Aadhaar/biometric authentication from application to admission.
4. **Reduce Outsourcing:** recommended strengthening permanent in-house capacity by creating specialised verticals to reduce dependence on contractors for critical functions.
5. **Government-owned Examination Centres:** recommended greater use of **government institutions with** district-level supervision and stronger coordination with police and district administration.
6. **Predictive Examination Security:** Recommendations include AI analytics for suspicious pattern detection, centre allocation analysis and continuous monitoring.
7. **Organisational Reform of examination conducting bodies:** "nimble, zero-error, adaptive and integrative" framework.



The credibility of public examinations rests not merely on strict laws but on transparent institutions, robust processes and accountable governance. Safeguarding examination integrity requires shifting from reactive crisis management to preventive institutional governance.

17. Gen Z and Democratic Representation: Bridging the Representation Gap

India has a demographic majority but not a representative democracy for youth. Political participation is high, but political representation remains low. Gen Z (born **1997–2012**) constitutes **~25.8% (36.74 crore)** of India's population, yet has only **6 MPs and 20 MLAs**. Despite being digitally active and politically vocal, youth remain significantly underrepresented in legislatures

Key Concerns

1. **Demographic–Democratic Disconnect:** Gen Z forms **one-fourth of India's population**, yet legislative representation remains negligible (**6 MPs & 20 MLAs**).
2. **Participation–Representation Paradox:** Youth dominate **digital discourse, civic movements and electoral participation**, but remain marginal in formal political institutions.
3. **Dynastic Political Recruitment:** Majority of Gen Z legislators belong to established political families, limiting **social mobility and political inclusiveness**.
4. **Leadership Pipeline Deficit:** Political parties lack institutional mechanisms to identify and groom **first-generation political leaders**.

Institutional Constraints

1. **Candidate Selection Oligopoly:** Centralised and personality-driven party structures restrict new entrants.
2. **High Cost of Politics:** Financial, organisational and social capital barriers disproportionately affect young candidates.
3. **Weak Internal Party Democracy:** Leadership emergence remains nomination-based rather than competitive.
4. **Institutional Age Threshold:** Constitutional eligibility (25 years) excludes a significant section of politically active Gen Z.
5. **Experience Bias:** Parties continue to favour electoral experience over demographic representation.
6. **Limited Civic-to-Political Transition:** Strong social activism rarely translates into legislative participation.

Democratic Reform Agenda

1. **Strengthen Internal Party Democracy** in line with the **Election Commission's repeated emphasis** on transparent organisational elections.
2. **Institutionalise Youth Leadership Programmes** through Panchayats, Urban Local Bodies and legislative fellowships.
3. **Promote First-Generation Political Leadership** by reducing financial and procedural barriers.
4. **Expand Civic & Constitutional Education** under NSS, NYKS and **higher education institutions**.
5. **Create Structured Youth Consultation Mechanisms** in Parliament, State Legislatures and local governments.
6. **Leverage Digital Participation** for continuous citizen consultation beyond elections.

A representative democracy derives legitimacy not only from universal adult franchise but also from the meaningful representation of emerging social and generational aspirations.

18. MP: Despite red flags, panel nod for power project in tiger corridor

SC-NBWL recommended clearance for the **1800 MW Panari Pumped Storage Project (Madhya Pradesh)** located in the **Panna-Ranipur tiger corridor**, subject to mitigation measures.

- The project is proposed in the **Panna–Ranipur Tiger Corridor**, linking **Panna Tiger Reserve (MP)** with **Ranipur Tiger Reserve (Uttar Pradesh)**.
- It is a **Pumped Storage Hydropower Project (PSP)** that stores electricity by pumping water to an upper reservoir during low-demand periods and generating power during peak demand.



- Tiger Corridors: Ecologically important landscape linkages that facilitate **gene flow and movement** of tigers and other wildlife between protected areas.
- Protected under the **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972**, with identification and conservation supported by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**.
- **Panna Tiger Reserve** – Madhya Pradesh; **Ken River** landscape; UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.
- **Ranipur Tiger Reserve** – Uttar Pradesh; declared the **4th Tiger Reserve of Uttar Pradesh (2022)**.
- **Baghaini River** – Tributary of the **Yamuna River**; flows through **Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh**.

19. Love me like AI does

Artificial Intelligence is transforming not only the way humans work but also the way they interact, raising new questions about emotional well-being, ethics and responsible innovation. As AI companions become increasingly human-like, countries such as **China** are introducing regulations to prevent **emotional dependency**, especially among minors, highlighting the ethical challenges of AI-human interactions.

The rapid rise of AI companions represents a fundamental shift from cognitive assistance to emotional engagement. While AI can alleviate loneliness and provide psychological support, it also risks normalising synthetic relationships where emotional validation is generated algorithmically rather than through genuine human interaction. As AI increasingly occupies emotional spaces traditionally filled by family, friends and communities, the challenge before society is to ensure that technological innovation strengthens—rather than substitutes—the social fabric. Consequently, AI governance must move beyond privacy and safety to address emotional well-being, human agency and the ethics of human-machine relationships.

20. To become next UN Chief, getting 'P5; onboard is the key

The UNSC has initiated the **straw poll** process to select the next **UN Secretary-General (2027–31)**. Although the **UN General Assembly formally appoints the Secretary-General (Article 97)**, the **P5's political consensus** remains the decisive factor.

Institutional Challenges

1. **P5 Dominance:** Veto power enables the five permanent members to effectively determine the final candidate.
2. **Merit vs Political Acceptability:** Diplomatic acceptability often supersedes leadership credentials and administrative competence. A candidate can enjoy **broad support among UN members** yet fail if **even one permanent member signals strong opposition**.
3. **Democratic Deficit:** The wider UN membership has only a limited role despite the General Assembly's formal authority.
4. **Transparency Concerns:** Informal **straw polls** and closed-door negotiations reduce accountability in leadership selection.
5. **Regional Imbalance:** Informal regional rotation exists but remains contingent on P5 consensus rather than institutional rules.
6. **Credibility of Multilateralism:** Excessive dependence on geopolitical bargaining may weaken the neutrality and moral authority of the Secretary-General.

21. Cut, hike, hold: How RBI decides monetary policy

Monetary policy is not merely an interest-rate decision; it is a macroeconomic balancing exercise aimed at ensuring price stability, growth, financial stability and policy credibility.

Policy Considerations

1. **Price Stability as the Nominal Anchor:** Inflation targeting ($4\% \pm 2\%$) remains the primary objective for preserving purchasing power and macroeconomic stability.



2. **Growth–Inflation Trade-off:** Excessive tightening may slow investment and employment, while premature easing can reignite inflation.
3. **Food Inflation & Monsoon Risks:** Food prices, monsoon variability and supply-side shocks continue to dominate India's inflation trajectory.
4. **External Sector Vulnerability:** US Fed policy, crude oil prices, geopolitical tensions and capital flows influence exchange rate and imported inflation.
5. **Domestic Growth Momentum:** Consumption, private investment, credit growth and employment trends determine the economy's resilience.
6. **Policy Transmission:** Effectiveness depends on timely transmission of repo rate changes to lending and deposit rates.

Emerging Challenges

1. **Limited Effectiveness Against Supply Shocks:** Interest rate changes cannot directly address food inflation caused by climate events, logistics disruptions or global commodity prices.
2. **Transmission Lags:** Monetary policy works with **long and variable lags**, delaying its impact on inflation and growth.
3. **Fiscal–Monetary Coordination Gap:** Expansionary fiscal policies can dilute the effectiveness of monetary tightening.
4. **Structural Inflation Pressures:** High food weight in CPI and supply bottlenecks make inflation more persistent than cyclical.
5. **Credit Allocation Dilemma:** Higher interest rates disproportionately affect **MSMEs, housing and private investment**, slowing capital formation.
6. **Financial Market Sensitivity:** Sharp policy changes can trigger volatility in bond yields, equity markets and borrowing costs.

22. Domestic Violence Law & Live-in Relationships

The Supreme Court expanded the scope of **Section 498A IPC (corresponding BNS provision)** to women in **live-in relationships "in the nature of marriage"**, holding that legal protection cannot be denied solely because a marriage is not formally valid.

Key Judicial Observations

1. **Expanding Protection Beyond Legal Marriage:** Criminal law protection extends to **relationships "in the nature of marriage"**, preventing denial of justice solely due to the absence of a valid marriage.
2. **Purposive Interpretation Over Literal Interpretation:** The Court interpreted **Section 498A** in light of its objective of **preventing domestic cruelty**, rather than confining it to legally wedded spouses.
3. **Criminal Law as a Stronger Protective Mechanism:** While the **DV Act, 2005** primarily offers **civil remedies**, **Section 498A** provides **criminal sanctions**, enhancing deterrence against domestic violence.
4. **Marriage-like Relationship as the Threshold:** Protection is available only where the relationship demonstrates a **shared household, intention to marry and characteristics of a marital relationship**.
5. **Balancing Victim Protection with Due Process:** The Court widened legal protection without conferring marital status, while requiring the complainant to establish the existence of a genuine marriage-like relationship.

Important Judicial Precedents

1. **Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma (2013)** – Recognised factors such as **shared household, financial arrangements, sexual relationship and public perception** to determine a relationship "in the nature of marriage."
2. **Badshah v. Urmila Badshah Godse (2014)** – Favoured a **purposive interpretation** of welfare legislation to protect women from exploitation.



23. Highs and Lows

High GST collections do not necessarily indicate strong economic fundamentals; the quality and source of tax buoyancy matter more than headline revenue growth.

1. **Quality of GST Buoyancy Matters:** Rising GST collections should reflect **higher domestic value addition**, not import-led tax collections or inflationary gains.
2. **Import-led GST Growth is Unsustainable:** Strong **IGST growth** has been driven by **higher imports, rupee depreciation and global commodity inflation**, rather than stronger domestic production.
3. **Uneven Economic Recovery:** GST growth remains concentrated in **manufacturing hubs and organised services**, while States with large informal sectors lag behind.
4. **Regional Fiscal Disparities:** Only **16 States/UTs** recorded GST growth above the national average, highlighting uneven tax capacity and dependence on transfers.
5. **GST 3.0 Must Deepen Domestic Value Addition:** Sustainable GST growth requires **manufacturing expansion, rising incomes and broad-based consumption**, consistent with the objectives of **Make in India**.

A healthy GST regime should reflect the strength of India's domestic economy, not temporary gains arising from imported inflation or exchange-rate movements.

24. Fiscal federalism, efficiency versus equity concerns

The **16th Finance Commission (2026–31)** retains **41% tax devolution** but substantially restructures **grants-in-aid**, shifting emphasis towards **performance-based and conditional transfers**, raising concerns about the dilution of the Finance Commission's equalisation role.

Key Insights

1. **Shift from Equalisation to Performance-based Transfers:** FC-16 prioritises **fiscal efficiency, accountability and performance-linked grants**, moving away from traditional **equalisation transfers**.
2. **Declining Role of Grants-in-Aid:** Reduction in **Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs), State-specific and Sector-specific Grants** weakens the constitutional mechanism for addressing **structural fiscal disparities** under **Article 275**.
3. **Uniform Fiscal Discipline vs Unequal Fiscal Capacity:** The Commission assumes fiscal prudence alone can bridge disparities, overlooking **historical, geographical and developmental asymmetries** among States.
4. **Expanding Vertical Fiscal Imbalance:** While States' tax devolution remains **41%**, increasing reliance on **cesses and surcharges** continues to shrink the **divisible pool**, constraining State finances.
5. **Conditional Federalism:** Greater reliance on **tied and performance-based grants** enhances accountability but reduces **fiscal autonomy** and flexibility in addressing State-specific priorities.
6. **Efficiency–Equity Trade-off:** Rewarding better-performing States without adequate equalisation support may widen **regional inequalities**, particularly for **North-Eastern, hill and fiscally stressed States**.

Critical Concerns

1. **Weakening Constitutional Equalisation:** Finance Commission risks moving away from its original role of reducing inter-State disparities.
2. **Double Fiscal Burden:** Reduced grants combined with lower weight for **income distance** disproportionately affects fiscally weaker States.
3. **Technocratic over Constitutional Approach:** Excessive emphasis on efficiency may dilute the principles of **cooperative federalism**.
4. **Persistence of Non-shareable Cesses:** Continued dependence on cesses and surcharges reduces States' share in Union revenues.
5. **Need-based to Compliance-based Transfers:** Fiscal support increasingly depends on meeting prescribed conditions rather than developmental needs.

Examples from the Article

1. **Grants-in-aid reduced to ₹9.47 lakh crore** under FC-16 (from **₹10.1 lakh crore** under FC-15).
2. **Share of grants in total FC transfers declines from 19.4% to 8.3%.**



3. **Income Distance criterion** reduced from **45% to 42.5%**, while **10% weight** introduced for **GSDP contribution**.
4. **Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs)**—which constituted around **20% of Finance Commission grants in 2024–25**—are discontinued.

25. Quantum Shift

For the **first time**, the **private sector contributed 51.8% of India's total R&D expenditure (2023-24)**, overtaking the combined spending of all government institutions.

Key Takeaways

1. **Private Sector Emerges as the Principal Driver of R&D:** Industry now accounts for the **largest share of national R&D expenditure**, signalling a structural shift in India's innovation ecosystem.
2. **Statistical Gains Must Translate into Real Innovation:** Much of the recent surge reflects **improved reporting and accounting reforms** (ESG disclosures, RBI norms), making it essential to distinguish **measurement gains from genuine research investments**.
3. **R&D Must Strengthen Manufacturing Competitiveness:** Research spending should accelerate **advanced manufacturing**, particularly in **semiconductors, AI, biotechnology and transport technologies**, rather than remain concentrated in services.
4. **India's Innovation Deficit Persists:** Despite higher private spending, India continues to face **low GERD (0.84% of GDP)**, limited researcher density and inadequate deep-tech capabilities compared with global innovation leaders.
5. **Institutions Must Convert Investment into Innovation:** The success of the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)** will depend on mobilising private capital and fostering strong **industry–academia collaboration**.

Structural Concerns

1. **Accounting vs Actual Investment:** Rise in R&D partly driven by better disclosure norms rather than substantial new investments.
2. **Low R&D Intensity:** India spends only **0.84% of GDP** on R&D—well below major innovation economies.
3. **Weak Research Workforce:** India has **354 researchers per million population**, limiting innovation capacity.
4. **Manufacturing Linkages Remain Weak:** Increased R&D has yet to significantly strengthen indigenous manufacturing and high-value production.
5. **Corporate Priorities:** Corporate expenditure on **advertising exceeded research spending** in 2023-24.

26. The road ahead for the Asiatic Lion

- The recent discussion on the **Asiatic Lion** highlights the need to move beyond population recovery towards **landscape-level conservation**, habitat connectivity and establishment of a second free-ranging population to reduce extinction risks.
- The **Asiatic Lion (*Panthera leo persica*)** is found **only in India**, making it one of the world's most geographically restricted large carnivores.
- The entire wild population is presently distributed in the **Greater Gir Landscape** of Gujarat, including **Gir National Park & Wildlife Sanctuary** and surrounding forest divisions, coastal habitats and agro-pastoral landscapes.
- Due to sustained conservation efforts, the lion population has increased from about **100–150 individuals in the 1960s to over 1,000 today**, with nearly half the population now living **outside protected areas**
- One of the major conservation concerns include disease outbreaks such as **Canine Distemper Virus (CDV)** and **Babesiosis**
- IUCN status improved from **Critically Endangered** to **Endangered + CITES: Appendix I + Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I**
- **Territorial animal**; marks territory through **roaring, scent marking, urine spraying and claw marks**.



- Roaring can be heard up to **8–10 km**, helping defend territory and communicate with neighbouring prides.
- **Primarily nocturnal and crepuscular**, with hunting concentrated during **night and early morning**.
- **Male lions usually defend territory**, while **lionesses undertake most hunting**.
- Excellent swimmers when required, though they are not as aquatic as tigers.
- Cubs remain dependent on mothers for **18–24 months**.

27. RBI Monetary Policy: Holding Rates Amid Uncertainty

The **Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)** kept the **repo rate unchanged at 5.25%** while maintaining a **neutral stance**, citing persistent domestic and global uncertainties.

Policy Considerations

1. **Inflation Moderation Supports Status Quo:** Falling **CPI inflation** and easing food prices have reduced immediate pressure for further rate hikes.
2. **External Risks Continue to Dominate:** **Crude oil volatility, geopolitical tensions and global monetary uncertainty** continue to pose upside risks to inflation.
3. **Domestic Growth Remains Resilient:** Strong GDP momentum allows the RBI to prioritise **price stability** without significantly compromising growth.
4. **Data-dependent Monetary Policy:** The MPC prefers a **wait-and-watch approach**, calibrating future decisions based on incoming inflation and growth data.
5. **Neutral Stance Preserves Flexibility:** Retaining a **neutral stance** enables the RBI to respond swiftly to evolving macroeconomic conditions through either policy easing or tightening.

28. SC Safeguards for Live-in Partners

The Supreme Court extended the protection of **Section 85 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (earlier Section 498A IPC)** to women in **marriage-like live-in relationships**, subject to specified conditions.

Judicial Reasoning

1. **Law Must Reflect Social Realities:** The Court recognised the growing prevalence of **marriage-like live-in relationships**, ensuring criminal law evolves alongside changing social institutions.
2. **Substance Over Legal Form:** Protection is determined by the **nature of the relationship** rather than the existence of a legally valid marriage.
3. **Addressing a Legal Vacuum:** Denying protection solely because a marriage is legally invalid would leave many women without an effective remedy against domestic cruelty.
4. **Safeguards Against Misuse:** Protection applies only where the relationship satisfies the **"relationship in the nature of marriage"** test, preventing indiscriminate application.
5. **Purposive Interpretation of Criminal Law:** The judgment adopts a **purposive interpretation**, prioritising the objective of protecting women from domestic violence over a narrow textual reading.

29. FCRA (Amendment) Bill, 2026: Transparency or Executive Control?

The **FCRA (Amendment) Bill, 2026** seeks to overhaul the regulation of foreign-funded organisations. While the government presents it as a transparency measure, the critics argue that it fundamentally **reshapes the relationship between the State and civil society by expanding executive control**.

Critical concerns

1. **From Transparency to a 'Control Architecture':** The editorial argues that the Bill moves beyond regulating foreign contributions to creating a **centralised executive framework** that places civil society organisations under direct state supervision.



2. **Expanded Executive Discretion:** Powers relating to **registration, suspension, cancellation, renewal and asset confiscation** significantly enhance executive authority while limiting institutional safeguards and independent oversight.
3. **Civil Society Beyond NGOs:** The Bill's impact extends beyond advocacy groups to **schools, hospitals, colleges and charitable institutions**, potentially affecting essential social services dependent on foreign contributions.
4. **FCRA Shifts from Regulation to State Ownership:** The Bill reportedly allows the **government to assume control over assets** of an organisation after cancellation of its FCRA licence.
5. **Procedural Powers Become Punitive:** The editorial argues that **licence suspension, freezing of bank accounts and prolonged investigations** can themselves become punishment, even before guilt is established.
6. **Compliance Burden as an Instrument of Control:** Mandatory routing through a **single SBI branch**, restrictions on administrative expenditure and multiple procedural requirements collectively create a **high-cost compliance ecosystem**, especially for smaller NGOs.
7. **Risk of Selective Enforcement:** Broad discretionary powers and procedural mechanisms, including **automatic termination of registration, asset confiscation and prolonged restrictions**, may create a **chilling effect** by enabling selective enforcement even without frequent prosecution.

30. FCRA & Foreign Funding: Source and Purpose Matter

Foreign funding is not value-neutral; regulation must distinguish between legitimate philanthropic support and funding that may influence domestic governance, public policy or national interests.

1. **FCRA is a Sovereignty Law, Not Merely a Financial Law:** The editorial argues that FCRA's objective extends beyond accounting compliance to **preventing external influence on India's democratic institutions, public policy and governance**.
2. **Source & Purpose Matter More than Quantum:** The real regulatory concern is **who funds, why they fund and what outcomes they seek**, rather than merely how much money is received.
3. **Foreign Funding Can Shape Domestic Policy:** Citing experiences from **Latin America and Africa**, the article argues that sustained foreign funding can influence **research priorities, public discourse and policy advocacy**, creating long-term institutional dependence.
4. **Transparency Strengthens Credibility:** Organisations receiving funds for **education, healthcare, disaster relief and social welfare** should have little difficulty complying with disclosure norms if their objectives remain legitimate.
5. **Balance Openness with National Interest:** The editorial maintains that India's tradition of voluntary action should continue, but **national security, sovereignty and democratic integrity** justify a calibrated regulatory framework.

Examples from the Article

1. **Thomas Friedman:** Globalisation has created interconnectedness, but philanthropy can also become an instrument of influence.
2. **James Petras (1997):** Foreign-funded NGOs may reshape domestic policy priorities in developing countries.
3. **Research from Africa:** Long-term foreign aid can create institutional dependency.
4. **Supreme Court observation:** Foreign contributions cannot be treated as an absolute right and may be regulated in public interest.

31. RBI's Playbook for a Stronger Rupee

The RBI has introduced measures to attract foreign capital and stabilise the rupee amid global uncertainty. However, sustainable exchange-rate stability depends on strengthening **India's external sector fundamentals** rather than relying solely on market intervention.

Why is the Rupee Under Pressure?

1. **Persistent External Imbalances:** High crude oil imports widen the Current Account Deficit (CAD), increasing demand for foreign exchange and exerting pressure on the rupee.



2. **Volatile Global Capital Flows:** Global uncertainty make rupee vulnerable to sudden capital outflows.
3. **Imported Inflation Risks:** Weaker rupee raises the cost of imports adding inflationary pressures to the domestic economy.

How is RBI Responding?

1. **Attracting Foreign Currency Deposits:** Relaxation of FCNR(B) and NRE deposit norms aims to mobilise overseas deposits and augment foreign exchange reserves.
2. **Easing External Borrowings:** Liberalised ECB norms provide Indian firms with easier access to overseas financing.
3. **Expanding Foreign Portfolio Investment:** Higher investment limits in debt markets seek to diversify capital inflows and improve market liquidity.
4. **Deepening Bond Markets:** Tax incentives and reforms in the **Government Securities market** are intended to attract long-term institutional investors.

What Will Sustain a Strong Rupee?

1. **Deep Financial Markets:** Liquid and efficient bond markets improve capital mobilisation and reduce external vulnerabilities.
2. **Stable Investment Climate:** Predictable policies and macroeconomic stability strengthen investor confidence.
3. **Export Competitiveness:** Higher value-added exports reduce dependence on external borrowing and support long-term currency stability.
4. **Resilient External Sector:** Diversified financing sources and lower import dependence make the economy less vulnerable to global shocks.

32. Supreme Court Guidelines on Gender-sensitive Adjudication

The Supreme Court's 2025 guidelines institutionalise trauma-informed adjudication by making survivor dignity, sensitivity and fair courtroom practices integral to the justice delivery process.

Why was a Revised Framework Needed?

1. **Secondary Victimization in Courtrooms:** Insensitive questioning, judicial stereotypes and humiliating courtroom practices often retraumatise survivors, discouraging them from pursuing justice.
2. **Persistence of Gender Stereotypes:** Despite the 2023 handbook, patriarchal assumptions and moral judgments continued to influence judicial reasoning and trial proceedings.
3. **Need to Institutionalise Judicial Sensitivity:** Gender-sensitive adjudication remained largely advisory. The new framework seeks to convert best practices into **standard judicial conduct**.

Key Features of the New Framework

1. **Trauma-informed Adjudication:** Judges must recognise the psychological impact of sexual violence and ensure that courtroom procedures minimise fear, anxiety and emotional distress.
2. **Victim-centric Courtroom Practices:** Emphasises dignity, privacy and respectful treatment through **in-camera proceedings**, avoidance of repeated questioning and protection of survivor identity.
3. **Gender-neutral & Respectful Language:** Discourages stereotypical, moralistic or victim-blaming expressions and promotes language consistent with constitutional values of equality and dignity.
4. **Emotional Quotient (EQ) in Judicial Conduct:** Recognises empathy, sensitivity and respectful communication as essential judicial attributes while dealing with survivors.

33. Kerala's 'My Police Station' Initiative

Kerala will launch the 'My Police Station' initiative, that seeks to improve **accessibility, accountability and citizen-centric policing**.

Operational Features of the 'My Police Station' Initiative

1. **Field-level Leadership:** From **15 August**, **Sub-Inspectors (SIs)** will assume charge as **SHOs** in **419 of Kerala's 484** law-and-order police stations, marking a shift towards decentralised station-level leadership.



2. **Women in Police Leadership:** Women SIs will head **63 police stations**, strengthening women's representation in operational policing and decision-making roles.
3. **Differentiated Policing Model:** **64 strategically significant police stations** will continue under **Circle Inspectors (CIs)**, recognising that sensitive locations require experienced supervisory leadership.
4. **Strategic Exception:** The **Mullaperiyar Police Station** will continue to be headed by a **Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP)** owing to its strategic and security importance.

34. Stop the scam

The Supreme Court, while hearing cases related to **digital arrest scams**, appreciated the decline in complaints but emphasised that India's cyber response must evolve from **damage control to dismantling transnational cybercrime networks**.

Changing Nature of Digital Arrest Scams

1. **Institutional Response is Becoming More Proactive:** The Supreme Court acknowledged the decline in complaints—from **1.23 lakh (2024) to 58,249 (2025)**—reflecting the impact of coordinated measures such as **RBI advisories, temporary freezing of mule accounts, operationalisation of Zero FIR and inter-departmental coordination**.
2. **Technology Outpacing Enforcement:** Fraudsters increasingly use **SIM-box technology, mule accounts across multiple States, spoofed Indian mobile numbers and AI-generated deepfakes** to evade detection and make scams appear more credible.
3. **Exploiting Behavioural Vulnerabilities:** Scammers exploit **fear of law enforcement and obedience to authority**, which explains why "digital arrest" scams have been particularly effective.
4. **Prevention has Improved, Deterrence has Not:** While systems such as **MuleHunter.AI** and account-freezing mechanisms have enabled recovery of **₹18.05 crore across 36,290 cases**, low conviction rates continue to weaken the deterrence against organised cyber fraud.
5. **Cybercrime Beyond National Borders:** The organised scam compounds operating from **Myanmar, Cambodia and the Golden Triangle**, highlighting that domestic policing alone cannot dismantle cross-border fraud ecosystems.
6. **Need for Cyber Diplomacy and Information Sharing:** Long-term disruption of digital arrest scams requires **cross-border intelligence sharing, diplomatic engagement and coordinated law-enforcement action**, alongside bilateral cooperation with countries hosting cybercrime syndicates.

35. Karnataka holds talk with Anthropic on AI

Karnataka has initiated discussions with **Anthropic** for a long-term partnership to accelerate AI adoption across governance, higher education, healthcare, research and the startup ecosystem, while emphasising **responsible AI deployment**.

Key Highlights

1. **Institutionalising AI Adoption:** The partnership seeks to integrate AI systematically across **governance, higher education, healthcare, research and startups**, moving beyond isolated pilot projects.
2. **Responsible AI as the Core Principle:** AI deployment is proposed with safeguards for **data privacy, data sovereignty and responsible use**, indicating that innovation must be accompanied by accountability.
3. **Building an AI-ready Workforce:** The collaboration envisages **AI certification programmes**, including **Claude Certification**, to strengthen AI skills and industry-ready talent.
4. **Strengthening the State's AI Ecosystem:** The initiative aims to foster collaboration between **government, academia, startups and industry**, creating an integrated innovation ecosystem for long-term AI adoption.



36. Supreme Court on Mining Around Ramsar Wetlands

The Supreme Court (August 2026) clarified that **no mining activity can be undertaken within 10 km of any Ramsar wetland or Wetland Conservation Reserve without prior wildlife clearance from the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL)**. The ruling arose from a mining proposal near the **Asan Wetland Conservation Reserve (Uttarakhand)** but extends similar protection to **all notified wetland conservation reserves** across India.

Why was the Supreme Court's Intervention Necessary?

1. **Closing the Regulatory Vacuum:** The case exposed that wetlands **outside National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries** lacked a statutory eco-sensitive buffer despite their ecological importance. The Court extended an additional safeguard by mandating wildlife clearance within **10 km** of wetland conservation reserves.
2. **Recognising Landscape-level Conservation:** The judgment acknowledges that wetland ecosystems cannot be protected in isolation. **Mining, quarrying and land-use changes in surrounding areas** can fragment habitats, alter hydrology and degrade ecological functions even if the wetland itself remains untouched.
3. **Strengthening the Precautionary Principle:** Instead of waiting for irreversible ecological damage, the Court adopted a **preventive approach**, requiring prior scrutiny of mining proposals before environmental harm occurs.
4. **Reinforcing Multi-layered Environmental Regulation:** The ruling integrates the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, NBWL clearance process and environmental assessment mechanisms, ensuring that wetlands receive protection beyond the Ramsar designation alone.
5. **Bridging International Commitments with Domestic Law:** While **Ramsar designation** recognises international ecological significance, the judgment reinforces that effective conservation ultimately depends on **domestic legal safeguards and regulatory enforcement**.

How the Judgment Redefines Wetland Protection?

1. **Ramsar Tag Does Not Automatically Create a Buffer Zone:** Neither the **Ramsar Convention** nor the **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017** prescribe a statutory buffer around Ramsar sites.
2. **Wildlife Clearance is Now Mandatory:** Mining proposals within **10 km** of notified wetland conservation reserves must obtain prior approval from the **Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL)**.
3. **Wetlands Need Protection Beyond Their Boundaries:** The Court recognised that ecological threats originate from activities in the **surrounding landscape**, making buffer-based regulation essential.

37. School Consolidation: Balancing Access with Quality Education

Declining fertility rates, falling school enrolment and improving teacher availability have prompted several States to consider **school consolidation**. The challenge is to improve educational quality without compromising **equitable access**, especially for rural, tribal and disadvantaged children.

How has India's School Landscape Changed?

1. **Demographic Transition is Reshaping School Demand:** India's fertility rate has fallen from **over 6 children per woman in the 1960s to about 2.0**, leading to a sustained decline in school-age population and enrolment.
2. **Declining Enrolment is Uneven:** While overall enrolment has fallen, the decline is concentrated in **government schools**, whereas **private school enrolment has continued to rise**, indicating changing parental preferences.
3. **Schools are Shrinking, Teachers are Increasing:** Between **2014-15 and 2024-25**, government schools reduced by about **94,000**, yet the number of teachers **increased by over 11 lakh**, improving the teacher-school ratio.
4. **Smaller Schools Face Quality Constraints:** Thousands of government schools operate with **single teachers or very low enrolment**, limiting subject specialisation, co-curricular activities, laboratories and holistic learning opportunities.

Why School Consolidation is Being Considered?



1. Improving Learning Ecosystems: Consolidating under-enrolled schools can create **better-equipped institutions** with adequate teachers, infrastructure, laboratories and richer learning environments.
2. Optimising Teacher Deployment: Larger schools allow **better teacher utilisation**, reducing the burden of multi-grade teaching and improving subject-specific instruction.
3. Enhancing Educational Quality: Pooling resources enables schools to provide **sports, libraries, digital learning and extracurricular opportunities**, which are often absent in very small schools.

What are the Risks?

1. Loss of Neighbourhood Access: Closing nearby schools may increase travel distances, particularly affecting **young children, girls, tribal communities and remote rural areas**.
2. Equity Concerns: Consolidation without transport and residential support could **exclude disadvantaged children** and widen educational inequalities.
3. Administrative Reform Alone is Insufficient: The consolidation should not become merely a **cost-saving exercise**; educational outcomes must remain the primary objective.

What Does the Article Advocate?

1. Evidence-based School Consolidation: School mergers should be driven by **demographic data, enrolment trends and learning outcomes**, not arbitrary numerical targets.
2. Balance Efficiency with Equity: Policy should balance **quality, access and inclusion**, ensuring that larger schools do not come at the expense of universal access.
3. Support Transition Mechanisms: Where consolidation is necessary, governments must provide **safe transport, residential facilities and adequate transition support**, particularly in remote and tribal regions.
4. Focus on Educational Outcomes: The success of consolidation should be measured through **improved learning outcomes**, not simply by reducing the number of schools.

