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1. Bitter Pills: Drug Pricing and Hospital Margins

The Supreme Court has questioned the disparity between the **Price to Retailer (PTR)** and **Maximum Retail Price (MRP)** of certain drugs, with the gap reaching up to **1,000% in some cases**. The concern is that such pricing practices can create incentives for hospitals to stock medicines offering higher margins, ultimately increasing the burden on patients.

PTR–MRP Gap and Its Consequences

1. **Huge pricing gap:** Some drugs are not available over the counter, allowing hospitals to purchase medicines at lower prices while patients are charged the much higher **MRP**.
2. **Hospital incentives:** Manufacturers may deliberately specify inflated MRPs so that hospitals can retain a larger **difference between purchase price and selling price**, creating an incentive to stock particular brands.
3. **Weak price competition:** Patients purchasing medicines through hospital pharmacies often cannot compare prices or switch to cheaper alternatives, allowing hospitals to maintain higher margins.
4. **Impact on patients:** The practice is particularly burdensome for patients requiring **long-term treatment for cancer and chronic conditions**, as high medicine costs can lead to **reduced adherence** and delayed treatment.
5. **Unequal impact:** Smaller hospitals with lower revenues may be disadvantaged because they cannot command the same financial margins as larger hospitals.

Regulatory Gap and the Need for Price Rationalisation

1. **2013 Drug (Prices Control) Order:** The framework allows the **NPPA** to determine the ceiling price of scheduled medicines using the average market price, with a **16% retailer margin**.
2. **MRP–ceiling disconnect:** Even when a ceiling price exists, manufacturers can sell below it while printing an MRP substantially above the actual selling price, allowing a large **PTR–MRP spread**.
3. **Illustration:** A medicine costing about **₹66** could have a market price of ₹116 and a ceiling price of ₹160, yet carry an MRP of **₹500**, creating a large margin.
4. **Cancer medicines:** In 2019, the Government capped the trade margin at up to 30% for 42 non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines on a pilot basis.
5. **Supreme Court's suggestion:** A **fixed percentage mark-up across drugs** could replace the present structure, ensuring that margins do not rise disproportionately with the drug's price.

2. Satisfaction with Police Remains Low Among Cybercrime Victims

India's rapid digital transformation has been accompanied by a rise in cybercrime, making effective police response increasingly important. As per the findings of **State of Policing in India Report 2026**, jointly conducted by **Lokniti-CSDS and Common Cause** although cybercrime reporting mechanisms have expanded, the experience of victims remains poor: **63% remain dissatisfied with police handling**, with satisfaction falling further during investigation.

Reporting Mechanisms Have Expanded, but Effective Policing Remains the Gap

1. **Growing institutional response:** Government efforts have expanded through **cyber helplines, the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal and specialised cyber police stations** across States.
2. **Reporting–action gap:** Despite easier access to reporting mechanisms, nearly **two in three cybercrime victims (63%) remain dissatisfied** with police handling; **42% are somewhat dissatisfied and 21% very dissatisfied**, while only **37% are satisfied**.
3. **First contact vs follow-up:** Victims report comparatively higher satisfaction at the **first point of contact**, but satisfaction steadily erodes as the case moves towards investigation and follow-up.
4. **Institutional capacity:** The findings suggest that improvements in reporting infrastructure have **not been matched by corresponding improvements in investigation and case management**, creating a gap between complaint registration and effective police action.
5. **Long waiting times:** For victims who visited police stations, only **28% were attended to within an hour**.
6. **Repeated visits: 31%** reported visiting the police station **once or twice**, **34% three or four times**, and **23% five times or more** to pursue their complaints.
7. **Procedural burden:** Cybercrime reporting therefore remains not merely a procedural challenge but also a **time-consuming process**, particularly when victims have to repeatedly visit police stations or follow up on complaints.

Gender and Rural Divide in Cybercrime Policing

1. **Women face greater difficulty:** Women appear to have **significantly poorer experiences than men** in dealing with police.

2. **Very dissatisfied:** While the level of **somewhat dissatisfaction is identical at 42% for both genders**, **26% of women are very dissatisfied**, compared with **18% of men**.
3. **Gendered burden:** The sharper dissatisfaction among women indicates that the problem is not simply about the availability of cybercrime mechanisms but also about **how victims experience police interaction and follow-up**.
4. **Rural disadvantage:** Victims in rural areas reported **nearly double the incidence of five or more visits to police stations compared with their urban counterparts.**
5. **Access beyond technology:** The rural–urban difference shows that expanding digital reporting alone cannot eliminate inequalities when victims still need to interact with **physical police infrastructure, investigators and follow-up mechanisms**.

From Digital Reporting to Effective Resolution

1. **Digital-first but not digital-only:** The expansion of portals and helplines has improved the **entry point into the policing system**, but victims continue to face difficulties once complaints move into investigation.
2. **Complaint registration is not resolution:** The central weakness lies in the gap between **registering a cybercrime complaint and securing effective police action**.
3. **Time matters:** Waiting times, repeated visits and prolonged follow-up shape citizens' overall experience of policing even when reporting mechanisms themselves are accessible.
4. **Better case management:** The findings point towards the need for **more efficient case management and better communication during investigation**.
5. **Victim-centric policing:** Cybercrime policing needs to become more **responsive, transparent and capable of delivering timely justice**, particularly for victims facing financial and psychological consequences.

3 . ECI and Court Make It Harder, Not Easier, to Trust Independent Institutions

Special Intensive Revision and the Burden on Citizens

1. **SIR and electoral integrity:** The Special Intensive Revision exercise may be justified in principle for ensuring the integrity of electoral rolls, but its **conception and execution** have raised concerns regarding the fairness and ease of the process.
2. **Opaque process:** The use of opaque procedures and software protocols has raised substantive questions about electoral administration rather than merely procedural ones.
3. **Shifting the burden of proof:** The process has been criticised for **shifting the burden of proof onto citizens**, making individuals establish their eligibility rather than ensuring that electoral administration facilitates their inclusion.
4. **Mass appeals against voters:** The Election Commission filing appeals against around **16 lakh voters in West Bengal who had been found eligible for inclusion** has intensified concerns about the manner in which electoral-roll revision is being conducted.

Judicial Oversight and Constitutional Accountability

1. **ECI's constitutional responsibility:** The Election Commission has the power and responsibility to ensure the **integrity of electoral rolls**, while its institutional independence is constitutionally protected.
2. **Supreme Court as accountability mechanism:** Since removal of Election Commissioners involves a high constitutional threshold, judicial scrutiny becomes an important practical mechanism for checking the exercise of electoral authority.
3. **Safeguards versus institutional power:** Judicial intervention should protect citizens through **strong procedural and substantive safeguards** without unnecessarily infringing upon the ECI's constitutional powers.
4. **Casual treatment of voting rights:** Remarks and decisions concerning excluded voters have raised concerns that the **right to vote can be treated too casually**, despite its centrality to democratic participation.

Constitutional Self-Awareness and Institutional Conduct

1. **Constitutional self-awareness:** Constitutional bodies exercising significant public power require awareness that their authority exists to **protect citizens from arbitrary power and disenfranchisement**.
2. **Institutionalised impunity:** The deeper concern is not merely the technical details of SIR but the emergence of a **"culture of impunity"** in which constitutional offices may exercise significant power without adequate institutional self-correction.
3. **Independence is not insulation:** Institutional independence cannot be1come a shield against legitimate scrutiny. Constitutional autonomy must coexist with **accountability and responsible exercise of power**.
4. **Procedure and virtue:** A formal appointment procedure by itself cannot guarantee the quality or conduct of constitutional functionaries; **"procedure is no substitute for virtue"** captures the distinction between institutional design and institutional behaviour.

Institutional Trust and the Disenfranchised Voter

1. **Trust in independent institutions:** When constitutional institutions themselves become the subject of controversy, the resulting damage extends beyond one electoral process to **public faith in independent institutions**.

2. **Government versus constitutional authorities:** The dynamic becomes more complex when criticism shifts from the government towards constitutional authorities, because institutional independence can itself become a **shield for the government** from direct scrutiny.
3. **Invisible disenfranchisement:** While political parties and the media may mobilise around electoral controversies, many voters whose political rights are affected remain **outside the zone of visibility**.
4. **Political agency:** Converting the experience of disenfranchised voters from a statistic into **political agency** remains difficult, thereby weakening the public pressure generated by the controversy.
5. **Restoring institutional credibility:** Accountability, correction of procedural shortcomings and restoration of integrity in the electoral process are necessary to rebuild the **citizen's faith in constitutional institutions**.

4. Pause SIR and Conduct an Audit of Voter Deletions

Public and Political Pressure on the Election Commission

1. **Growing public mobilisation:** Dissatisfaction has taken the form of organised protests by **activists, student groups and political parties**, particularly in major urban centres. The protests reflect the widening public scrutiny of the functioning of the ECI.
2. **Opposition pressure:** Opposition leaders have demanded the **CEC's resignation** and, over allegations of bias favouring the ruling party, have also called for criminal proceedings.
3. **Parliamentary challenge:** Opposition lawmakers are seeking to use parliamentary mechanisms to challenge the CEC's position, including fresh notices for removal after earlier notices were declined by the presiding officers of both Houses.
4. **Exceptionally high removal threshold:** Removal of the CEC is deliberately modelled on the **impeachment procedure applicable to a Supreme Court judge**. Under the 2023 law, while an Election Commissioner may resign by writing to the President, involuntary removal involves a parliamentary process requiring admission of a petition followed by a majority in both Houses, making removal extremely difficult without government backing.

Legal Challenges and Institutional Accountability

1. **Judicial challenges:** Two separate challenges have reached the Supreme Court. One questions administrative and technological decisions of the CEC, including allegations that important policies and software modifications were made **unilaterally without unanimous agreement of the three-member ECI**.
2. **2023 selection process:** Another challenge concerns the constitutionality of the 2023 selection mechanism, which replaced the **Chief Justice of India with a Union Cabinet Minister** on the selection panel, resulting in an executive-dominated **two-to-one balance**.
3. **Immunity under Section 16:** The 2023 legislation provides serving and former Election Commissioners immunity from **civil or criminal proceedings for actions undertaken in discharge of official duties**. The provision itself remains open to judicial scrutiny.
4. **Accountability versus immunity:** If blanket immunity is found unconstitutional, the legal consequences for actions alleged to be **manifestly mala fide** could become significant. Thus, institutional independence and protection from harassment must be balanced against meaningful accountability.