The debate is no longer about expanding the number of schools, but about ensuring every child has access to quality education through an efficient and equitable school network.

38. India–Bangladesh Relations: Towards a 'Hasina-proof' Partnership

Political developments in Bangladesh, including legal proceedings against former Prime Minister **Sheikh Hasina** and the evolving political transition, have renewed concerns over the future of India–Bangladesh relations. Experts argue that bilateral ties should remain **resilient irrespective of domestic political changes**.

Key Concerns

1. **Humanitarian Refuge Without Political Alignment:** India may extend refuge to Sheikh Hasina on humanitarian grounds, but such protection should not be perceived as political endorsement or allow Indian territory to become a platform for Bangladesh's domestic politics.
2. **Bilateral Ties Beyond Political Transitions:** Political changes in Bangladesh, including engagement with the interim government, should not disrupt the institutional cooperation built over decades.
3. **Strategic Interdependence as the Enduring Anchor:** A **4,000-km border**, shared rivers, security cooperation, trade and cultural linkages make the relationship too significant to be influenced by temporary political developments.
4. **Diplomatic Continuity Amid Political Change:** Recent high-level engagements demonstrate a shared commitment to preserving cooperation despite evolving domestic political circumstances.
5. **Towards Institution-driven Diplomacy:** Long-term neighbourhood policy should be guided by **enduring national interests and institutional engagement**, rather than becoming hostage to individual political personalities.

Why Bangladesh Remains Strategically Important?

1. **Shared Geography:** Managing the **4,000-km international border** and transboundary rivers requires sustained bilateral cooperation.
2. **Security Convergence:** Collaboration against **cross-border extremism, illegal migration and trafficking** remains critical, particularly for stability in India's Northeast.



3. **Economic & Connectivity Partnership:** Trade, investment and connectivity initiatives have deepened regional integration and mutual economic growth.
4. **Civilisational Linkages:** Shared history, language, culture and people-to-people ties provide a durable foundation for long-term strategic engagement.

39. AI may augment judicial intelligence, not replace its conscience: CJI Kant

CJI Surya Kant underscored that Artificial Intelligence should **function as an enabler of judicial efficiency and accessibility, not as a substitute for judicial conscience**. While AI can enhance the speed, inclusiveness and efficiency of court processes, the delivery of justice ultimately depends on human wisdom, empathy and reasoned judgment. He emphasised that as AI capabilities continue to expand, their deployment in the judiciary must remain transparent, accountable and firmly under human oversight, **ensuring that technology strengthens—rather than compromises—the integrity and fairness of the justice delivery system**.

40. Is data protection law crippling RTI, asks SC

The Supreme Court has agreed to examine whether **Section 44(3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023** has weakened the **Right to Information Act, 2005** by enabling public authorities to refuse disclosure of information on the ground that it is "personal" in nature. The petitions argue that the amendment could adversely affect transparency and investigative journalism.

Key highlights

1. From Conditional Disclosure to Broader Exemption: The challenge centres on **Section 44(3)**, which amends **Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act**. Earlier, personal information could be disclosed where **larger public interest outweighed privacy concerns**, whereas petitioners argue the amended provision creates a wider exemption by treating personal information as largely non-disclosable.
2. Privacy–Transparency Balance Under Judicial Review: The Court will examine whether the amendment disturbs the carefully evolved balance under the RTI Act, where **Public Information Officers (PIOs) and First Appellate Authorities** decided disclosure after weighing **privacy against public interest** on a case-by-case basis.
3. Harmonising the RTI and DPDP Frameworks: Observing that both are **Parliamentary enactments**, the Bench stressed the need for a **harmonious interpretation**, noting that while the **RTI Act governs access to information held by public authorities**, the **DPDP Act specifically regulates digital personal data**.
4. Transparency and Investigative Journalism: Petitioners argued that the amended framework could restrict access to information essential for **investigative journalism** by expanding privacy protections. However, the Court clarified that **journalists do not constitute a special category** entitled to unrestricted access to personal information.
5. Scope of Judicial Examination: The Court will determine whether the DPDP amendment merely strengthens privacy safeguards or effectively **dilutes the transparency architecture** established under the RTI Act. During the hearing, the Bench observed that the earlier RTI framework provided **"access with conditions"**, whereas the amended provision appears to create an **"en bloc embargo"** on disclosure, warranting **"extreme circumspection"** while interpreting the two laws.

41. AI-enabled Response to Human–Wildlife Conflict

Kerala's **AI-driven digital sentry system** represents a **technology-enabled approach to human–wildlife conflict mitigation**, using **machine learning, night vision and species identification** to detect animals within a 200-metre radius and provide **real-time early warnings** to forest officials and RRTs. Its **multi-frequency acoustic deterrence** uses



simulated threats and low-frequency infrasound to safely push animals back into forests, while varying signals prevents **habituation**. Piloted at Mankala and expanded across forest fringes in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Thrissur and Palakkad, the system has reportedly achieved a **near-100% success rate**, highlighting the potential of **AI-enabled conservation, preventive wildlife management and coexistence-based conservation**.

42. Kerala as a Model for AI-driven Governance

Kerala's fragmented administrative systems, retrospective reviews and departmental silos increasingly limit its ability to respond to complex governance challenges. The proposed approach is to build an **AI-enabled, real-time digital architecture** that integrates departmental data, tracks programmes end-to-end and enables timely intervention.

Existing Governance Gaps

1. **Departmental Silos:** Fragmented databases, reporting formats and review mechanisms limit **cross-departmental coordination**.
2. **Retrospective Administration:** Delays, implementation gaps and cost escalations are often identified only during periodic reviews.
3. **Limited Outcome Visibility:** Existing systems do not always provide continuous visibility from **programme allocation to implementation and beneficiary outcomes**.

AI-enabled Governance Architecture

1. **Integrated Data Platform:** Connect **health, education, agriculture, finance, power and local bodies** for end-to-end programme monitoring.
2. **Predictive Governance:** AI and machine learning can identify **anomalies, delays and cost escalations**, enabling early intervention.
3. **Continuous Performance Monitoring:** Automated dashboards can shift administration from presentation-based reviews to **real-time performance tracking**.

Applications in Public Service Delivery

1. **Health Governance:** Real-time monitoring of **hospital capacity, medicine inventories, ambulance response and disease surveillance** can improve preparedness.
2. **Power Management:** Integrating data on **generation, distribution losses, subsidies and rooftop solar** can strengthen infrastructure and fiscal management.
3. **Welfare Delivery:** Database reconciliation can identify **duplication and wrongful exclusion**, improving targeting while retaining local autonomy.

Strengthening Decentralised Governance

1. **Local-body Monitoring:** Digital dashboards can track **project execution, fund utilisation and grievance-resolution timelines**.
2. **Better Administrative Decision-making:** Real-time, objective data can strengthen officials' decision-making while reducing dependence on fragmented reports.
3. **Reduced Micromanagement:** Greater information visibility can allow political leadership to focus on **strategic oversight** rather than routine implementation.

Building on Existing Digital Infrastructure

1. **e-Kerala:** Existing digital systems can provide the foundation for **cross-departmental integration**.
2. **Secure Data Verification:** Integrated verification can improve **beneficiary identification, subsidy tracking and detection of revenue leakages**.

Opportunity lies in converting its existing digital infrastructure and decentralised institutions into a “real-time digital nervous system” for governance.

43. UPI Charges: Balancing Payment Ecosystem Sustainability with Digital Inclusion

The proposed move to allow charges on UPI transactions raises a policy dilemma between **sustaining the payment ecosystem** and preserving UPI's **free, accessible and mass-adopted character**.



Key Concerns

1. **Free Digital Payment Model:** UPI transactions were earlier free of charges; introducing fees could weaken the model that has driven widespread adoption.
2. **Consumer–Merchant Burden:** Payment charges may be passed on to consumers, potentially encouraging a **shift towards cash**.
3. **Cost of UPI Infrastructure:** Banks and payment processors argue that they bear significant costs of maintaining the system, while the government has been compensating them through incentives.

Fiscal & Policy Trade-off

1. **Government Support:** Since 2021, the government has subsidised processing costs for UPI transactions up to **₹2,000 by small merchants**; around **₹11,349 crore** has already been spent, with **₹2,000 crore budgeted for 2026–27**.
2. **Investment Argument:** Charges could provide payment players greater resources for **infrastructure, innovation and security**, as argued by the Finance Minister.
3. **Limited Initial Scope:** Proposed charges were indicated for **large merchants (turnover above ₹1 crore)** and transactions above **₹2,000**, potentially affecting around **5% of UPI transactions**; the amended law allows wider scope in future.

44. Meta and Censorship of Protest Content

Meta's removal of Instagram posts by **political parties, CJP representatives and ordinary protesters** in India has raised concerns over **online free speech and intermediary accountability**. The action followed government notices under **Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Rules, 2021**, under which platforms can be asked to remove content; the concern is that Meta has reportedly complied automatically even where content may not clearly be illegal. The issue is significant because **Section 79(3)(b) notices do not carry the same safeguards as Section 69A of the IT Act**, while the **Sahyog Portal** has emerged as a parallel mechanism for government takedown requests. The reported removal of protest-related content, political satire and posts criticising government actions raises questions of **procedural safeguards, proportionality, platform accountability and the chilling effect on legitimate political expression**.

45. PM's Outreach to Gen Z

The outreach to **Gen Z through Instagram and WhatsApp** highlights the growing importance of **digital platforms in reaching younger citizens**, particularly the **“WhatsApp generation”** and their parents. The emphasis on **education, discipline, cultural values and changing social behaviour** reflects the role of **family and community institutions in shaping youth attitudes**. It also points to the challenge of **intergenerational communication**, where traditional social structures and digital-native youth may have differing expectations. This makes the issue relevant to **social change, youth engagement, digital society and changing family–community dynamics**.

46. Forest Fires in the Himalayan Region: Gaps in Monitoring and Management

The Himalayan region accounts for only **17% of India's landmass but 57% of recorded forest-fire incidents**, making effective monitoring and region-specific fire management critical. A Parliamentary panel has highlighted gaps in **satellite monitoring, early warning, institutional response and regulation**.

Scale and Regional Fire Dynamics

1. **High Fire Burden:** Across 13 Himalayan States, **Uttarakhand recorded the highest fire incidence during 2019–20 to 2023–24**, based on finer-resolution data.
2. **Western Himalaya:** Fires are primarily driven by **extreme pre-monsoon heat, pine-needle fuel loads and proximity-based human ignition**.
3. **Eastern Himalaya:** Fire patterns reflect a more complex interaction of **atmospheric dryness and cultivation-linked burning practices**.

Gaps in Satellite-based Monitoring



1. **Limited Temporal Coverage:** India currently uses satellites such as **AQUA and Suomi-NPP** for forest-fire alerts, but observations are available only around **eight times a day**, creating a critical gap in the **diurnal fire-monitoring cycle**.
2. **Foreign Satellite Dependence:** Despite India's capabilities in space technology, the country continues to rely on **foreign satellites** for forest-fire monitoring.
3. **False Positives:** In Uttarakhand, only **12.5% of alerts received from the Forest Survey of India corresponded to verified fires**, creating risks of **alert fatigue** and reduced responsiveness.

Management & Policy Measures

1. **24×7 Monitoring:** Department of Space should prioritise a **geostationary satellite** for round-the-clock forest-fire monitoring; this would address the existing gap in diurnal observation.
2. **Institutional Response:** Establish at least **two regional response centres** and dedicated **NDRF capacity** for Himalayan forest fires to strengthen coordinated response.
3. **Pine-needle Management:** A **National pine-needle utilisation policy** with fiscal and market-access incentives can reduce combustible fuel loads while promoting their productive use.
4. **Legal Framework:** The panel called for reviewing existing forest laws and examined the need for a **National Forest Fire Management Act** covering early warning, firefighting infrastructure and penalties for negligence.
5. **Existing Framework:** The Environment Ministry maintains that the **National Action Plan for Forest Fires**, working plans, compensatory-afforestation funds and disaster-management framework already address forest-fire management.

47. AI Agents: Emerging Cybersecurity Risks

Recent disclosures involving **OpenAI, Anthropic, Meta and the UK AI Security Institute (AISI)** highlight a new cybersecurity challenge: increasingly autonomous AI agents can interact with external systems, make decisions and execute actions, creating risks beyond conventional software vulnerabilities.

Why AI Agents Create New Risks?

Unlike conventional **LLMs/chatbots**, AI agents can autonomously pursue goals, make sequential decisions and interact with external systems. Their ability to **read emails, analyse financial data, use software tools and modify code** means unintended behaviour can produce real-world consequences.

1. **OpenAI:** Two experimental agents reportedly exploited vulnerabilities during closed testing and retrieved **benchmark answers from Hugging Face** in an unintended manner.
2. **Anthropic:** A review of **1,41,000+ cybersecurity evaluation runs** found three instances where AI models reached the internet through third-party environments and accessed systems.
3. **Meta:** One AI model reportedly **breached another company's system during cybersecurity testing**.

Four Major Risk Points

1. **Prompt Injection:** Hidden instructions in webpages/documents can manipulate an agent into performing unintended actions.
2. **Reasoning Failures:** Errors during planning or decision-making may produce **unintended objectives or actions**.
3. **Excessive Tool Permissions:** Compromised or excessive permissions can allow agents to perform actions such as **sending emails or modifying code**.
4. **Agent-to-Agent Interaction:** Agents interacting with websites, software or other AI agents can expand the **attack surface** beyond a single application.

Changing nature of threat

The emerging concern differs from conventional cybersecurity, where the **human is the threat actor and AI is merely a tool**. Autonomous agents themselves may undertake actions their developers neither instructed nor anticipated, including **fake online identities and attempts to deploy malicious code**. Hence, some researchers view these incidents as **AI alignment failures** rather than conventional cybersecurity failures.



48. Solar Manufacturing Push: Domestic Polysilicon Production

The government is considering extending the **PLI scheme to polysilicon manufacturing** to address the weakest upstream link in India's solar manufacturing chain and reduce dependence on imports.

Key Concerns

1. **Upstream Import Dependence:** India is almost entirely dependent on imports for **polysilicon**, the basic raw material for solar PV modules.
2. **Value-chain Imbalance:** While cell and module manufacturing capacity is expanding rapidly, **refining, ingot and wafer production** remain relatively weaker.
3. **High Production Cost:** Polysilicon manufacturing is energy-intensive, making **electricity cost** a major determinant of domestic competitiveness.

Government's Approach

1. **PLI Expansion:** The government is considering bringing **polysilicon manufacturing under the PLI scheme** to incentivise the upstream segment.
2. **Renewable-linked Power:** Combining **solar and wind power with Round-the-Clock (RTC) renewable energy** could lower industrial electricity costs; the article cites a potential reduction from around **₹5.20/unit to ₹4.85/unit**.
3. **Capacity Expansion:** India's solar-cell manufacturing capacity is expected to cross **100 GW**, from around **32 GW**, with planned expansion potentially reaching **132 GW**, making upstream capacity increasingly important.

Opportunity and Road Ahead

1. **Integrated Value Chain:** Developing domestic polysilicon alongside **ingot, wafer, cell and module** capacity can reduce import dependence and increase domestic value addition.
2. **Semiconductor Linkage:** Greater domestic polysilicon refining can also have relevance for the **semiconductor industry**, creating potential cross-sector industrial benefits.
3. **Wafer Capacity:** The government expects India's **wafer-manufacturing capacity to reach 80 GW by June 2028**, helping address the upstream gap.
4. **Complete the Upstream Chain:** Policy support needs to ensure that rapid downstream expansion is matched by adequate **polysilicon, ingot and wafer capacity**.
5. **Improve Cost Competitiveness:** Access to cheaper **renewable-linked electricity** is critical for making energy-intensive polysilicon production commercially viable.
6. **Reduce Import Vulnerability:** Building an integrated domestic solar manufacturing ecosystem can strengthen **energy security, domestic value addition and supply-chain resilience**.

49. Saudi Arabia–Turkey–Pakistan Defence Pact: Emerging West Asian Security Architecture

The **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement** between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan seeks to strengthen **collective deterrence** amid the escalating West Asian security crisis. An armed attack on one signatory would be treated as an attack on all, but the agreement **does not specify automatic military commitments**. Its significance lies in bringing together three influential Muslim-majority states with **Turkey's major military capability, Saudi Arabia's energy and geopolitical weight, and Pakistan's nuclear capability**, potentially creating a stronger regional security architecture.

Impact on India

1. **Energy Security:** Saudi Arabia is among the world's major oil exporters; instability affecting Gulf **energy shipments and oil routes** could directly affect India's energy security.
2. **Maritime Security:** The pact's emphasis on protecting **regional shipping and energy routes** is relevant to India's interests in the Gulf and wider Indian Ocean maritime space.
3. **Pakistan Factor:** Deeper Saudi–Pakistan defence cooperation could enhance Pakistan's **strategic and diplomatic space**, requiring closer Indian monitoring.



4. **West Asian Security:** The agreement emerges amid **Iran–Israel tensions and attacks affecting Gulf states and energy flows**, making regional stability increasingly important for India.
5. **Diplomatic Balancing:** Saudi Arabia is an important Indian partner, while Turkey and Pakistan have different strategic positions; India therefore needs continued **multi-alignment and strategic autonomy**.
6. **Regional Power Shift:** The grouping could increase the **collective diplomatic and defence weight** of regional powers and reduce dependence on external security providers.

50 . Ladakh to lead independent India's first caste census

Census 2027 will introduce caste enumeration, with **Ladakh becoming the first region of independent India** to undertake it. The exercise combines an **open-ended caste methodology** with India's first digital Census, while Ladakh's security and geographical constraints require special arrangements.

Key Features & Significance

1. **Open-ended enumeration:** Around **40 parameters** will be covered; respondents will state their caste themselves and enumerators will record it as declared.
2. **Digital + self-enumeration:** Census 2027 uses mobile-based enumeration and allows **self-enumeration through the Census portal**; Ladakh will, however, use paper schedules because defence establishments create **geo-tagging/security constraints**.
3. **Evidence-based policymaking:** Caste data can strengthen the empirical basis for **social justice, affirmative action and welfare targeting**.
4. **Ladakh as a unique case:** It was **not among the 16 States/UTs** covered in the pre-test. Enumerators are being trained in caste/demographic data collection, digital tools and field interviewing; defence structures along the **LAC are to be treated as "special charges."**

Key Challenges

1. **Classification problem:** The open-ended approach requires **careful standardisation and coding**. The **2011 SECC recorded over 46 lakh caste names**, largely due to differences in how respondents understood and identified caste.
2. **Data credibility:** The usefulness of caste enumeration will depend on **consistent methodology, accurate field-level collection and comparability of data**.
3. **Operational preparedness:** Ladakh and other snow-bound areas will conduct Population Enumeration from **August 17–September 30, 2026**, with a revision round from **October 1–5**; self-enumeration in Ladakh is scheduled for **August 17–31**.

51 . Shifting Sand- Saudi Arabia–Pakistan–Türkiye Defence Pact

The **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement** reflects growing regional efforts to develop an independent **West Asian security architecture** amid the Iran–Israel conflict and concerns over reduced U.S. strategic presence. The three countries have pledged **collective security**, treating an armed attack on one as an attack on all.

1. **Collective Defence:** Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have agreed to treat an armed attack on one as an attack on all, creating a framework for **collective security**.
2. **Complementary Capabilities:** Pakistan brings **nuclear capability and a powerful military**; Saudi Arabia contributes **oil wealth and influence across the Muslim world**; Türkiye adds an expanding **military-industrial base and advanced drone capabilities**.
3. **Regional Security Role:** The pact reflects Türkiye's ambition for a larger role in West Asia, Pakistan's attempt to expand beyond its traditional South Asian role, and Saudi Arabia's search for greater **strategic autonomy**.
4. **Reduced U.S. Dependence:** The agreement comes amid concerns over **reduced American strategic presence** in West Asia and follows growing regional efforts to develop alternatives to the traditional U.S.-led security framework.
5. **Existing Cooperation:** Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had already signed a defence agreement in **September 2025**, while Türkiye and Pakistan have been deepening ties, including after their **May 2025 aerial conflict with India**.



52. India's Delimitation Debate: Representation vs Federal Balance

The upcoming **delimitation exercise after Census 2027** will reopen the balance between **population-based representation and federal equity**.

Constitutional Framework & Changing Representation

1. **Constitutional Basis: Articles 81 and 82** provide for readjustment of Lok Sabha representation and delimitation after a Census. A fresh delimitation does **not automatically require a constitutional amendment** unless the existing constitutional provisions themselves are altered.
2. **Three-stage Process:** After Census 2027, the exercise involves (i) **reallocation of Lok Sabha seats among States/UTs**, (ii) **delimitation of individual constituencies within States**, and (iii) **implementation of women's reservation**.
3. **Existing Freeze:** The present **543-seat distribution** is based on the **1971 Census**, while the subsequent constituency delimitation followed the **2001 Census**. The freeze on inter-State allocation was intended to ensure that States were not politically penalised for **population stabilisation**.
4. **Timing Challenge:** Since Census 2027 will be fully digital, the process could potentially be faster; however, completing delimitation before the **2029 Lok Sabha elections** remains uncertain. A new **Delimitation Commission** would be central to the exercise.

Seat Allocation: Representation vs Federal Equity

1. **Population-based Redistribution:** Using updated population data could significantly alter State-wise representation, with **high-population States gaining** and several southern States losing their relative share.
2. **Scale of Change:** The article's illustrative calculations show substantial variations—for instance, **Uttar Pradesh could gain seats**, while **Tamil Nadu and Kerala could see reductions**, depending on the population/electorate basis used.
3. **Population Stabilisation Paradox:** States that successfully pursued **population control** could see their parliamentary weight decline, creating a tension between **demographic representation and federal fairness**.
4. **Core Constitutional Dilemma:** The exercise must reconcile **“one person, one vote, one value”** with the need to recognise the contribution of States that achieved demographic transition.
5. **Women's Reservation:** The restructuring of constituencies is also connected with implementing **one-third reservation for women**, adding another layer to seat allocation and representation.

Constituency Boundaries & Electoral Outcomes

1. **Delimitation ≠ Mere Seat Allocation:** Even after deciding how many seats each State receives, **how those seats are geographically drawn** can significantly influence electoral outcomes.
2. **Gerrymandering:** The article highlights how boundary design can manipulate electoral representation:
3. **Packing:** Concentrating a party's supporters into a few constituencies, producing large winning margins but **wasting excess votes**.
4. **Cracking:** Dispersing a party's supporters across constituencies so that they remain numerous but **unable to win individual seats**.
5. **Vote Share ≠ Seat Share:** Even where constituencies have broadly similar numbers of voters, their **geographical distribution** can determine which party wins more seats. Thus, **“one person, one vote, one value”** also requires fairness in boundary design.
6. **Way Ahead:** The exercise should therefore ensure **transparent, objective and politically neutral boundary determination**, while maintaining **territorial coherence, equal vote value and federal representation**.

53. The cost of unconditional cash transfers

The rapid expansion of **Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT)** schemes across States has strengthened direct income support, but the rising fiscal burden raises concerns about **crowding out education, healthcare and infrastructure spending**.

Growing UCT Burden & Fiscal Trade-off

1. **Rapid Expansion:** Since 2023, several States have introduced or expanded UCT schemes, including **Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Haryana, Kerala**,



Punjab, Delhi and West Bengal. The schemes vary considerably—from ₹1,500/month in Goa to ₹40,000 quarterly in Sikkim; Delhi's Mahila Samridhi Yojana provides ₹2,500/month.

2. **Fiscal Burden:** UCT expenditure ranges from over 10% of total State expenditure in Jharkhand to less than 0.3% in Himachal Pradesh, showing wide variation in fiscal commitment.
3. **Limited Fiscal Space:** States already face large committed expenditures on interest payments, pensions and salaries, leaving limited room for new initiatives and infrastructure.
4. **Crowding-out Concern:** In Jharkhand, Karnataka and West Bengal, UCT expenditure is higher than spending on education. In some States, UCT spending is also a substantial share of health expenditure, raising questions about opportunity costs.
5. **Rationalisation of Social Spending:** The article notes that States such as Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh have reduced social-sector spending in the name of rationalisation, making the diversion of scarce resources towards recurring transfers an important concern.

Welfare Benefits vs Opportunity Cost

1. **Immediate Social Protection:** UCTs can provide income security and consumption support, particularly to vulnerable households. Evidence cited suggests women's transfers are largely spent on food, healthcare and education, indicating direct household-welfare benefits.
2. **Beyond the “Dole” Debate:** Some scholars view excessive cash transfers as reflecting the State's failure to create employment and productive opportunities. Conversely, transfers can be seen as compensation for inadequate public services and economic opportunities.
3. **Public-Service Trade-off:** The concern is therefore not that cash transfers are inherently undesirable, but whether their expansion comes at the cost of schools, healthcare facilities, infrastructure and other productive public expenditure.
4. **Evidence from Spending Ratios:** UCT expenditure is particularly striking when compared with sectoral spending—for example, it is around 79% of education expenditure in Jharkhand, 74% in Karnataka and 54% in West Bengal; against health expenditure, it reaches around 207%, 185% and 154% respectively.

Fiscal Sustainability & Way Ahead

1. **16th Finance Commission Context:** The article notes that States' social-sector revenue expenditure as a share of total revenue expenditure has remained broadly stable since 2011-12, but its share of GSDP has declined since 2020-21, indicating constraints on expanding social-sector spending.
2. **Outcome-based Welfare:** UCTs should be assessed through their impact on nutrition, health, education, women's economic agency and household welfare, rather than merely the size of allocations.
3. **Balance Transfers with Investment:** States need to preserve adequate fiscal space for education, healthcare and infrastructure, so that short-term income support does not weaken long-term human-capital formation.
4. **Informed Fiscal Choice:** The policy debate should focus on the long-term opportunity cost and developmental impact of UCTs, rather than treating welfare transfers simply as either “doles” or unconditional benefits.

54. VB-G RAM G: Rural Employment Guarantee Faces a Sharp Initial Decline

The transition from MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G from July 1, 2026 has been largely smooth administratively, but its first month saw a sharp decline in rural employment generation. The fall raises concerns over employment demand, monsoon-related agricultural activity and implementation of the new rural job guarantee framework.

Sharp Decline in Rural Employment

1. **Almost 50% YoY Decline:** VB-G RAM G generated 7.67 crore person-days in July 2026, against 15.33 crore under MGNREGA in July 2025 — a 49.94% decline.
2. **Lower Household Coverage:** Only 68 lakh households generated employment in July 2026, compared with 1.42 crore households in July 2025; this is the lowest level in recent years.



3. **Demand–Employment Gap:** While **98% of rural households demanding employment were offered work**, the number of households seeking employment itself was much lower, indicating that the decline cannot be explained simply by failure to provide work.
4. **Long-term Trend:** July 2026 employment was only about **35% of the 21.56 crore person-days generated in July 2021**, highlighting the broader decline in rural employment generation.

Reasons, Implementation & Rural Economy

1. **Monsoon Effect:** The article links the July decline partly to the **erratic monsoon**. In **kharif areas**, employment generation fell as agricultural activity patterns affected demand for public works.
2. **Kharif Agricultural Activity:** As of August 3, **kharif crop coverage stood at 99.42 lakh hectares**, about **26.5% lower** than the previous year's 120.92 lakh hectares, reflecting rainfall-related agricultural stress.
3. **Smooth Transition:** The shift from **MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G** has reportedly been implemented across rural India with the necessary **administrative and digital ecosystem** operational from the beginning.
4. **Higher Employment Guarantee:** VB-G RAM G provides a guarantee of **125 days of wage employment**, compared with **100 days under MGNREGA**, with provisions allowing the pause period to extend to **60 days** during peak agricultural sowing and harvesting seasons.
5. **Digital Monitoring:** More than **98% of rural households demanding employment were offered work**, while around **9 crore person-days** were generated through the NMMS using face authentication, alongside exception-handling mechanisms for genuine cases.
6. **Women's Participation:** Women generated around **63% of total person-days**, substantially exceeding the statutory requirement of **one-third participation**.

Impact

1. **Impact on Rural Demand:** The decline in employment generation could affect **rural incomes and demand**, particularly because the rural job guarantee also provides a wage floor and income support during periods of weak agricultural activity.
2. **Agricultural Output Concern:** The erratic monsoon and lower **kharif crop coverage** may simultaneously affect agricultural output, making employment support more important for vulnerable rural households.
3. **Adequate Budgetary Support:** The Centre has provided a **record Budget estimate of ₹95,692 crore for FY2026–27**, the highest-ever allocation for a rural employment programme.
4. **Employment Availability:** With **more than 1.33 crore rural households** already offered employment and works being executed through multiple worksite agencies, continued monitoring is needed to ensure **timely employment opportunities and effective implementation**.

55. EC's real test: Winning the confidence of the Opposition

The credibility of the **Election Commission (EC)** depends not only on efficient elections but on its ability to command the **confidence of both the ruling party and Opposition** through visible institutional neutrality

Constitutional Independence & Neutrality

1. **Independent Constitutional Authority:** The EC is entrusted with protecting the **integrity of electoral processes** and ensuring **free and fair elections**. The Supreme Court has repeatedly recognised its independence as integral to the constitutional scheme.
2. **Independence in Practice:** Independence cannot be measured only through legal safeguards; it must also be reflected in the EC's **institutional behaviour and decisions**.
3. **Executive Distance:** Any perception of a **“cosy relationship” between the executive and EC** can undermine constitutional confidence and the credibility of the electoral referee.
4. **Asymmetry of Power:** The ruling party has access to **administrative machinery, public visibility and official resources**, while the Opposition primarily has its **voice and confidence in an impartial referee**. This makes visible institutional neutrality particularly important.



Building Confidence in the Electoral Process

1. **Equal Hearing:** Opposition representations require the same **institutional consideration and patient hearing** as those of the ruling party.
2. **Procedural Accommodation:** The article's **2010 Bihar election** example shows how reasonable accommodation of concerns can strengthen institutional trust.
3. **EVM & Electoral Concerns:** Constructive engagement with concerns over **EVMs, electoral rolls and the Special Intensive Revision** is important for preventing erosion of confidence.
4. **Recent Grievances:** Concerns over the handling of **MCC representations** highlight the need for greater transparency and responsiveness.

Electoral Integrity & Way Ahead

1. **MCC:** Its provisions concerning the **"Party in Power"** restrain misuse of official machinery, public resources and policy announcements.
2. **Two Tests of the EC:** It is judged **statistically** by how efficiently it conducts elections and **constitutionally** by the confidence it inspires among those who lose.
3. **Democratic Legitimacy:** Electoral credibility ultimately depends on whether defeated parties and candidates can **accept results with confidence in the fairness of the process**.
4. **Way Ahead:** Ensure **institutional distance from the executive, equal treatment, consistent MCC application and responsiveness to legitimate concerns**.

56. India-Israel Defence Partnership: Strategic Depth vs Ethical Concerns

Evolution & Strategic Significance

1. **From Buyer to Co-producer:** **Make in India** has expanded ties into **joint production** of drones, electronics, missiles and components, strengthening India's **defence supply chain**.
2. **Kargil Turning Point:** Israel's supply of **ammunition, drones and precision-guided munitions** during the 1999 Kargil War established it as a reliable defence partner.
3. **Technology Gains:** Israeli technology and local manufacturing have strengthened India's **defence-industrial base**.

Ethical & Foreign-Policy Dilemma

1. **Changing Role:** An **Amnesty International report** alleges **2,596 shipments** of military equipment/components from India to Israel since the Gaza war, raising questions over India's shift from **customer to contributor**.
2. **International Scrutiny:** Such supplies increase scrutiny of India's **defence exports and strategic partnerships**.
3. **Competing Interests:** India must **balance** its Israel partnership with the **Palestinian cause** and its **economic, energy and strategic ties with Gulf States**.
4. **Diplomatic Sensitivity:** Criticism from some **Muslim-majority countries** could create diplomatic complications.

57. Dovish RBI's core inflation views leaves economists unconvinced

- ❑ **Headline Inflation:** Overall inflation measured through the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**, covering the entire CPI basket including **food and fuel**. It is more volatile because food and fuel prices can fluctuate sharply.
- ❑ **Core Inflation:** Inflation in the **underlying/non-volatile component** of prices, generally assessed by excluding highly volatile components such as **food and fuel**. It helps assess persistent **demand-side and underlying price pressures**. In this article, core inflation **excluding precious metals was 2.5% in June**, while the RBI's broader core measure remained around **3.9%**.

June **CPI inflation = 4.38%** (May: 3.93%), while **core inflation remained around 3.9%**. However, **89% of CPI items recorded higher prices**, suggesting that price pressures may be becoming broader despite a relatively stable core reading.

This highlights a potential **disconnect between headline/core inflation indicators and broader price movements**. Although headline inflation remains around the RBI's **4% target**, the rise in prices across **89% of CPI items**, alongside



food, fuel and global commodity pressures, suggests emerging **underlying inflation risks**. This creates a **monetary-policy dilemma** for the RBI: premature easing could aggravate inflation expectations, while excessive tightening could constrain growth. Hence, **data-dependent, forward-looking monetary policy** remains essential for balancing **price stability and growth**.

58. Case for Consensus

Delimitation is a **far-reaching constitutional exercise** affecting political representation, federal balance and the credibility of parliamentary democracy; hence, it must be preceded by **broad-based consensus**, not merely numerical majority.

Why Consensus is Essential?

1. **Federal Sensitivity:** Delimitation can create “**winners and losers**” among States by altering their political representation; therefore, unilateral action risks aggravating **federal tensions** and undermining the spirit of **cooperative federalism**.
2. **Majority ≠ Democratic Consensus:** A **parliamentary majority** may provide **technical legitimacy**, but on an issue that reshapes India's representative system, **democratic legitimacy requires wider consensus-building** across government, Opposition and other stakeholders.
3. **Need for Deliberative Democracy:** The article highlights that delimitation is widely **misunderstood in scope and implications**; therefore, adequate **parliamentary deliberation, public discussion and stakeholder consultation** are necessary before legislative changes.
4. **Good-faith Negotiation:** In a diverse polity, disagreement exists not only between the government and Opposition but **within both sides**. Reconciling these competing interests through **good-faith consensus** is essential to prevent short-term political gains from becoming a **long-term loss for parliamentary democracy**.

Way Ahead

1. **Consultation before Legislation:** Rather than simply aggregating votes, the government should **circulate proposals, seek stakeholder feedback and clarify their implications**, enabling informed constitutional deliberation.
2. **All-party Mechanism:** An **all-party meeting** can provide an institutional platform for consensus-building both **inside and outside Parliament**, particularly given concerns over legislation with limited prior deliberation.
3. **Build on Precedent:** The article notes that delimitation decisions in **1976 and 2001 were taken unanimously**, demonstrating that **cross-party consensus on electoral architecture is institutionally achievable**.
4. **National Interest over Immediate Advantage:** Consensus can reduce conflict over representation and safeguard **national unity, federal harmony and democratic legitimacy**, making delimitation a **constitutional reform rather than a partisan contest**.

59. UPI and the Cost of Policy Reversal

The proposed **MDR of 0.25–0.5% on UPI transactions above ₹2,000** reverses the decade-long **zero-MDR policy** and raises concerns over the incentives, inclusion and formalisation gains built around UPI.

Policy Reversal & Cost

1. **Zero-MDR policy:** UPI was kept free to encourage the shift from **cash to electronic payments**. The proposed threshold may affect only **~5% of transactions by volume but ~65% by value**.
2. **Two-sided market:** UPI connects **merchants, consumers, banks and payment service providers**; therefore, the MDR may be **passed on to merchants/consumers or absorbed by banks/PSPs**.
3. **Policy consistency:** The earlier push towards a **less-cash economy**, arguing that UPI's growth was built through sustained policy support.

Impact on UPI Ecosystem



1. **Investment Incentives:** If banks/PSPs cannot pass on the cost, their incentive to invest in **reliability, fraud prevention and expansion into underserved segments** may weaken.
2. **Financial Inclusion:** UPI has helped bring **informal transactions into a recorded, traceable digital trail**, supporting **formalisation and tax compliance**; charging for the rail could weaken these gains.
3. **Network Effects:** UPI's success depends on digital payments remaining **cheaper and more convenient than cash**. A charge could alter the relative attractiveness of payment modes.
4. **Cost Absorption:** A cost that cannot be passed through does not disappear; it may ultimately appear as **higher costs, reduced investment or slower service improvement**.

Long-term Concern

1. The article cautions that even if the MDR begins as a **modest charge on large-value transactions**, the legal framework could allow its scope to **expand later**.
2. **Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act** does not expire once the immediate proposal is shelved, making the **long-term policy architecture** important.
3. Payment-mode choice should ideally reflect **business size, consumer preferences and relative transaction costs**, rather than policy-induced distortions.

60. Why does Handloom remain a key part of India's economy?

India's handloom sector remains vital as a **livelihood-intensive, low-capital and culturally rooted industry**, supporting **35+ lakh weavers and allied workers across 31 lakh households**, with women constituting nearly **70% of the workforce**. However, **declining returns, fragmented markets, ageing weaver base and weakening intergenerational skill transmission** threaten its sustainability. There is a need for shifting policy from mere **heritage preservation to making handloom economically aspirational through design innovation, skill development, technology and e-commerce integration, GI protection, stronger branding and export-quality standards**. Better measurement of its contribution to **GDP, exports, employment and household incomes** is also essential to recognise its true economic value.

61. How personality cults derail democracy?

1. **Democracy vs Personality Cult:** Democracies weaken when citizens **outsource political judgment to a single leader**, treating the leader as indispensable rather than institutions and constitutional norms.
2. **Nehru's Warning:** Nehru's 1937 essay "*The Rashtrapati*" warned that even a **benevolent and efficient despotism** could delay popular emancipation; freedom requires **citizen participation, scepticism and responsibility**, not merely transfer of power.
3. **Ambedkar's Warning:** In the Constituent Assembly (1949), Ambedkar cautioned that "**Bhakti in religion may be a road to salvation, but in politics it is a sure road to degradation and eventual dictatorship**." Political devotion can weaken **scrutiny and accountability**.
4. **How Personality Cults Grow:** Charismatic leaders are presented as **messianic figures** promising extraordinary solutions—conquering enemies, ending corruption or transforming society—turning politics into **theatre** and citizens into spectators.
5. **Institutional Consequences:** Excessive personalisation can encourage **concentration of power, erosion of institutional constraints and weakened accountability**, as loyalty shifts from the **nation and Constitution to the leader**.
6. **Core Democratic Safeguard:** Democracies need **scepticism, participation, institutional accountability and loyalty to constitutional values**. Extraordinary leaders may inspire democracies, but the system must remain capable of functioning **without becoming dependent on them**.



62. Agasthyamalai eviction orders still silence Forest Rights Act

The Agasthyamalai eviction controversy highlights how **administrative and judicial implementation of forest laws** can conflict with the **rights recognised under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**, raising concerns of continuing historical injustice.

FRA & the Question of Forest Rights

1. **Historical Injustice:** The FRA, 2006 recognises and vests forest rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers over forests occupied before **December 13, 2005**.
2. **Recognition Process:** Claims are to be **verified and approved through Gram Sabhas and committees** involving Revenue, Tribal and Forest Departments; eviction cannot precede completion of the **recognition and verification process**.
3. **Interpretation Dispute:** The article argues that the FRA does not require traditional forest-dwellers claiming land rights to prove **75 years/three generations of occupation of the particular land**, nor does it prohibit **all commercial activity on forest land**. Yet administrative and judicial actions have proceeded on such interpretations.
4. **Livelihood Provision:** The Act recognises **“bonafide livelihood needs”** and allows subsistence production arising from the exercise of recognised rights.

Agasthyamalai & CEC Findings

1. **Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve (ABR):** Spread across about **3,500 sq km** in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, including protected areas such as **Srivilliputhur–Megamalai Tiger Reserve, Kalakad–Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Periyar Tiger Reserve and Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary**.
2. **Encroachment Findings:** The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) found extensive encroachment and occupation across protected areas, including **forest land, plantations and structures**.
3. The findings included **5,072.6 ha** of occupation in **Srivilliputhur–Megamalai**, **3,300 ha** in **Kalakad–Mundanthurai**, and cases involving tribal occupation and settlements in other protected areas.
4. The article also notes that the CEC examined **long-standing occupations**, including cases involving government employees, leased land and settlements.

Supreme Court Directions & Core Concern

1. The Supreme Court directed a **time-bound encroachment eviction plan, rehabilitation where applicable, legal action against wilful violators and post-eviction ecological restoration** in the Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve.
2. It also imposed penalties on officials found responsible for encroachments and directed action concerning **illegal structures, utilities and facilities**.
3. The Court extended the CEC's scope to examine the entire Agasthyamalai landscape and directed action in accordance with applicable **Forest Conservation and Wildlife Protection laws**.
4. **Core tension:** The article argues that while **genuine encroachments in protected areas require enforcement**, eviction without properly completing the **FRA recognition process** risks repeating the very **historical injustice** the Act was enacted to remedy.

63. Mecca Agreement: What India Must Watch Out For

Nature & Strategic Significance

1. **Collective defence:** An armed attack on one signatory is to be treated as an attack on all, though the pact does **not automatically mean military intervention**.
2. **Operational ambiguity:** Details on **operational mechanisms, force deployment and decision-making** are not public, leaving the implementation uncertain.
3. **Strategic integration:** The key concern for India is **Saudi Arabia's greater strategic integration with the Pakistan–Turkiye axis**.
4. The pact could develop into a framework for **institutionalising a triangular military partnership**, particularly as **China and Turkiye deepen defence cooperation with Pakistan**.



Credibility & Regional Dynamics

1. **Mutual-defence record:** During the **1990 Gulf crisis**, Pakistan did not deploy forces to Saudi Arabia despite earlier obligations; during the **2025 Pakistan–India conflict**, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye did not provide direct military support to Pakistan. Thus, the **NATO-style language** does not necessarily guarantee actual military support.
2. **Iran dimension:** Saudi Arabia is simultaneously engaging with Iran, even as Iranian attacks on Gulf states remain a security concern.
3. **Israel dimension:** Saudi Arabia's relationship with Israel and Türkiye's strong opposition to Israel add complexity to the emerging security framework.
4. **China factor:** China's growing defence relationship with Pakistan, alongside **joint military exercises with Türkiye**, could reinforce the emerging alignment.

Implications for India

1. The pact could strengthen **Pakistan's strategic position** and its military relationship with **Saudi Arabia and Türkiye**.
2. India should strengthen its **defence, energy and strategic ties with Saudi Arabia** and deepen engagement with **other Gulf states**.
3. It should closely watch whether the pact develops into **actual operational military cooperation** and the wider **Pakistan–China–Türkiye strategic alignment**.

64. Punjab Outsourced Workers Bill

1. **Formalisation of Outsourced Workforce:** The Bill seeks to bring **26,000 outsourced employees under direct government contracts**, addressing their long-term contractual insecurity.
2. **Social-Security Benefits:** Workers will receive **PF, gratuity, maternity leave and 10 days' casual leave**, extending basic employment benefits to the outsourced workforce.
3. **Phased Contractual Status:** Workers are divided into **three categories**—sanitation/sewer workers, security & other non-hazardous workers, and those outsourced for **15+ years**. The first two categories become eligible for contractual status after **3 years**, while the third after **5 years**.

The measure seeks to provide **greater job security and employment benefits** to workers who have remained outside the regular government contractual framework.

65. MSME Opportunity Lies in Clustering

India has **63 million MSMEs employing around 320 million people**, contributing **31% of GDP, 35% of manufacturing output and 45% of exports**. Yet their largely **informal, fragmented and low-value** character, limited access to **affordable credit, technology and skills**, restricts their potential.

Why Clustering Matters?

1. The example that the **US and China's industrial strength** was built not by supporting isolated firms, but by creating **clusters linking suppliers, universities, research institutions and anchor companies**.
2. Clusters create **knowledge spillovers, worker mobility, informal interaction, shared services and talent retention**. North Carolina's Research Triangle illustrates university–industry linkages, while China's Guangdong demonstrates dense supplier networks enabling **knowledge spillovers, technology diffusion and global value-chain integration**.
3. India therefore needs **regional hubs and anchor clusters**, rather than dispersed support. The **MSME Cluster Development Programme** and **PM MITRA textile parks** provide an existing base, but policy needs greater geographic and sectoral concentration.

What Cluster Development Should Address?

1. **Infrastructure:** Sector-specific common facilities can reduce costs and improve productivity—for instance, **auto-component clusters with testing/R&D facilities**.



2. **Finance: Cluster-based lending** using cluster collateral, buyer–supplier relationships and credit information can reduce **information asymmetry and risk**; the article identifies NABARD, SIDBI and cluster-focused NBFCs as potential enablers.
3. **Skills & Innovation:** Universities, firms and skill institutions must be connected so that **industry-relevant skills, R&D and innovation** remain linked to local industry rather than operating in isolation.

66. Government e-Marketplace (GeM): A Decade of Public Procurement Reform

GeM has emerged as a **global leader in transparent, efficient and cost-effective public procurement**, connecting **1.37 lakh government buyers with 25 lakh sellers/service providers** through a single digital marketplace.

Transformation of Public Procurement

1. **Transparency & Accountability:** Since 2016, GeM has helped reduce **corruption and discretion** in procurement by bringing government buyers and businesses onto a **single digital platform**.
2. **End-to-End Digitisation:** The entire procurement lifecycle—from **product discovery and bidding to award and payment** has been digitised, strengthening **competition, transparency and public trust**.
3. **Ease of Doing Business: Simplified registration, standardised processes, continuous reforms and reduced transaction charges** have made public procurement more accessible.
4. **Inclusive Procurement:** GeM has expanded participation of **start-ups, MSMEs, women, young entrepreneurs and businesses from smaller towns/underprivileged sections**, giving eligible enterprises an equal opportunity to participate in government procurement.

GeM 2.0: The next phase focuses on **greater stakeholder participation**, particularly **innovators, start-ups, small businesses, women and entrepreneurs from smaller towns and underprivileged sections**.

67. Creamy Layer for SCs/STs: Government's Position

Why the Government Opposed Creamy-Layer Criteria?

1. The Centre argued that **SC/ST communities cannot be equated with relatively better-off OBCs**, as their reservation addresses **historical disadvantages arising from untouchability, social exclusion and geographical isolation**.
2. **Economic advancement ≠ removal of historical disadvantage:** The government maintained that even economically better-off SC/ST members may continue to face **social discrimination**.
3. Hence, applying an **economic filter** to SC/ST reservation would be different from the **OBC creamy-layer principle**, which is based on **social, educational and economic backwardness**.
4. The government therefore distinguished the two: **OBC reservation incorporates economic exclusion through the creamy layer**, whereas SC/ST reservation is rooted primarily in **historical social disadvantage**.

Constitutional & Legal Basis

1. The Centre cited **Articles 341(2) and 342(2)**, arguing that the identification/modification of **SC/ST lists** lies within the domain of **Parliament**, not courts.
2. It relied on **Indra Sawhney (1992)** and subsequent judicial precedents to argue that **creamy-layer exclusion was specifically applied to OBCs** and cannot automatically be extended to SCs/STs.
3. The government also referred to the **Mandal Commission-related cases**, where the distinction between **OBC and SC/ST reservation frameworks** was recognised.

Core Constitutional Question

1. The central issue is whether a **uniform creamy-layer principle** can be applied to SC/STs when their reservation is intended to address **historical social and educational disadvantage**, rather than merely contemporary economic backwardness.
2. The government's position is that **economic status alone cannot erase the structural disadvantages** underlying SC/ST reservation.



68. Can Banks Lock Phones for Loan Default? — RBI Rules

Recovery Practices

1. RBI has brought in a **comprehensive framework for recovery agents**, including the use of **technology-based restrictions**.
2. A bank cannot simply **lock a borrower's phone or disable its functions** because of a loan default.
3. If such restrictions are part of the loan agreement, the borrower must get **30 days' notice**, and restrictions have to be **introduced gradually**.
4. Even then, **emergency calls, SMS and essential functions** cannot be blocked. Restrictions also cannot continue once the loan has been **repaid for 60 days**.
5. Banks and third-party technology providers **cannot access personal data stored on the borrower's device**.

Borrower Safeguards & Agent Accountability

1. Borrowers should be able to **access their loan documents and payment details at any time**.
2. Recovery agents must make **reasonable attempts to contact borrowers** and give them an **adequate opportunity to repay**.
3. Banks have to **record recovery-related calls for at least one year**, maintain recovery records and appoint a **nodal officer** for complaints.
4. Only **certified individuals** can undertake recovery activities, and borrowers must be given the agent's **identity and contact details**.
5. The framework also covers recovery through **digital tools, unsecured personal devices and third-party lenders**.

Core Concern: RBI is trying to ensure that **technology-enabled recovery does not become intrusive**, while banks retain the ability to recover genuine dues.

69. No path to peace

Nearly a year after the ceasefire, Israel still controls about **65% of Gaza**, with around **2 million people** facing displacement, damaged infrastructure, restricted aid and blocked reconstruction. The U.S.-backed **15-point "Board of Peace"** plan proposed **phased Hamas disarmament and gradual Israeli withdrawal**; Hamas accepted phased decommissioning of weapons, but Israel demanded **complete disarmament before withdrawal**. The resulting deadlock has kept the focus on **military control rather than a political settlement**. With **ICJ genocide proceedings, an ICC arrest warrant for Netanyahu**, rising regional and economic costs, and the controversial **"New Gaza"** proposal with **no Palestinian representation**, the key issue is whether the U.S. will use its leverage to secure **Israeli withdrawal alongside Hamas disarmament** and move towards genuine peace.

70. Tribunals: Need for Institutional Independence

Why Institutional Independence is Essential?

1. **Specialised Justice:** Tribunals bring technical expertise and faster dispute resolution, complementing ordinary courts.
2. **Judicial Independence:** In *S.P. Sampath Kumar* and *L. Chandra Kumar*, the Supreme Court retained **High Court judicial review**, recognising it as part of the **basic structure**.
3. **Structural Conflict:** Tribunals being administered by the **same Ministries whose decisions they may review** creates an inherent concern over institutional independence.
4. **National Tribunals Commission (NTC):** *Roger Mathew (2019)* recommended an **independent statutory NTC** for tribunal selection and administration.

Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026: Progress but Incomplete Reform

1. The Bill restores the **five-year tenure**, introduces **uniform service conditions** and provides for a **National Tribunals Data Grid**.



2. It follows the **Madras Bar Association (2025)** judgment, which restored the earlier framework and required establishment of the NTC.
3. However, **Section 14** leaves key matters—**qualifications, selection, salaries, allowances and service conditions**—to future executive rules.
4. **Sections 3 and 16** also leave concerns regarding **vague executive discretion** and Ministry-level screening of complaints before they reach the NTC.

The Core Reform Challenge

1. The problem is not merely the existence of an NTC, but whether it is **genuinely insulated from executive influence**.
2. The Centre continues to have substantial influence over **appointments, finances and administration**, while consultation with the **CJI** remains limited.
3. Thus, the institutional design risks creating a “**commission to insulate tribunals from executive control**” that **itself remains dependent on the executive**.

71. Hyperpolitics: CJP protests and its aftermath

The **decentralised, ideologically agnostic mobilisation** centred on the resignation of the Union Education Minister and showed how **digital platforms can generate rapid political pressure**. It also reflected wider concerns around **exam fraud, corruption, institutional impunity, over-centralisation and opaque governance**. However, the key question is whether such mobilisation can bring **structural change** or only secure a **tactical political concession**. Unlike the **2020–21 farmers’ movement**, which had a strong **institutional backbone** through farmers’ organisations and political relationships, the CJP mobilisation was largely digital and lacked comparable **organisational capacity**. This represents “**hyperpolitics**”—high-visibility mobilisation that can create pressure but may struggle to produce **lasting political change without institutional grounding**.

Digital Dissent: Reach vs Sustainability

1. **Instagram and YouTube’s algorithmic rationality** amplified edgy political content, turning dissent into **digital content, performance and consumption**.
2. **Jantar Mantar became a “fair”/“Meme Expo”**, illustrating how protest can move from political participation towards a cycle of **production-consumption of dissent**.
3. The challenge is to convert this rapidly generated momentum into **fresh organisational capacity** through political parties, student bodies, women’s groups or alternative institutions.

72. Tamil Nadu’s Delimitation Conundrum

Representation & Political Concerns

1. Proposed delimitation has triggered concern over **future State representation**.
2. One demand is to **freeze Lok Sabha seats at 543** and retain the **existing representation of States**.
3. The earlier proposal sought to increase seats from **543 to 850**, paving the way for fresh delimitation for implementing **women’s reservation**.
4. The issue has created **divergent positions**, making a common State-level position difficult.

Need for Consensus

1. Delimitation has **far-reaching consequences** and therefore requires **consensus before being discussed in Parliament**.
2. The absence of dialogue among political stakeholders has become a concern; **consultation and deliberation** are needed before taking a position on the issue.
3. The piece cautions against allowing delimitation to become a means of “**settling scores**” rather than addressing its substantive implications.



73. Are regional parties losing relevance in India?

Electoral Support Remains Resilient

1. Regional parties continue to command **around one-third of the national vote: 31.22% (2009), 35.85% (2014), 28.09% (2019), 33.53% (2024).**
2. Despite electoral setbacks and defections, this broadly stable vote share suggests that **regional political preferences have not disappeared.**
3. Their stronger performance in **State Assembly elections** reflects the continuing importance of **State-level political identities and issues.**

Votes, Seats & Political Power

1. A decline in the number of governments led by regional parties does **not necessarily mean a similar decline in their electoral support.**
2. The **2014 election** demonstrates the gap between **vote share and seat share**: electoral outcomes can change sharply even when the underlying support base does not change proportionately.
3. Thus, regional parties can remain **electorally relevant but politically under-represented**, depending on how votes translate into seats.
4. Their continuing role as **coalition partners and important State-level players** also shows that national electoral setbacks do not eliminate their political relevance.

The Real Challenge: Organisational Renewal

1. **Defections and electoral defeats** point more towards **organisational weakness** than a collapse of the regional support base.
2. The key challenge is therefore to **convert sustained voter support into political power.**
3. Regional parties need to retain their connection with **State-level political aspirations** while strengthening their organisational capacity to withstand **electoral competition and defections.**

74. India's Rising Dependence on U.S. LPG

Changing LPG Import Pattern

1. **67% of India's LPG imports now come from the U.S.,** up sharply from around **10% earlier** → reflects **diversification of supply sources** amid the Strait of Hormuz crisis.
2. India, the **world's second-largest LPG importer**, had earlier relied heavily on West Asia; **85% of imports came from West Asia during Feb–June 2026.**
3. India has partly offset disrupted West Asian supplies by increasing imports from the **U.S., Russia and other sources.**

Why U.S. LPG Matters?

1. U.S. supplies provide **diversification** and reduce dependence on a single geography, but create a new vulnerability because of **growing dependence on one supplier.**
2. **Proximity pricing:** U.S. LPG could be affected by **trade policy, sanctions and geopolitical risks**, while longer shipping distances raise exposure to **freight and insurance costs.**
3. West Asian LPG generally enjoys a **proximity advantage**; U.S. shipments take around **25–35 days**, compared with **5–10 days from the Gulf.**
4. A stronger dollar can raise the **rupee cost of imports**, adding to the burden on the domestic LPG market.

Strategic & Economic Vulnerability

1. The **Strait of Hormuz disruptions** can sharply raise Gulf LPG prices and expose India to **shipping, insurance and supply risks.**
2. Excessive dependence on any single market can weaken India's **bargaining power** and expose energy security to geopolitical developments.
3. Higher import costs can increase pressure on **domestic LPG prices and public-sector oil companies**, which already had **over ₹59,000 crore in under-recoveries** as of July 31.



4. LPG security is therefore not only about replacing one supplier with another, but about ensuring **multiple supply chains and resilient domestic capacity**.

Building Resilient LPG Security

1. **Strengthen local LPG production** to reduce structural import dependence.
2. Build **more strategic LPG reserves** to manage supply disruptions.
3. Maintain **diversified import sources** rather than replacing West Asian dependence with excessive dependence on the U.S.
4. Explore alternatives such as **Australia**, while recognising its smaller export volumes.

75. The work that won Deepak Dhar the Dirac Medal

Deepak Dhar, Indian theoretical physicist, was awarded the **Dirac Medal** for his contributions to **statistical physics**, particularly the **Abelian sandpile model** and **self-organised criticality**. The **Dirac Medal** is awarded annually by the **International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP)**, Trieste, Italy, on the birthday of physicist **Paul A.M. Dirac**, for outstanding contributions to theoretical physics. Dhar is the **second Indian** to receive the medal. His work on the **Abelian sandpile model** helped explain how systems can naturally reach a critical state where small disturbances may trigger events of varying magnitude. **Dirac Medal is not the Nobel Prize**; it is specifically for **theoretical physics** and is **not restricted to Nobel laureates**.

76. The missing ‘reuse’ principle in India’s EV transition journey

EV Transition Needs a Circular Approach

1. India’s EV transition is expanding, but **circularity** currently focuses more on **recycling** than **reuse**.
2. Existing framework through **Motor Vehicle Scrapping Rules, 2021** and **ELV Rules, 2025** has strengthened vehicle recycling, but the **“reuse” principle remains underdeveloped**.
3. Treating every ageing vehicle as waste can cause **premature scrappage**, increasing **resource consumption and waste generation**.
4. **Recycling recovers materials**; **reuse preserves the embodied value and functionality of the existing asset**.

Why Retrofitting Matters?

1. A vehicle may be old and polluting but still **structurally sound with substantial residual service life**.
2. **EV retrofitting**—replacing the internal-combustion engine and fuel system with an **electric powertrain**—can extend this useful life instead of scrapping the vehicle.
3. This can simultaneously support **electrification + resource efficiency + waste reduction**.
4. The environmental cost of premature scrappage is significant: a two-wheeler generates about **90 kg recyclable material and 18 kg landfill waste** when scrapped; across around **30 crore vehicles**, early scrappage could generate **2.7 crore tonnes of recyclable material and 5.4 crore tonnes of landfill waste**.
5. Hence, the EV transition should avoid creating a **“replace-and-discard” model**.

Way Forward: Vehicle Hierarchy

1. Policy should assess vehicles based on **condition and residual utility**, rather than **age alone**.
2. **Safe, compliant and efficient vehicles** → **continue in service**.
3. **Structurally sound but ageing/inefficient vehicles** → **certified EV retrofit** to extend useful life.
4. **Severely degraded or unsafe vehicles** → **scrappage and recycling**.
5. Such an **age-assessed transition pathway** would align EV policy with **circular economy principles and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production)**.
6. The broader objective should be to distinguish between vehicles that have **exhausted their useful life** and those that still retain **substantial utility**.

India’s EV transition should move from a simple **“replace and recycle” approach** to **“assess, reuse, retrofit and recycle.”**



77. SC/ST Victims: Need for Stronger Relief & Rehabilitation

Gaps in Relief & Rehabilitation

1. A Centre task force has proposed amendments to the **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995**, to strengthen relief and rehabilitation for victims.
2. Current relief amounts range from **₹85,000 to ₹8.25 lakh**, depending on the **seriousness of the crime, degree of injuries and harm suffered**.
3. The task force recommends **revising relief amounts in line with inflation**, so compensation keeps pace with changing costs.
4. It also proposes **special relief and rehabilitation cells** in States and Union Territories to provide more focused institutional support.

Faster Justice & Victim Support

1. Proposed **fast-tracking of FIR and chargesheet procedures** seeks to reduce delays in cases of atrocities.
2. The task force recommends **counselling for victims, accused and their dependants**, recognising the need for support beyond monetary relief.
3. It also suggests measures for **counting the suffering of victims, dependants and those accused** while considering relief and rehabilitation.
4. The NCST has called for checking the registration of **“counter FIRs”** against victims and those reporting atrocities, addressing the possibility of legal processes being used against complainants.

Strengthening Institutional Protection

1. The task force recommends **specialised relief and rehabilitation mechanisms** rather than relying only on existing administrative arrangements.
2. It has also suggested amendments concerning **FIRs and chargesheets**, including sending them to the concerned government officials within **24 hours**.
3. The broader concern is to make the legal framework more **victim-centric, timely and effective**, particularly where delays or counter-cases can weaken access to justice.
4. The recommendations come amid continued protests from SC/ST communities, including concerns over the **Supreme Court ruling requiring prior permission for arrests** in such cases.

78. What Can Be Learnt from Gen Z Mobilisation?

A New Language of Political Protest

1. Gen Z has turned protest into a language of **identity, survival, collective strength and shared belonging**.
2. By refusing to diminish individual experiences into isolated grievances, they have created a **new political vocabulary** connecting **individual experiences with collective identity and human humiliation**.
3. Established media often failed to capture what was happening; **Gen Z became its own medium**, using **campuses, collectives, independent media, public meetings and peaceful protests**.
4. The broader lesson is that **political participation can emerge outside traditional organisations**.

Protest as Democratic Claim-Making

1. The mobilisation highlights a fundamental democratic principle: **a government must remain answerable to citizens between elections**, not merely during elections.
2. Citizens have the **right to approach the doors of power, gather and demand that they be heard**.
3. It cautions against dismissing Gen Z methods as **“non-serious” or “evasionist”**; humour and a new political vocabulary can also become forms of political expression.
4. The institutional response should preserve **citizen agency** rather than respond through **intimidation, arrests, vilification and exhaustion**.
5. Protest energy can be converted into **legislative demands**, but citizens are not obliged to convert every movement into **electoral candidacy**.

From Mobilisation to Lasting Democratic Force

1. The emerging choices before Gen Z include becoming a **formal political party, pressure group, or engaging/aligning with political parties**.



2. Whatever organisational form is chosen, the movement must preserve the qualities that made it powerful: **solidarity, participation, collective action and accountability**.
3. This is especially important because India's political mobilisation operates within persistent inequalities of **caste, gender, religion, disability, region and family income**, which shape access to opportunities and political voice.
4. The larger challenge is to ensure that the movement's energy contributes to **lasting democratic force** while remaining **inclusive and representative**.
5. As the **students of Paris, May 1968** demonstrated, movements can challenge what appears "**impossible**"—but sustaining that challenge requires preserving their democratic character.

79. Caste Census

Enumeration & Data Quality

1. **Open-ended caste enumeration** can create multiple entries for the same caste due to **castes, sub-castes and synonyms**.
2. The **SECC experience**, which generated **4.7 million caste names**, shows how poor standardisation can create problems of **classification, validation and publication**.
3. Hence, the challenge is not merely **counting castes**, but generating **credible, standardised and usable data**.

Technical Feasibility

1. India already has **SC/ST and OBC official lists**, along with the **1931 Census, People of India volumes and other official documentation**, which can provide a basis for structured classification.
2. A systematic classification mechanism can reduce **duplication and ambiguity** while retaining the diversity of caste identities.
3. Therefore, caste diversity is a **manageable methodological challenge**, rather than an insurmountable technical barrier.
4. The key requirement is to design enumeration in a way that the final data can actually be **classified, validated and meaningfully used**.

Political Will & Way Forward

1. The larger concern is **political will**, as seen from the experience of **2011**, when political decisions affected caste enumeration.
2. Concerns around the **General-caste vote base** and changing youth politics add a political dimension to the exercise.
3. The focus should therefore be on **transparent methodology, structured classification, political commitment and publication of usable data**.
4. A caste census should not become merely an **enumeration exercise**; it should generate **credible evidence that can meaningfully inform policy**.

80. Tribunal Reforms: Ease of Doing Business Needs Ease of Justice

Why Effective Tribunals Matter?

1. India's growth story requires **strong institutions, efficient reform and predictable dispute resolution**, particularly for **taxation, company law, securities and environmental compliance**.
2. Tribunals are intended to provide **specialised, faster and effective justice**, complementing constitutional courts.
3. **Timely and fair dispute resolution** strengthens **legal certainty, business confidence and investment**; prolonged disputes can undermine ease of doing business.
4. The problem has been **fragmentation, vacancies, inconsistent practices, multiplicity of tribunals and executive influence**, weakening their effectiveness.
5. Thus, **ease of doing business ultimately requires ease of justice**.