Electoral Credibility and the SIR Controversy

1. **Political resistance:** The ruling establishment has adopted a firm defence of both the CEC and SIR, signalling that protests, parliamentary disruptions and political pressure will not necessarily determine executive decisions or force resignations.
2. **Institutional credibility:** Continued controversy surrounding the CEC risks undermining the **perceived neutrality of the ECI**, which is fundamental to the credibility of the electoral system.
3. **Decline in institutional reputation:** The ECI was earlier regarded as a model electoral authority internationally, including through its engagement with the **UN and emerging democracies**. Concerns over electoral-roll deletions and election administration now raise questions about India's reputation as the world's largest democracy.
4. **SIR and voter deletions:** The disputed SIR has become central to the controversy, particularly amid claims of extremely large-scale voter deletions and unusual changes in electoral-roll administration.
5. **Need for transparency:** With elections approaching, the immediate requirements are to **pause the disputed SIR, disclose the ECI's decision-making record, and conduct an independent audit of voter deletions and software changes**.

5. Rising Sea Level Threat to India's Eroding Coastline

Sea-level rise is accelerating, creating growing risks for **low-lying coastal regions and island nations**. The UN's first declaration on rising seas focuses on protecting threatened states and integrating sea-level projections into coastal planning.

Rising Seas and the Question of Statehood

1. **Accelerating sea-level rise:** Global sea-level rise more than doubled from **2.1 mm/year in 1993–2002 to 4.7 mm/year in 2015–2024**. In 2024, sea level rose by **6 mm**, the highest annual increase recorded.
2. **Long-term consequences:** Sea-level rise will continue for centuries even after achieving net zero. The concern is therefore not only immediate flooding but the **long-term habitability of coastal and island regions**.
3. **Continued statehood:** The UN declaration creates a **"presumption in favour of continued statehood"** for countries whose territory becomes submerged or uninhabitable, protecting their sovereignty and UN membership.
4. **Maritime boundaries:** Countries can maintain their **nautical boundaries** despite coastal retreat. This is important for vulnerable island countries whose maritime rights could otherwise be affected by changing coastlines.
5. **Human displacement:** The declaration also emphasises **human rights, international cooperation and support for people forced to leave their homes** because of rising seas.

India's Coastal Vulnerability

1. **Extensive maritime exposure:** India has a coastline of around **11,098 km**, along with **1,298 offshore islands and islets**, making sea-level rise and coastal erosion significant concerns.
2. **Eroding coastline:** Around **one-third of India's mainland shoreline is eroding**, with erosion particularly concentrated in certain coastal stretches.
3. **Rapid erosion zones:** Nearly **400 km of coastline is retreating by more than 5 metres a year**, while another 225 km is retreating by 3–5 metres annually.
4. **Sundarbans: Ghoramara Island** in the Sundarbans shrank from around **7.2 sq km in 1972 to 3.6 sq km in 2022**, while Lohachara Island has already disappeared. Such changes have resulted in displacement and livelihood difficulties for affected communities.
5. **Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar:** These island groups are particularly significant because they extend India's **nautical boundaries** into the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.

Coastal Planning and Adaptation

1. **CRZ limitations:** The **2019 Coastal Regulation Zone notification** uses fixed no-build distances from the high-tide line. On rapidly retreating coastlines, such fixed buffers may become inadequate.
2. **Hazard-line approach:** The **Survey of India's hazard line**, which incorporates sea-level rise and shoreline change, provides a more dynamic basis for coastal planning.
3. **Climate-resilient infrastructure:** Sea-level projections and local erosion rates need to be incorporated into **coastal infrastructure planning**, rather than relying only on present-day shoreline conditions.
4. **Planned relocation:** India needs greater attention to people facing gradual displacement from coastal erosion, including **land tenure and livelihood support** for relocated communities.
5. **Adaptation finance:** Rising seas require greater investment in **coastal protection and adaptation**. The declaration also highlights the need for increased climate finance for vulnerable developing countries.
6. **India's position:** India continues to emphasise **equity and Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)** in global climate action, alongside greater support for adaptation.
7. **Way forward:** Coastal planning needs to shift towards **risk-based planning, stronger coastal infrastructure, scientific monitoring and planned adaptation**, particularly in areas experiencing rapid shoreline retreat.

6. 'Public View': Why SC/ST Act Covers Online Slurs

The Calcutta High Court has held that **casteist slurs on social media can attract provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**, observing that the requirement of "public view" is not confined to physical spaces. The ruling recognises that the interpretation of the Act must remain responsive to the **digital domain and technological advances**.

Meaning of "Public View" under the SC/ST Act

1. **Statutory requirement:** Sections **3(1)(r) and 3(1)(s)** criminalise intentionally insulting or intimidating an SC/ST member by caste name **"in any place within public view."** The offence requires that the victim belongs to an SC/ST community, the accused intended to humiliate them on the basis of caste, and the incident occurred within public view.
2. **Public view is distinct from public place:** The Supreme Court in *Hitesh Verma v. State of Uttarakhand* (2020) held that "public view" refers to a situation where **members of the public can witness or hear the alleged utterance**.
3. **Digital domain:** The Calcutta High Court held that the requirement of public view **"transcends physical space into the digital domain"**, allowing social-media remarks to fall within the scope of the provision when its requirements are satisfied.

4. **Actual public presence matters:** The requirement depends on whether the alleged utterance was made in circumstances where members of the public could **witness or hear it**. The mere fact that an incident occurred within a particular premises does not automatically establish "public view".

Application to Social Media and Technological Change

1. **Facebook casteist abuse:** The case involved a Scheduled Caste petitioner who alleged that two men from general-caste communities had used **casteist expletives against him on Facebook**.
2. **Court's reasoning:** The High Court set aside the special court's order that had described the case as **"perverse"** and directed the police to submit a closure report, holding that "public view" extends into the **digital domain**.
3. **Technology-responsive interpretation:** The Kerala High Court in *Sooraj V. Sukumar v. State of Kerala* (2022) observed that the SC/ST Act is an **"ongoing statute"** and should accommodate technological advances. A restrictive interpretation could defeat the **purpose of the legislation**.
4. **Balancing the statutory requirement:** Expansion of "public view" to online spaces does not remove the requirement altogether; courts must still examine whether the **specific statutory conditions** are fulfilled in each case.

7. Other than Outrage: Restrictions on Women Cannot Be the Answer to Unsafe Public Spaces

The continuing incidence of violence against women shows that **legal provisions and institutional mechanisms alone have not translated into safer public spaces**. The response cannot be to restrict women's mobility; it must address weak implementation, unsafe infrastructure, police responsiveness, judicial delays and **deeply entrenched patriarchal traditions**.

Continuing Violence Despite Multiple Safeguards

1. **Rising reported crimes:** Crimes against women increased from around **2.4 lakh in 2012 to 4.4 lakh in 2024**. Part of the increase may reflect **higher reporting**, but the scale nevertheless points to continuing gaps in women's safety.
2. **Around 50 crimes every hour:** In 2024, around 5**0 crimes against women were reported every hour**, with high rates reported in metropolitan cities such as **Jaipur, Indore, Lucknow and Delhi**.

Implementation Gap in Women's Safety

1. **Multiple mechanisms:** Government initiatives include **Mission Shakti, women's helplines, One Stop Centres, fast-track courts and the Nirbhaya Fund**. However, the existence of these mechanisms has not by itself ensured safer public spaces.
2. **Safety audits without follow-up:** Safety audits are useful only when identified deficiencies are followed by **time-bound corrective action**. Merely identifying unsafe locations without fixing them creates a gap between policy and implementation.
3. **Unsafe urban infrastructure:** A city cannot be considered safe if **poor lighting, inadequate connectivity and unsafe public spaces** continue to expose women to risks.
4. **Police responsiveness:** Police patrols and emergency numbers need to be linked with **prompt intervention by trained and sensitised personnel**, particularly in vulnerable locations.
5. **Preventive and outcome-based policing:** The focus needs to move from **scheme-based policing to preventive, outcome-based policing**, with public audits of vulnerable locations and accountability for correcting identified deficiencies.
6. **Justice delayed:** The **enormous backlog of cases** weakens the deterrent effect of law. The promise of speedy investigation loses meaning when survivors have to wait for years for trial and justice.

From Scheme-Based to Preventive, Outcome-Based Policing

1. **Preventive policing:** There is a need to move from **scheme-based policing to preventive, outcome-based policing**, rather than measuring safety merely through the existence of schemes and infrastructure.
2. **Public audits: Public audits of vulnerable locations** and clear deadlines for addressing identified deficiencies can make safety interventions more accountable.
3. **Justice backlog:** The justice system must address the **enormous backlog of cases**. The promise of speedy investigation loses meaning when survivors wait for years for trial and justice.
4. **Restrictions are not the answer:** Unsafe public spaces cannot be addressed by restricting women's **freedom and mobility**—asking them not to walk after dark, return home earlier or avoid parks and malls.
5. **Address male violence and patriarchy:** The focus must remain on addressing the **possibility of male violence** and the **deeply entrenched patriarchal traditions** that contribute to restrictions on women's freedom.

8. Season's End: The IMD Is Conservative When It Comes to Projecting Rainfall Deficit

Monsoon Forecasts and the Actual Rainfall Pattern

1. **Initial forecast:** IMD initially forecast monsoon rainfall at around **92% of LPA (±5%)**, later revising it to around **90% of LPA (±4%)**. Actual rainfall ended at **87.4% of LPA**.
2. **Actual outcome:** The 2026 southwest monsoon ended with **759.4 mm rainfall, about 87.4% of the LPA of 868.6 mm**, making it a **deficient monsoon**

3. **Changing rainfall drivers:** The monsoon season was influenced by **ocean conditions and Western disturbances**, while extra-tropical rain-bearing systems brought more rain into India during the monsoon months.
4. **El Niño:** El Niño strengthened during the latter part of the season, influencing rainfall conditions and complicating monsoon forecasting. The IMD expects El Niño conditions to persist/strengthen during October–December.
5. **Agricultural impact:** On July 10, **Kharif sowing was 16% behind last year's level**, although by early September the gap had narrowed to under 2%. Karnataka declared drought in **over 100 taluks**, while Maharashtra declared drought in **265 of 358 taluks**.
6. **Agricultural drought threshold:** Although the national rainfall deficit was around 12%, drought conditions were declared in several regions, highlighting how national rainfall averages can conceal severe sub-regional and agricultural distress.
7. **Post-monsoon outlook:** El Niño is expected to strengthen/peak around November 2026. Its persistence may influence post-monsoon rainfall patterns, with implications for **soil moisture availability and agricultural output.**

9 . For New Energy, Remove Old Bottlenecks

India has **more than 300 GW of installed renewable-energy capacity** and ranks third globally in renewable-energy deployment, but installed capacity does not always translate into electricity being available when demand is highest.