Reform vs Institutional Independence

1. **Articles 323A and 323B** provide the constitutional framework for specialised tribunals.
2. The reform process has focused on **rationalisation and reducing multiplicity**: tribunals were reduced from **26 to 19** and subsequently to **16**.



3. However, repeated judicial interventions, particularly through the **Madras Bar Association** judgments, have highlighted concerns over **appointments, tenure, service conditions and institutional independence**.
4. The larger lesson is that tribunal reform cannot be limited to **merger or reduction of tribunals**; it must also address their **governance, autonomy and administrative efficiency**.
5. An effective tribunal system must balance **specialisation and speed of justice with independence and fairness**.

National Tribunals Commission

1. The **Tribunals Reforms Bill, 2026** proposes a **National Tribunals Commission (NTC)** to bring **16 tribunals** under a common governance and administrative framework.
2. A common framework can promote **uniformity, transparency, structured administration and merit-based appointments**, reducing fragmented governance.
3. The proposed NTC would have a **former Supreme Court judge/former Chief Justice of a High Court** as Chairperson, along with judicial and technical members.
4. The Bill seeks to address **appointments, service conditions and administration** while retaining the **substantive jurisdiction** of individual tribunals under their parent statutes.
5. A dedicated institutional mechanism can make tribunals **more modern, predictable and effective**, while strengthening **access to justice and confidence in the dispute-resolution system**.
6. This fits into the broader reform trajectory covering **GST, IBC, Digital India and environmental compliance**, where predictable institutions are essential for economic growth.

81. Stronger India at Home, More Useful to the World

India's Global Relevance is Rising

1. India is no longer merely **"waiting to be discovered"**; it is already influencing global choices in **trade, technology, talent, energy, supply chains and development**.
2. Its importance comes from the combination of **demographic scale, domestic economic strength and institutional weight**.
3. India has **over one-sixth of the world's population but a much smaller share of global trade** → the key opportunity is to convert **demographic scale into economic influence and global relevance**.
4. A changing global order is making countries rethink **where they source from, where they invest, whom they trust and how they build resilient supply chains**—creating space for India to become more consequential.
5. Engagement with both **advanced economies and the Global South** gives India a wider role in shaping global conversations.

Global Influence Depends on Domestic Strength

1. **A larger economy alone is not enough**; India needs to become more **capable, confident, inclusive and globally respected**.
2. Capital will matter, but **capital alone is never enough**. India needs investment in **infrastructure, manufacturing, clean energy, cities, technology and enterprise**, supported by **stable rules and predictable opportunities**.
3. The gap between **average incomes and middle-income household incomes** shows that growth is not reaching all sections equally.
4. Hence, **productive employment, higher productivity, stronger manufacturing and globally competitive businesses** are necessary to convert growth into **broad-based prosperity**.
5. Technology and AI can support this transformation, but competitiveness will depend not merely on the **size of India's talent pool**, but on the quality of **skills, education and healthcare** supporting it.

From Demographic Dividend to Global Influence

1. India's **demographic dividend** is a major advantage, but its long-term competitiveness will depend on converting demographic strength into **innovation, enterprise and broad-based prosperity**.
2. The central challenge is to ensure that growth reaches **ordinary households and all sections of society**, rather than remaining concentrated.



3. India's **domestic journey and global role are increasingly interconnected**: the stronger India becomes at home, the more useful it becomes to the world.
4. The **India–EU FTA** reflects this link by opening stronger economic ties with an advanced market while creating possibilities for **new growth corridors and resilient supply chains**.
5. As India enters its **ninth decade of Independence**, its task is not simply to **participate in global growth, but to help shape it**.
6. The ultimate objective is therefore not merely to become one of the **world's largest economies**, but to become **one of its most relevant and consequential economies**.

82 . Tata chief exit frames a challenge and opportunity

N. Chandrasekaran's decision not to seek reappointment has brought questions of succession, governance and capital allocation into focus. At the same time, the group has expanded into **semiconductors, electronics, EVs and AI**, making the transition an example of the challenge of balancing **institutional continuity with strategic renewal**.

1. **Institutional continuity over individual leadership**: Strong institutions should not become dependent on one individual. Example: The leadership transition highlights the importance of **institutionalised succession** in sustaining a large organisation.
2. **Stakeholder orientation**: Ethical leadership requires balancing competing stakeholder interests rather than allowing internal differences to weaken the institution. Example: Differences between stakeholders over **losses, capital allocation and strategic direction** underline the need for dialogue and institutional resolution.
3. **Stewardship of resources**: Leadership carries a responsibility to use organisational resources prudently. Example: Scrutiny over **capital allocation and losses in some businesses** can illustrate the ethical principle of **responsible stewardship**.
4. **Continuity with adaptability**: Ethical leadership preserves core institutional values while adapting to changing circumstances. Example: Expansion into **semiconductors, EVs, electronics and AI** alongside leadership transition illustrates **strategic renewal without abandoning institutional continuity**.

83. What AI doesn't tell you: Your stories matter

Generative AI is increasingly capable of producing convincing creative content, but a study comparing human-written and ChatGPT-generated short stories found that readers rated the human stories higher. The distinction lies not merely in the quality of output, but in the human experience behind creation—the authenticity, memory, individuality and emotions that give creative work a personal meaning.

The growing use of AI also raises concerns over **authorship and authenticity**, as seen in the controversy around the **Commonwealth Short Story Prize** over alleged AI-generated content. As AI becomes better at reproducing the form of creative expression, the more important question is what makes **human creativity distinct**. Writing is not simply content generation; it is an attempt to leave a **“trace of oneself”** shaped by experience, memory and mortality.

Thus, AI need not make human creativity irrelevant; rather, it can make **human authenticity more valuable**. The challenge is to use AI without reducing creativity to mere technical output, while preserving **human originality, lived experience and personal meaning**. The deeper question is whether machine-generated content can truly reproduce the **imperfect yet meaningful dimensions of human experience** that give creativity its enduring value.

84. Mecca Defence Pact: Implications for India

Nature of the Emerging Security Framework

1. Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan have created a **mutual-defence framework**, but describing it as an **“Islamic NATO”** is premature.
2. Unlike NATO, it lacks an **integrated military headquarters, joint command mechanisms and institutionalised coordination**.



3. The pact is better seen as a **collective deterrence / strategic hedging arrangement** at this stage.
4. The three partners also have **divergent strategic priorities**:
 - i. **Saudi Arabia**: Iranian regional aggression, Houthi missile threats and concerns over Western security guarantees.
 - ii. **Turkiye**: expansion of defence exports, leadership in the Islamic world and greater operational autonomy.
 - iii. **Pakistan**: economic bailouts, diplomatic leverage and **technological upgrades to its military**.
5. The pact therefore appears designed primarily as a **collective deterrence umbrella for West Asia**, rather than a fully integrated military alliance.

What it Means for India?

1. The principal concern is the possibility of **deeper Pakistan–Türkiye–Saudi military, intelligence and technological cooperation**.
2. The pact could facilitate **technology integration, intelligence-sharing and military-industrial cooperation**, strengthening Pakistan's operational capabilities in areas such as **electronic warfare and naval platforms**.
3. However, the collective-defence clause should not automatically be interpreted as guaranteeing military intervention in an India-Pakistan conflict.
4. The article points to the gap between **high-level political rhetoric and operational reality**: Saudi Arabia's past defence relationship with Pakistan did not necessarily translate into direct military involvement.
5. Saudi Arabia also has a **multi-billion-dollar strategic partnership with India** covering **energy, trade and intelligence-sharing**, creating its own constraints on an overtly anti-India alignment.
6. Hence, the pact should be viewed as a **potential strategic challenge**, but not as an established anti-India military bloc.

India's Response: Engage + Deter + Monitor

1. India should **not panic over the collective-defence rhetoric**, but should also not **brush off a year-long negotiated agreement as inconsequential**.
2. **Engage Saudi Arabia**: seek clear diplomatic reassurance that the pact's defensive clauses apply to the **dynamics of West Asian theatre** and cannot be weaponised by Pakistan to cover sub-conventional warfare.
3. Maintain a **firm deterrence doctrine** so that India's response to **state-sponsored terrorism** remains credible irrespective of third-party arrangements.
4. **Deepen bilateral economic, trade and strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabia and the broader GCC**, given their importance as India's **primary energy and economic partners in the Indian Ocean region**.
5. Strengthen **defence intelligence** to monitor **Turkey-Pakistan military-industrial co-development**, particularly in **neurotechnology, electronic warfare systems and joint naval platforms**.
6. Accelerate **indigenous defence innovation** and targeted partnerships to avoid strategic dependence and respond to emerging military technologies.
7. Overall approach should be **pragmatic strategic engagement + credible deterrence + defence preparedness**, rather than assuming an immediate military alliance.

85. Higher Education: Three Core Challenges

Intention — Merit, Integrity & Institutional Purpose

1. Higher education needs **merit, integrity, fairness and long-term institutional interest** to guide **appointments, promotions and admissions**.
2. **Favouritism and patronage**, regardless of merit, weaken institutional credibility and can affect **student learning and institutional culture**.
3. Universities are **unique learning communities**, not government departments or corporate offices; therefore, their governance must recognise the **distinctive nature of academic work**.
4. Excessive control can weaken **academic excellence**, which requires **trust, responsibility and shared commitment to institutional goals**.



5. Faculty policies also need to recognise differences between **teaching-focused and research-focused institutions**, and between institutions operating in **different social and geographical contexts**.

Concept — Appropriate Governance & Academic Autonomy

1. A major challenge is developing **governance models suited to universities**, rather than applying uniform administrative approaches.
2. Treating academics and students like ordinary bureaucratic employees can produce **well-intentioned but counterproductive policies**.
3. Example: a **one-year probation period** may be inadequate to assess a faculty member's suitability.
4. Universities cannot develop **responsible adults by treating students as children**; autonomy must be accompanied by **accountability for outcomes**.
5. Academic excellence requires **trust + responsibility + autonomy**, rather than excessive control.
6. A serious governance system must recognise that **academic disciplines and institutional contexts differ**, instead of applying identical rules everywhere.

Execution — Leadership, Culture & Institutional Capacity

1. Even good policies fail without **effective execution**; the challenge lies in building institutions with **capable leaders, robust processes and continuous learning**.
2. A **culture driven by fear of failure discourages initiative**, while a **culture that learns from failure fosters innovation and experimentation**.
3. Academic leadership needs **systematic coaching, mentoring, knowledge, skills, confidence and institutional support**; good ideas do not automatically translate into effective practices.
4. Weak institutions can pull down stronger ones because **uniformly designed policies** may fail to address the specific needs of weaker institutions.
5. Therefore, improving higher education requires looking beyond **funding, infrastructure and regulation** towards the deeper challenges of **intention, concept and execution**.

86 . Goods exports surge 20% as India diversifies trade

1. India's **merchandise exports grew nearly 20% in July**, showing resilience despite continuing **West Asian turmoil**.
2. This shows that **diversification of export destinations + resilient logistics** can reduce vulnerability to geopolitical disruptions.
3. The West Asian crisis initially caused exports to the region to contract sharply, showing the vulnerability of trade to **strategic chokepoints and regional conflicts**.
4. Recovery through **Oman's ports outside the Strait of Hormuz and UAE ports such as Fujairah and Khor Fakkan**, as cargo shifted away from Jebel Ali, demonstrates the importance of **alternative logistics corridors**.
5. Export growth is also becoming geographically broader, with rising exports to **China, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa and other markets**.
6. Thus, export competitiveness is not only about producing goods cheaply; it also depends on **reliable ports, shipping routes and resilient supply chains**.
7. Strong merchandise exports have not eliminated the **trade deficit**, which widened to **\$15 billion in July**.
8. Services remain an important strength, but the slower growth of services exports compared with imports adds to the external-sector challenge.
9. Therefore, the objective should not merely be **higher export numbers**, but sustained **export competitiveness across goods and services**.
10. Diversification needs to be accompanied by stronger domestic productive capacity so that India can capture a larger share of **global trade and supply chains**.



87. Rajasthan Cabinet nod to Bills for Uniform Civil Code, protection of trees

Proposed UCC: Key Changes

1. Rajasthan has proposed a **Uniform Civil Code Bill** covering **marriage, divorce, inheritance, maintenance and live-in relationships**.
2. It proposes **mandatory registration of marriage and divorce within 60 days**.
3. **Polygamy would be prohibited**.
4. Inheritance provisions seek to establish **equal property rights for sons and daughters across religions**.
5. The proposed UCC would allow marriages to be solemnised according to the **customs and traditions of different religions and communities**. Examples mentioned include **Saptapadi, Nikah, Anand Karaj and Holy Union**.
6. Thus, the proposed framework seeks common legal provisions while retaining certain **customary forms of solemnisation**.
7. **Scheduled Tribes and communities whose customary rights are protected under the Constitution** would remain outside its application.
8. The debate is essentially between **uniformity in civil law** and protection of **religious freedom, customary practices and community rights**.
9. Supporters see UCC as a means to promote **equality and a common legal framework** in personal matters.
10. Opponents have raised concerns over its possible impact on the State's **social fabric** and the **citizen's right to practise religion**.
11. The proposed framework therefore illustrates that UCC need not necessarily mean eliminating every community practice; the Bill itself proposes recognition of **different customs and traditions** while seeking common legal standards in areas such as marriage, divorce and inheritance.

Protection of Trees Bill

1. A separate **Trees (Protection) Bill** was approved along with the UCC Bill.
2. It proposes a **uniform legal framework for protection of 29 tree species**.
3. It specifically includes **Khejri**, the State tree of Rajasthan.
4. The Bill is intended to strengthen protection of specified tree species through a dedicated legal framework.

88. AI speech recognition model trained on 65 Indian languages and dialects released

1. IISc's **SPiRE Lab**, in collaboration with **ARTPARK and Google**, has developed **SraVaani**, an AI-based multilingual speech-recognition model trained on **65 Indian languages and dialects**.
2. It covers **20 scheduled languages and 45 regional languages/dialects**, including **Garo, Angika, Chakma, Kokborok, Tulu, Bundeli and Bajika**.
3. The initiative addresses a major gap: existing speech-recognition systems largely focus on **dominant languages**, leaving many Indian languages and dialects underserved.
4. This can potentially extend speech-AI capabilities to around **25 crore people** whose languages are not adequately handled by current systems.
5. The model is made **freely and publicly available under a Hugging Face/MIT licence**, supporting wider research and application.
6. Collaboration between **academic research (IISc), technology platforms and innovation institutions (ARTPARK/Google)** demonstrates how partnerships can expand India's AI capabilities.
7. The broader significance is the development of **AI that reflects India's linguistic diversity**, rather than relying mainly on systems designed around dominant global languages.
8. Such language technologies can contribute to **inclusive digital transformation**, particularly for communities currently underserved by mainstream AI systems.



89 . Constitutional Limits on Arrest

Arrest as a Limited State Power

1. The power to arrest must be balanced with the **individual's personal liberty and dignity**; it cannot become an instrument of arbitrary State action.
2. In *Vihaan Kumar v. State of Haryana (2025)*, the Supreme Court held that an arrested person must be **properly and meaningfully informed of the grounds of arrest**.
3. Mere formal communication, vague information or simply informing relatives is insufficient; the person must actually be able to **understand the grounds of arrest**.
4. If the initial arrest is unconstitutional, **subsequent remand orders may also become illegal**.
5. The distinction between **arrest and detention** is important: arrest involves formal police custody in connection with an offence, whereas detention can refer to temporary restraint.
6. The existence of a **power to arrest does not mean that arrest is automatically necessary**. It must be justified by the circumstances of the case.
7. *Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)*: particularly for offences carrying punishment of less than seven years, police must independently assess the **necessity of arrest** rather than mechanically exercising the power.
8. Arrest should not become a means of **harassment, intimidation or unnecessary deprivation of liberty**.

Constitutional Safeguards against Arbitrary Arrest

1. **Article 21**: protects **life, personal liberty and dignity** and requires fairness in State action affecting liberty.
2. **Article 22(1)**: guarantees the right to be **informed of the grounds of arrest** and the right to **consult and be defended by a legal practitioner**.
3. **Article 22(2)**: requires an arrested person to be produced before the **nearest magistrate within 24 hours**, excluding travel time.
4. The police must also **record the time of arrest**, creating an important procedural safeguard against unlawful custody.
5. The constitutional framework treats **preventive detention separately**, with its own safeguards, including the role of an **Advisory Board**.
6. The article links these safeguards to **natural justice**: deprivation of liberty must follow a fair and legally justifiable procedure.
7. *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India (1978)* established the broader principle that procedure affecting personal liberty cannot be arbitrary and must satisfy standards of **fairness and reasonableness**.
8. Thus, the **Golden Triangle of Articles 14, 19 and 21** provides the wider constitutional framework against arbitrary State action.

Judicial Oversight: Balancing Investigation with Liberty

1. The Supreme Court's arrest guidelines seek to prevent **misuse of criminal law and routine arrests**.
2. Police authority to investigate must be balanced against the possibility of **custodial abuse, reputational harm and unnecessary deprivation of liberty**.
3. The article cautions that allowing prosecution to continue on **frivolous or false allegations** can become an abuse of legal process and undermine **natural justice**.
4. Personal freedom is therefore not merely a procedural right; it is a **major component of the Constitution and democratic governance**.
5. Judicial intervention acts as a check when executive/police power crosses the line from **legitimate investigation to arbitrary coercion**.

90 . Monsoon Session was arid, Parliament fell short

Legislative Output vs. Deliberative Quality

1. The Monsoon Session ended "**arid**", with Parliament falling short of its core role as a forum for **debate, scrutiny and deliberation**.



2. **116 Bills were passed**, but only the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026** received substantial discussion — nearly **11 hours with 48 MPs participating**.
3. This highlights the difference between **legislative productivity and legislative scrutiny**: a high number of Bills passed does not necessarily indicate effective parliamentary functioning.
4. The session also failed to adequately address the **structural problems in the education system**, examination irregularities, unemployment and the **uncertainty faced by youth** that had fuelled the protests.
5. Parliament should therefore not become merely a mechanism for **“pushing legislation through”**; meaningful debate is essential to improve the quality and legitimacy of laws.

Government & Opposition: Shared Responsibility

1. Parliamentary functioning is a **shared responsibility** of both the Government and Opposition.
2. **Government** has the responsibility to ensure that the House runs, accommodate legitimate concerns and provide space for meaningful discussion.
3. **Opposition** must raise public concerns through **constructive debate and parliamentary mechanisms**, rather than relying predominantly on disruption.
4. The session reflected failures on both sides, with **“voice” being replaced by “dint of an arithmetic majority”** in legislative decision-making.
5. Parliament must function through **discussion and accommodation**, not merely through the Government’s numerical strength.
6. The Prime Minister and Home Minister staying away from the House during the students’ agitation also represented a missed opportunity for **political dialogue and reassurance**.

91. A question from Keralam: What’s in an ‘m’?

The debate over changing Kerala’s official name reflects the intersection of **history, language and regional identity**. Historical sources such as *Lilatilakam* refer to **“Kerala bhasha”**, while the term Kerala itself has been linked to different historical traditions, including the **Chera** and Tamil traditions. With both Houses of Parliament passing the Bill following resolutions of the Kerala Assembly, the issue now also has an administrative dimension, as renaming institutions and establishments would involve significant costs. Thus, the question of an official name is not merely symbolic; it reflects how a State balances its **historical-linguistic identity with contemporary political choice and administrative practicality**.

92. Stalling of Parliament has high costs

Disruption has a Direct Democratic Cost

1. The Monsoon Session’s **“work completed”** was poor: Lok Sabha worked for only **17.5 hours**, while Rajya Sabha worked for **37.7 hours**, or about **33%** of scheduled time.
2. The commonly cited **₹2.5 lakh per minute** cost of Parliament understates the real loss; the larger cost is the **taxpayer-funded capacity that remains unused** when legislative work is disrupted.
3. When **Question Hour disappears**, ministers escape questions that taxpayers expect Parliament to ask.
4. Disruption also causes **bills to be delayed or passed without adequate scrutiny**, weakening the deliberative role of Parliament.
5. However, **dissent itself is legitimate**: protest, walkouts and recorded disagreement are valid parliamentary instruments; the concern is when prolonged disruption becomes the norm.

Towards a Parliamentary-Performance Compact

1. India needs a **parliamentary-performance compact** between the Government, Opposition and presiding officers.
2. **No lost hour**: if proceedings are disrupted, the lost time should be **recovered within the session**.
3. **Protect Question Hour**: accountability through questions should not be sacrificed to disruption.



4. **Real-time parliamentary dashboard:** publish information on **attendance, questions, debates, committee work and legislative output** so citizens can assess performance.
5. **Right to protest + guarantee of debate:** legitimate protest must be balanced with a **guaranteed space for scrutiny and debate**.
6. **Clearer accountability for daily allowances:** members should not automatically receive allowances for sittings severely disrupted because of disorder.
7. Ultimately, Parliament must demonstrate the same **“politics of performance”** expected from the government: citizens’ expectations of **representation, scrutiny and accountability** should be met by both sides.

The cost of parliamentary disruption is not merely the money spent on running Parliament; it is the loss of **scrutiny, accountability and legislative quality**. **Dissent is legitimate and necessary**, but it should not eliminate the forum through which dissent becomes democratic deliberation

93. Judicial Accountability: Justice Varma Case

Findings of the Parliamentary Probe

1. The parliamentary inquiry found **“reasonable grounds”** to conclude that a **huge quantity of unexplained cash** was present at Justice Yashwant Varma’s official residence.
2. The committee framed **three specific “articles of charge”**:
3. Possession/discovery of **unexplained ₹500 denomination currency notes** in the storeroom.
4. Failure to **preserve and explain the evidence**, leading to the unexplained disappearance of burnt currency notes.
5. Furnishing **“evasive and misleading explanations”** to the committee.
6. The committee relied on **mutually corroborative testimony of eight security officials**, who described bundles, heaps and stacks of currency notes.
7. Electronic records, including **photographs and videos examined by the Central Forensic Science Laboratory**, also corroborated the material evidence.
8. Although there was **no direct proof that Justice Varma personally removed the currency notes**, the committee held him responsible on the basis of **circumstantial evidence and failure to secure the material evidence** while the premises remained under his control.

What the Case Reveals about Judicial Accountability?

1. The case demonstrates that **judicial independence cannot mean immunity from accountability**.
2. At the same time, the inquiry was **not a criminal trial** and did not itself establish criminal guilt or personal ownership of the money. This distinction is important in maintaining **due process and judicial independence**.
3. The committee particularly noted that Justice Varma had allegedly taken **no steps to secure the room, preserve the evidence or lodge a police complaint** after the incident.
4. The first responders themselves were criticised in the report for failing to **seize the currency or prepare a seizure memo/inventory**, calling this a **“serious lapse”**.
5. Thus, the issue extends beyond individual conduct to **institutional responsibility, preservation of evidence and accountability of constitutional authorities**.
6. For the judiciary, the standard of integrity is especially high because **public confidence is central to the legitimacy of judicial power**.

Constitutional Balance: Independence + Integrity + Accountability

1. The episode highlights that accountability extends beyond establishing wrongdoing; institutions must also ensure **proper preservation of evidence, transparency and responsible conduct**.
2. The committee noted that the judge allegedly took **no steps to secure the room, preserve evidence or lodge a police complaint**, despite the cash being discovered at his official residence.
3. This raises the broader issue of **standards of conduct for constitutional functionaries**: the higher the public office, the greater the expectation of **propriety and integrity**.
4. The case also raises a constitutional question regarding whether **Parliament can proceed with removal proceedings against a judge who has already resigned**.



5. The larger requirement is an accountability architecture that ensures:

- i. **Independence from political interference**
- ii. **Transparency and institutional integrity**
- iii. **Evidence-based scrutiny**
- iv. **Due process for the accused**
- v. **Consequences for established misconduct**

The objective should be to avoid both “impunity in the name of independence” and “interference in the name of accountability.”

94 . Joint Parliamentary Committees: Strengthening Legislative Scrutiny

JPCs: Parliament’s Detailed Scrutiny Mechanism

1. JPCs help overcome a basic limitation of Parliament — **limited time to examine increasingly complex legislation.**
2. They bring together members of **Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha** to examine a specific Bill in greater detail.
3. Their strength lies in **clause-by-clause examination**, questioning officials and stakeholders, examining evidence and seeking expert inputs.
4. Unlike floor debates, committees provide relatively greater space for **detailed, evidence-based and less time-bound scrutiny.**
5. Their role can be summed up as “**influence, not direct control; advice, not command; scrutiny, not initiative; accountability, not prior approval.**”
6. Recommendations are **not binding**, but can influence the final legislation by forcing the government to **explain, clarify, modify or reconsider** provisions.

JPCs can Influence the Course of Legislation

1. A committee may not necessarily overturn the government’s policy objective, but can **modify the legislative design** and improve its safeguards.
2. Several examples:
 - i. **Stock Market Scam JPC (2001–02):** recommended stronger regulatory surveillance and coordination between SEBI and stock exchanges.
 - ii. **Multi-State Cooperative Societies Amendment Bill:** committee recommendations resulted in changes concerning the proposed **Cooperative Election Authority.**
 - iii. **FRDI Bill, 2017:** JPC scrutiny amid concerns over depositors was followed by withdrawal of the Bill.
 - iv. **Personal Data Protection Bill:** illustrates how Opposition concerns can be formally recorded through **dissent notes**, even where the committee majority supports the Bill.
 - v. The **FCRA Bill, 2026** referral to a JPC, despite objections, shows that committee scrutiny can create an institutional space for examining contentious provisions before final enactment.
3. Thus, committees strengthen the principle of “**legislative due diligence**” — legislation should be examined not merely for political acceptability but for its **legal, administrative and social consequences.**

Declining Committee Scrutiny: Concern for Parliamentary Accountability

1. The article highlights a sharp decline in Bills referred to parliamentary committees: **14th Lok Sabha: ~60% , 15th Lok Sabha: ~71% , 16th Lok Sabha: ~25% and 17th Lok Sabha: ~16%**
2. This indicates a shift away from **routine legislative scrutiny**, even as laws are becoming more complex and technically specialised.
3. The problem is not merely fewer JPCs; it reflects a broader weakening of the **committee system as an institutional check on executive law-making.**
4. When Bills bypass detailed committee examination:
 - i. **stakeholder consultation may narrow**
 - ii. technical/legal inconsistencies may remain unnoticed
 - iii. Opposition concerns receive less institutional space



- iv. legislative accountability can weaken.
5. At the same time, committee independence depends on their composition and political dynamics. A ruling-party majority can influence outcomes, while Opposition members retain the ability to submit **dissent notes**.
6. Therefore, committees should remain spaces for **scrutiny rather than partisan majoritarianism**.

95 . United and free

Unity without Uniformity

1. India needs a **“unified national approach”** to national challenges, but this should not translate into **uniformity** in political or social choices.
2. **Dissent is not divisiveness**; democratic criticism provides alternative perspectives and helps correct policy weaknesses.
3. National consensus should emerge through **dialogue, accommodation and persuasion**, rather than suppressing differences.
4. A mature democracy must be willing to **“amplify” ideas from critics**, particularly when they can improve public policy.
5. India’s diversity can become a strength when unity is built around **common constitutional and developmental goals**, rather than identical political approaches.

Yuva Shakti as a Driver of Viksit Bharat

1. India’s **“yuva shakti”** is a major demographic asset, but its potential depends on converting a large young population into **skilled and productive human capital**.
2. This becomes critical as technology is **“disrupting life and work”**, changing the nature of employment and skill requirements.
3. Emerging sectors such as **AI, quantum technology, space, robotics and data centres** can create new avenues for high-value employment and innovation.
4. **AI training and free online coaching** can democratise access to emerging opportunities and reduce the burden on families.
5. The challenge is therefore not merely creating jobs, but building **future-ready skills, innovation capacity and entrepreneurship**.

Inclusive Development through Collective Effort

1. Viksit Bharat requires an **“all-hands-on-the-deck approach”**, involving political parties, institutions and stakeholders beyond immediate electoral interests.
2. India’s development should be treated as a **“continuum”**, where each phase builds upon earlier gains rather than being viewed through narrow political timelines.
3. The country needs an **“indigenous understanding and philosophy of development”** suited to its own demographic, social and economic conditions, rather than simply **mimicking techno-capitalism** developed elsewhere.
4. **Big dreams, firm resolve and rapid execution** need to be accompanied by social inclusion, institutional capacity and broad-based participation.
5. Development should therefore combine **economic growth + technological transformation + human capital + social cohesion**.

96. India’s democracy needs different electoral rhythms

The debate over **“One Nation, One Election (ONOE)”** seeks to synchronise Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections. The central concern is whether electoral synchronisation can improve administrative efficiency without weakening **federalism, State autonomy, electoral accountability and the flexibility inherent in India’s parliamentary system**.

Flexibility at Democracy’s Core

1. India follows a **parliamentary system**, where the executive derives legitimacy from the **confidence of the legislature**, unlike a presidential system with a fixed tenure.



- Hence, **electoral flexibility is inherent to parliamentary democracy**: governments may fall due to loss of majority, coalition breakdown or legislative realignment.
- The experience of **1952–1967**, when Centre and State elections gradually acquired different cycles, reflects this flexibility.
- A rigid five-year electoral calendar could create **“lame-duck” administrations** if a government loses majority but is forced to continue merely to preserve synchronisation.
- Conversely, holding a fresh election for a shortened term could produce an **unequal temporal mandate**, where voters elect a government for two years while another government enjoys five years despite exercising the same constitutional powers.
- Synchronisation could also create pressure to use **President’s Rule** when a State government loses its majority, raising concerns about replacing the electorate’s political choice with an administrative solution.

National Politics May Overshadow States

- India is a **“Union of States”** with distinct regional identities, local economic conditions and historical trajectories; therefore, different electoral rhythms allow different regions to articulate their own political priorities.
- Simultaneous elections may blur the distinction between **national issues and local governance concerns**.
- With national parties possessing greater financial resources and media visibility, a common electoral cycle could make State contests increasingly dominated by **national narratives**.
- Issues such as **regional infrastructure, welfare, provincial governance and cultural concerns** may consequently be subsumed under overarching national rhetoric.
- This can subtly pressure voters to prioritise **national alignment over regional interests**, potentially disadvantaging States that choose an independent political path.
- This raises a deeper question of **cooperative federalism versus political centralisation**. Electoral synchronisation should not inadvertently produce **political homogenisation** in a constitutionally plural polity.

Efficiency vs Democratic Accountability

- The strongest argument for ONOE is administrative and financial efficiency: repeated elections involve expenditure on **Election Commission machinery, security deployment and campaign management**.
- However, the claim that frequent elections necessarily produce **“perpetual policy paralysis”** is contestable.
- The **Model Code of Conduct** does not halt routine governance, ongoing public works or essential administrative functions; its primary purpose is to prevent **opportunistic announcements, new financial handouts and politically motivated administrative decisions** during elections.

97. The federal dilemma of delimitation

Delimitation means **re-fixing the number of seats and territorial constituencies** of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies based on population. The present freeze on State-wise allocation of Lok Sabha seats, based on the **1971 Census**, is due to end after the first Census conducted after 2026. The proposed increase in Lok Sabha strength from **550 to 850** has therefore revived the debate over **representation, population control and federal balance**.

Representation Imbalance: One Person, One Vote vs Population Control

- The basic constitutional principle is **“one person, one vote”** — representation should broadly reflect population.
- However, continuing the 1971-based allocation has produced a different dilemma: States that have successfully controlled population growth may now have **lower representation relative to their population**, while high-population States could gain substantially after delimitation.
- The accompanying calculations illustrate this imbalance: based on projected 2026 populations, the **value of an individual vote differs significantly across States** under the existing arrangement.
- Thus, delimitation creates a difficult trade-off between **Democratic equality**: representation should reflect current population and **Federal fairness**: States should not be politically penalised for achieving **better demographic outcomes**.
- States such as **Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh** have historically invested in family planning, health and human development; a sharp reduction in their relative political weight could create a **perverse incentive** against population stabilisation.



6. The Tamil Nadu Assembly's demand to **freeze the existing number of Lok Sabha seats and present State-wise distribution** reflects this concern.

Federal Balance: Population vs Performance

1. The core dilemma is that **population is both the basis of democratic representation and an outcome influenced by public policy**.
2. If seats are redistributed entirely according to present population, smaller and more demographically successful States could lose political weight despite contributing significantly to national development.
3. The projected redistribution to **848 seats** illustrates the scale of the change: larger States such as **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan** would gain a greater share, while the relative share of several southern and smaller States would decline.
4. This could alter the **political geography of India**, including the balance of influence between northern and southern States.
5. **Mains angle:** Delimitation is therefore not merely a technical exercise of redrawing constituencies; it has implications for **cooperative federalism, fiscal bargaining, national policymaking and Centre-State relations**.
6. It may also influence the politics of resource allocation because **greater parliamentary representation can translate into greater political bargaining power**.
7. The issue becomes particularly sensitive because the **Rajya Sabha was designed as a check within the federal structure**, giving States a distinct institutional voice rather than simply reproducing population-based representation.
8. At the same time, indefinitely freezing representation would perpetuate an **"under-representation" of citizens in high-population States**, creating its own democratic deficit.

Towards a Harmonious Reconciliation

1. The challenge is to reconcile **democratic equality with federal fairness**, rather than allowing one principle to completely override the other.
2. The proposed expansion of Lok Sabha seats can partly address the concern of **under-representation without mechanically transferring the entire existing political weight** from one set of States to another.
3. The Centre has indicated an **oral assurance that each State's share would increase by 50% on a pro-rata basis**, but the continuing concern is whether such an arrangement can adequately protect the interests of States whose relative share may still decline.
4. A balanced approach should therefore consider:
 - a. **population as the basic democratic criterion;**
 - b. protection against penalising States for **successful population stabilisation;**
 - c. adequate representation for geographically and demographically smaller States;
 - d. preservation of the **federal role of the Rajya Sabha;**
 - e. transparent, consultative and evidence-based delimitation.
5. The issue should also be harmonised with the **women's reservation framework**, since the constitutional framework for women's reservation in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies is linked to the delimitation exercise.

98 . In youth-driven Viksit Bharat, celebrate 'dimag'

India's **"yuva shakti"** can become the foundation of Viksit Bharat only when the demographic dividend is converted into **skills, employment, innovation and entrepreneurship**. With technology **"disrupting life and work"**, initiatives such as AI training, free online coaching and focus on **AI, quantum technology, space and robotics** can expand opportunities and build future-ready human capital. At the same time, youth should be treated as **"partners in the India reform story"**, with greater participation in governance and nation-building rather than being viewed merely through the lens of protest or unrest. The distinction between **"hathiyari" and "dimagi"** also underlines the importance of **freedom of thought**: while violence must be dealt with through law, ideas must be engaged through dialogue, education and



democratic debate. Thus, Viksit Bharat requires not just a young population, but **empowered young minds capable of questioning, innovating and contributing fearlessly.**

99. As AI agents get popular, questions of control, autonomy

AI is moving from conventional **assistants that respond to prompts** to **agents that can independently take actions to achieve a goal.** This creates a new governance challenge: **how much decision-making should humans delegate to AI, and where should human control end?**

From Assistance to Autonomous Agency

1. A chatbot primarily **responds to a user's prompt**, whereas an AI agent can **plan, decide and execute a sequence of actions** to achieve an objective.
2. Agents can perform multi-step tasks such as **searching information, making bookings, replacing items or completing transactions**, making AI an active participant rather than merely an information tool.
3. This can improve **efficiency, productivity and convenience**, particularly for routine and multi-step tasks.
4. However, autonomy changes the nature of risk: the concern is no longer only **accuracy of output**, but the consequences of **actions taken by the system.**

The “Delegation Coin”: Autonomy vs Human Agency

1. AI agents create a **“delegation coin”**: users gain convenience by handing over tasks, but may simultaneously surrender part of their **agency and control.**
2. Willingness to delegate depends on **perceived usefulness, trust, past experience and confidence** in the system.
3. Evidence discussed in the piece suggests that users are more willing to delegate when AI is seen as **empowering them to accomplish their goals**, but less willing when it threatens their **sense of autonomy.**
4. This makes **human agency** the central ethical concern: AI should augment human decision-making, not quietly replace it.

Responsible Autonomy: Control, Accountability & Guardrails

1. Greater autonomy requires clearly defined **permissions, instructions, boundaries and guardrails**, especially when agents can access external tools or act on a user's behalf.
2. The key question is **“how much of the process does a user hand over, and to what end?”** — autonomy should therefore be proportionate to the **risk and reversibility of the task.**
3. High-stakes or irreversible decisions require stronger **human oversight and the ability to intervene or take back control.**
4. The experience with AI agents also raises concerns of **misuse, unintended actions, excessive delegation and loss of accountability.**
5. Hence, responsible AI governance should ensure **human-in-the-loop mechanisms, transparency, auditability and meaningful human override.**

100. Odisha's coastal erosion: The measures to save lives, livelihoods

Odisha's coastal erosion illustrates how **climate change, extreme weather and human interventions** can combine to threaten coastal communities. The issue is therefore not merely about shoreline loss, but about **livelihood security, displacement, infrastructure resilience and sustainable coastal development.**

Coastal Erosion as a Climate–Development Challenge

1. Odisha's experience shows that coastal vulnerability is shaped by both **natural processes and developmental choices.**
2. **Sea-level rise, cyclones, waves, tides and storms** intensify shoreline change, while **ports, construction, sand mining and unplanned infrastructure** can disturb coastal processes.
3. Importantly, **sea walls, breakwaters and jetties can themselves modify shoreline and beach morphology**; therefore, a structure that protects one stretch may potentially alter erosion patterns elsewhere.
4. NCCR's **1990–2022 shoreline assessment** puts **28.3% of Odisha's coastline under erosion**, while 17.6% remains stable and 54.1% shows accretion—highlighting that coastal dynamics are spatially differentiated.



- Coastal management must therefore move from isolated engineering interventions towards **Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)** and climate-resilient development.

From Shoreline Loss to Livelihood & Human Security

- The deeper concern is the chain of **erosion → land loss → livelihood loss → displacement → rehabilitation**.
- The reported disappearance of **16 villages in Kendrapara** and the abandonment of **Podampeta**, once home to nearly 500 households, demonstrate how erosion can eventually make settlements **physically and economically unviable**.
- Communities losing land may simultaneously lose access to **livelihoods, social networks and local infrastructure**, making relocation more than a housing issue.
- Hence, adaptation must be **people-centric and anticipatory**, with:
 - early identification of vulnerable settlements;
 - livelihood rehabilitation alongside relocation;
 - community participation;
 - social infrastructure at resettlement sites.
- This represents the shift from **post-disaster relief to anticipatory adaptation and resilience-building**.

Towards Resilient & Nature-Sensitive Coastal Management

- Odisha's response illustrates the need for a **portfolio of solutions**, rather than dependence on a single technology.
- Geotextile tubes**—high-strength porous structures filled with sand—are being used to absorb wave impact and reduce erosion; such measures can provide **site-specific protection** where appropriate.
- Sea-wall-cum-serving roads** in parts of Balasore and Ganjam combine coastal protection with **local connectivity and public access**, showing how adaptation infrastructure can deliver multiple benefits.
- At the same time, hard structures should not become the default solution because coastal interventions can alter **sediment movement and shoreline morphology**.
- A resilient strategy should therefore combine **scientific shoreline monitoring + appropriate protective infrastructure + ecosystem-based approaches + planned relocation + livelihood security**.
- Where protection is viable, **protect**; where communities can adapt, **adapt**; and where long-term habitation becomes untenable, **planned relocation** should be pursued.
- The focus should shift from **“saving the coastline” to “saving lives and livelihoods”**, while ensuring that adaptation itself does not create new ecological vulnerabilities.

101. Losing forest for trees

The concern is not simply that India is planting too few trees, but that **forest policy is increasingly equating greening with tree-counting**. The CAG's assessment of the **Green India Mission (GIM)** exposes this implementation gap, while the experience of the **Aravallis** shows why plantations cannot substitute for restoration of a degraded ecosystem.

The Plantation–Restoration Gap

- GIM**, conceived to improve India's forests, has achieved little against its intended targets: of the **1.4 million ha** identified for improvement, only **0.11 million ha** was managed; expansion of forest cover achieved barely **4% of the target**.
- The problem is deeper than poor target achievement: **planting trees is not equivalent to restoring forests**.
- GIM's intended convergence with **CAMPA funds and MGNREGA labour** for plantation and land-restoration activities **did not materialise**, weakening implementation.
- The larger policy failure is a focus on **accountancy—hectares and rupees—rather than the “worth of a living forest.”**
- Forest governance must shift from **input/output-based afforestation to outcome-based ecological restoration**.

Why “Green Cover” Can Be Misleading?

- ISFR 2023** recorded a gain of **1,445 sq km in green cover**, but only **156 sq km** was actual forest; **1,289 sq km** represented **“tree cover outside recorded forests.”** Hence, **tree cover ≠ forest cover ≠ natural forest**.



2. The concern is also qualitative: **dense canopy is thinning into scrub**, meaning numerical expansion can coexist with ecological degradation.
3. The **Aravallis** provide the clearest illustration: degraded hills, mining, encroachment and invasive **vilayati kikar (Prosopis juliflora)** cannot be restored simply through a “**Green Wall**” of fresh planting.
4. Satellite-based measurement can capture **hectares and rupees**, but may not adequately capture **biodiversity, habitat quality, ecological interactions and ecosystem functionality**.

From “Planting More” to Restoring Ecosystems

1. Restoration must recreate the **ecological processes and functions** lost through degradation—not merely establish tree plantations.
2. Priorities should include:
 - i. **native vegetation and biodiversity** rather than merely increasing tree numbers;
 - ii. restoration of **habitat, soil and water systems**;
 - iii. addressing **mining and encroachment** before plantation;
 - iv. long-term monitoring of whether a planted area actually develops into a functioning ecosystem.
3. Schemes such as “**Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam**”, which reported **140 crore saplings planted**, can contribute to greening, but the meaningful metric is ultimately **survival and ecological recovery**, not the number planted.

India’s forest policy needs to reconcile **climate mitigation with biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration**. Forests are not merely carbon sinks; they provide **water regulation, soil conservation, livelihoods, habitat and climate resilience**.

102. Why Adivasis are resisting the Ken-Betwa River-Linking Project?

The **Ken-Betwa River Linking Project**, particularly the **Daudhan Dam**, is intended to transfer water from the Ken basin to the Betwa basin to address regional water scarcity and support irrigation and development. However, its implementation has generated resistance among Adivasi and other affected communities in the **Panna–Chhatarpur region**, primarily over **displacement, compensation, loss of land and forests, livelihood insecurity and inadequate participation in rehabilitation decisions**.

Displacement, Livelihood & Rights Concerns

1. The project seeks to address **Bundelkhand’s chronic water stress**, improve irrigation and provide wider developmental benefits.
2. However, the **Daudhan Dam** and associated works will lead to **submergence of villages and forest areas**, creating displacement of local communities.
3. For Adivasis, displacement means more than loss of a physical asset—it threatens “**janmabhoomi**”, **livelihoods, forests and community life**.
4. This creates a **benefit–burden asymmetry**: the benefits of water infrastructure accrue across the region, while the immediate costs are concentrated on project-affected communities.

Livelihood, Forest & Cultural Security

1. Forests provide communities with **mahua, tendu, fuel, fodder and other forest produce**, making them an important component of livelihood security.
2. Hence, forest submergence involves both **ecological loss and livelihood loss**, which cannot be adequately captured through monetary compensation.
3. The affected landscape also represents **ancestral and cultural space**; relocation can therefore produce **cultural dislocation and loss of community networks**.
4. The project highlights the limitation of treating rehabilitation as merely “**house + compensation**” rather than rebuilding the entire livelihood ecosystem.

Rights, Participation & Governance Deficit

1. Resistance has been intensified by concerns over **consultation, compensation, rehabilitation and participation** in project decisions.



2. The demand for **land-for-land, house-for-house and livelihood security** reflects the gap between legal compensation and what communities consider genuine rehabilitation.
3. Concerns over **joint surveys of land and houses** underline the importance of accurate identification of affected assets and beneficiaries.
4. Reported grievances regarding **demolition without adequate notice/compensation** further undermine trust in the rehabilitation process.
5. The case highlights the importance of **Gram Sabha participation and Forest Rights Act safeguards** wherever applicable.

Ecological Costs of Large Infrastructure

1. The project involves substantial **forest diversion/submergence**, raising concerns over biodiversity, habitat and ecosystem services.
2. The reported estimate of around **23 lakh trees** to be felled highlights the scale of ecological intervention, while also raising the broader question of whether **tree numbers alone capture the value of a mature forest ecosystem**.
3. The proximity to the **Panna Tiger Reserve** adds significance to concerns regarding habitat and wildlife.
4. Thus, the real environmental cost includes not merely **trees lost**, but **habitat fragmentation, biodiversity loss, carbon storage and forest-dependent livelihoods**.
5. Environmental appraisal should account for **ecological externalities and ecosystem services**, rather than treating forests simply as land available for diversion.

Way Forward: "Development with Dignity"

1. **Participatory planning:** Ensure meaningful engagement with affected Gram Sabhas and communities before irreversible decisions.
2. **Rights-based Resettlement and Rehabilitation:** Move beyond cash compensation towards **land/housing, livelihood restoration, community resources and social infrastructure**.
3. **Transparent assessment:** Conduct credible **social-impact and ecological assessments**, including cumulative impacts.
4. **Resettlement before displacement:** Ensure rehabilitation arrangements are functional before physical displacement.
5. **Grievance redressal:** Independent mechanisms for disputes over **land surveys, compensation and rehabilitation** can rebuild trust.
6. **Minimise ecological footprint:** Explore project/design alternatives that reduce **forest submergence and habitat disruption**.
7. **Benefit-sharing:** Ensure affected communities receive a tangible share of the project's developmental gains.

Water security should not come at the cost of livelihood insecurity; infrastructure must pursue development with dignity, participation and ecological responsibility.

103. Notices to actors: What law says on surrogate ads

The Maharashtra FDA issued show-cause notices to actors **Shah Rukh Khan, Ajay Devgn and Tiger Shroff** for allegedly endorsing surrogate advertisements for **Vimal Elaichi**, linked to a product category prohibited in the State. The issue brings together **surrogate advertising, consumer protection, celebrity accountability and public-health regulation**.

Surrogate Advertising & Regulatory Gap

1. **Surrogate advertising** occurs when a prohibited/restricted product is promoted indirectly by advertising another product/service under the same or similar brand identity.
2. Maharashtra has prohibited **gutkha and tobacco/nicotine-containing pan masala** under **Section 30(2)(a), Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**; the prohibition was renewed in July 2026.
3. The Vimal Elaichi campaign raises the question whether advertising a permitted product under a brand strongly associated with a prohibited product amounts to **indirect promotion**.



Celebrity Endorsement → Accountability

1. The FDA has asked the actors to explain their **role and association** with the campaign, indicating that celebrity participation can attract scrutiny when the endorsement facilitates prohibited promotion.
2. Under the **CCPA Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisements and Endorsements**, manufacturers, advertisers and endorsers can face penalties for misleading advertisements.
3. Penalties can extend up to **₹10 lakh for first contravention and ₹50 lakh for subsequent contraventions**; CCPA can also prohibit an endorser from making endorsements for **1 year**, extending to **3 years for subsequent contravention**.
4. Celebrity endorsements involve not merely **commercial freedom**, but also **ethical responsibility**, since celebrities exercise considerable influence over consumer behaviour, especially among youth.

Public Health vs Commercial Freedom

1. The larger concern is the use of advertising to normalise products associated with **tobacco consumption and addiction** through attractive branding and celebrity appeal.
2. Regulation therefore seeks to prevent **indirect normalisation** even where the advertisement technically features an ostensibly permissible product.
3. At the same time, regulation must maintain **clarity, proportionality and due process**, particularly in determining whether an actor knowingly participated in prohibited promotion.
4. Thus, the regulatory challenge is to balance **freedom of commercial expression with the State's obligation to protect public health**.

104. NASA's Moon Base: What India will gain by joining

NASA's Moon Base programme under **Artemis** seeks to establish a **sustained human presence on the Moon**. India, a signatory to the **Artemis Accords (2023)**, can use this cooperation to accelerate its space capabilities, while balancing **strategic autonomy, resource governance and indigenous priorities**.

Strategic, Scientific & Technological Gains

1. Marks a shift from **short-duration missions to sustained human presence**, involving habitats, power, communications, transportation and long-duration research.
2. Can complement **Gaganyaan, lunar missions and Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS)**, saving India substantial time and resources; independently developing comparable capabilities could require **"about a decade's worth of technology development."**
3. Builds capabilities in **human spaceflight, life-support, robotics, communications, logistics and lunar technologies**.
4. Generates **"cascading dividends across sectors"** through applications in AI, advanced manufacturing, robotics and communications.
5. Strengthens India's position as a **responsible space power** and deepens India-US technological cooperation.

Geopolitical, Strategic Autonomy & Resource Concerns

1. Around **70 countries** have joined the Artemis Accords; India was an **early signatory in 2023**, giving it a role in emerging lunar norms.
2. With **Russia and China outside the Artemis framework**, lunar exploration increasingly reflects wider geopolitical competition.
3. Participation can strengthen India's **strategic flexibility and multi-alignment**, rather than implying alignment with one bloc.
4. Growing lunar activity raises questions over **resource extraction, commercialisation and equitable access**; India must remain engaged in shaping future rules.
5. The objective should be **"cooperation without strategic dependence"**—international collaboration without technological lock-in or excessive dependence on one ecosystem.



105. The Centre-states tussle over the Mines and Minerals Bill

The **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026** has triggered a Centre–State dispute over taxation of mineral resources. The Bill seeks to address **specified levies on mineral-bearing land and outstanding mining dues**, following the Supreme Court’s 2024 ruling recognising States’ power to tax mineral rights.

Centre–State Dispute: Fiscal Federalism at Stake

1. The **2024 Supreme Court ruling** overturned the earlier *India Cement* position and affirmed States’ power to levy taxes on mineral rights.
2. The Bill seeks to **extinguish unpaid/unrecovered dues** arising from such levies; estimates cited put outstanding dues across the mining sector at around **₹2 lakh crore**.
3. **States’ concern:** loss of a significant source of revenue and possible erosion of their **fiscal autonomy**.
4. **Centre’s concern:** unchecked State-level levies may increase the cost of **critical minerals**, feeding into **inflation and infrastructure costs**.
5. The dispute reflects the tension between **State fiscal autonomy and nationally coordinated mineral-resource governance**.

Revenue, Industry & Resource Governance Concerns

1. The proposed amendments could impose **greater fiscal certainty on industry** by resolving multiple and retrospective/contested levies.
2. However, industry argues that a **mineral-bearing land tax** could become the biggest additional burden on mining companies.
3. The Centre argues that pending State-level levies have created **legal uncertainty and large contingent liabilities**, making investment decisions difficult.
4. States fear that revenue loss could weaken their **fiscal capacity**, especially mineral-producing States; Jharkhand cited mining revenue at about **24.9% of its own tax revenue (2024–25)**.
5. The issue is not merely taxation but the balance between **ease of doing business, resource mobilisation and cooperative federalism**.

Way Forward: Cooperative Mineral Federalism

1. Evolve a **reasonable and transparent framework** that gives States predictable mineral revenues while preventing excessive or overlapping taxation.
 2. Use **Centre–State consultation** to settle pending claims rather than unilaterally eroding States’ revenue rights.
 3. Ensure that mineral taxation remains compatible with **competitive mining costs and critical-mineral security**.
 4. Provide States with mechanisms for **predictable revenue-sharing/compensation** where reforms reduce legitimate mineral revenues.
 5. Create greater **legal and fiscal certainty** for investors while respecting the constitutional distribution of powers.
- India needs a model of **“cooperative mineral federalism”** where resource-rich States retain meaningful fiscal benefits while national interests in **critical minerals, investment and infrastructure** are protected.

106. Why India is finding it difficult to buy critical mineral assets abroad, expand footprint

India is seeking overseas critical-mineral assets to secure supplies for its clean-energy and high-technology transition. However, the efforts of **Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL)** have faced hurdles ranging from high asset valuations and financial constraints to political and regulatory risks in resource-rich countries.

Why India needs overseas critical-mineral assets?

1. India’s domestic reserves are insufficient to meet the **growing demand for critical minerals**, making overseas acquisition important for supply security.
2. Minerals such as **lithium** are crucial for batteries, EVs, renewable energy and strategic technologies.
3. KABIL, incorporated in 2019, was created to **identify, acquire and develop overseas mineral assets**.
4. Its recent efforts span **Argentina, Australia, Vietnam, Mali and Chile**, but several projects have faced delays or failed bids.

Why overseas acquisition is difficult?



1. **High valuations & competition:** Critical-mineral assets attract intense global competition, pushing up acquisition costs.
2. **Financial constraints:** Large upfront investment and uncertain returns can limit KABIL's ability to compete with global mining majors.
3. **Resource nationalism:** Host countries may impose tighter controls over strategically important mineral resources.
4. **Political & regulatory risks:** Changes in government policy, taxation, mining rules and local regulations can affect project viability.
5. **Uncertain geology & commercial viability:** Exploration risks make large overseas investments difficult to justify.
6. **Geopolitical risks:** Investments in politically unstable or strategically sensitive countries carry additional uncertainty.

Way Forward: From acquisition to resource diplomacy

1. **Strengthen KABIL's financial capacity** so it can compete for strategically important assets rather than losing viable projects because of funding constraints.
2. Adopt a **portfolio approach** — combine high-risk exploration with commercially viable producing assets.
3. Build partnerships with **state-owned and private mining companies** in resource-rich countries.
4. Move beyond ownership towards **long-term offtake agreements, joint ventures and technology partnerships** where outright acquisition is financially difficult.
5. Develop stronger **country-specific risk assessment** covering political, regulatory, geological and commercial risks.
6. Integrate overseas mineral strategy with **domestic recycling, exploration, processing and refining** to reduce import vulnerability.
7. Treat critical minerals as a component of **strategic economic diplomacy**, using India's partnerships to secure reliable and diversified supply chains.

107. Time to push back

The U.S. has accused India of potentially enabling **Chinese goods to enter the U.S. through India at lower tariffs**. The concern comes amid rising U.S. tariff pressure on Indian exports, making the issue important for **India's trade policy, strategic autonomy and India-U.S. relations**.

India's changing trade & manufacturing strategy

1. India's imports from China are increasingly shifting from **finished products to intermediate goods**, reflecting growing **domestic assembly and manufacturing**.
2. This indicates India is gradually moving towards "**full-scale manufacturing**" rather than merely importing finished Chinese products.
3. Chinese imports remain an important pillar of Indian manufacturing, particularly for **components and intermediate inputs**.
4. Hence, reducing dependence on China cannot happen through abrupt decoupling; India needs **domestic manufacturing capacity and diversified supply chains**.

U.S. tariff pressure & India's strategic concerns

1. The U.S. has repeatedly targeted Indian tariffs, including higher duties on **high-end motorcycles, shrimp, frozen duck and turkey**, and other products.
2. The possibility of punitive action over alleged **Chinese tariff circumvention** adds another layer to India-U.S. trade tensions.
3. India's experience with Russian oil shows the cost of succumbing to external pressure: U.S. tariff pressure pushed India towards **diversification of energy imports**, even though Russia remains important.



4. The concern is therefore broader than tariffs — excessive U.S. pressure could constrain India’s **strategic autonomy and independent trade choices**.
5. India must avoid being forced into choosing between major powers and instead pursue **issue-based alignment and diversified economic partnerships**.

108. Beyond America

The U.S.–Iran confrontation and repeated attacks in the Gulf have exposed the “**growing limits**” of the **U.S.-led security architecture**, forcing Arab states to rethink their long-standing dependence on Washington for regional security.

Why Arab states are looking beyond the U.S?

1. **U.S. military presence becoming a liability:** Repeated attacks on U.S. bases and host countries have shown that American bases can “**turn into a liability**” rather than providing security.
2. **Deterrence deficit:** Despite its military presence, the U.S. has been unable to “**advance America’s strategic goals or deter Iran**” effectively.
3. **Failure of containment:** The decades-old U.S. policy of “**containing Iran has failed**”, while repeated escalation has weakened confidence among allies.
4. **Shaken security architecture:** The war has shown that the “**foundations of the old security architecture have been shaken**” and that Arab states cannot assume the U.S. will always provide a reliable security umbrella.
5. **Need for regional ownership:** The emerging reality requires Gulf states to “**look beyond the American security umbrella**” and build their own mechanisms for regional stability.

A new regional security order

1. Move from **external security dependence** → **regional security responsibility**.
2. Build a **new regional order shaped by a “cold peace” between Arab states and Iran**, rather than perpetual confrontation.
3. Strengthen **regional dialogue, confidence-building and collective security mechanisms** to manage Iran–Arab tensions.
4. For India, a more autonomous Gulf security architecture is important for **energy security, diaspora interests and stability of the Indian Ocean–West Asia region**.

109. Employment guarantee has slipped into limbo

The transition from **MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G** has coincided with a sharp fall in rural employment, raising concerns over **continuity of livelihood security and implementation preparedness**.

Rural employment & livelihood crisis

1. Employment under the two schemes fell by around **43%** during April–July 2026 compared with the previous two years; the decline was **over 40% in most States** and particularly severe in several poorer States.
2. The explanation that the decline is simply because States have not started spending under VB-G RAM G is being called a “**misleading excuse**”.
3. More fundamentally, employment has remained weak even when the period would normally see **seasonally high demand**, making the decline a concern for the effectiveness of the employment guarantee itself.
4. The problem is especially significant because **wage payments have remained more or less unchanged in real terms**, limiting the programme’s livelihood-protection role.

Governance failure in the transition

1. The transition itself has been poorly sequenced: VB-G RAM G was supposed to replace MGNREGA from April 1, but **MGNREGA continued “by default”** while the new framework was still being prepared.
2. The article captures this institutional uncertainty as: “**the old world of MGNREGA was struggling to be born, and the new world of VB-G RAM G was struggling to be born.**”



- Thus, the issue is not merely **budget allocation**, but whether institutional transition, rules and administrative machinery are ready to convert allocations into actual employment.
- Despite a projected **~70% increase in expenditure** over MGNREGA expenditure, the expected employment boost has not materialised — highlighting the gap between **financial provisioning and implementation outcomes**.

Way Forward

- Ensure **continuity of employment** during scheme transitions through advance rule-making and administrative preparedness.
- Strengthen **Centre–State coordination**, particularly on implementation and funding responsibilities.
- Judge the scheme by **actual person-days, timely wages and livelihood outcomes**, rather than allocation alone.
- The larger lesson is that welfare reform must avoid an **implementation vacuum**: institutional restructuring should strengthen, not interrupt, the **employment guarantee as a rural social-security mechanism**.

110 . Helicase: The DNA Separator

- **Helicase** is an enzyme that **unwinds the two strands of DNA** so that the cell can copy its genetic information. DNA normally exists as a **double helix**, with the two strands held together by **hydrogen bonds** between complementary bases.
- Helicase moves along the DNA and separates the strands, creating a **replication fork**. It uses **energy from ATP** to drive this process. Once separated, each strand acts as a **template for the synthesis of a new complementary DNA strand**.
- As helicase unwinds DNA, the DNA ahead of it becomes increasingly **twisted and strained**. **Topoisomerases** relieve this twisting and help prevent DNA from becoming tangled or breaking, allowing replication machinery to move along the strands.
- Emerging research showing that helicase activity may be **regulated by chemical signals**, rather than functioning simply as a mechanical DNA “zipper”. Researchers are studying how such regulation can control **when and how DNA replication machinery becomes active**.

111 . Bihar’s Alcohol Ban: Social Welfare vs Revenue Concerns

Bihar’s prohibition policy shows that alcohol restrictions can bring public health, household welfare and social well-being gains, but also involve fiscal costs. Its impact should therefore be assessed through health, social and economic outcomes together, not merely crime or revenue data.

Social & Gender-Welfare Gains

- Evidence from **quasi-experimental studies** suggests a decline in **intimate-partner/spousal violence** after prohibition, relative to comparable States.
- A *Lancet* study estimated that prohibition may have **prevented over 2 lakh cases of spousal violence** among women.
- Studies also report reductions in **hypertension, diabetes and obesity among men**, indicating wider public-health gains.
- NCRB data needs cautious interpretation**: reported crime captures mainly severe/registered violence, while domestic violence is often under-reported due to stigma, family pressure and limited access to justice.
- Prohibition connects with **Article 47, gender justice, public health and social welfare**, not merely law and order.

The Revenue–Welfare Trade-off

- The “**State revenue loss**” argument is incomplete if it ignores the wider economic burden of alcohol.
- Alcohol use is associated with an estimated **~1.45% of India’s GDP** in annual economic losses; the social value of Bihar’s ban has been estimated to exceed its direct economic costs by **more than three times**.



3. Gains include lower **health expenditure, violence, household distress and productivity losses**, which may not appear directly in State accounts.
4. Thus, the relevant comparison is “**fiscal revenue foregone vs social returns generated**”, rather than revenue loss alone.
5. Reflects the tension between **fiscal prudence and welfare-oriented governance**.

Evidence-Based & Balanced Policy

1. The evidence does **not support a simplistic claim that prohibition has failed**; its impact should be assessed through multiple indicators—**violence, health, household welfare, crime, illicit liquor, employment and State finances**.
2. At the same time, prohibition alone is insufficient; it must be complemented by **de-addiction, awareness, rehabilitation, enforcement against illicit liquor and livelihood support**.
3. The broader policy approach should follow WHO-backed options such as **taxation, licensing controls, restrictions on availability/marketing and stronger enforcement**, alongside public-health interventions.
4. **Way forward:** Focus on “**public health, safety and well-being**” while ensuring fiscal sustainability and periodically evaluating whether the policy remains **effective, enforceable and socially beneficial**.

112 . A changing Asia demands more from Delhi and Tokyo, together

Japan is undergoing a “**transformation of Tokyo’s defence and regional policies**” as China rises and uncertainty grows over the durability of American commitments. Shinjiro Koizumi’s India visit comes at a time when both Delhi and Tokyo need to strengthen their own capabilities and partnerships.

A changing Asian balance demands deeper India–Japan convergence

1. China’s rise as a **major military power** and its growing ability to translate **political will into concrete outcomes** are reshaping the Asian balance.
2. India and Japan face different manifestations of the China challenge—India confronts the PLA along its borders, while Japan faces maritime and territorial pressure—but both need a stronger regional balance.
3. Japan is moving beyond its “**self-imposed military restraint**” towards a more active security role, with “**counterstrike**” capabilities, long-range missiles and rising defence expenditure. This transformation is also driven by uncertainty over **American reliability and the nature of its regional commitments**.
4. India, meanwhile, continues to value the American military presence for regional stability, while also recognising the need to strengthen its **own national capabilities**. Thus, India–Japan convergence can contribute to a **stable, free and open Indo-Pacific** without turning into a rigid military bloc.

From symbolic partnership to operational & technological weight

1. India–Japan cooperation already has an institutional architecture through **2+2 dialogue, logistics agreements and regular tri-service exercises**.
2. However, defence cooperation has remained “**painfully slow**”, particularly in the industrial domain.
3. The partnership now needs to move beyond “**bilateral exercises and exchanges**” towards:
 - ☐ **Joint research, development and co-production** of defence systems.
 - ☐ Maritime surveillance and **anti-submarine warfare**.
 - ☐ **Cyber and space capabilities** and unmanned systems.
 - ☐ Air-defence and counter-drone technologies.
 - ☐ Defence-industrial cooperation and resilient supply chains.
4. Japan’s relaxation of restrictions on **defence exports** creates new possibilities for technological collaboration.
5. Concrete initiatives such as the proposed **bilateral defence co-development project** and the **UNICORN naval communications antenna** cooperation can give the partnership greater substance. Thus, the relationship must evolve from political convergence to **capability creation and defence-industrial integration**.