Transmission Infrastructure and Grid Integration

1. **Curtailment of renewable power:** Transmission constraints and the need to maintain **grid security** have forced operators to curtail a significant amount of solar-generated electricity, particularly during April–June.
2. **Green Energy Corridor Phase-III:** The scheme aims to strengthen systems to evacuate **up to 135 GW of renewable energy** and add **50 GWh of battery energy storage**, addressing both evacuation constraints and storage requirements.
3. **Intra-state transmission:** Renewable projects are often concentrated in particular regions, while electricity demand is spread across **cities, industries and rural areas**. Strengthening the network's **last leg** is therefore crucial for ensuring that renewable power actually reaches consumers.
4. **High transmission cost:** The scheme has an estimated **₹1,36,378 crore** allocation for transmission infrastructure, but implementation involves challenges beyond investment.
5. **Right-of-way and clearances: Right-of-way compensation, land acquisition and environmental clearances** remain major bottlenecks in laying transmission lines, particularly where high-voltage lines pass near habitations.

Storage and Institutional Bottlenecks

1. **Storage as a functioning grid component:** The **50 GWh storage component** must become a functioning part of the grid rather than merely a procurement target, particularly because renewable generation is variable and demand may peak when solar generation is unavailable.
2. **Viable storage ecosystem:** Battery projects require **viable business models and incentives**, especially because the sector depends on overseas suppliers for critical raw materials.
3. **Need for clear rules: Recycling arrangements and clear rules on who can use and pay for storage** are necessary for the storage system to become commercially viable.
4. **Fragmented decision-making:** Renewable resources, transmission corridors and electricity demand do not follow administrative boundaries. **Fragmented decision-making often delays projects**, requiring greater coordination among the concerned authorities.
5. **Integrated monitoring and decision-making:** A proposed **portal bringing all approving authorities together for real-time monitoring and faster decision-making** could help address these coordination bottlenecks.
6. **Learning from past experience:** The next phase of the Green Energy Corridor needs to address not merely the creation of renewable capacity but the **bottlenecks in transmission, storage, clearances and coordination** that determine whether this capacity can actually be utilised.

10. Industry Is Growing, but Isn't Creating Jobs

India's formal manufacturing sector continues to grow, but the expansion is **not translating into employment at the same pace**. Output and employment have both increased, yet wages, labour productivity and the shift towards organised manufacturing remain uneven, leaving the country with a persistent **employment challenge**.

Manufacturing Growth and Employment

1. **Output–employment gap:** In **2024-25**, manufacturing output grew by **7.8%**, while employment grew by **7.2%**. Thus, employment increased but grew slightly slower than industrial output.
2. **Wages lagging productivity:** Wages per worker have grown at a **slower pace than net profit and output per worker**, indicating that the gains from manufacturing growth are not being equally reflected in worker earnings.

3. **Capital-intensive growth:** The pattern suggests that manufacturing expansion is not necessarily generating employment in proportion to its increase in output, raising concerns about the **labour-absorbing capacity of industrial growth**.

Informal and Organised Manufacturing

1. **Large informal workforce:** In **2023-24**, around **1.9 crore persons were employed in organised manufacturing**, while about **3.3 crore were employed in the unorganised manufacturing segment**, highlighting the large informal employment base.
2. **Small-firm dominance:** Small firms dominate organised manufacturing numerically, but factories employing **more than 100 workers account for a larger share of employment**, while also recording higher wages and labour productivity.
3. **Productivity versus employment:** Manufacturing needs to generate not merely higher output but also **productive and better-paid employment**, particularly for workers currently concentrated in informal and small-scale establishments.
4. **Employment challenge:** Without stronger expansion of **labour-intensive manufacturing** and greater movement of workers into organised enterprises, India may continue to face the paradox of **industrial growth without sufficient job creation**.

11. We Have a Model Investment Treaty. And Are Losing Billions Because of It

India's **2016 Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** was intended to protect India from problematic investor–State disputes, but its restrictive provisions may also be discouraging foreign investment and exposing India to costly disputes.

Restrictive Investment Treaty Framework

1. **2016 Model BIT:** The treaty was framed after India faced several investment disputes and sought to protect the State from expansive interpretations of investor rights.
2. **Narrower investor protection:** The 2016 model restricts the scope of protections available to foreign investors and requires them to pursue **domestic remedies before approaching international arbitration**.
3. **Longer dispute resolution:** The domestic-remedy requirement can substantially delay access to international arbitration, with the UAE agreement cited as requiring **five years of domestic proceedings** before arbitration.
4. **Limited treaty network:** Since the **2016 Model BIT**, India has concluded only **six new investment treaties**, while the number of BITs in force fell sharply from **73 in 2015 to 29 in 2017 and eight by 2021**. None of the eight remaining treaties covered a significant source of foreign capital.
5. **Recent treaties:** The newer treaties with the **UAE (2024) and Israel (2025)** reduced the domestic-remedy requirement from the earlier **five-year period to three years**, indicating some movement towards greater investor access while retaining several restrictive features of the 2016 Model BIT.

Investment and the Cost of Restrictive Protection

1. **Gross versus net FDI:** Gross FDI inflows reached a record **$94.5 billion in 2025-26**, but after accounting for repatriation/disinvestment and India's outward direct investment, **net FDI was only about $7.65 billion**.
2. **Reinvested earnings:** Reinvested earnings of foreign firms stood at around **$25.6 billion in 2025-26**, exceeding India's net FDI by more than three times and highlighting their importance in sustaining foreign investment.
3. **India's position:** India has moved from being among the countries receiving the most foreign investment to recording a **decline in direct investment inflows**, raising concerns about the investment climate.
4. **Foreign investors' concerns:** The restrictive treaty framework **may affect the predictability and attractiveness of India's investment environment**, particularly when investors compare the protection available across competing jurisdictions.
5. **Treaty protection versus investment:** The central concern is that a treaty designed primarily to prevent **abusive investor claims** may also discourage genuine investment if foreign investors perceive available protections as inadequate.

Need for Reconsideration

1. **Balance protection and attraction:** India needs to balance protection of **State regulatory space** with sufficient assurance to foreign investors against arbitrary or unfair treatment.
2. **Bilateral investment treaties:** The newer treaties indicate some movement away from the earlier five-year domestic-remedy requirement, but the broader treaty framework remains **more restrictive than India's earlier approach**.
3. **Investment climate:** The larger issue is whether India's investment treaties are helping attract and retain capital or becoming an **additional factor affecting investment decisions and the attractiveness of the Indian market**.
4. **Policy choice:** The challenge is to create an investment treaty framework that protects India's interests while ensuring that **foreign investors find India sufficiently predictable and attractive**.

12 . Rescue Act: Preventing Ecological Degradation Is the Way to Protect Wildlife

The reintroduction of tigers in West Bengal's **Buxa, Dampa and Palamau reserves** highlights that wildlife recovery depends not only on releasing animals but also on restoring and protecting the **habitat, prey base and ecological conditions** needed for their survival.

Buxa's Ecological Challenges

1. **Tiger reintroduction:** After the National Tiger Conservation Authority found no tigers in **Buxa, Dampa and Palamau by 2018**, the Bengal Forest Department, with the Wildlife Institute of India, began a programme to introduce **seven tigers in Buxa over two years**. The first tigress has now been released.
2. **Fragmented landscape:** Buxa is surrounded by **revenue villages and tea estates**. Railway infrastructure, the proposed restoration of the railway route to Jainti and commercial traffic on the Bhutan–West Bengal road further add to pressures on the landscape.
3. **Loss of ecological balance:** The forests have become **dense woodland with a closed canopy**, which has choked the growth of grasses and caused **herbivore populations to dwindle**.
4. **Weak prey base:** The density of **chital, the preferred prey of tigers, is dismal**. Goats, macaques and cattle have consequently become common in tiger diets, reflecting the deterioration of the natural prey base.
5. **Restoration measures:** Since 2018, **chital have been reintroduced, some canopies artificially opened to revive grasslands, and villagers relocated from the reserve's core** to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts.

From Preventive Conservation to Ecological Rescue

1. **Preventive conservation:** Since 1973, Project Tiger followed a model of protecting **source populations, habitats, prey bases and corridors**. The objective was to maintain ecological conditions before populations collapsed.
2. **Reactive conservation:** More recent approaches have become increasingly **reactive**, with authorities at places such as **Sariska and Panna reintroducing tigers after populations had already declined or disappeared**.
3. **Heavy-handed interventions:** Reintroduction demonstrates significant technical capabilities but can also become **expensive and heavy-handed**. The article cautions that simply putting tigers back into a landscape does not amount to conservation.
4. **Inviolate core habitat:** The Project Tiger belief that the core habitat must remain **"inviolate"** has, in some cases, been used by state machinery to **override the rights of Adivasis and forest-dwelling communities and disrupt incomes from ecotourism**.
5. **Wildlife corridor:** Buxa forms part of a **viable wildlife corridor contiguous with Phibsoo in Bhutan and Manas in Assam**. Higher prey density and fewer disturbances could allow tigers to disperse naturally across this landscape.
6. **What constitutes success:** Success should mean that tigers **establish territories, produce cubs that survive and breed, and receive natural immigration that strengthens genetic diversity**.
7. **Advance, not rescue:** Conservation should be an **"advance, rather than a rescue"**. Ecological degradation needs to be monitored early so that the State does not wait for tigers to disappear before taking action.
8. **Community participation:** Communities living in and around Buxa need to be involved in decisions concerning **conflict prevention and protection of livelihoods**, making conservation compatible with the people dependent on the landscape.