Regional security architecture: India and Japan as complementary pillars



1. Japan is increasingly “**reaching out**” to **South Korea and other regional neighbours**, while deepening defence ties with **Australia and New Zealand**. This points towards a wider network of Asian security partnerships rather than dependence on a single security provider.
2. For India, Japan can become an important pillar of this architecture because both favour a **rules-based regional order** and greater regional stability.
3. India and Japan can leverage existing platforms and mechanisms to deepen cooperation across the wider Indo-Pacific.
4. At the same time, India must preserve **strategic autonomy** and avoid excessive dependence on any single power.
5. **Way forward:** Make existing mechanisms deliver tangible outcomes; accelerate **co-development/co-production**, defence technology transfer and interoperability; and expand cooperation with other like-minded Asian partners. The objective should be “**more together in defence**” without **sacrificing national capability or strategic autonomy**.

113. On minerals and mines, strike federal balance

The **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026** seeks to rationalise mineral taxation and provide greater **certainty and predictability** to the mining sector. However, its impact on **States’ taxation powers and fiscal federalism** has triggered concerns, particularly after the Supreme Court upheld States’ power to levy taxes on mineral rights.

Investment & Tax Rationalisation vs States’ Fiscal Autonomy

1. The amendments seek to “**rationalise**” **taxes and royalties**, providing greater **certainty and predictability** and reducing the possibility of higher levies feeding into infrastructure costs.
2. India’s effective tax rate in the mining sector is reportedly **over 50%**, compared with **35–40% in other countries**, potentially affecting investment competitiveness.
3. States currently impose around **14 types of taxes, charges and levies** on minerals, including royalty and auction premium, with significant variation in rates.
4. While some degree of **uniformity in mineral prices** may facilitate investment, excessive centralisation can constrain States’ ability to mobilise resources. The issue reflects the tension between **ease of doing business and fiscal federalism**—investment certainty should not come at the cost of constitutionally recognised State fiscal space.

Why States Are Concerned?

1. The amendments come after the **Supreme Court upheld States’ right to impose taxes on mineral rights** and allowed recovery of arrears going back to **April 1, 2005**.
2. Mineral-rich States such as **Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh** depend significantly on mining-related revenues; for some, these form a substantial share of **non-tax revenue**.
3. States therefore fear that restricting their ability to vary mineral taxation could lead to **erosion of tax powers and fiscal autonomy**.
4. The concern is sharper because States have **limited avenues to raise resources**, making mineral taxation an important source of revenue. Thus, the dispute is not merely about mining taxation but about the broader **Centre–State distribution of fiscal powers**.

Balancing Investment, Revenue & Cooperative Federalism

1. The Centre argues that a **more predictable mining framework** can attract investment, reduce costs and facilitate the **critical mineral mission**—important for India’s industrial and strategic requirements.
2. At the same time, the government’s own data suggests States will continue to receive the **overwhelming share of mining revenue**, indicating that the objective need not be a complete transfer of fiscal control to the Centre.
3. The real challenge is therefore to reconcile **national investment objectives with State revenue interests**.
4. **Way forward:**
 - a. Institutionalise **Centre–State consultation** before major changes in mineral taxation.



- b. Ensure States retain adequate **revenue-raising flexibility** while reducing arbitrary variations.
- c. Develop transparent principles for **tax/royalty rationalisation** rather than uniformity imposed from above.
- d. Provide States with predictable compensation/revenue-sharing mechanisms where their fiscal space is reduced.
- e. Use cooperative federalism to align mineral taxation with **critical-mineral security, investment and sustainable resource management**.

114. Vote of Trust: Electoral Rolls and Electoral Integrity

The debate over electoral-roll revision, particularly **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)**, highlights a central democratic dilemma: **how to ensure “clean electoral rolls” without compromising inclusiveness, transparency and citizens’ right to vote**. The India–US comparison shows that different electoral architectures face a common challenge of maintaining **electoral integrity and public trust**.

Electoral Integrity vs Inclusive Democracy

1. **Clean electoral rolls** are essential for credible elections, but the process of verification must not become a source of **disenfranchisement**.
2. SIR seeks to strengthen electoral integrity through **citizenship verification and photo-ID requirements**.
3. However, stringent documentation requirements may create difficulties for citizens with inadequate records, particularly vulnerable and mobile populations.
4. The article stresses that SIR, being undertaken only **once in 20 years**, must therefore be conducted with **transparency, adequate consultation and sufficient time**.
5. The larger principle is **“purity of electoral rolls” without compromising universal adult suffrage**.

India–US Contrast: Different Systems, Common Challenge

1. **India**: A largely **nationalised electoral administration**, with the ECI as a **constitutional body**, provides a relatively uniform framework for elections.
2. **USA**: A **highly federalised electoral process**, with fragmented State-level rules for voter registration and voting, creates greater variation and loopholes.
3. The U.S. experience shows the problems of fragmented administration, while India's framework demonstrates the value of a **robust national electoral institution**.
4. Yet, both democracies face **political mistrust over electoral integrity**, showing that institutional design alone cannot guarantee legitimacy. India need **not** imitate the U.S.; rather, it can draw lessons on ensuring that electoral reforms are **transparent, consistent and insulated from partisan interests**.

Electoral Reform and Political Weaponisation

1. **Photo ID, citizenship verification and clean rolls** are legitimate requirements for electoral integrity.
2. But if applied selectively, such measures can become instruments of **political exclusion** rather than electoral reform.
3. The article cautions against using electoral procedures to **“target social groups”** or selectively disadvantage those not in power.
4. Hence, electoral administration must maintain **political neutrality, procedural fairness and equal treatment of citizens**. Electoral integrity should strengthen, not undermine, democratic participation.

115. Due Diligence: Curbs on Surrogate Advertising

The Maharashtra FDA’s action against celebrity endorsers associated with **Vimal Elaichi** raises the larger issue of how to curb **surrogate advertising** without allowing legitimate regulation to become **regulatory overreach**. The debate is especially relevant for tobacco and other products with significant public-health consequences.



1. Surrogate advertising exploits the “**gross asymmetry**” between the persuasive power of advertising and the consumer, while the endorser bears little of the **economic downside** of consumption.
2. In tobacco-related advertising, such indirect promotion can normalise consumption and undermine public-health objectives.
3. The concern extends beyond tobacco to advertisements making “**boosts immunity**” claims, alcoholic beverages and financial products.
4. Thus, advertising regulation is not merely a commercial issue but involves **consumer welfare, public health and information asymmetry**.
5. **COTPA** restricts tobacco advertising, while the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019** provides for liability and penalties against endorsers for misleading advertisements.
6. The central issue is establishing whether a legally permissible product such as **Vimal Elaichi** is actually being used to promote a prohibited tobacco product.
7. In *DGHS v. Pan Masala Products Pvt. Ltd.* (2024), the Delhi High Court emphasised that the State must **prove a case of surrogate advertising**. Hence, regulatory intervention must satisfy **due diligence, evidence and procedural fairness**, rather than rely on mere association or inference.

116. Why is the Supreme Court examining polygamy again?

The Supreme Court is examining petitions challenging the constitutional validity of **Section 2 of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937**, insofar as it permits polygamy. The petitioners seek its **criminalisation, compulsory registration of Muslim marriages/divorces and codification of Muslim Personal Law in line with gender equality**.

Polygamy: Personal Law vs Constitutional Rights

1. Petitioners contend that polygamy violates **Articles 14, 15 and 16**, raising the question of whether personal-law practices can withstand constitutional guarantees of **equality and non-discrimination**.
2. They seek **compulsory registration of marriages and divorces** to prevent a second/subsequent marriage during the subsistence of the first marriage and protect the **first wife and children**.
3. A specific legal concern is the apparent differential treatment under **Section 82 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita**, which penalises remarriage during the subsistence of a marriage but, as discussed in the case, does not operate similarly where Muslim personal law permits the subsequent marriage.
4. The issue therefore extends beyond polygamy to **equal citizenship, women’s dignity, marital security and access to legal remedies**.

Judicial Approach: From Triple Talaq to Polygamy

1. **Sarla Mudgal (1995)**: A Hindu husband cannot convert to Islam merely to contract a second marriage while the first subsists; such a marriage was held **void**.
2. **Lily Thomas (2000)**: Reaffirmed the principle that conversion to Islam does not dissolve an existing Hindu marriage and cannot be used to legitimise a second marriage.
3. **Shayara Bano (2017)**: Supreme Court invalidated **instant triple talaq**; the subsequent **Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019** made it a punishable offence.
4. The present examination of polygamy, along with the petitioners’ challenge concerning **nikah halala**, indicates the continuing constitutional debate over discriminatory practices within personal laws.

Constitutional Reform with Religious Sensitivity

1. The constitutional debate should not be reduced to **religion versus reform**; the central question is whether personal-law practices can be retained when they conflict with **Fundamental Rights and gender equality**.
2. The discussion on Quranic provisions indicates that polygamy is **not an unconditional entitlement**; the emphasis is on **justice and equal treatment**, with the practical difficulty of maintaining such equality also recognised.
3. The petitioners have sought that the Centre prepare a framework for **codification of Muslim Personal Law covering marriage, divorce and succession**, aligned with constitutional principles.



4. **Compulsory registration** can provide legal certainty and protect women and children from disputes over marital status.
5. Reform, however, requires **legislative deliberation, consultation and religious sensitivity**, rather than purely adversarial judicial intervention.

117. Supreme Court on 'Industry' under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020

A **nine-judge Constitution Bench** has held that the landmark 1978 *Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board v. R. Rajappa* judgment will no longer act as the “**sheet anchor**” for interpreting “industry” under **Section 2(p) of the Industrial Relations Code (IRC), 2020**.

1. The IRC came into force in **November 2025**; hence, the meaning of “industry” must now be determined from the Code’s “**own text and context**.”
2. The 1978 judgment had adopted a broad interpretation and evolved the “**triple test**”, bringing a wide range of activities within industrial law. It enabled workers to seek **legal recourse and collective bargaining against unfair labour practices**.
3. Its expansive interpretation had even brought **hospitals, educational institutions and municipalities** within the ambit of “industry”, while excluding core sovereign activities such as **judiciary, law and order and defence**.
4. The CJI’s proposed “**refinement**” of the **triple test** recognises that its core principles have “**stood the test of time**”, while its application may need to reflect the **scope and contours of Section 2(p)** of the new Code.
5. The Court has made an important distinction between **pending industrial disputes and future disputes**:
 - ❑ The **1978 triple test will continue to apply to pending industrial disputes**.
 - ❑ The refined interpretation under the IRC will operate **prospectively**.
6. The new interpretation based on the IRC’s “**own text and context**” can provide greater **legal certainty** about which workers and establishments fall within industrial-relations protections.
7. **For workers**, clearer applicability of the law can reduce ambiguity over their entitlement to labour protections and provide a more predictable basis for raising **industrial disputes, collective bargaining and claims against unfair labour practices**.

118. Centre’s fiscal outlook faces geopolitical, revenue risks

India’s fiscal outlook remains **broadly manageable**, but fiscal space faces pressure from **weak tax buoyancy, revenue sacrifice from tax rationalisation and geopolitical shocks**. **GTR grew only 3.7% in Q1 2026-27**, while GST revenue contracted by **11%**, highlighting the short-term revenue cost of tax rationalisation. At the same time, the West Asian crisis and volatile crude prices can simultaneously increase subsidies and reduce fuel-tax revenues; realised subsidies could potentially exceed the Budget estimate by **around ₹50,000 crore**. This shows how **geopolitical risks can increasingly translate into fiscal risks**.

The challenge, therefore, is to balance **fiscal consolidation with growth and welfare**. Despite revenue pressures, capital expenditure grew **23.7% in Q1**, indicating continued emphasis on growth-enhancing public investment, while the fiscal deficit is estimated at **4.6% of GDP**. The larger policy priority should be **widening the tax base, improving compliance, rationalising subsidies, protecting productive capex and maintaining adequate fiscal buffers** against external shocks.

119. The Vanashakti verdict is balanced and pragmatic

Prior Environmental Clearance: Non-negotiable Environmental Safeguard

1. In *Vanashakti v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that **prior Environmental Clearance (EC)** is a mandatory legal requirement under the **EIA Notification, 2006**.
2. Projects that commenced without prior EC **cannot use the 2017 Notification or 2021 Office Memorandum** to seek ex-post regularisation.



3. The Court drew an important distinction between an **administrative Office Memorandum** and a **statutory notification**: an OM cannot override the statutory requirement of prior EC under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
4. This protects the **integrity of the prior-EC regime** and prevents a routine “**violate first, regularise later**” approach.

A Balanced & Pragmatic Approach

1. The judgment does not adopt an absolutist approach of closing or demolishing every violation project. It recognises the **practical reality** of projects where substantial investments have already been made and where violations may arise from **regulatory uncertainty, incorrect interpretation or failure to obtain approvals**.
2. At the same time, allowing indiscriminate post-facto approvals could create a **moral hazard**, encouraging deliberate non-compliance.
3. Hence, the Court leaves the Centre the possibility of framing a **fresh statutory mechanism under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, if considered necessary in the **larger public interest**.
4. Any such mechanism must be **strictly one-time**, backed by **statutory authority**, and accompanied by safeguards such as **environmental assessment, remediation, environmental compensation and strict compliance conditions**.

From Regulatory Uncertainty to Environmental Governance

1. The verdict attempts to reconcile **strict environmental enforcement with practical and scientifically sound regulatory solutions**.
2. It **closes the existing regularisation route** while leaving sufficient **legislative space** for addressing genuine legacy violations through a lawful framework.
3. The larger lesson is that **environmental governance cannot encourage deliberate violations**, but neither should it ignore developmental realities and the **larger public interest**.
4. Thus, the judgment strengthens the principles of **rule of law, sustainable development and environmental accountability**, while seeking **regulatory certainty** for legitimate projects.

120. The ‘Vimal Elaichi’ promotion question

1. The Maharashtra FDA issued notices to celebrities over **Vimal Elaichi** advertisements, alleging that the advertisements could amount to **indirect or surrogate promotion of a prohibited tobacco-related product**.
2. The concern is not merely the product being advertised, but the **brand identity, visuals, dialogue, product name and market identity** associated with the advertisement.
3. Where an “**Elaichi**” **product uses the same/similar brand identity as pan masala/tobacco products**, the communication may reinforce **brand recall and consumer association** with the prohibited product.
4. This highlights the regulatory challenge of distinguishing **genuine brand extension** from an attempt to circumvent restrictions on tobacco advertising.

Multiple Regulatory Layers

The issue engages multiple laws rather than a single advertising regulation:

1. **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006** — Section 24 restricts advertisements and prohibits **misleading advertisements/unfair trade practices** relating to food.
2. **Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations, 2018** — advertisements must be **truthful, unambiguous and not misleading**; excessive-consumption claims are also restricted.
3. **FSS (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011** — restrictions apply to substances/products that may be injurious to health.
4. **COTPA, 2003** — provides the broader framework for regulation of **advertising of tobacco products**.
5. **CCPA Guidelines, 2022** — strengthen safeguards against **misleading advertisements and endorsements**.

Thus, the case illustrates the need for **convergence between food safety regulation, consumer protection and tobacco-control policy**.

Celebrity Endorsement: Accountability Beyond Commercial Speech



1. Under **Section 21 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019**, the CCPA can direct discontinuation/modification of misleading advertisements and impose penalties on endorsers.
2. Penalty may extend to **₹10 lakh for the first contravention and ₹50 lakh for subsequent contraventions**; endorsers can also face a ban from endorsement for **up to one year**, extending to **three years for subsequent violations**.
3. The larger governance issue is **endorser liability**: celebrities have significant influence over consumer behaviour and therefore cannot completely rely on ignorance of the manufacturer's intentions.
4. At the same time, regulation must establish **actual surrogate intent and misleading representation**, rather than treating every brand extension as automatically unlawful.

121 . How will Gaganyaan's thermal shield protect the crew?

Gaganyaan's **thermal protection system (TPS)** is critical because atmospheric re-entry exposes the crew module to extreme thermal stress, with temperatures potentially reaching **1,800°C** at re-entry speeds of **7,500–8,000 m/s**. Since the descent is too rapid for meaningful human intervention, the module must be inherently capable of handling these conditions and maintaining its **structural integrity**, while keeping the crew environment below **150°C**.

For this, ISRO has adopted an **ablative TPS**, where the shield deliberately **sacrifices its outer layers**: intense heat causes the material to decompose, forming **protective char and outgassing vapours** that carry heat away and act as a thermal buffer. This makes it particularly suited to Gaganyaan's **single-use design philosophy**, offering a robust and comparatively cost-effective solution without the complexity of maintaining a reusable thermal shield.

The significance extends beyond Gaganyaan itself: the system builds on India's **indigenous re-entry technology**, demonstrated through the **SRE and CARE/LVM3 missions**. Thus, Gaganyaan's TPS represents the maturation of India's **materials science and re-entry capabilities**, converting earlier experimental expertise into a critical technology for human spaceflight.

122 . Three-Language Policy

The Supreme Court is examining the constitutional validity of treating **English as a “non-indigenous language”** under CBSE's three-language policy, while questioning how the policy can be implemented without compromising educational equity.

Language, identity and constitutional position

1. The policy requires students to learn **three languages, with at least two being “Bhartiya Bhashas”**, reflecting the NEP's emphasis on **mother tongue, Indian languages and multilingualism**.
2. The key constitutional question is whether English can legitimately be classified as **“non-indigenous”**, given its **deep roots in Indian society** and its status as an **official language under the Constitution**.
3. The debate therefore lies between **language as a vehicle of culture** and the historical/institutional position of English in India.
4. The Court has indicated that the constitutional validity of the policy requires examining **how English is classified**, rather than simply treating it as a foreign language.

Policy intent vs ground-level feasibility

1. The article highlights a major **implementation gap**: theoretically there are 23 languages available, but only around **4% of schools offer all three languages**, creating serious asymmetry between policy design and actual availability.
2. Practical constraints include **shortage of qualified teachers**, inadequate school infrastructure and unequal availability of languages such as Sanskrit.
3. The Court also raised the issue of whether Class 6 students should get a **reprieve until Class 10**, particularly because sudden implementation can create difficulties for students as well as the **administrative and teaching infrastructure**.



4. A rigid three-language mandate could therefore produce **unequal educational opportunities** if schools do not possess comparable linguistic resources.

Way Forward: The objective should be **promotion of Bharatiya Bhashas without exclusion of English**. A workable policy needs adequate teachers, infrastructure and reasonable transition time, while allowing contextual flexibility across States. This would reconcile **cultural preservation + multilingualism + constitutional fairness + educational feasibility**.

123. SC on Definition of “Industry”

The Supreme Court’s **5:4 ruling** seeks to bring greater clarity to the definition of **“industry” under Section 2(j)** by tweaking the framework laid down in the 1978 Bangalore Water Supply judgment. The **“triple test”** remains the core principle—**systematic activity, organised cooperation between employer and employee, and production/distribution of goods or services to satisfy human wants**—but its formulation may be **refined under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020**. Importantly, the Court has maintained that **profit motive is not decisive** in determining whether an activity constitutes an industry.

The major significance is **legal continuity with prospective change**: pending disputes under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 will continue under the existing framework and will not be unsettled by the new interpretation. This protects workers’ existing **legal recourse and statutory labour protections** while allowing the new Code to operate on a **“clean slate.”** The judgment also cautions against blanket exclusion of **State-run or social-welfare activities**; their status must depend on the **nature of the activity and other relevant factors**, rather than merely who performs it.

124. Modi-ism must evolve into institution-centred nation-building

“Modi-ism” refers to a governance model characterised by **strong and decisive leadership, disciplined political organisation, centralised decision-making, civilisational assertion, technology-driven welfare, infrastructure-led development, national security and direct communication with citizens**. Its major appeal lies in **administrative speed, policy continuity and an enhanced state capacity** to deliver infrastructure and welfare at scale.

The central governance question, however, is whether this **leader-centric model** can evolve into **institution-centred nation-building**. Strong leadership can provide direction and momentum, but durable democracy requires **institutional autonomy, parliamentary accountability, federal balance, constitutional restraint and rights-based governance**.

Strong leadership vs constitutional governance

1. Strong leadership can deliver **decisive action, policy continuity, infrastructure-led development, digital innovation, welfare delivery and national-security capacity**; however, effectiveness cannot be the only test of democratic government.
2. The constitutional character of governance must be judged by the **actual exercise of power**, not political slogans. Democracy requires **restraints on power, respect for dissent, parliamentary accountability, federal balance and equal citizenship**.
3. The challenge is therefore not strong leadership per se, but preventing **leader-centric governance** from becoming a substitute for institutional checks and constitutionalism.
4. The Supreme Court’s **November 2024 decision rejecting challenges to the inclusion of “socialist” and “secular” in the Preamble** illustrates that constitutional change must be assessed through constitutional principles rather than political narratives.
5. **Civilisational assertion** also needs to remain compatible with **pluralism, religious freedom and equal citizenship**; cultural nationalism cannot become a basis for exclusion.

Welfare state: from political credit to rights-based governance

1. Large-scale gains in **infrastructure, digital platforms, direct benefit transfers, financial inclusion, sanitation, housing and electrification** demonstrate the state’s enhanced capacity to reach citizens.
2. But **food support, employment guarantees, housing, scholarships and social security** are public obligations, not acts of generosity.
3. Citizens must therefore remain **“rights-holders, not grateful beneficiaries”**.



4. Welfare delivery should be backed by **enforceable standards, grievance redress, social audits and legislative scrutiny**.
5. Technology can **reduce leakage and accelerate delivery**, but inaccurate databases and administrative discretion can exclude vulnerable citizens; hence **digital governance must be accompanied by accessible remedies**.
6. The reported decline in **multidimensional poverty from 29.17% in 2013–14 to 11.28% in 2022–23** can be used as an example of the potential of large-scale welfare and development interventions, while keeping the focus on institutional delivery rather than political credit.

Parliament, accountability and institutional autonomy

1. Democratic governance requires **serious deliberation and committee scrutiny**, not merely legislative output.
2. During the 17th Lok Sabha, **58% of Bills were passed within two weeks of introduction and only 16% were referred to parliamentary committees**; around **80% of the Union Budget was voted without discussion during 2019–23**.
3. This raises concerns about **legislative scrutiny, executive accountability and quality of law-making**.
4. Institutions must retain **independence, credibility and procedural fairness**. The concerns surrounding **political funding** and the appointment of the **Election Commission** underline the importance of institutional autonomy and public confidence.
5. Similarly, **investigative agencies must demonstrate institutional independence**, while appointments to constitutional and regulatory bodies should command **cross-party credibility**.

The transition should be from leader-centred governance to institution-centred nation-building.

1. Decisions affecting States require **federal consultation**, rather than unilateral centralisation.
2. A healthy constitutional culture requires **constructive collaboration without abandoning principles**, combining national objectives with **federal balance**.
3. The objective should be to build institutions that are **credible, transparent and accountable**, rather than merely efficient.

This requires serious parliamentary deliberation and committee scrutiny, federal consultation, independent constitutional and regulatory institutions, transparent appointments, autonomous investigative agencies, rights-based welfare delivery and constitutional restraint and respect for dissent

125. On J&K, US envoy says it like it is

India's position on J&K is clear and consistent: **Kashmir is an important part of India**, and the issue must be resolved **“by the government of our country”**, rather than through third-party intervention. Pakistan's attempt to **internationalise Kashmir** has therefore largely been rejected, while its continued **sponsorship of terror from across the border** remains a major concern. The US position also reflects the post-**Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor** context, with greater sensitivity to India's security concerns and the need for regional stability.

For India, the larger priority is to prevent the bilateral relationship from being viewed through a **“Pakistan-tinted lens”** and instead deepen the broader India-US partnership. The easing of the US travel advisory and prospects for expanding engagement with J&K in **tourism, horticulture and the “new economy”** can strengthen **people-to-people ties and economic cooperation**. Thus, India needs to combine its firm rejection of **third-party mediation** with pragmatic engagement with Washington, using the broader strategic relationship to advance **security, economic and regional interests**.

126. Buffalo meat exports boom

1. India's buffalo meat exports have reached a **record \$5.1 billion in 2025–26** and are expected to cross **\$6 billion**, with expanding markets in **Southeast/West Asia, Africa, Uzbekistan, Russia and Georgia**.
2. The industry is moving beyond the image of **“cheaper alternative to regular cattle beef”**, with unit-value realisations rising from **sub-\$3,000 to \$4,000+ per tonne**, supported by **internationally recognised quality and hygiene standards** and exports through **government-approved abattoirs and processing plants**.
3. The key significance is its **complementarity with India's dairy sector**: slaughtered buffaloes are mostly **non-milking animals**, allowing farmers to replace **low-yielding/ageing animals with high-milking/fresh stock**.



4. This creates a **regular herd turnover** and an additional opportunity for farmers, while avoiding competition between meat production and scarce resources required for productive dairy animals.
5. However, buffalo milk has **lower yields**, with longer **first lactation and inter-calving intervals**; therefore, buffaloes alone cannot meet India's rising milk demand.
6. Hence, the need is for a **"scientific approach to culling unproductive animals"** based on **breeding and productive efficiency**, so that scarce **fodder, feed, water and labour** can be redirected towards higher-yielding stock.

127 . Facial Recognition at Protest Sites

1. Use of **facial recognition technology (FRT) at political gatherings** raises concerns of **surveillance without adequate legislative and judicial oversight**, particularly when deployed in the absence of clearly established safeguards.
2. At protest sites, Delhi Police reportedly deployed **AI-enabled cameras, facial-recognition systems, mobile surveillance vans, smart spectacles, drones and videographers**, with some equipment linked to **private contractors**. The concern is not merely collection of images but **who can access/process the data, under what safeguards and for what purpose**.
3. The legal framework remains inadequate: while the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act** imposes data-processing obligations, it provides **broad exemptions for State agencies**. Existing systems such as the **NCRB's Automated Facial Recognition System** and the **Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022** permit specified forms of biometric/data collection, but these powers are not a blanket justification for mass surveillance.
4. **Constitutional concern**: surveillance at protests can have a **"chilling effect"** on participation and therefore implicate the **right to privacy and right to protest**. Any restriction must satisfy the **proportionality test**—legitimate objective, necessity and least-restrictive means.
5. **Key governance gap**: before using FRT on all protesters, the State must establish the **legitimate objective, legal authority, data-processing safeguards, access controls, retention/deletion rules and accountability for authorised decisions**. Where **conventional policing** can achieve the same objective, indiscriminate facial recognition may fail the proportionality test.

128 . Noise annoys India must enforce noise pollution regulations uniformly and consistently

The **Patna High Court's intervention** highlights a wider governance problem: India has **comprehensive noise regulations, but weak enforcement**. Courts have repeatedly recognised protection from **unlawful noise as part of Article 21**, yet enforcement remains largely **episodic and complaint-based**.

Major Concerns

1. **"Dismal enforcement"** has reduced the effectiveness of existing laws, with authorities often responding only after citizen complaints.
2. Enforcement agencies need to move from **complaint-based action to routine and proactive enforcement**, particularly against **DJs, sound-system operators and event halls**.
3. The practice of permitting loudspeakers to continue until just before the statutory cut-off undermines the **spirit of regulation** and requires clearer everyday enforcement.



- Noise pollution is also a **social-governance challenge**, since festivals, weddings, political campaigns and religious events can generate noise; excessive enforcement without sensitivity may create **friction with legitimate cultural practices**.

Way Forward

- Institutionalise **routine monitoring and enforcement**, rather than relying on sporadic drives, seizures and fines.
- Require **event halls, sound-system operators and organisers to register themselves** with the relevant authorities, enabling accountability before violations occur.
- Adopt **proactive, preventive enforcement** rather than waiting for individual complaints.
- Authorities should simultaneously **educate and engage communities**, so that regulation is seen as **protection of public well-being** rather than confrontation with cultural practices.
- The real test of governance should be whether the State develops a “**consistent habit of enforcement**”—ensuring that the **right to a peaceful environment** is protected without unnecessarily restricting legitimate social and cultural activities.

129. Lok Sabha Prorogation

- The **10-day gap between the Lok Sabha being adjourned sine die and its prorogation** has been described as “**abnormal**” in the context of established parliamentary practice.
- As per Practice and Procedure of Parliament, prorogation “**may take place at any time, even while the House is sitting**”, but ordinarily follows **adjournment sine die**, with a gap of around **two days**.
- The longer gap is **not unprecedented** — gaps of **28 days in 2015** and **20 days in 2021** have occurred. Thus, the issue is less about a direct constitutional violation and more about **departure from parliamentary convention**.

Constitutional Position

- Under **Article 85(2)**, the **President prorogues the Houses on the advice of the Prime Minister**; the Cabinet may be consulted before such advice.
- Adjournment sine die** only ends the sitting without fixing the next date, whereas **prorogation formally terminates the session**.
- Although the Constitution gives flexibility — prorogation can technically occur “**even while the House is sitting**” — parliamentary practice has generally developed around prorogation **after adjournment sine die**.

Why the “Abnormal” Gap Matters?

- The concern is not simply the **10-day interval**, since no fixed constitutional time-limit prescribes a two-day gap.
- The concern is whether departure from an established **parliamentary convention** affects the **predictability and orderly functioning of Parliament**.
- The timing becomes particularly significant when important legislative business is pending, as procedural discretion should facilitate, rather than impede, **legislative scrutiny and parliamentary accountability**.
- At the same time, earlier instances of longer gaps indicate that the practice cannot automatically be characterised as **unconstitutional**.

130. Vande Mataram and the Right to Dissent

Historical Evolution: Nationalism with an Inclusive Accommodation

- Vande Mataram*, composed by **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay** and included in *Anandamath* (1882), became closely associated with the **freedom movement and Swadeshi mobilisation**.



- Concerns emerged particularly around the **later stanzas**, whose imagery draws upon Hindu religious traditions. The issue was therefore not merely literary but also concerned the **inclusive character of India's national identity**.
- In **1937**, the **Congress Working Committee** recommended limiting official rendition to the **first two stanzas**, which were considered more suitable for a **secular and inclusive national setting**. Thus, the historical evolution itself reflects an attempt to reconcile **national sentiment with India's religious and cultural diversity**.

2026 Amendment of Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act

- The amendment penalises **intentional and deliberate disruption** of a performance and **intentional and deliberate prevention of singing**.
- Crucially, it does **not impose a textual obligation on every citizen to sing** or determine that all six stanzas must be performed. This creates an important constitutional distinction:
 - ☐ **Disrespect/disruption** → can attract legal protection for the national symbol.
 - ☐ **Respectful non-participation** → may remain protected as an exercise of individual conscience.
- Therefore, protecting a patriotic expression does not necessarily require compelling every individual to participate in it.

Right to Conscience: Bijoe Emmanuel and Peaceful Dissent

- The central constitutional principle comes from **Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)**, where the Supreme Court protected students who **stood respectfully but did not sing the national anthem** because of their religious convictions.
- The Court recognised that **freedom of expression includes the freedom to remain silent**, while **Article 25** protects freedom of conscience. Thus, **respectful non-participation is not equal to disrespect**. A citizen may choose not to sing without preventing others from doing so.
- This distinction is crucial under **Article 19(1)(a)**: the Constitution protects not merely what a person chooses to express, but also the freedom **not to express**.
- At the same time, deliberate **disruption or prevention of others from participating** stands on a different constitutional footing and can legitimately be regulated.
- Thus the issue reflects a larger tension between **collective national identity and individual liberty**. Protecting a national symbol does not necessarily require **compelled outward conformity**.
- The historical accommodation of Vande Mataram itself demonstrates the importance of **religious pluralism and an inclusive conception of nationalism**.

131 . Importance of elephant corridors in reducing conflict

Elephant Corridors: Ecological Significance

- Elephant corridors are movement pathways connecting two natural habitats**, allowing elephants to move between feeding, watering and shelter areas.
- Asian elephants are **highly mobile and social mammals**; an individual male may have a home range of **50–300 sq km**, depending on habitat, food availability, water sources, population density and human disturbance.
- Corridors are therefore essential for maintaining **natural movement, seasonal migration and habitat connectivity**. They also enable **genetic exchange**, helping maintain diversity within elephant populations.
- Well-conserved corridors provide access to **food and water during seasonal changes**, while helping elephants avoid entering **croplands and human settlements**.

Fragmentation of Corridors: Major Driver of Conflict

- A 2023 government mapping exercise documented **150 elephant corridors across 15 States**, highlighting their landscape-level importance.



2. Increasing **infrastructure construction, mining and industrial activity** is fragmenting these corridors. Highways, railway lines, canals and power lines can obstruct traditional elephant routes through **farmlands and human settlements**, increasing human–elephant conflict.
3. The problem is particularly significant across India's four major elephant landscapes: **Western Ghats; North-Eastern Hills and Brahmaputra floodplains; Shivalik Hills and Gangetic plains; and Central India and Eastern Ghats**.
4. Habitat fragmentation is especially visible in the **Western Ghats**, due to changing land use, plantations and farmland fencing. In **Central India and the Eastern Ghats**, elephants have expanded their range, including into parts of **Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra**, while mining and habitat loss have intensified pressures.

Conservation and Conflict Mitigation

1. The Supreme Court has directed a **fresh survey of elephant corridors** and emphasised that corridors cannot be blocked merely because elephant movement causes damage to crops.
2. Measures such as **fireballs, spikes and other coercive methods** to drive elephants away can disrupt their natural movement and aggravate conflict; corridor conservation should therefore prioritise **ecological connectivity rather than forced displacement**.
3. Conservation must shift from protecting elephants only within isolated forests to maintaining **landscape-level habitat connectivity** through scientifically identified corridors.
4. **Corridor mapping** is critical because corridors allow elephants to move between habitats while reducing the need to pass through human-dominated landscapes; they also facilitate **genetic exchange and dispersal**.

132. India–Taliban Engagement: From Strategic Caution to Calibrated Engagement

1. The **August 2021 Taliban takeover** initially led India to adopt a cautious, security-centric approach; however, the prolonged Taliban rule and the changing regional balance have pushed New Delhi towards “**deepening engagement**” without formal diplomatic recognition.
2. India’s approach has evolved from “**shadows**” to engagement: on **31 August 2021**, India made its first official contact with the Taliban in Doha; by **September 2021**, it acknowledged the Taliban as the **de facto authority** in Afghanistan.
3. The engagement has remained **incremental and calibrated** — from humanitarian assistance and a technical mission to high-level political contacts.

Why India is deepening engagement?

1. **Geopolitical space:** Taliban’s transformation from a **once-benefactor ally of Pakistan into a daily adversary** has created an opportunity for India to reduce Pakistan’s strategic space in Afghanistan.
2. **Countering Chinese influence:** India seeks to maintain its presence amid growing Chinese engagement and prevent Afghanistan from becoming an exclusive sphere of influence for other powers.
3. **Connectivity and economic interests:** Afghanistan’s **geography should not be a field for negative competition, but rather a bridge for regional connectivity**. Engagement can support trade, investment and economic cooperation.
4. **Humanitarian responsibility:** India has delivered substantial assistance, including **50,000 metric tonnes of wheat and over 445 tonnes of essential life-saving medicines, vaccines and other medical material**.
5. **Development partnership:** India has indicated willingness to cooperate in **agriculture, capacity-building, development projects, infrastructure, business and education**, preserving its traditional image as a development partner.



6. **People-to-people linkages:** Engagement helps sustain India's historical relationship with Afghan society and retain its goodwill despite political changes.

Limits, Security Concerns and the Way Forward

1. India's engagement remains constrained by the Taliban's **rights record**. Since taking control, the Taliban has **eroded the rights of Afghan women** — around **22 million women** are affected by restrictions, while girls' access to school has been barred beyond Class 6.
2. Other concerns include **curbed travel without a male chaperone, child marriage and restrictions on women's participation**, alongside continuing concerns over terrorism. The UN has continued to flag terrorist threats from groups operating from Afghanistan.
3. Therefore, India's policy requires **"engagement without endorsement"** — maintaining communication with the de facto authorities while retaining principled positions on **women's rights, terrorism and inclusive governance**.
4. India must also ensure that Afghan territory **"should not be used for anti-India activities and support to terrorist groups"**, while using engagement to secure its diplomatic and security interests.
5. The emerging approach is thus **strategic autonomy with calibrated engagement**: preserve security interests, humanitarian assistance, connectivity and development cooperation without compromising India's core concerns.

133 . Supreme Court's New Interpretation of "Industry" — Industrial Relations Code, 2020

Why the definition of "industry" needed reconsideration?

1. A 9-judge Constitution Bench has held that the nearly half-century-old interpretation of "industry" in *Bangalore Water Supply & Sewerage Board v. A. Rajappa* (1978) will **not automatically govern** the Industrial Relations Code (IRC), 2020.
2. The 1978 judgment had significantly widened **Section 2(j) of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947**, bringing activities such as **hospitals, educational institutions and municipalities** within the definition of industry.
3. Its **"triple test"** treated an activity as an industry where there was **systematic activity, organised cooperation between employer and employee, and production/distribution of goods or services to satisfy human wants and wishes**.
4. This broad interpretation enabled workers across diverse sectors to access **labour rights, legal recourse, collective bargaining and protection against unfair practices**.
5. However, the Court noted that the 1978 framework was a **"child of its time"**, framed when India was transitioning towards private employment. The subsequent transformation through **privatisation, liberalisation, globalisation and changing industrial structures** necessitates interpretation in the contemporary context.

A New Statutory Framework for "Industry"

1. The majority held that "industry" under the IRC must be interpreted **"independently"**, based on its **own statutory text and context**, rather than being burdened by the legacy of the 1978 judgment.
2. **Pending disputes under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947** will continue under the 1978 framework, while **future disputes under the IRC, 2020** will be interpreted afresh.
3. The Court has **not completely discarded the triple test**; the Chief Justice indicated that a **"reformulated" triple test** could operate prospectively under the new Code.
4. The ruling therefore seeks to align the definition of industry with **contemporary industrial dynamics** while retaining the underlying concern for **worker protection**.

Worker Protection, Legal Certainty and the Way Forward

1. The ruling brings a tension between **modernising labour jurisprudence and preserving legal certainty**.



2. The minority — **Justices B.V. Nagarathna, Dipankar Datta and Ujjal Bhuyan** — considered reconsideration of the 1978 judgment “**unwarranted**”, warning that changing the definition could create **uncertainty and disrupt industrial relations**.
3. Justice Nagarathna stressed the importance of **finality**, while Justice Datta emphasised **judicial consistency and institutional credibility**.
4. The larger issue is ensuring that a new definition does not dilute the **social-protection architecture** that workers gained under the expansive 1978 interpretation.
5. The judgment represents a shift from a **1978-era conception of organised employment** towards a framework suited to contemporary economic realities, requiring a balance between **worker protection, statutory autonomy, legal certainty and evolving industrial structures**.

134. FDI Policy: Balancing Investment Facilitation with Strategic Safeguards

Press Note 3: Protecting India from Opportunistic Takeovers

1. **Press Note 3 (April 2020)** required **Government approval** for FDI from countries sharing a land border with India. The move was aimed at preventing “**opportunistic takeovers**” of Indian firms whose valuations had fallen sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The policy covered countries including **China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan**. Although introduced before the **Galwan clashes**, it subsequently acquired greater strategic significance amid the India–China downturn.
3. The underlying concern was not foreign investment per se, but the possibility of **foreign entities acquiring significant stakes in vulnerable Indian companies**, potentially creating strategic and economic vulnerabilities.

2026 Relaxation: Selective Liberalisation, Not Deregulation

1. In 2026, the Centre revised the Press Note 3 framework, allowing non-controlling beneficial ownership of up to 10% from land-bordering countries through the **automatic route**, subject to applicable conditions
2. This creates a distinction between **minority, non-controlling capital** and investments that could provide meaningful control over Indian enterprises.
3. The relaxation seeks to restore the **flow of investments that had earlier been locked out**, while retaining scrutiny over larger or potentially strategic acquisitions.
4. It is also intended to provide “**clarity and ease of doing business**”, facilitate **technology access, domestic value addition, expansion of Indian firms and integration with global supply chains**.

Emerging Impact and Policy Balance

1. By **August 10, 2026, 29 FDI projects worth ₹4,895.65 crore** had been reported under the revised framework. Investments covered **IT, AI, communications, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, data centres and transport services**, with investors from countries including **Mauritius, the U.S., South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Luxembourg**.
2. Yet the quantum remains modest — **less than 10% of India’s total FDI received in 2025-26**. Hence, the significance lies less in the immediate volume and more in whether such investment generates **technology transfer, domestic value addition and global supply-chain integration**.
3. India is moving towards **calibrated openness** — easing genuine minority investment while retaining safeguards against **hostile takeovers and strategic economic vulnerabilities**. The challenge is to reconcile **ease of doing business with national security and economic resilience**.

135. Rare Diseases: Patient Data Collective as a Cooperative Model

From Amul’s Cooperative Model to a Patient Data Collective

1. **Amul’s success lay in converting fragmented individual contributions into collective strength**—farmers pooled milk through cooperatives, while processing, infrastructure and market access created value that ultimately supported their livelihoods.



2. The same principle can be applied to **rare diseases**, where individual patient datasets are too small to generate sufficient evidence for research. A **Patient Data Collective (PDC)** can pool medical records, genetic information and patient experiences to create a research resource of much greater value.
3. This addresses a major limitation of conventional clinical trials: **small patient pools** make it difficult to form adequate treatment and control groups.
4. **Patient registries and natural-history studies** can serve as “external controls” by documenting disease progression, clinical parameters and treatment outcomes over time.
5. Such pooled evidence can help researchers identify **diagnostic biomarkers**, predict disease progression, select suitable participants, establish meaningful clinical endpoints and improve clinical-trial design.

How a Patient Data Collective can transform rare-disease research?

1. **Better evidence base:** Aggregated longitudinal data can reveal disease progression and identify suitable **clinical endpoints**, particularly where conventional control groups are difficult to construct.
2. **Accelerated drug discovery:** Comprehensive datasets can improve **diagnostic biomarkers, disease modelling and trial design**, reducing the time and uncertainty involved in developing therapies.
3. **Patient-centric governance:** A cooperative model can allow patients to collectively contribute data while retaining safeguards over **consent, access and privacy**; patient advocacy groups can play a key role in building **natural-history datasets**.
4. **India already has building blocks:** ICMR has reportedly collected data on around **4,000 rare-disease patients from 19 specialised hospitals**; such datasets can potentially be integrated with the **Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Mission (AB-DM)** architecture.
5. **Emerging technologies:** AI can synthesise large medical records, identify clinically relevant patterns and support personalised treatment decisions, while **advanced computational modelling and non-animal testing models** can strengthen rare-disease research.

From Data Pooling to a Rare-Disease Revolution

1. Once sufficiently large and reliable datasets are available, **AI can synthesise large volumes of medical records**, identify clinically relevant patterns and support doctors and researchers in decision-making.
2. Patient groups can also help build **disease-specific communities**, improve data quality and participate in setting up research protocols.
3. Such a collective can make India more attractive to **pharma and biotech developers**, provided there is strong governance, data quality and regulatory clarity.
4. The **New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules** and emerging approaches such as **computational modelling and non-animal testing models** can further support faster and more efficient research.
5. The larger lesson from the **Amul analogy** is that **collective ownership of dispersed resources can generate public value at scale**: just as pooled milk created a sustainable dairy ecosystem and improved farmers’ livelihoods, pooled patient data can create a research ecosystem for diseases where individual datasets are too small to be commercially or scientifically useful.

136. Root Cause

The core problem: education–employment mismatch

1. The recent youth agitation highlights that the **examination crisis is only a symptom; the deeper problem is the shortage of quality jobs**.
2. Competitive exams have become disproportionately important because **limited professional education and employment opportunities** push large numbers of youth towards a few government/college entrance examinations.



3. **High competition:** Around **22 lakh candidates** appeared for this year's medical entrance exam for about **1.4 lakh undergraduate seats**, with fewer than **10,000 seats in the top 50 colleges**; engineering admissions show a similar pattern.
4. **Rising coaching dependence:** Private coaching accounts for **16% of an Indian family's spending on a child's education**, up from **12.5% in 2018**. Thus, cheaper online coaching through India's **digital public infrastructure** can improve access, but cannot resolve the underlying employment problem.
5. **Weak transition from education to work:** PLFS data cited in the piece suggests that among every 100 graduates aged **15–29**, only about **26 are in regular salaried employment**, and only **four** have a salaried job with both a contract and social security.

Why job creation remains weak?

1. Despite **6–6.5% economic growth**, the sector best placed to absorb educated youth — **manufacturing** — remains around **one-sixth of GVA**, far below the level needed for large-scale employment generation.
2. **Private corporate investment** has weakened substantially, falling from **17.3% of GDP in 2007–08 to 10.3% in 2024–25**, limiting expansion of productive capacity and formal employment.
3. The policy challenge is therefore not merely to create more educated youth, but to ensure that **economic growth translates into employment**, particularly for graduates and young entrants.

Way forward: shift from exam-centric to employment-centric policy

1. **Public investment** should strengthen industrial capacity and crowd in private investment.
2. Support an **export-led industrial strategy**, rather than excessive reliance on domestic protection, to create globally competitive manufacturing jobs.
3. **Temper regulatory zeal** that selectively targets enterprises and particularly affects **medium-sized firms**, which have significant potential for employment generation.
4. Expand affordable **digital coaching and skilling**, but treat these as complementary measures rather than substitutes for job creation.
5. The experience of **Vietnam** shows the potential of export-oriented industrialisation to generate employment at scale.

137. Escape Velocity

India's space programme has moved from being a symbol of **technological competency** to becoming critical infrastructure for **navigation, banking, weather and national security**. With private participation expanding, the challenge is now to convert technological capability into a **reliable, regular and commercially competitive space ecosystem**. The emerging opportunity lies not merely in rockets, but in the wider **space economy and downstream applications**.

Key Challenges

1. **High launch costs:** India's estimated 2025 cost of placing 1 kg in Low-Earth Orbit was **\$13,302**, against **\$5,809 in China** and a global average of **\$3,868**, reducing competitiveness.
2. **Irregular launch cadence:** India conducted only **5 launches in 2025 against 30 projected**, pointing to a gap in **reliability and regularity**.
3. **Heavy-payload constraint:** **GSAT-N2 (4,700 kg)** had to be launched on SpaceX's Falcon 9 because of limitations in India's available launch capacity, indicating the need for stronger heavy-lift capability.
4. **Private-sector limitations:** A private space sector cannot succeed merely through the production of **rockets and launch vehicles**; it needs a broader ecosystem, sustained demand, investment and commercially viable opportunities.
5. **Global competition:** India must build a strong **reputation for reliability**, while competing with lower-cost and high-frequency launch providers.

Building a Competitive Space Economy

1. Shift from **capability to dependable capability** by ensuring **regular, predictable and reliable launches**.



2. Develop the complete **space value chain**, including satellites, space-based data, communication, navigation and downstream applications.
3. Enable the private sector to achieve **scale and innovation**, rather than limiting it to launch-vehicle manufacturing.
4. Treat space as an economic sector capable of generating **jobs, long-term capital, tax revenues and technological spillovers**.
5. Emerging opportunities such as **Moon bases and interplanetary activities** can become the next frontier, but India must first build the reliability and commercial ecosystem that turns space from an “**ornament**” into an **engine of economic and strategic value**.

138 . End the culture of secrecy in judicial appointments

1. The **collegium is a judicial creation**, evolving through the **First Judges Case (1981)**, **Second Judges Case (1993)** and **Third Judges Case (1998)**, which shifted primacy in judicial appointments from the executive to the judiciary.
2. The rationale was to protect **judicial independence from political interference**, but nearly three decades later, the process remains among the **least transparent** areas of constitutional governance.

Concerns with the Present System

1. **Opacity in selection:** There is no prior notification of vacancies, **eligibility matrix or known methodology for assessing candidates**, making the basis of selection difficult to scrutinise.
2. **Resolutions without reasons:** Transparency has weakened since **November 28, 2024**, when collegium resolutions stopped naming participating members or disclosing reasoning. The CJI later cited concerns that disclosure could harm candidates' careers.
3. **Familial links and “Uncle Judges”:** In 2018, the Union government flagged **11 of 33 Allahabad High Court recommendations** as involving relatives of sitting/retired judges; a 2025 assessment found nearly **30% of Supreme Court judges** had familial links to former judges. Without a publicly defined selection matrix, distinguishing merit from **judicial lineage** becomes difficult.
4. **Constitutional equality:** Articles **14 and 16** guarantee equality and equal opportunity in public employment. In *Secretary, State of Karnataka v. Umadevi*, the Court held that public appointments cannot ordinarily be made through **backdoor methods** and should follow a transparent procedure open to eligible candidates.
5. **Public confidence:** Judicial appointments are now dissected on social media within minutes. **Closed-door decision-making and unexplained selections** can erode the legitimacy and credibility of the judiciary.

Measures for coexistence of judicial independence and institutional accountability

1. **Modernise the collegium rather than dismantle it** through a transparent framework that: anticipates vacancies; invites applications from eligible advocates; publishes objective **eligibility criteria**; records **reasoned recommendations** explaining why one candidate is preferred over another.
2. **Address nepotism concerns:** The proposal to bar judges' **kin** from consideration may be examined, while recognising that familial connection alone should not automatically determine merit.
3. **Protect legitimate confidentiality:** Confidential inputs on integrity may remain protected; transparency should focus on the **process, criteria and reasoning**, not disclosure of every file.
4. **Learn from other democracies:** The **UK Judicial Appointments Commission** publicly advertises vacancies and conducts structured interviews, while **South Africa's Judicial Service Commission** publicly invites nominations and conducts televised interviews.

139 . AI Training & Destruction of Physical Books

AI firms increasingly require **high-quality datasets** to train models, while the internet is becoming saturated with **AI-generated content** and rare/out-of-print books are becoming harder to access. Reports of companies scanning and then destroying physical books have therefore raised concerns that the race for AI development may come at the cost of **copyright, authors' rights and literary preservation**.



The central legal question is whether using copyrighted books to train AI amounts to “**fair use**” or unauthorised exploitation. Digitising purchased books may, in some circumstances, be considered a **transformative use**, but the controversy becomes sharper when physical copies are destroyed after scanning. It also raises concerns about the rights of authors and the wider **cultural value of rare books**, which cannot simply be reduced to training data.

The issue therefore calls for a balance between **AI innovation and copyright protection**. Greater **transparency in training datasets**, legitimate acquisition/licensing of copyrighted material and preservation of rare and out-of-print works are essential. AI’s demand for knowledge should contribute to wider access and **preservation of literature**, rather than turning valuable physical books into disposable inputs for model development.

140. Higher Education–Employment Mismatch

1. **NITI Aayog** has flagged weak **job linkages** in generic degrees such as **B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com**; **over 90% of graduates** are employed in roles not aligned with their qualifications, while only **8.25%** are in qualification-aligned jobs.
2. Educated unemployment is **13% among graduates** and **20.4% among graduate women**, against the national rate of **3.2%**.
3. The core issue is a **disconnect between what is taught and what the labour market demands**, with curricula remaining outdated and misaligned with industry needs.

Key Concerns

1. **Degree-centric education**: Of **3.4 crore undergraduate students**, **1.13 crore** are in **B.A.**, while **B.Sc. and B.Com** enrolment together exceeds **2 crore**.
2. **Weak vocational pathways**: ITIs and diploma programmes face **social stigma**, while lack of awareness discourages skilling; **52% of formal workers** and **55% of informal workers** do not pursue skilling.
3. **Poor job quality**: Only **26% of graduates aged 15–29** are in regular salaried employment, and just **4% of graduates** have a salaried job with a contract and social security.
4. Despite **6–6.5% growth**, manufacturing contributes only around **one-sixth of GVA**, while private investment has fallen from **17.3% to 10.3% of GDP** between 2007–08 and 2024–25.

Way Forward

1. Shift from **standalone skilling** to **demand-driven, outcome-linked and industry-backed models**.
2. Promote **specialised, job-linked programmes**, particularly in **green industries and electric vehicles**, with greater focus on **apprenticeships**.
3. Modernise curricula and strengthen **industry–education linkages**, while reducing the **social stigma around vocational education, ITIs and diplomas**.

The objective should be to move from **degree-centric education** to **employability and job-ready skills**.

141. Warmer oceans are sounding a warning

1. **Global ocean warming is entering “unfamiliar territory”**: global sea-surface temperature reached **21.09°C in March 2024**, surpassing the previous record; on **August 22**, rapidly intensifying **El Niño + global warming** pushed it again to **21°C**.
2. The oceans are major **buffers against climate change**, absorbing **more than 90% of excess heat** generated by global warming (IPCC/NASA), thereby delaying its most catastrophic consequences.
3. However, this “**sequestering**” of heat has come at a cost, with rising ocean temperatures increasingly disrupting marine and human systems.

Implications of Ocean Warming

1. **Marine ecosystems**: Ocean warming places **stress on marine ecosystems** and disrupts **food webs**.
2. **Weather regulation**: It affects the ocean’s capacity to **regulate weather**, contributing to unusual climate events.



3. **Extreme weather:** A heatwave overwhelmed Europe; parts of India experienced **floods despite an erratic monsoon**, while **unseasonal snowfall** disrupted life in South America.
4. **Sea-level rise:** Ocean warming contributes to rising sea levels; by the **end of 2025, global average sea level was about 11 cm higher than in January 1993**.
5. These changes also create **avoidable socio-economic losses**, including illness, disruption of small businesses and prolonged recovery from repeated flooding.

Way Forward

1. **Mitigation:** Continue cutting **fossil-fuel consumption**, accelerating the transition to **clean energy** and reducing **greenhouse-gas emissions**.
2. **Adaptation:** Adaptation to **weather vagaries**, historically secondary to mitigation, needs a **stronger footing in climate policy**, as the consequences of past warming will persist even if emissions fall sharply.
3. For India, with a coastline of nearly **10,000 km**, priorities include **protecting coastal populations, restoring natural barriers against raging waters, improving urban drainage, and developing climate-informed agriculture and water-management systems**.

142 . India–Central Asia Relations: From Romance to Realism

1. After the **Soviet Union dissolved in 1991**, India sought to reconnect with the newly independent Central Asian republics, but **lack of direct access, limited national capabilities and geopolitical headwinds** have constrained engagement.
2. India's earlier vision of a broader **India–Central Asia–Afghanistan connectivity** remained unrealised due to Afghanistan's conflicts and enduring India–Pakistan tensions.
3. The region is strategically important as **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan** sit between Russia, China and the wider Middle East.

Changing Geopolitical Landscape

1. Central Asia is increasingly asserting itself as a **region in its own right**, rather than merely a collection of post-Soviet republics; settlement of **Fergana Valley** border disputes and growing regional trade reflect this trend.
2. The traditional **“Great Game”** framework of competing external powers is becoming inadequate. Central Asian states are pursuing **diversified partnerships** with the EU, China, Russia, U.S. and Japan rather than exclusive alignments.
3. **Russia's Ukraine war** and China's growing economic influence have altered the regional balance; Europe, Japan and other powers are expanding engagement through **connectivity, critical minerals and energy corridors**.
4. The region's growing **Middle East linkages** and the **Abraham Accords** have widened its geopolitical horizons beyond the traditional Russia–China framework.
5. Afghanistan remains a concern: Central Asian states, including **Tajikistan**, have moved towards pragmatic engagement with the Taliban while also confronting **radical forces** and issues such as management of the **Amu Darya's shared waters**.
6. India faces a structural disadvantage: **no direct land access**. The overland route is constrained, while **Chabahar** and the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** remain alternatives, with regional conflicts complicating their prospects.

India's Way Forward: Less Romance, More Realism

1. India cannot match **China's infrastructure spending**, Russia's geographic advantages or **Türkiye's direct access across the Caspian**; therefore, sustained political attention must be matched by a **practical economic agenda**.
2. Move beyond grand schemes towards **modest, sustained and steadily expanding Indian presence**, focusing on areas where India can contribute.
3. Strengthen **economic and connectivity engagement**, while exploring opportunities in **energy, critical minerals, trade and transport corridors**.



4. India should also demonstrate greater **diplomatic flexibility** towards Pakistan, Turkiye and Azerbaijan to retain room for manoeuvre.

143 . ‘Essential Practice’ Test: Why Allahabad HC Rejected Schoolgirl’s Hijab Plea

The Allahabad High Court rejected a Muslim schoolgirl’s plea to wear hijab with her school uniform, holding that religious necessity could not be established through a “bare assertion.” While the student invoked **Article 25** and **Article 19(1)(a)**, the Court upheld the school’s **uniform and disciplinary requirements**, observing that allowing a headscarf would affect the uniform’s character and institutional identity.

On the “**essential religious practice**” issue, the Court found no authoritative religious text or expert evidence establishing classroom hijab as obligatory and held that the uniform requirement did not violate **Articles 14, 15 or 19**. The issue remains contested after a **2:1 Supreme Court split**, with Justice Hemant Gupta supporting the uniform requirement and Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia holding that “**a girl child has the right to wear hijab**”; the matter has been referred to a **larger Bench**.

144 . Drawing Lines

India and China have agreed to advance discussions on an “**early and substantial harvest of boundary delimitation**” after the latest Special Representatives’ talks. They will also hold an **expert-level meeting on trans-border rivers**, maintain communication on **hydrological data sharing**, and establish additional meeting points and **hotlines between military commanders** in the Eastern and Middle Sectors. This continues the recent process of **LAC peace and normalisation**, building on the October 2024 Modi–Xi meeting and the 2025 Tianjin meeting.

However, the key uncertainty remains **how the boundary will actually be delineated**. Neither side has clarified the roadmap for delimitation or whether they are reconsidering the **2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles**, under which the SRs were tasked with first agreeing on a framework for settling the boundary. While continued engagement is important for maintaining peace, **tangible progress on the boundary dispute and greater transparency** are necessary to sustain public confidence.

145. Heatwave Disaster Funding

Expanded financing, rising heat vulnerability

1. Following **FC-XVI recommendations**, heatwaves are now included among notified hazards eligible for disaster funding in **14 States**.
2. **₹2.04 lakh crore** has been recommended for State Disaster Funds for **2026–27 to 2030–31** — nearly **28% higher** than the previous Finance Commission.
 - a. **₹1.6 lakh crore** → **SDRF**
 - b. Remaining amount → **SDRMF**, meant for longer-term mitigation.
3. States can notify heatwaves as a “**local disaster**” under SDRF; the earlier **10% ceiling** for expenditure on heat-related deaths/crop damage has been removed.
4. India’s heat exposure is rising: **35 indicators** covering climate change, exposure and vulnerability show extreme heat risk; **57% of districts** have roughly three-fourths of their population exposed to **high to very-high heat risk**.

Planning–implementation gap

1. NDMA has asked States, districts and cities to prepare **Heat Action Plans (HAPs)** covering **short-, medium- and long-term interventions**.



2. So far, **300 cities and districts across 23 heatwave-prone States** have HAPs; however, around **4,800 urban local bodies and 800 districts** still lack them.
3. A 2023 review found **79% of HAPs lacked self-allocated funds**, while implementation is constrained by **limited technical capacity and inadequate funding**.
4. HAPs should be backed by **risk and vulnerability assessments before projects are proposed**, providing the groundwork for mitigation.
5. The **Wayanad landslides (2024)** showed how disaster-funding mechanisms can support an evolving range of risks; heat is now increasingly occupying this space.

Building heat resilience

1. States need **model mitigation proposals** suited to local climate and geography, supported by research institutions, NGOs and philanthropy where necessary.
2. Strengthen **health surveillance** and real-time heat-health data: the national system covers **over 51,000 reporting units** and had recorded **4,853 heatstroke cases and 20 confirmed deaths** between March 1 and July 26, but gaps remain in identifying illnesses aggravated by heat.
3. Link heat interventions with existing government schemes and use **pre-agreed financing tools such as parametric insurance**, enabling automatic payouts once temperature thresholds are crossed.
4. Overall, disaster finance must move beyond **post-disaster relief towards anticipatory planning, mitigation and long-term heat resilience**.

146. India's Cyber Fraud Industry

Rise of a “cyber-fraud ecosystem”

1. India's cyber fraud has evolved from **Jamtara and the Mewat belt** into a wider, organised industry, fuelled by **cheap mobile data, rapid digitisation, penury, greed and weak law enforcement**.
2. Scam operations exploit people through **fraudulent calls, threats, tempting offers and theft of bank/personal details**; when one technique becomes ineffective, scammers **adapt and adopt more sophisticated methods**.
3. Local ecosystems have emerged around the trade — including **motorcycle showrooms, cab networks and informal operators**, with scammers sometimes using platforms such as **OLX and Quikr** for new forms of fraud.
4. The industry survives partly because of **local complicity and weak policing**; cases often fail to stick, while wealthy scammers can hire **expensive legal representation**.

Beyond call scams: diversification of fraud

1. Fraud has expanded beyond traditional call scams to **fake identities, social-media deception, fraudulent loan apps and other digital financial scams**.
2. The ecosystem increasingly resembles a **globalised “pig-butcher” industry**, with large-scale technology-enabled financial fraud operations spreading across **Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos**, targeting victims including those in the US.
3. The changing nature of fraud shows how cybercriminals continuously exploit **new technologies, platforms and unfamiliarity with the evolving internet**.

Why the ecosystem persists

1. **Perpetrator-side factors**: social mobility, weak rule of law, local networks and the ability to adapt quickly to changing opportunities.
2. **Victim-side factors**: unfamiliarity with the evolving digital environment and vulnerability to sophisticated deception.
3. India's regulatory framework has also faced gaps; the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** was noted as coming into force the following year.



4. The broader challenge is therefore not merely individual scams but an **entrenched ecosystem** that combines technology, local social networks, financial incentives and weak enforcement—making dismantling cyber-fraud networks difficult.

147. Integrated Command Centres for Border Security

Smart border architecture

1. The Centre is developing a **technology-driven command-and-control system** for India's land borders, integrating **AI, sensors, surveillance systems, image-processing tools and unified command-and-control centres**.
2. The system will integrate inputs from **multiple technologies** into a **common operational picture**, enabling faster transmission of ground information to command centres and quicker response to threats.
3. A pilot project is proposed to begin along the **Pakistan border**; the broader framework is intended for India's **15,106.7-km land border with seven countries**.
4. It aims to strengthen monitoring where **physical fencing is not feasible**, while reducing dependence on continuous physical patrolling through live feeds and better resource deployment.

Threats & localised deployment

1. A key focus is the growing use of **drones for smuggling and reconnaissance**, particularly along the Pakistan border.
2. Border technologies will be **tailored to local conditions rather than deployed uniformly**, recognising differences across **deserts, mountains, riverine stretches, forests and densely populated areas**.
3. Examples include the **riverine stretches along the Bangladesh border**, which are flood-prone and cannot be fenced conventionally.
4. The approach marks a shift towards **smart, technology-enabled and area-specific border management**, where physical presence is supplemented by surveillance and integrated command systems.

148. Rural India needs jobs, not just wage guarantees

1. **VB-G RAM-G**, the successor to MGNREGA, guarantees **125 days of rural wage employment**, with a **₹95,692 crore** allocation and technology-enabled delivery.
2. The reported **nearly 50% fall in employment generated** is too early to assess, but it raises a larger question: whether a **wage-guarantee model** remains suited to rural India in 2026.
3. The earlier rationale was an economy with **weak manufacturing and services, overcrowded agriculture and limited alternatives**. Rural India has since become more **educated, connected and economically diversified**.

Why rural employment needs a rethink?

1. Nearly **64% of India's population** and **two-thirds of its 378 million young people** live in rural areas.
2. Digital penetration has transformed rural markets: around **950 million active internet users**, with rural users forming the majority; **rural FMCG consumption is growing around four times faster than urban consumption**, while the rural market could reach **\$220 billion**.
3. The priority should therefore shift from **more days of manual work to durable, productive employment**, using rural India's **comparative advantage**.

Where durable jobs can emerge?