13. Obstacle Race: The Special Intensive Revision Exercise Is Threatening Universal Adult Franchise

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR), intended to "clean" electoral rolls, has raised concerns over **selective disenfranchisement**. The key issue is that the enumeration process places the **onus on electors to prove eligibility**, while getting back onto the rolls after deletion is considerably more difficult than getting names deleted.

Concerns with the SIR Process

1. **Shift in burden of proof:** The enumeration process puts the **onus on electors to prove their eligibility**, with many names deleted first and verified later. Getting back onto the rolls after being struck off the draft is described as onerous.
2. **Logical discrepancies:** The ECI has added a new exclusion criterion called **"logical discrepancies"**, first implemented in West Bengal and subsequently extended from States to Union Territories.
3. **Large-scale deletions:** Nearly **13.4 crore electors** have been removed from draft rolls across **30 States and UTs**, amounting to about **14% of the electorate before revision**. Deletions have increased with each phase — **8.3% in Bihar, 12.9% across 12 States and UTs in Phase 2, and 17% in Phase 3**.
4. **Asymmetry in correction:** The ECI says deleted electors can return during the claims phase, but only through a **fresh application** if they discover that they have been struck off. At the same time, requests for deletion can be made quickly, creating an unequal burden between **deletion and restoration**.
5. **Changes in procedure: Form 6** was altered without any amendment to the rules, requiring applicants to establish whether they, their parents or grandparents had appeared on the electoral roll of the last SIR.
6. **West Bengal example:** In West Bengal, **16.1 lakh requests** were filed to remove electors whom judicial officers had already cleared. A **centralised roll database in New Delhi** facilitated this process.

Implications for Universal Adult Franchise

1. **Corrective measures:** The ECI has asked **Booth Level Officers (BLOs)** to restore deleted voters to the rolls. "However, these corrective steps do not remove concerns that many eligible voters may have been left out of the draft rolls during the process."
2. **Internal objections:** The ECI's own members objected to what the piece describes as **plainly illegal changes to procedure**, adding an institutional dimension to the controversy.
3. **Universal adult franchise:** The concern extends beyond individual deletions. A process that makes it difficult for eligible citizens to remain on or return to electoral rolls creates an obstacle to **universal adult franchise**.
4. **Electoral democracy:** The larger concern is therefore not merely the conduct of SIR but its implications for **electoral democracy itself**, particularly when the process of deletion is easier than the process of restoration.
5. **Institutional responsibility:** The two Election Commissioners, **Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi**, are specifically criticised because, as a majority in the three-member ECI, they **could have overruled the CEC**, raising questions about the functioning of the Commission during the exercise.

14 . From Varanasi to Tashkent: Gandhi's Influence on Shastri

Lal Bahadur Shastri's political journey was deeply influenced by **Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of truth, non-violence and moral courage**. From his student years in Varanasi to his conduct as Prime Minister during the India-Pakistan war, Shastri retained what the piece describes as a **"quintessential Gandhian"** approach.

Shastriji's Years in the Freedom Movement

1. **Influence of Gandhi:** Gandhi's return to India in **1915** after his South African experience and his emphasis on **non-violence and civil rights** had a strong influence on the young Shastri.
2. **Influence of Tilak:** Shastri was also influenced by **Bal Gangadhar Tilak and his nationalist ideas**, which contributed to the development of his early political outlook.
3. **Gandhi and Non-Cooperation:** Gandhi's call for Indians to join the **Non-Cooperation Movement** and his 1921 speech in Varanasi at the **Kashi Vidyapeeth** had a decisive impact on Shastri.
4. **Renunciation of government support:** According to C.P. Srivastava's *Lal Bahadur Shastri: A Life of Truth in Politics*, Shastri **dropped out of his government-aided high school** three months before completing his course and joined the Congress as a volunteer.
5. **Gandhian principles:** From then onwards, Shastri became a devoted follower of Gandhi and dedicated himself to the Gandhian ethical principles of **truth and non-violence**.

The Tashkent Agreement and the "Quintessential Gandhian"

1. **India-Pakistan War:** As Prime Minister, Shastri faced the **1965 India-Pakistan war**. The conflict ended after the Soviet Union acted as a third-party mediator between India and Pakistan.
2. **Tashkent Declaration:** Talks at Tashkent resulted in the signing of the **Tashkent Declaration on January 10, 1966**, formally ending the war.
3. **Peace and good relations:** According to L.P. Singh, who worked closely with Shastri, he considered **peace and good relations between India and Pakistan essential if India was to preserve her soul**.
4. **Commitment to peace:** Sandeep Shastri's account records Shastri telling his aides that signing the Tashkent Agreement was **"the one greatest tribute one could pay to the Mahatma."**
5. **Quintessential Gandhian:** Shastri died suddenly on **January 11, 1966**, only a day after signing the agreement. Even as Prime Minister, his final major act reflected the **"quintessential Gandhian"** approach—placing peace and reconciliation at the centre of his conduct.

15. India's Twin Mechanism for Governing Drug Prices

India follows a **twin mechanism for regulating drug prices**: price ceilings for scheduled medicines and restrictions on price increases for non-scheduled medicines. The framework is based on the **Essential Commodities Act, 1955** and the **Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 (DPCO)**, with the Supreme Court now examining aspects of the pricing regime and the high mark-ups charged on some medicines.

Legal Framework and Two Pricing Categories

1. **Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** Section **3(1)** empowers the government to regulate essential commodities to maintain supplies, ensure equitable distribution and availability at fair prices, while **Section 3(2)(c)** enables it to control the price at which an essential commodity may be bought or sold.
2. **DPCO, 2013:** The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 provides the framework for regulating the prices of scheduled formulations and monitoring the prices of non-scheduled formulations. The **NPPA** administers this framework.

3. **Scheduled medicines:** These are medicines included in the **National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM)** and are subject to a **price ceiling**.
4. **Non-scheduled medicines:** Medicines outside the scheduled category are not directly subject to a price ceiling. Manufacturers can set their MRP, but the MRP cannot be increased by **more than 10% in 12 months**.
5. **Scale of coverage:** The NLEM covers nearly **390 drugs**, accounting for around **90% of the total drug market**. Medicines outside the list remain under the less restrictive mechanism.

How Price Ceilings Are Calculated

1. **Market-based price ceiling:** For a scheduled medicine, the ceiling price is calculated from the **average price at which the medicine is sold by companies having at least 1% market share**, with a **16% retailer margin** added.
2. **Illustration:** If three brands sell a medicine at **₹8, ₹10 and ₹12**, the average price is ₹10. Adding the 16% retailer margin gives a price ceiling of **₹11.60**.
3. **Moving Annual Turnover:** Market share is calculated using **Moving Annual Turnover (MAT)**, based on the previous 12 months' sales.
4. **Revision through WPI:** The NPPA revises the ceiling price annually according to the **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)**. The April 1 revision follows the WPI change, which can therefore raise or reduce the permitted price.
5. **Non-scheduled price increase:** For medicines outside price control, the principal restriction is the **10% annual limit**. Manufacturers cannot increase the MRP beyond this limit even though they are free to set the initial MRP.

High Mark-ups and the Limits of Price Control

1. **Price ceiling versus actual selling price:** The existence of a price ceiling does not eliminate differences in the prices at which medicines are ultimately sold through different parts of the supply chain.
2. **Hospital pharmacies:** The piece highlights significant **mark-ups in hospital pharmacies**, where medicines can be sold at prices substantially higher than those available outside hospitals.
3. **"Decoy" and trade margins:** The Supreme Court has examined the issue of high mark-ups, including the concern that some medicines may be sold with **very high trade margins**, raising questions about how pricing works beyond the manufacturer level.
4. **Corporate hospital pharmacies:** The concern is particularly visible in medicines sold through **corporate hospital pharmacies**, where the price charged can be considerably higher than the price of the same medicine outside the hospital.
5. **Judicial scrutiny:** The pricing framework has been challenged before the Supreme Court, including in the context of **medicines covered by the DPCO, 2013 and the distinction between scheduled and non-scheduled drugs**. The broader issue is whether the existing mechanism sufficiently protects consumers from excessive medicine prices and mark-ups.

16. SCO Meet: Signals from 1st Official Indian Visit to Pakistan since Op Sindoor

India's participation in the SCO National Coordinators' meeting in Islamabad is significant as it is the **first official Indian visit to Pakistan since Operation Sindoor**. Pakistan's SCO presidency makes participation necessary despite the bilateral freeze, while the multilateral platform allows India to retain **situational awareness** and ensure it remains **"in the room"** on issues affecting its interests.

The visit also reflects the wider strategic environment. The article highlights the **US being seen to side with Pakistan**, China's provision of **weapons and satellite intelligence to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor**, and Trump's support for Pakistan Army chief Asim Munir. At the same time, China is described as the **more consequential challenge for Delhi than Pakistan**, making it important for India to keep both fronts relatively calm. The SCO therefore provides a limited channel that **"leaves the door ajar for communication"**, even without a return to normal bilateral engagement.

India-Pakistan relations have moved from the **2015 Lahore visit** and attempts at dialogue to Pathankot, Uri, Pulwama, Balakot, the abrogation of **Article 370**, the 2021 ceasefire and the renewed conflict after Pahalgam. With bilateral talks still absent, India's present position is centred on **guaranteed response to future terror attacks, no distinction between State and non-State actors, and no let-up against terrorist infrastructure despite nuclear blackmail**. The SCO engagement therefore represents multilateral engagement without changing India's stated baseline that good-neighbourly relations require an environment **free of terror and hostility**.

17. Behind Trade Deal Delay: US Leverage, India's Limited Options

US Leverage and India's Negotiating Constraints

1. **Tariff uncertainty:** The first round of **US Section 301 tariffs resulted in a 10% tariff**, while India now faces uncertainty over a new Section 301 investigation and potentially higher tariffs. Separately, the US had removed the additional **25% tariff linked to Russian oil purchases**, but the new Russia sanctions law creates fresh tariff risks.