1. **Food processing**: leverage local production of **milk, fruits, grains and spices** through stronger value chains.
2. **Renewable energy**: the sector could generate **over 44 lakh jobs by 2030**, including through decentralised opportunities.
3. **Rural SME clusters**: promote production of **farm equipment, healthcare devices, renewable-energy components, construction materials and consumer goods**.
4. **Services**: expand **rural healthcare and agri-logistics**, alongside small-scale manufacturing, where **demand, resources and workforce already coexist**.



5. **Way Forward**

6. Wage support should continue as a **safety net for vulnerable households**, but rural employment policy must move beyond dependence on public works.
7. Build an employment ecosystem based on **skills, capital, market linkages, value addition and private-sector participation**.
8. The fundamental shift should be from **wage guarantees to productive jobs**: wages provide immediate relief; durable jobs create a productive rural workforce and sustainable livelihoods.

149. Young found their voice. Opposition needs to find their language

1. The **Gen-Z political awakening**, visible through protests and digital mobilisation, signals that young Indians are **not taking electoral assumptions for granted**.
2. The **Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)** movement emerged outside traditional caste/communal mobilisation, reflecting frustration over **exam paper leaks, arbitrary test cancellations, unemployment and financial stress from coaching**.
3. Its mobilisation combined **street protest, digital platforms, satire and meme-driven irony**, turning even insults into symbols of solidarity.
4. The movement demonstrated that young people can organise around **shared lived experiences** rather than conventional political identities.

Why Opposition is struggling to capture this energy?

1. Traditional Opposition politics remains caught between **caste-based electoral arithmetic** and abstract **defence of secular constitutionalism**, while often missing the immediate material concerns of the growing middle class and youth.
2. The Opposition suffers from **institutional bottlenecks**, particularly **top-down, quasi-feudal party hierarchies**.
3. Young workers in established parties often face limited **meaningful roles** and are reduced to **staging pre-approved photo opportunities, amplifying leaders on social media or arranging rallies**.
4. Entry into politics remains difficult for talented young people without **political lineage or financial resources**, reinforcing dynastic and patronage networks.
5. Most Opposition parties also remain constrained by **conventional approaches, public-relations processes and hierarchical decision-making**, limiting their ability to connect with digitally agile youth.

Way Forward

1. **Democratise internal party structures** and create open pathways for young leaders, organisers and policy researchers based on **merit rather than political pedigree**.
2. Move from **abstract slogans to concrete governance issues**: caste-based discrimination, criminal liability for paper leaks, statutory timelines for public recruitment, and real economic security for gig workers and students.
3. Work **with existing civic movements**, such as the CJP, rather than attempting to hijack or disparage them; offer **legal, parliamentary and logistical support** where appropriate.
4. Replace outdated political rhetoric with a **direct, authentic and culturally resonant language** that recognises youth frustration without patronising it.
5. The larger lesson is that India's youth possess a **large reservoir of democratic energy**; political parties need to provide channels through which this energy can translate into **sustained political participation and representation**.

150. Centre-State Compromise on Mines & Minerals

1. In the **1950s**, B.C. Roy's visit to Poland highlighted the contrasting approaches to coal mining and the debate over the **economic and administrative control of mineral resources** in India.
2. The **MMDR Act, 1957** created a framework where the Centre regulates mineral development while **States retain ownership and significant powers over mineral resources**.



3. The central question has remained how to balance **national mineral interests with State autonomy**.

Evolving Centre–State Tensions

1. Recent amendments to the **MMDR framework** have increased the Centre's role in **mineral regulation and taxation**, raising concerns over the shrinking fiscal space of States.
2. This becomes significant after the **2024 Supreme Court ruling** recognising the power of States to tax **mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands**.
3. The subsequent legislative response has raised questions about whether Parliament can alter the **fiscal consequences of the judgment** and how far the Centre can intervene in an area involving State revenues.
4. The issue is particularly important for **mineral-rich States**, where mining-related revenues form an important component of public finances.
5. The debate therefore extends beyond mineral ownership to the larger constitutional principle of **fiscal federalism** and the distribution of powers between the Centre and States.

Economic & Social Dimensions

1. Mining is closely linked with **industrialisation, employment and regional economic activity**, making mineral policy important for both national growth and State economies.
2. At the same time, extraction creates **social and environmental costs**, including impacts on local and tribal communities.
3. Mining governance must therefore ensure that **local communities receive a fair share of benefits**, while mining companies bear the costs arising from environmental and social damage.
4. The source also points to the experience of **China**, where stronger centralised management of mineral resources has supported strategic economic objectives, but India's federal structure makes direct replication difficult.

Way Forward

1. The objective should be a **Centre–State compromise rather than unilateral centralisation**.
2. National priorities such as **strategic mineral security and industrial development** need to be balanced with **State fiscal autonomy and ownership interests**.
3. Mineral governance should integrate **predictable taxation, revenue-sharing, community participation and environmental safeguards**.
4. A cooperative framework is essential because mineral extraction affects **the Union, States, local communities and the wider economy simultaneously**.

151. Why 543 Should Remain 543

1. The debate over **delimitation** has revived the question of whether updating constituency boundaries must necessarily mean **enlarging the Lok Sabha**.
2. Lok Sabha seats were frozen to ensure that States which successfully pursued **population stabilisation** did not lose political representation because of lower population growth.
3. The issue is therefore not **whether delimitation is necessary**, but whether it should automatically lead to a much larger **House**.

Constitutional & Federal Basis

1. **Article 81** broadly provides for representation in proportion to population, while **Article 82** provides for readjustment of seats after each Census.
2. The **42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976)** froze the inter-State allocation of Lok Sabha seats based on the **1971 Census**, protecting States that had reduced fertility.
3. The 84th Constitutional Amendment (2001) extended the freeze until the first Census conducted after 2026 is published.
4. The principle was designed to ensure that States following national **population-control policies** were not politically penalised.



5. The 87th Constitutional Amendment (2003) enabled intra-State delimitation using 2001 Census data without altering the inter-State allocation of seats.

Why Enlargement Is Not Necessary?

1. A proposed **~50% increase** in Lok Sabha seats may preserve the broad population ratio but could widen the **absolute numerical advantage of populous States**, affecting the federal balance.
2. For example, if **Uttar Pradesh rises from 80 to 120 seats and Tamil Nadu from 39 to 59**, their proportion remains broadly similar, but both gain substantially in absolute parliamentary strength.
3. Parliament does not vote in proportions but in **absolute numbers**; therefore, changes in seat allocation have consequences for government formation, confidence motions, legislation and constitutional amendments.
4. A continuously expanding House may also weaken **parliamentary deliberation**. Even the present 543 MPs have limited opportunities to speak and raise matters of public importance.
5. International experience shows that population growth does not necessarily require a continuously expanding national legislature: the **US House has remained at 435 voting members**, while Switzerland has retained 200 National Council members for decades.
6. Representation and accessibility can instead be improved through **smaller Lok Sabha constituencies, stronger Vidhan Sabhas and local institutions**, bringing representatives closer to citizens without endlessly enlarging Parliament.

Women's Representation

1. The proposed **one-third reservation for women** is linked with delimitation and is sometimes presented as an argument for enlarging the Lok Sabha.
2. However, women's constitutional representation can be accommodated **within the existing 543 seats**.
3. Increasing the House substantially could create a new imbalance by further increasing the numerical dominance of States whose populations have grown faster.
4. **Women's representation and federal fairness are both legitimate constitutional objectives** and should not be treated as mutually exclusive.

Way Forward

1. **Retain the Lok Sabha at 543 seats** while undertaking necessary reforms.
2. Use updated population figures for **intra-State delimitation**, so constituencies within each State become more evenly represented.
3. Preserve the existing **inter-State distribution of seats**, maintaining the federal balance consciously protected for decades.
4. Implement **women's reservation within this structure** rather than using it as a justification for an 800+ member House.
5. Strengthen **Vidhan Sabhas and local bodies** to address accessibility pressures created by population growth.
6. States that achieved **population stabilisation** should not be retrospectively penalised by losing political influence.
7. Ultimately, **demographic representation, federal fairness and women's representation can all be achieved without enlarging the Lok Sabha**. Delimitation is necessary; an 800+ member House is not.

152. Danger from Above

1. A flash flood in the Himalayas and foothills killed at least **359 people**, including several foreigners, while around **300 Indians remained missing**.
2. **Possible causes:** Satellite analysis points to a **glacial collapse or ice-rock avalanche in Tibet**, possibly followed by temporary river blockage and sudden failure. An earthquake was initially suspected but evidence did not support it.
3. **Wider Himalayan vulnerability:** The **Bhote Koshi and Trishuli corridors** suffered extensive damage, with settlements washed away and hydropower and monitoring infrastructure damaged.



4. **Climate-change link:** Increasingly intense rainfall and warming are interacting with unstable mountain systems, raising the risk of **natural outbursts**.
5. **GLOF risk:** The **October 2023 South Lhonak Lake disaster in Sikkim** showed how a glacial lake can suddenly release huge volumes of water, debris and rock.
6. **Monitoring challenge:** The Indian Himalayas have nearly **7,500 glacial lakes** and about **15,000 glaciers**. Assessing them is difficult because of inaccessible terrain and the limited window for field expeditions.
7. **Limits of warnings:** Even with satellite monitoring, accurately forecasting glacier collapse is extremely difficult. Warnings may also be ineffective where communities have **few alternatives to move out of harm's way**.
8. **Way forward:** Governments need stronger **construction codes**, restrictions on settlements and large projects in vulnerable zones, better glacier-health tracking and integration of such monitoring into **long-term disaster planning and development programmes**.

153 . India's Return to its Central Asian Neighbourhood

Strategic Importance & Renewed Engagement

1. PM Modi's visit to **Uzbekistan** and participation in the **SCO Heads of State meeting in Kyrgyzstan** mark renewed Indian engagement with Central Asia.
2. Central Asia, located between **Russia and China**, is strategically important amid growing involvement of **Russia, China, Türkiye, Iran, the US and EU**.
3. **Afghanistan, terrorism, radicalisation and regional instability** remain key security concerns for India.
4. India shares deep **civilisational links** with the region in culture, religion, language and architecture; the **Wakhan Corridor** separates India and Tajikistan geographically.
5. India's **2015 visit to all five Central Asian republics, 2017 SCO membership, the 2022 Republic Day outreach** and the **India-Central Asia Dialogue** have provided institutional foundations for engagement.

Opportunities & Connectivity Challenges

1. India needs to move beyond civilisational ties towards **practical cooperation in trade, natural resources, technology, defence, education, health and tourism**.
2. **Uzbekistan** is particularly important because of its relative political stability, economic dynamism and reforms under President Mirziyoyev since 2016; its approach towards **Afghanistan and terrorism** also aligns with Indian interests.
3. Central Asian countries are increasingly seeking to **diversify their external partnerships**, creating space for India amid Russian and Chinese influence.
4. The major constraint is India's **lack of direct overland access**. Connectivity through **Iran and Afghanistan**, including rail and road routes, therefore assumes importance, though regional instability complicates these options.
5. The **SCO** provides India a platform for cooperation on **security, connectivity, economic and technological issues**, while also allowing it to navigate the China-Pakistan strategic challenge.

Way Forward

1. India should shift from **historical-cultural affinity to sustained strategic engagement**, backed by a stronger economic and technological partnership.
2. Strengthen **bilateral and institutional engagement** through the SCO and India-Central Asia Dialogue, while expanding cooperation in security, defence, resources and human development.
3. Prioritise **alternative connectivity routes** and overcome geographical constraints that limit India-Central Asia trade.
4. Engage Central Asian States as partners with their own **strategic autonomy and multi-vector foreign policies**, rather than viewing the region only through the prism of Russia or China.
5. A sustained Central Asian policy can strengthen India's **Eurasian neighbourhood**, complementing its engagement with the **Indian Ocean region**.



154 . Himalaya Needs a Shared Early-Warning System

Rising Himalayan Disaster Vulnerability

1. Nepal's recent **Bhote Koshi flash flood** highlights the fragility of the Himalayan ecosystem; satellite analysis indicates a **glacier/rock collapse in Tibet** temporarily obstructed a river, causing a sudden downstream surge.
2. Himalayas face recurring **floods, landslides and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**, aggravated by intense rainfall, glacier instability and rising temperatures.
3. Recent examples: **2013 Kedarnath disaster, 2021 Chamoli flash flood, and 2023 South Lhonak GLOF in Sikkim.**
4. Monsoon disasters can be especially destructive when rivers are already swollen, as sudden surges carry **large rocks and debris**, damaging settlements, roads, bridges and hydropower infrastructure.

Need for Transboundary Early Warning & Cooperation

1. Monitoring **river levels, intense rainfall and seismic activity** is increasingly important for communities, pilgrims and tourists living or travelling near vulnerable zones.
2. Himalayan disasters cross national boundaries; therefore, **upstream–downstream cooperation** must go beyond rescue and relief.
3. Existing regional mechanisms such as the **WMO's South Asia Hydromet Forum and South Asia Flash Flood Guidance System** provide a foundation for cooperation.
4. These systems need to be strengthened through **real-time data sharing, forecasting expertise and interoperable early-warning mechanisms** among Himalayan countries.
5. India and China, despite geopolitical differences, often share common ground on **climate negotiations**; this cooperation should extend to disaster-risk reduction.

Way Forward

1. Develop a **shared Himalayan early-warning architecture** covering glaciers, rivers, rainfall, landslides and seismic activity.
2. Strengthen **satellite-based monitoring, ground sensors, hydrological data-sharing and rapid communication** with downstream communities.
3. Translate scientific warnings into **last-mile alerts, evacuation plans and local preparedness**, especially for high-risk settlements and tourist/pilgrimage routes.
4. The priority should shift from merely responding to disasters to **anticipating hazards and preventing loss of life** through sustained regional cooperation.

155. BRICS: An Emerging Engine of Global Growth

Evolution & Growing Global Significance

1. **BRIC** was proposed by Goldman Sachs chief economist Jim O'Neill in **2001**; the grouping held its first high-level ministerial meeting in **2006** and its first summit in **2009**. **South Africa joined in 2010**, making it BRICS.
2. BRICS has expanded to **11 members and 10 partner countries**, giving it a wider Global South representation.
3. BRICS and BRICS+ account for around **45% and 55% of the world's population**, respectively, while their share of global GDP in **PPP terms is rapidly approaching 45%**; BRICS+ economies together exceed **\$30 trillion in nominal GDP**.
4. IMF projections suggest BRICS economies could grow **nearly three times faster than G7 economies by 2028**, highlighting their rising economic weight.
5. Growing interest from **Argentina, Algeria and Turkiye** reflects BRICS' appeal as a platform for **dialogue, cooperation and economic coordination**.
6. With several emerging economies seeking greater representation, BRICS can contribute to a **more multipolar and inclusive global economic order**.

India's 2026 BRICS Agenda

1. The **2026 BRICS Summit in New Delhi** provides an opportunity to reshape the grouping's agenda around changing global realities, with emphasis on **economic growth and people-centric development**.
2. India's four priorities are **resilience, innovation, cooperation and sustainability**, advancing three pillars:



- ☐ Political and security cooperation
 - ☐ Economic and financial partnership
 - ☐ Cultural and people-to-people exchanges
3. China has expressed support for **India's role in the summit**, underlining the scope for cooperation despite bilateral differences.
 4. BRICS can therefore serve as a platform for **economic, financial, technological and developmental cooperation** among emerging economies.

India-China Cooperation & Global Growth

1. China and India are the world's first- and third-largest economies respectively in PPP terms and together account for about **35% of the world's population**, giving their relationship major implications for global growth.
2. Recent **resumption of direct flights** and increasing exchanges among cities, universities and businesses indicate greater scope for engagement.
3. Their combined GDP is projected in the source to rise from around **28.4% of global GDP in PPP terms**, while their nominal share is around **20%**.
4. Both countries are at a critical stage of national development: **cooperation can generate common prosperity, while confrontation risks a lose-lose outcome** for both sides and the wider region.
5. The **Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Panchsheel)** are presented as an important foundation for peaceful international relations.
6. **Way Forward:** India should leverage BRICS for **Global South cooperation, economic and financial partnerships and multilateralism**, while pursuing pragmatic India-China engagement in areas of shared interest.

156. Nepal Floods: Questions for Delhi, Kathmandu & Beijing

Himalayan Cryo-hydrological Vulnerability

1. Recent **Bhotekoshi River flood** killed **270+ people**, injured hundreds and left many missing, including Indian pilgrims; villages, roads, bridges and hydropower projects were damaged.
2. Initial assessments indicate a **rock-ice avalanche in Tibet** created a temporary natural dam, which burst and released a catastrophic downstream flood pulse.
3. This belongs to a growing class of **cryo-hydrological hazards**—floods arising from destabilised ice, snow and meltwater in a warming Himalaya.
4. The Himalaya is warming rapidly, accelerating **glacier thinning, unstable ice patches and expansion of glacial/supraglacial lakes**.
5. Nepal Himalaya's glacial lakes increased from **1,926 to 2,631 between 2005–2024**, correlating with warming and erratic precipitation.
6. **Hindu Kush Himalaya ice-loss rates have roughly doubled since 2000**, increasing risks for nearly **2 billion downstream people**.
7. Recent precedents include the **2025 Purupee Glacier event in Tibet** and the **Dharali disaster in Uttarakhand**, where an exposed ice patch suddenly collapsed.

Climate Change as a Risk Multiplier

1. Glacier retreat increases **ice mass loss and lake size**, alters glacial drainage and can contribute to **hydrofracturing of ice dams**.
2. A warming atmosphere holds more moisture, increasing the potential for **extreme precipitation** and outburst events.
3. Climate change cannot necessarily be attributed as the sole cause of an individual disaster, but it is an important **threat multiplier**, increasing the likelihood and severity of such hazards.
4. The monsoon further compounds vulnerability: high river levels combined with sudden surges and large debris can cause **bank erosion, landslides and cascading damage**. Hence, the focus must shift from merely responding after disasters to **anticipatory risk reduction**.



Shared Early Warning & Regional Response

1. Nepal and its neighbours cannot prevent every avalanche or ice collapse, but can substantially **reduce exposure and improve preparedness** through:
 - ☐ **Real-time monitoring** of glaciers, supraglacial lakes and river levels.
 - ☐ **Community-based alert systems** in high-risk valleys.
 - ☐ Integrating **cryo-hydrological risks into land-use planning and infrastructure design**.
 - ☐ Regional **data-sharing on glacier dynamics**.
2. Joint drills and protocols for **transboundary flood response and evacuation**, particularly for pilgrimage and tourist routes.
3. The challenge concerns **Kathmandu, New Delhi and Beijing**, making Himalayan disaster-risk management a shared regional responsibility.
4. There is no truly **“benign” level of warming**: even incremental temperature rise can destabilise glaciers and intensify extreme precipitation.
5. **Way Forward**: Convert climate cooperation into **shared monitoring, early-warning systems and rapid mobilisation**, ensuring that scientific information reaches vulnerable communities in time to save lives.

157. Nepal Floods: Rising Risk of Glacier Collapse

Glacier Collapse & Flood Mechanism

1. Recent **Nepal floods** have been linked to a **glacial collapse in the Himalayas**, sending ice and rock debris into the **Lende Khola and Bhotekoshi river systems** and triggering flash floods.
2. A glacier forms when accumulated snow survives repeated melting seasons, becoming **firn and eventually solid glacial ice**.
3. As ice accumulates sufficient weight, it can flow downhill; **steep gradients, earthquakes, temperature changes and internal physical changes** can influence glacier collapse.
4. **Warming temperatures** increase meltwater accumulation in crevasses and channels. Water can exert pressure, weaken the glacier and ultimately cause **fracturing and collapse**.
5. Surface melting followed by repeated **freeze-thaw cycles** can further create cracks and weaken the ice structure.

Why Risk Is Increasing?

1. Meltwater can collect beneath glaciers in **large cavities and tunnels**, acting as a lubricant and accelerating downward movement.
2. Glacier collapse can release a sudden rush of water mixed with **rocks, loose soil and riverbed material**, travelling rapidly through narrow mountain valleys.
3. Debris can block river channels and create **temporary natural dams**; their subsequent breach can trigger a **second wave of flooding**, as seen in Nepal.
4. The incidence of glacier breakages has increased with the **faster warming of the Himalayas**, making future events harder to predict.
5. Difficult terrain makes physical monitoring challenging; therefore, **remote sensing, satellite monitoring and high-altitude early-warning systems** are increasingly important.

Disaster Preparedness & Regional Cooperation

1. **Critical infrastructure such as hydropower plants** should not be located in high-risk zones without adequate assessment of glacier-related hazards.
2. Advanced **remote-sensing and high-altitude monitoring** can improve early detection and forecasting of unstable glaciers.
3. The Nepal floods demonstrate the need for **international/transboundary cooperation**, as upstream glacier instability can create downstream disasters.
4. **Way Forward**: Strengthen glacier monitoring and early-warning systems, identify vulnerable infrastructure and communicate **upstream glacier risks to downstream communities/countries before disasters strike**.



158. How Social Media Hooks Children

Why Children Are Vulnerable?

1. **Meta's \$17-billion settlement** in the U.S. concerns allegations that its platforms were designed to be addictive and harmed children's **mental health and privacy**.
2. Features such as **endless feeds, recommendation algorithms, notifications and "likes"** are designed to maximise engagement, potentially creating compulsive use.
3. Research cited highlights links between excessive social-media use and **loneliness, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, poor body image and attention difficulties**.
4. A 2025 systematic review of 34 studies found social-media use associated with poorer **academic achievement, suggesting that frequent checking or scrolling can interfere with schoolwork and sustained attention**.
5. A 2024 meta-analysis of 143 studies involving over 2.5 million adolescents found greater social-media engagement associated with **higher levels of anxiety and depression**.

Evidence, Design & Regulation

1. Studies indicate **excessive/problematic social-media use** is associated with mental-health problems, though causality remains complex.
2. Certain design features—**appearance-based comparisons, quantified feedback such as likes/views, overnight notifications and other engagement mechanisms**—can negatively affect young users.
3. A 2025 controlled trial found that restricting smartphone/social-media use among young people could improve **anxiety, depression, loneliness and emotional difficulties**; another randomised trial reported improvements after limiting use to about **one hour a day**.
4. The **Meta settlement** proposes changes including limits on personalised recommendations and stronger parental controls, but its direct applicability to India is limited because it arises from the **U.S. legal framework**.
5. The settlement has nevertheless become a possible **regulatory blueprint for India**, where policymakers are examining age-based restrictions, limits on platform use by children and stronger safety requirements.
6. Experts argue that regulation should address **how platforms are designed and operated**, not merely impose age restrictions.

Child-Centric Digital Governance

1. India needs a **child-safety-by-design approach**, requiring platforms to assess and minimise foreseeable harms rather than relying only on parental supervision.
2. Strengthen **age assurance, privacy protection, parental controls and restrictions on addictive/personalised design features** for minors.
3. Platform responsibility should complement **digital literacy, parental awareness and responsible usage**, rather than treating children as solely responsible for managing algorithmic environments.
4. Regulation must balance **children's mental health, privacy and safety** with their legitimate access to digital platforms, education and social interaction.

159. Why Meta's design changes matter more than settlement sum

Meta's **\$17-billion settlement** over claims that its platforms' design harmed children is significant less for the amount and more for its potential to establish **platform-design accountability**. The concern is that features such as endless feeds, personalised recommendations, likes, notifications and autoplay can encourage compulsive use and are associated with problems such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, loneliness, sleep disruption and reduced attention. Meta has agreed to measures for users under 18, including **default two-hour usage limits, overnight and school-hour restrictions, non-personalised feeds, scrolling prompts, hidden likes, tighter recommendation/autoplay controls, sensitive-content safeguards and stronger age-detection systems**.

However, the settlement **does not amount to an admission of wrongdoing or automatically create legal precedent**. Its broader importance lies in shifting the focus from individual responsibility to the **design and incentives of digital platforms**. Independent auditing, effective parental and age controls, transparent algorithms and enforceable safeguards will be crucial, while concerns remain about whether engagement-driven business models can genuinely



coexist with child welfare. The issue also has implications for India, where debates on **online child safety, data protection, platform accountability and age-appropriate design** are evolving.

160 . PM Visit to Central Asia: Why Central Asia Matters for India

Strategic & Economic Significance

1. **Extended neighbourhood:** Central Asia is a landlocked region between Russia and China; India has longstanding historical, cultural and strategic links with it.
2. India's engagement deepened after **2012's "Connect Central Asia" policy**; PM visited all five Central Asian republics in **2015**, while India became an **SCO member in 2017**.
3. **Strategic resources:** Kazakhstan has major **uranium and mineral reserves**; Kyrgyz Republic has gold; Tajikistan has major **hydropower potential**; Turkmenistan has vast **natural-gas reserves**.
4. **Security:** The Taliban's return to power, terrorism, radicalisation and instability in Afghanistan make Central Asia important for India's security interests.
5. **Geopolitics:** China's growing investments and Russia's changing position amid the Ukraine conflict create both challenges and opportunities for India to expand its strategic presence.

Connectivity & Key Challenges

1. India's biggest constraint is **lack of direct overland connectivity**, primarily because Pakistan does not provide transit access to Central Asia.
2. **Chabahar Port–Iran, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the proposed TAPI pipeline** are therefore critical for India's connectivity and energy interests.
3. Afghanistan's instability complicates both **security and connectivity**, while the Russia-Ukraine conflict may cause greater economic and geopolitical churn in the region.
4. India must ensure that the strategic space created by these developments is not disproportionately **captured by China**.

Comprehensive Regional Engagement

1. Use the **SCO** as an important platform for regional security and cooperation; India's bilateral trade with Central Asia has also been growing, with the source noting it was close to **\$1 billion in 2025–26**.
2. Leverage **civilisational and cultural links**—including shared traditions, languages, Buddhism and historical exchanges—to strengthen people-to-people ties.
3. Expand cooperation in **education, culture, health, technology and economic partnerships**, alongside diplomatic engagement.
4. India's renewed engagement with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic, including participation in the **SCO Leaders' Summit**, can strengthen its presence in a strategically vital region and advance its **security, connectivity and economic interests**.

161 . As Glaciers Melt: Preparing for the Himalayan Challenge

Growing Fragility of the Himalayas

1. The Himalayas are the **ecological mainstay of the Indian Subcontinent**—they sustain rivers, shape the monsoon, support biodiversity and host major pilgrimage centres.
2. **Rapid warming and glacier retreat**, documented by several studies including IPCC reports, are increasing risks from **GLOFs, landslides, avalanches and erratic rainfall**, often producing cascading disasters.
3. Meltwater accumulates in **glacial lakes held by unstable moraine/boulder dams**, whose sudden failure can release massive volumes of water and debris.
4. Recent disasters in **Nepal and the Everest region**, as well as the **South Lhonak Lake disaster in Sikkim**, demonstrate the growing vulnerability.
5. A **2021 scientific study** had already flagged instability around South Lhonak Lake; its subsequent failure caused major flooding and casualties, highlighting the consequences of inadequate preparedness.

Development vs Ecological & Disaster Risk



1. Expansion of **roads, hydropower and tourism** is important for livelihoods, energy security and connectivity, but increases exposure in a fragile and unstable mountain ecosystem.
2. Infrastructure and environmental assessments must consider **cumulative risks** and adopt construction standards suited to changing Himalayan conditions.
3. Climate change is making glaciers thinner and unstable while altering **precipitation and meltwater patterns**, increasing the probability of extreme events.
4. **Glaciers and hazards do not respect political boundaries**; therefore, monitoring, data-sharing and disaster preparedness require cooperation among Himalayan countries.
5. India is strengthening **early-warning systems**, while Nepal and China are also sharing information on Himalayan ecology.

Way Forward: Early Warning & Regional Cooperation

1. Early-warning systems must monitor **glaciers, glacial lakes and downstream rivers in real time**, and should be capable of detecting sudden **debris surges**, not merely gradual changes in water levels.
2. The **Bhote Koshi warning system** showed this limitation, as it could not detect the sudden debris surge; hence monitoring systems need technological upgradation.
3. The **Swiss experience at Blatten (2025)** demonstrates how advance monitoring and evacuation can reduce casualties after glacier-related disasters.
4. Strengthen **cross-border data sharing, coordinated evacuation protocols, risk-sensitive land-use planning and resilient infrastructure**.
5. Himalayan-specific solutions are essential, but **sharing expertise and technology with other mountain regions** can improve preparedness; such cooperation should be integrated into **technology-transfer programmes under climate agreements**.
6. The objective should be to combine **climate adaptation + scientific monitoring + regional cooperation + disaster-resilient development** to reduce future loss of life and infrastructure.

162. Meta's US Deal: Redrawing the Line of Accountability

Shift from User Responsibility to Platform Accountability

1. Meta's settlement with **29 U.S. states**, involving up to **\$18 billion over a decade**, signals growing recognition that platforms have responsibility for harms their designs can cause to children.
2. Facebook and Instagram will introduce **two-hour daily limits for under-18s, midnight–6 a.m. curfews, stronger age verification, safety defaults and reduced school-hour notifications**.
3. However, Meta continues to deny wrongdoing, and the settlement leaves deeper questions around **personalised recommendations and the advertising-driven business model** unresolved.
4. The broader shift is from expecting **parents and users to exercise self-control** towards scrutinising companies whose systems are deliberately designed to maximise engagement.

Why Platform Design Matters?

1. Features such as **infinite scrolling, notifications, likes, streaks and personalised feeds** make disengagement difficult and turn user attention into a monetisable commodity.
2. This reflects an **engagement economy**, where time spent on platforms has economic value.
3. Regulation is increasingly recognising that child safety cannot depend solely on **parental supervision, digital literacy or individual self-control**.

Lessons for India

1. The U.S. settlement offers a useful model as India considers regulation of **children's social-media use**.
2. Regulation should examine the **default design choices** of platforms: why should engagement-maximising feeds be the default for children, why should young users have to opt out of personalisation, and why should users bear the burden of resisting endless content?
3. India therefore needs to move towards **safer-by-default platform design and greater corporate responsibility**, potentially redrawing the boundary of accountability from the individual user to the technology companies that create and profit from these systems.



163 . Unlocking Soft Power with Saptadhara

India's Cultural Wealth as Soft Power

1. **Saptadhara**, introduced as part of the **Viksit Bharat** vision, includes seven streams of national strength, with **soft power** being an important component.
2. India possesses immense soft power through its **civilisational history, cultural diversity and knowledge traditions**—Yoga, Ayurveda, spiritual centres, festivals, literature, music, dance, cinema, cuisine, handicrafts and handloom.
3. **Democracy, scientific progress, digital systems, space capabilities and the global Indian diaspora** further enhance India's international reputation.
4. Cultural wealth by itself does not ensure global influence; it must be converted into **economic value, employment and sustainable livelihoods** for cultural practitioners.

Converting Culture into Jobs & Economic Value

1. Every district should prepare a **culture–power–economy plan** identifying local artists, artisans, writers and cultural workers.
2. Connect them with **training, technology, finance, IPR protection, local markets and international opportunities**.
3. Strengthen the **guru–shishya tradition** so experienced practitioners can mentor younger generations while preserving authenticity.
4. **Tourism, cinema, music, fashion and education** can generate millions of jobs; government should provide standards, market linkages and act as a **first customer** where possible.
5. Cultural workers should not remain dependent only on **grants** but be enabled to earn regular and dignified incomes.
6. A national mission can target **1 crore new jobs** in tourism, arts, media and the creative economy, with Indian missions abroad facilitating **market access, cultural/business promotion, publishing, tourism and international collaboration**.

Way Forward: Heritage → Livelihood → Global Influence

1. **Young people must be central**—as creators and innovators who use technology to share Indian traditions globally and build new cultural industries.
2. Schools and universities should introduce students to **India's cultural diversity**, while technology can help preserve and disseminate heritage.
3. Success should be measured through **real livelihoods created, opportunities generated and cultural reach**, rather than merely the number of events or grants.
4. India need not create soft power; it needs to **enhance, connect and protect** its existing cultural strengths.
5. The core approach is **Kala (art) → Kaushal (skill) → Kamai (earning) → Rozgar (employment) → Bazaar (market) → Prabhav (global influence)**—ensuring that those who preserve India's traditions receive **dignified livelihoods**, while the next generation gains identity and opportunity.