2. **Russia factor:** The US had removed the additional **25% tariff on Indian imports in recognition of India's commitment to stop purchasing Russian oil**. Separately, India committed to negotiate robust bilateral digital-trade rules.
3. **Digital trade commitments:** The proposed deal includes **cross-border data flows, digital trade practices and removal of barriers to digital trade**, making this an important area of negotiation.
4. **India's market-access concerns:** The US is seeking greater access to the Indian market, including in **agriculture and dairy**, where India has significant domestic sensitivities.
5. **Large purchase commitment:** India has indicated that it could purchase around **$500 billion worth of energy, aircraft and aircraft parts, and other goods over the next five years**, but such commitments have to be balanced against their implications for domestic industry.
6. **Beyond tariffs:** Negotiations also cover **intellectual property, innovation, non-market policies, procurement and export controls**, showing that the disagreement extends beyond conventional tariff reduction.
7. **Economic-security dimension:** Both sides have agreed to strengthen cooperation on **economic security, supply-chain resilience and innovation**, but differences remain over how these commitments should be translated into the trade agreement.
8. **India's limited options:** The US is a major destination for Indian exports, making prolonged tariff barriers costly for Indian exporters. At the same time, India cannot easily concede on sensitive agricultural sectors or abandon its broader economic relationship with Russia.

18 . Two or Three? Students Must Be Free to Choose a Third Language Not Tested in a Board Exam

The Supreme Court's interventions have highlighted gaps in the **three-language policy of the CBSE**. The concern is not only about the number of languages students learn, but also about the **timing, choice and examination burden** imposed on them.

Supreme Court Concerns over the Three-Language Policy

1. **Reducing the burden:** The Court has said that **Class 6 students should receive the same relief as Classes 7, 8 and 9**, whose final Class 10 examination will be only an internal assessment rather than a Board examination. The Court is seeking to reduce the load on students until schools are fully prepared.
2. **Timing of implementation:** The Court had earlier questioned whether the policy could begin from **2027 instead of 2026**, but the CBSE has subsequently resisted this compromise at different stages of the hearing.
3. **Sudden language learning:** The Court had pointed out that suddenly introducing a new language in **Class 9** would be disruptive if students had not studied a second "Indian" language until Class 8.
4. **Status of English:** The Court has also asked for careful consideration of treating **English as an indigenous language**, rather than categorising it as a foreign language.

Language Choice, English and the Practical Consequence

1. **English as an Indian language in practice:** English has been used in India for **at least 300 years** and is widely used in education, courts and professions. It also serves as a **preferred link language** and provides an employment advantage in global industries such as IT.
2. **NEP 2020:** While the National Education Policy advocates learning **two Indian languages**, it also recognises the importance of **foreign languages** for the global mobility of Indians seeking employment.
3. **Shrinking language choices:** The practical consequence of the current policy could be the removal of **Spanish, French and other foreign languages** from CBSE schools. Many schools may retain **Sanskrit as the second Indian language**, while schools in southern States may continue with languages such as **Tamil or Kannada**.
4. **Cross-regional language learning:** The Court has found merit in learning more **Indian languages to strengthen the federal structure**, but the article questions whether a compulsory additional Indian language serves sufficient practical purpose when it may simply cater to the **linguistic impulses of some**.
5. **Two-language alternative:** Some experts suggest that a **two-language policy — English and the mother tongue — may be best for India**, while students can still be allowed to choose a third language and be assessed through **internal assessment rather than a Board examination**.

19. Outbound Force: The United States Is Leaving Iraq in a Weakened, If Not Defeated, Position

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, justified by claims of **WMDs and terrorist links**, led to the dismantling of the existing order, prolonged violence and a major humanitarian crisis. After more than two decades, the U.S. is leaving Iraq with **Iranian influence strengthened and the limits of American power exposed**.

From Invasion to Prolonged Instability

1. **Collapse of the Iraqi order:** The removal of Saddam Hussein was followed by the **dismantling of Iraq's political and security structure**, creating conditions for sectarian violence and a prolonged **murderous phase of the Iraq war**.

2. **Humanitarian consequences:** The conflict resulted in enormous loss of life, displacement and destruction, becoming a **"humanitarian disaster of the 21st century"**.
3. **Rise of Al-Qaeda and ISIS: Al-Qaeda in Iraq** became a major force by 2007. The **Iraqi Sunni Awakening**, along with the Sons of Iraq, pushed it back, but the militant network survived and eventually contributed to the emergence of the **Islamic State**, which captured large parts of Iraq and Syria.
4. **Iranian influence:** The removal of Saddam also removed an important regional counterweight to Iran. **Iranian influence grew inside Iraq**, including through groups such as the **Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) or Hashd al-Shaabi**.

Limits of American Power

1. **Regional consequences:** The intervention contributed to the **destabilisation of parts of West Asia**, while Iran emerged with greater influence in Iraq. The destruction of the Iraqi state therefore had consequences extending beyond Iraq itself.
2. **Afghanistan parallel:** The Iraq experience is accompanied by the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan after years of fighting the Taliban, where the Taliban ultimately returned to power. Together, the two experiences raise questions about the sustainability of prolonged U.S. military intervention.
3. **Strategic outcome:** The U.S. is leaving Iraq after enormous expenditure and prolonged military involvement, while **Iran has gained influence and American power has been exposed to significant limits**.
4. **"Weakened, if not defeated":** The larger concern is that the U.S. may have achieved neither a durable transformation of Iraq nor lasting regional stability, leaving behind a situation in which a **superpower has ultimately been pushed out of a country it invaded**.

20. Does a Visa Guarantee Entry into India?

A **valid visa does not create an enforceable right to enter India**. The Delhi High Court has held that the grant of a visa and the actual permission to enter India are **distinct matters**, governed by the powers of the competent authorities under immigration law.

Visa and Permission to Enter Are Distinct

1. **Turkmenistan citizen's case:** A Turkmenistan national holding a valid **business visa** was stopped at the Indira Gandhi International Airport and denied entry. She argued that the visa entitled her to enter India and challenged the decision under **Articles 14 and 21**.
2. **Court's distinction:** The High Court held that there is **no inherent or legally enforceable right of a foreign national to enter India merely because a visa has been issued**.
3. **Visa ≠ admission:** The grant of a visa and **permission to enter India are two distinct matters**, with the latter remaining subject to the powers of the competent authorities.
4. **Individual assessment:** The authorities can consider the circumstances of the petitioner and her **medical and business travel history** while deciding admission. The Court therefore rejected the argument that denial of entry was automatically discriminatory merely because her husband had been allowed to enter.

Legal Framework Governing Foreigners

1. **Government's power:** Under **Section 3 of the Foreigners Act, 1946**, and now **Section 7 of the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025**, the Central government can make provisions to **prohibit, regulate or restrict the entry, departure or presence of foreigners in India**.
2. **Entry requirements: Section 3** of the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 requires a foreigner seeking entry into India to possess a valid passport or travel document and a valid visa.
3. **Grounds for exclusion:** Even where these documents are possessed, a foreigner may be denied entry or stay if considered inadmissible on grounds including **national security, sovereignty and integrity of India, relations with a foreign state, or public health**.
4. **Role of immigration authorities:** Examination by the Immigration Officer is therefore important. Possession of a visa satisfies an entry requirement but does not eliminate the **discretion and statutory powers of the competent authorities**.

Constitutional Position of Foreigners

1. **Article 14:** The Court did not find that the denial amounted to discriminatory treatment merely because the petitioner's husband had been permitted entry; the authorities are entitled to assess the circumstances of each foreigner.
2. **Article 21:** Foreigners are protected by the constitutional guarantee of **life and personal liberty**, but this does not create a general right to enter or reside in India.
3. **Article 19(1)(e):** The Supreme Court in **Hans Muller of Nuremberg v. Superintendent, Presidency Jail (1955)** recognised the Central government's power under the foreigners law to expel foreigners. In **Louis De Raedt v. Union of India (1991)**, the Court held that foreigners cannot claim the fundamental right to **reside and settle in India**, which is available only to citizens.

21 . What Does Trump's AI Accord Mean for Tech Companies?

The **AI accord signed** by leading U.S. technology companies sets out voluntary safety commitments as the Trump administration seeks to encourage AI development while avoiding heavy regulation. The **White House Accord and Joint Commitments** focus on making companies responsible for building AI safely, but the framework is **not legally binding and carries no penalties**.

Voluntary Safety Commitments

1. **Four safety measures:** Participating companies have committed to **internal controls, dedicated safety teams, external audits and independent board oversight** for their AI systems.
2. **Company responsibility:** Each company is expected to develop its own systems for **safely developing and deploying AI**, regularly review and update its **safety standards and best practices**, and build public trust.
3. **Internal safeguards:** The commitments include stronger internal controls to prevent **unintended AI hacking**, safety operations and multiple layers of **internal checks and reviews**.
4. **Independent oversight:** Companies have committed to independent external audits and board-level oversight, with the aim of identifying and reporting **potential violations of the agreement**.
5. **Frontier AI:** The framework is particularly relevant to companies developing **frontier models**, where increasingly capable systems create greater safety concerns.

The central feature of the accord is that it relies on **voluntary industry commitments rather than statutory regulation**. The Trump administration presents this as a way to establish **"guardrails"** without slowing innovation through heavy-handed regulation. However, the commitments are not legally binding, and the accord does not establish penalties for companies that fail to meet them.

This creates a tension between **AI innovation and safety regulation**. Companies retain considerable discretion over how they implement their commitments, while concerns over increasingly capable AI systems continue to grow. The accord therefore represents an attempt to strengthen **corporate self-governance and accountability**, but its effectiveness will depend on whether voluntary safeguards, audits and board oversight are sufficient to manage the risks associated with frontier AI.

22 . Green Energy Corridor III: Tackling India's Renewable Power Bottleneck

The Union Cabinet has approved **Green Energy Corridor Phase-III (GEC-III)** with an outlay of **₹1.86 lakh crore** to facilitate evacuation of up to **135 GW of renewable energy**. The focus is on addressing the growing mismatch between rapidly expanding renewable generation and the transmission infrastructure needed to integrate it into the **national power grid**.

Renewable Power Bottleneck

1. **Evacuation challenge:** India's rapid expansion of renewable capacity is creating a growing **power-grid challenge**. Renewable electricity is increasingly being generated at locations where transmission capacity is inadequate, resulting in power being **curtailed or facing restrictions on evacuation**.
2. **Daytime solar generation:** Grid congestion is particularly significant during periods of **high daytime solar generation**, when renewable output can exceed the available transmission capacity.
3. **Transmission lag:** Renewable capacity has expanded faster than the associated **transmission infrastructure**, making evacuation an important bottleneck in India's renewable-energy transition.
4. **GEC-III scale:** The scheme will facilitate evacuation of **135 GW of renewable energy** and strengthen the transmission network required for integrating this capacity into the national grid.

Storage and Transmission Architecture

1. **Battery Energy Storage System:** For the first time, GEC includes a dedicated **BESS component of 50 GWh**. It will help **store excess renewable electricity during periods of high generation and dispatch it when demand rises**.
2. **Intra-State Transmission:** More than **₹1.36 lakh crore** of the ₹1.86 lakh crore outlay is allocated to **Intra-State Transmission Systems (InSTS)**, while **₹50,000 crore** is allocated for 50 GWh of BESS. Total Central financial support is **₹54,082 crore**.
3. **Greenfield and brownfield projects:** Greenfield transmission projects will be implemented through **Tariff-Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB)**, while **brownfield upgrades and network-strengthening works** will follow a **Cost-Plus Basis (CPB)**.
4. **TBCB and CPB:** Under TBCB, private transmission companies compete to develop and operate projects at a **competitively determined tariff**. Under CPB, project costs are recovered along with an approved return through a **regulated tariff**.

Implementation Challenge

1. The scheme will support renewable-energy evacuation as India expands renewable capacity, but implementation requires coordination between **State transmission utilities, private transmission companies and renewable-energy developers**.
2. GEC-III is expected to support the evacuation infrastructure required for substantial renewable expansion between **2030 and 2035**, including the development of additional InSTS infrastructure.

3. The core problem remains the **pace mismatch between renewable-energy capacity addition and transmission implementation**. This has already resulted in significant quantities of clean electricity facing **evacuation restrictions**, highlighting why transmission and storage have become critical to India's renewable-power expansion.

23. Domestic Capacity, Reforms Key amid Global Uncertainty, Says Das

India remains **"within striking distance of 8% growth"** despite global uncertainty, with **domestic capacity, structural reforms, macroeconomic stability and sustained public investment** providing resilience. The focus is on strengthening domestic demand and productivity while using emerging technologies such as AI to support future growth.

Domestic Capacity and Structural Reforms

1. **Domestic resilience:** India's economy has built greater resilience through **domestic capacity and structural reforms**, reducing dependence on external conditions.
2. **8% growth potential:** Shaktikanta Das said India is **"within striking distance of 8%" growth in Q1 of 2026-27**, building on the **7.8% growth recorded in Q1 2025-26**.
3. **Self-reliance with openness:** India should not become **"self-reliant or protectionist"**. The objective is to strengthen domestic capabilities while remaining integrated with **global markets and negotiating more free trade agreements**.
4. **Domestic demand:** Strong domestic demand remains an important cushion against global uncertainty, while continued reforms can strengthen India's **productive capacity and competitiveness**.

Macroeconomic Stability and New Growth Drivers

1. **Stable macroeconomic framework:** The combination of **low inflation, moderate fiscal deficit, manageable current account deficit and stable external-sector conditions** provides a strong foundation for growth.
2. **Public investment:** Sustained **public investment in infrastructure** has helped strengthen economic activity and create conditions for private investment.
3. **Reforms and productivity:** Continued structural reforms are necessary to raise **productivity, competitiveness and long-term growth potential**, particularly as global supply chains are being reorganised.
4. **Artificial intelligence:** AI can become an important new growth driver. Das emphasised harnessing AI to **"enhance productivity"**, while also developing the infrastructure, skills and governance needed to manage its risks.
5. **Digital infrastructure:** India's existing **digital public infrastructure** provides a base for adopting AI across sectors and supporting more efficient economic activity.

Sustaining Growth amid Global Uncertainty

The broader approach is to combine **domestic capacity with global integration** rather than choose between self-reliance and openness. With global uncertainty, trade tensions and shifting supply chains, India's resilience will depend on **diversified exports, stronger domestic production, continued reforms and sustained investment**.

The objective is therefore not merely to achieve a high short-term growth rate, but to make growth **more durable, productive and resilient** through macroeconomic stability, structural reforms and emerging technologies.

24 . High Decibel: These Birds Are Louder Than Elephants, Jackhammers and Chainsaws

Researchers studying birds in Brazil's **Serra do Mar mountains** found that the **red-legged seriema** produces calls reaching around **121–122 decibels**, making it one of the loudest known birds. The study links its unusually powerful call to the bird's vocal anatomy and offers insights into how **birdsong evolves**.

Red-Legged Seriema: An Exceptionally Loud Bird

1. **Extremely loud call:** The red-legged seriema's call can reach **121–122 decibels**, exceeding the reported sound levels of an **elephant, jackhammer and chainsaw**.
2. **Why so loud:** Researchers found that the bird's vocal apparatus produces an exceptionally powerful sound. Its **trachea and vocal structures** help amplify the call.
3. **Evolutionary significance:** The researchers are interested in how such extreme vocal traits evolve, particularly when birds develop **very different song structures and amplitudes**.
4. **Comparison with other birds:** The study measured vocal amplitude across **123 bird species**, with the red-legged seriema among the loudest birds recorded.

Measuring Birdsong and Its Ecological Significance

1. Researchers used specialised equipment to measure the **amplitude of birdsong**, taking into account the distance between the bird and the recording equipment.
2. The study also examined how differences in **birdsong amplitude, frequency and pitch** relate to the birds' vocal anatomy.
3. The research highlights that **birdsong is not simply communication through melody**; differences in vocal structures can produce major variations in sound intensity.

4. The findings add to understanding of **vocal evolution in birds**, particularly how species develop distinctive songs and extremely high sound levels.

25 . Good, Not Good Enough: India's Sports Standards Need a Raise

India's ambition to host the **2036 Olympics** faces a reality check after the **Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games**. India won **85 medals from around 500 athletes**, down from **106 medals at Hangzhou**, and secured **21 golds**, seven fewer than at Hangzhou. Although India retained fourth place, **13 golds came from team events**, while the country remained weak in medal-fetching individual sports such as **athletics, swimming, gymnastics, fencing and cycling**. In contrast, China won **341 medals, including 169 gold**, with **54 medals in swimming alone**, highlighting the gap in sporting depth.

There were encouraging signs: India fielded **310 debutants**, improved its athlete-to-medal ratio marginally ahead of **Los Angeles 2028**, and recorded notable performances by **Kumkum Mohod, Neeru Dhanda, Pranavi Urs, Sujeet Kalkal and the women's hockey team**. Women's athletes also matched men with **38 medals each**. However, **athletics and shooting**, which contributed 24 and 15 medals respectively, together yielded **12 fewer medals than in 2023**; shuttle, tennis and some established athletes also disappointed. The need now is **stricter scrutiny of athletes' funding and efficient implementation of the revamped Khelo India scheme with a long-term vision**. Without raising India's sporting standards, an Olympic hosting bid could become a **"countdown to international embarrassment."**

26. Bird Islands: India's Conservation Efforts Must Go Beyond Symbolism

The release of **11 Great Indian Bustards (Godawan)** in the Desert National Park, Jaisalmer, is part of a conservation programme targeting **97 birds**, with nine more awaiting release. But reintroduction alone cannot secure the species' future. The bird's decline is linked to **grassland degradation, irrigation, pesticides, roads and power lines**, while the Supreme Court has had to intervene over the threat from overhead power lines. The Godawan may be a **cultural symbol of Rajasthan**, but cultural importance cannot substitute for protecting the ecological conditions on which the species depends.

India has **1,256 bird species**, around **11.5% of the world's total**, yet several are declining; **skylark numbers have fallen nearly 80% and Indian rollers around 30% in 12 years**. This points to a wider problem of habitat fragmentation and intensive human use of landscapes, including the pressures created by infrastructure and renewable-energy projects. The conservation approach therefore needs to move beyond isolated species protection towards **landscape-level conservation**—protecting grasslands, wetlands, fields and ecological corridors as connected habitats. The key shift is from **"species" to "landscapes" as the unit of conservation**, combining species recovery with habitat protection and development planning.

27. The Looming Crisis of World Unemployment

A recent World Bank forecast warns that the **Global South faces a widening jobs gap**: around **1.2 billion young men and women** are expected to reach working age over the coming decade, while the global economy is projected to generate **no more than 400 million viable jobs**. This creates an estimated **800-million-job deficit**, turning what should be a major demographic dividend into a potential source of widespread instability.

Why the Traditional Development Model Is Failing?

1. **Demographic dividend under pressure:** The earlier development model assumed that declining fertility, a rising working-age population and high productivity would create savings, investment and rapid economic growth. But in many developing countries, **demographic growth is now outpacing the capacity of domestic markets, infrastructure and institutions to absorb new labour**.
2. **Premature deindustrialisation:** Manufacturing once provided the bridge from **subsistence agriculture to productive urban employment**. Today, automation, robotics and advanced industrial software are reducing labour intensity, causing developing countries to lose manufacturing jobs **before reaching the income thresholds of earlier industrial economies**.
3. **Technology-driven inequality:** The modern economy increasingly rewards **high-skilled, technology-driven labour**, widening the gap between those with access to digital infrastructure, vocational training and tertiary education and those without it.
4. **Globalisation and job creation:** The challenge is therefore not simply unemployment but the inability of economies to generate **productive, accessible and adequately skilled employment** at the scale required by their changing demographics.

What Can Generate Mass Employment?

1. **Unlock private-sector capital:** Developing economies need to dismantle **"regulatory sclerosis"** that raises the cost of capital and discourages entrepreneurship. Simplifying regulatory regimes, ensuring transparent governance and strengthening property rights can encourage **domestic enterprise and long-term FDI**.

2. **Infrastructure as a jobs multiplier:** Investment in **physical and digital infrastructure** can simultaneously generate employment during construction and reduce the cost of doing business afterwards by improving connectivity, logistics and access to markets.
3. **Agriculture and rural value chains:** Agriculture remains the **largest employer in the developing world**. Moving from low-yield subsistence farming towards **high-value, technology-enabled agriculture**, supported by cold chains, localised food processing and climate-resilient techniques, can create remunerative rural employment and reduce distress migration.
4. **Health and care economy:** Investment in **health-care workers, nurses, community health personnel and elder-care specialists** can create large numbers of resilient, non-outsourceable jobs while strengthening human capital.
5. **Tourism and labour-intensive manufacturing:** Tourism offers a **decentralised job-creation model** because it employs semi-skilled and unskilled workers and supports transport, hospitality, artisans and local services. Similarly, **light manufacturing, green-transition manufacturing and decentralised production networks** can still absorb substantial labour when combined with skill-building.

India's Demographic Window: From Potential Dividend to Employment Crisis

1. **India at the epicentre:** India sits at the centre of this global employment challenge, with **millions of young people entering the workforce every year**. Yet GDP growth has not translated into employment creation at the required pace.
2. **Narrowing demographic window:** The opportunity provided by India's young population is time-bound. If productive employment is not created during this window, the demographic dividend can turn into a **demographic disaster**.
3. **Persistent underemployment:** The challenge is not merely generating jobs, but creating **productive and remunerative employment**. Persistent underemployment limits the ability of young workers to contribute meaningfully to economic growth.
4. **Skills–jobs mismatch:** India needs stronger alignment between **skills and labour-market demand**. Education and training systems must respond to changing requirements rather than producing qualifications without corresponding employment opportunities.
5. **Low female labour-force participation:** India's employment challenge is compounded by **low female labour-force participation**. Bringing more women into productive employment would both expand the workforce and strengthen household incomes and economic growth.
6. **Agriculture's low productivity:** Agriculture still absorbs **nearly half of India's population while contributing only around 16% of GDP**, indicating a major productivity and employment-quality gap. The priority is therefore to create alternative productive employment while improving agricultural value creation.
7. **Need for labour-absorbing growth:** India cannot rely only on capital- and technology-intensive sectors. **Labour-intensive manufacturing, agriculture-linked processing, tourism, healthcare, construction and green-transition activities** can provide broader employment opportunities.

28. Why Is Buxa Bringing Tigers Back?

A **three-year-old tigress, T138**, has been released in **Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal**, beginning a phased programme to establish a **viable, self-sustaining tiger population**. Buxa, declared a tiger reserve in **1983**, has not had a resident tiger for several years, despite retaining important forest connectivity with **Bhutan and Jaldapara**. The reserve has faced **anthropogenic pressure, land-use changes and declining prey availability**. **Valmiki Tiger Reserve** was selected as the source because its terrain is similar to Buxa. Earlier tiger translocations, including the **2018 Satkosia experience**, showed that adaptation, livestock dependence, human-tiger conflict and local acceptance can determine the success of reintroduction.

The major challenge is to ensure that released tigers can establish a **breeding population and eventually become self-sustaining**. Buxa has settlements and tea gardens, with around **300 families being considered for relocation**, while a railway line and heavy commercial traffic create additional risks. The programme therefore requires **post-release monitoring, genetic assessment, movement and behavioural tracking, health assessment and preparation for further releases**. Habitat and prey availability, landscape connectivity with neighbouring forests, and community participation will determine whether Buxa can move beyond simply releasing individual tigers to establishing a **stable, viable population**.

29. Why Are States Divided Over the Mining Amendment?

The amendment to the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act** has triggered a Centre-State debate because it **curbs States' fiscal powers over mineral resources**.

Constitutional and Fiscal Stakes

1. **Entry 54, Union List:** Parliament has the power to regulate mines and mineral development, while States retain powers over **taxation of mineral rights and mineral-bearing land**.

2. **2024 Supreme Court ruling:** The Court recognised States' power to tax **mineral rights**, subject to Parliament's power to impose limitations through legislation.
3. **Amendment's concern:** The amended framework places restrictions on States' ability to impose **taxes on mineral-bearing land**, potentially limiting an important source of revenue.
4. **Unequal fiscal impact:** Mineral-related receipts account for around **85% of Jharkhand's non-tax revenue, 80% in Odisha, 48% in Karnataka, 41% in Madhya Pradesh and 39% in Rajasthan**. Hence, the impact is much greater on mineral-rich States.

Fiscal Federalism and Political Divide

1. **Different State responses:** Mineral-dependent States such as **Odisha, Karnataka and Telangana** have raised concerns, while the response has also been shaped by **political alignment with the Centre**.
2. **State autonomy:** The central concern is that limiting States' ability to raise revenue from their mineral resources could weaken their **fiscal autonomy**, especially where mineral revenue forms a substantial part of State finances.
3. **Asymmetric federalism:** India's federal structure is **asymmetric rather than purely decentralised**. Since mineral resources and revenue dependence are unevenly distributed, a common restriction can have very different consequences across States.
4. **Larger issue:** The amendment therefore brings out the tension between **Union regulatory authority and State fiscal powers**. The broader federal question is whether greater central control over mineral resources could weaken the **fiscal space and bargaining power of States**, affecting the balance of Indian federalism.

30. ECI Must Not Force Voters to Lie: Solution May Lie in a Form 6X

Problems with the Present Verification Process

1. **Burden on voters:** The SIR process requires voters to establish their eligibility through documents and declarations, even where relevant historical records may not be readily available to them.
2. **Citizenship verification:** The exercise effectively brings questions of **citizenship determination** into the electoral-roll revision process, although voters may not possess the documents needed to conclusively establish it.
3. **Risk of inaccurate declarations:** The concern is not that voters deliberately intend to misrepresent facts, but that they may be **forced to provide answers to questions they cannot know with certainty**.
4. **Documentary difficulty:** Many voters, particularly those whose families have moved or whose older records are unavailable, may face difficulties in producing the required historical documentation.

Form 6X as a Possible Solution

1. **Existing Form 6:** The present system already provides **Form 6** for inclusion of a person's name in the electoral roll, accompanied by the required declaration and verification.
2. **Need for a new mechanism:** A **Form 6X** could provide a more appropriate route for voters who genuinely lack the documents or information demanded during SIR, rather than making them give potentially inaccurate declarations.
3. **Administrative verification:** Instead of placing the entire burden on the voter, the proposed approach could allow the **election machinery to undertake verification** using available records and prescribed procedures.
4. **Principle of electoral inclusion:** Electoral-roll revision must remove **ineligible entries and duplicate or doubtful names**, but it should not create a process in which genuine voters are excluded merely because they cannot establish facts beyond their reasonable knowledge.

The larger concern is to balance **clean electoral rolls with the right of eligible citizens to remain enrolled**. Intensive verification can strengthen the credibility of electoral rolls, but excessive documentary requirements can disproportionately affect citizens who lack historical records or have limited access to documentation.

The solution therefore lies in **verification without coercion**: voters should not be forced to "lie" simply because the form demands information they cannot establish. A mechanism such as **Form 6X**, combined with verification by election authorities, could help preserve both **electoral integrity and procedural fairness**.

31. How Scientists Used Light to Control Brain Cells

The **2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine** recognised discoveries concerning **light-gated ion channels and optogenetics**. The work changed how scientists study the brain by allowing them to **control and observe individual nerve cells with light**, creating a powerful method for understanding how neural circuits function and potentially developing new therapies.

From Light-Gated Channels to Optogenetics

1. **Light-gated ion channels:** These proteins respond to light by allowing ions to pass through cell membranes, enabling researchers to influence whether a neuron becomes active.

2. **Optogenetics:** The discoveries laid the foundation for **optogenetics**, in which genetically modified nerve cells are made sensitive to light and then controlled using precisely delivered light.
3. **Precise neural control:** Instead of stimulating groups of neurons together, researchers can **switch selected nerve cells on or off** and observe the resulting changes.
4. **Understanding neural circuits:** This makes it possible to study how particular neurons and circuits contribute to **memory, learning, movement and behaviour**, rather than merely observing correlations.

From Brain Research to Potential Therapies

1. **Brain-function research:** Optogenetics has allowed researchers to manipulate individual cells and observe their effects, providing an unprecedented level of **precision and causal understanding** in neuroscience.
2. **Memory and behaviour:** By controlling specific neurons, scientists can examine how neural activity produces particular behaviours and how memories are formed.
3. **Retinal therapy:** The approach has opened possibilities for treating **retinitis pigmentosa**, where genetically modified cells may be used to restore light sensitivity and potentially improve vision.
4. **Other neurological disorders:** The technique could help develop therapies that **control abnormal neural activity**, offering possibilities beyond conventional stimulation methods.
5. **Broader significance:** The major advance is the shift from simply observing the brain to **precisely manipulating its cells and circuits**, creating both a powerful research tool and a potential foundation for new neurological therapies.

32. House Privileges vs Free Speech: The Question before Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is examining the **constitutional limits of legislative privilege** in a case involving action taken against journalists for allegedly breaching the privileges of the House. The issue is whether the legislature's power to protect its **authority and dignity** can be exercised in a manner that affects **freedom of speech, equality, personal liberty and natural justice**.

Legislative Privileges and Fundamental Rights

1. **Articles 105(3) & 194(3):** Parliament and State legislatures have privileges and immunities necessary for their functioning.
2. **Privilege vs free speech:** The dispute concerns whether legislative privilege can be used against journalists for reporting on proceedings, particularly when such action affects **Article 19(1)(a)** freedom of speech and expression.
3. **Articles 14 & 21:** The petitioners argue that legislative action must also conform to **equality, fairness and due process**, especially where serious consequences such as imprisonment are involved.
4. **The Hindu–Murasoli case:** The privileges committee acted against journalists over reports concerning legislative proceedings, eventually leading to proceedings involving the publications' editors.

Judicial Review and Constitutional Limits

1. **Can courts review privilege?** A central question is whether courts can examine the **legality of privilege proceedings and punishments** or whether such matters fall exclusively within legislative domain.
2. **M.S.M. Sharma v. Sri Krishna Sinha (1959):** The Supreme Court dealt with the relationship between **legislative privilege and freedom of speech**, including the publication of proceedings.
3. **Keshav Singh case / Special Reference No. 1 of 1964:** The Court examined the conflict between **legislative privilege and judicial power**, establishing that legislative privilege is not completely beyond constitutional scrutiny.
4. **Recent concern:** The present proceedings involve the legality of **detention/imprisonment ordered through privilege proceedings**, bringing questions of judicial review and constitutional safeguards to the forefront.

The petitioners argue that privilege cannot become a means to override **fundamental rights and basic principles of natural justice**, particularly where journalists are reporting matters of public importance. The countervailing concern is that legislatures must retain sufficient privilege to protect their **authority, dignity and effective functioning**.

The larger constitutional question is therefore not whether legislative privilege should exist, but **where its limits lie**: privilege must protect legislative functioning without becoming an **"anathema to the Constitution"**, while judicial review must respect the institutional autonomy of legislatures.

33. Break the Chain: India Must Focus on Cutting Transmission of Leprosy

India has reduced the prevalence of leprosy and **grade-2 disability**, but continued transmission remains a concern. Prevalence had fallen below **1 case per 10,000 population by 2005**, leading to WHO's declaration of leprosy as a **"public health problem" eliminated**. However, transmission began rising again in the early 2010s. The priority now is therefore to **cut transmission**, in line with the **National Strategic Plan (NSP) and Roadmap for Leprosy 2023–27**.

Key Concerns and Way Forward

1. **Child transmission:** India accounted for around **46% of all child leprosy cases reported worldwide in 2025**, highlighting the need for stronger child-focused detection and prevention.

2. **Concentrated burden: Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Maharashtra** account for a disproportionate share of the national burden.
3. **Slow progress:** Against the projection of **300 districts** achieving "interruption of transmission", only **148 districts** had achieved it in 2025–26.
4. **Detection and prevention:** More than **70 crore people** were screened in highly endemic areas in 2025–26, with **24,367 cases detected through screening**; ASHA workers also identified suspected cases, of which **48,027 were confirmed**.
5. **Surveillance and diagnosis:** India has operationalised **digital surveillance** and is considering the **MPV vaccine** for highly infectious patients. Persistent **lacunæ in case detection**, late diagnosis and misdiagnosis as ordinary skin conditions continue to sustain transmission.
6. **Targets need recalibration:** The 2025-26 report **overshot projections** for overall incidence by **41%**, childhood incidence by **91.6%** and grade-2 disability by **34%**. India therefore needs to strengthen efforts in **locations and social settings where diagnosis and transmission remain entrenched**, rather than easing efforts after meeting prevalence-based targets.

The focus should move from simply reducing prevalence to **actually interrupting transmission**, with prevalence becoming a **secondary outcome**.

34. Let There Be Light: The Nobel Laureates for Medicine Illuminated How the Brain Works

The **2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine** was awarded to **Karl Deisseroth, Peter Hegemann and Georg Nagel** for discoveries concerning **light-gated ion channels and optogenetics**. Hegemann's work on *Chlamydomonas* showed how a light-sensitive algal protein could open a channel and allow charged ions to flow into cells, while Nagel helped establish the role of the **blue-light-sensitive protein**. Deisseroth transformed this into a **light-controlled switch for nerve cells**, making it possible to study how specific neural circuits regulate **memory, emotions and behaviour**.

Optogenetics uses **harmless viral agents to deliver genes for light-sensitive proteins into specific target cells**, after which precise pulses of light can activate selected neural pathways. This has enabled researchers to map neural circuits in ways that were previously difficult or impossible and has provided the **groundwork for clinical treatments** targeting neurological and psychiatric conditions, including **Alzheimer's disease and addiction**. Researchers are also exploring its use in **restoring sight**.

The work also demonstrates how fundamental scientific discoveries can move towards **practical therapies, diagnostics and healthcare applications**. At the same time, the benefits of such advances need to reach people **irrespective of their location or station in life**, making equitable access an important part of translating scientific progress into better health outcomes.

35. Indian Research Can Shape the World

India's technological challenge is not simply to **catch up** with advanced countries, as dependence on external licences and know-how can become a burden. The experience of Indian research contributing to **CRISPR technology** shows that investment in fundamental research can move from **curiosity to application** and create technologies with global impact.

What India Needs to Change?

1. **Invest in high-quality research:** Build strong **fundamental research** capabilities and connect them more effectively with practical applications.
2. **Open national laboratories:** National labs should become more accessible to **researchers, students and companies outside their walls**, enabling greater interaction with universities and industry.
3. **Create research "foundries":** Experimental spaces in **engineering, physics, biology, chemistry and mathematics** can allow young researchers to work with real instruments on real problems.
4. **Reduce regulatory burden:** High-quality institutions that already comply with regulations should not face excessive **General Financial Rules compliance**. Accountability should be measured by **outcomes rather than procedure at every step**.
5. **Speed up approvals:** Research involving **biological materials and clinical trials** faces slow and unpredictable approvals. Reducing these hurdles is particularly important for **small and medium-sized institutions** that cannot afford prolonged delays and costs.

The central shift is therefore from **"catching up" to building the capacity to create**. India already has high-quality research institutions and scientific talent; the priority is to make these **pockets of excellence the norm** and translate scientific capability into globally relevant technologies.

36. Why Growing Trust in Digital Payments May Be Leaving Indians More Exposed to Cybercrime

UPI has become one of India's most trusted and frequently used payment modes, but the SPIR 2026 findings reveal a **trust paradox**: people who trust online banking the most and use UPI most frequently are also more likely to have experienced cybercrime.

UPI processed over **24,000 crore transactions in FY 2025-26**, worth around **₹314 lakh crore**, making its scale—and therefore the potential cybercrime surface—enormous.

The Trust–Vulnerability Paradox

1. **UPI dominance:** Around **70% of India's internet-connected population** uses UPI. Nearly **49%** of respondents use UPI every day, while another **24%** use it once or twice a week.
2. **Frequency of use:** UPI is used **"many times" by 48%**, compared with **20% for debit/credit cards, 14% for payment wallets and 7% for NEFT/RTGS**.
3. **High perceived safety:** Around **23% of respondents considered online banking modes "very safe" and about 40% "somewhat safe." Among highly vulnerable users, however, the figures were much higher — **49% considered them "very safe" and 39% "somewhat safe."**
4. **Victimisation rises with trust:** Among those who considered online banking **"very safe", 28% had been victims of cybercrime**, compared with only **14% among those who never used online banking**. UPI users were also more likely to have experienced cybercrime than those who never used it.
5. **Behavioural vulnerability:** High trust can coexist with unsafe practices—such as opening **unverified links, files or OTPs from unknown callers**—creating opportunities for fraudsters.

How the Cybercrime Ecosystem Exploits Trust?

1. Cybercrime increasingly operates through a **supply chain**, with fraudsters using **pre-activated SIM cards, bank accounts and cell phones** to receive and move stolen money.
2. A relatively small investment in such **"kits"** can enable fraudsters to swindle large amounts, while making the transactions difficult to trace.
3. Fraudsters also **recruit users as intermediaries**, leaving them exposed to police action while the actual perpetrators remain difficult to identify.
4. The deception can continue after the initial fraud: victims may be persuaded to **share personal information** or even hand over their bank accounts after being manipulated into believing they were unknowingly involved in a crime.

The central concern is therefore not a lack of trust in digital payments, but **excessive trust without corresponding cyber-awareness**.

37. G7 to Release 100 mn Barrels of Crude Oil, Oil Products: Will This Curb Diesel Prices?

The G7 has agreed on a coordinated release of around 100 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products from emergency reserves to ease pressure on global fuel markets. The move comes amid a wider **global supply crunch and soaring fuel prices**, with diesel demand remaining strong across transport, agriculture, construction and other industries. However, the release may provide only **temporary relief** if the underlying supply disruptions persist.

Why Diesel Prices Are Rising and Will the Release Help?

1. **Supply disruption:** Diesel prices have risen sharply amid tighter global oil markets and reduced supply.
2. **Geopolitical pressures:** The G7 move comes against the backdrop of **geopolitical crises and supply disruptions**, with Europe particularly affected by reduced diesel imports from **Russia and the Middle East**.
3. **G7 intervention:** The release of **100 million barrels** from emergency reserves is intended to increase supply and ease pressure on fuel prices. Countries will also examine **additional diesel releases** if required.
4. **Limited impact on prices:** The measure can provide short-term relief, but the article notes that its effectiveness depends on how quickly the additional supply reaches markets and whether the broader **global supply crunch** continues.
5. **Diesel export ban:** The US has **not banned diesel exports**. Such a move could have reduced global supply further, but the US has continued to export diesel even as domestic prices have risen.

Impact on India

1. **Import dependence:** India's high **crude-oil import dependence** makes it vulnerable to global oil-price shocks, which can transmit into domestic diesel and other fuel prices.
2. **Industrial impact:** Higher diesel prices raise costs for **transport, agriculture, construction and other industries**, potentially increasing the cost of production and distribution.
3. **Inflationary pressure:** Expensive diesel can feed into the prices of goods and services through higher **transportation and logistics costs**.
4. **Retail consumers:** Consumers may face higher costs where diesel is used directly, while **public-sector fuel prices** may also be affected.
5. **Trade-off:** The G7 release may soften global prices temporarily, but sustained relief for India will depend on the **duration of the supply disruption, global oil availability and international diesel prices**.

38. Through 'Ghost Particles' in Ice, Window to Universe

The **2026 Nobel Prize in Physics** recognised **Francis Halzen** for decisive contributions to the **IceCube Neutrino Observatory** and the discovery of **high-energy neutrinos of astrophysical origin**. Neutrinos are electrically neutral subatomic particles produced in a wide range of nuclear and particle interactions. **High-energy astrophysical neutrinos originate in extremely energetic cosmic environments and can travel vast distances without being deflected by magnetic fields.**

Neutrinos and the IceCube Observatory

1. **"Ghost particles":** Neutrinos are extraordinarily difficult to detect because they **rarely interact with matter**. **Trillions of neutrinos pass through Earth every second**, with most passing through matter undetected.
2. **Why they are scientifically valuable:** Since neutrinos are not deflected by magnetic fields, their direction can retain information about their **astrophysical sources**, unlike many charged cosmic particles.
3. **IceCube:** Located at the **Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station in Antarctica**, IceCube uses the Antarctic ice as a giant detector. It became operational in **2011**.
4. **How detection works:** Thousands of light-sensitive detectors are embedded deep in the ice. When a neutrino interacts with matter, it can produce a **charged particle** that travels through the ice and generates a faint **flash of light**. IceCube detects these flashes and reconstructs the neutrino's direction and energy.
5. **Why Antarctica:** The enormous volume of clear, deep Antarctic ice provides a suitable medium for detecting the extremely rare interactions of neutrinos.

From Neutrino Detection to a New View of the Universe

The significance of IceCube goes beyond detecting neutrinos. **High-energy astrophysical neutrinos** can travel from distant cosmic sources and carry information about energetic processes that cannot be studied adequately through conventional electromagnetic observations. Their detection has therefore opened a new field of **neutrino astronomy** and provided scientists with another way of studying the cosmos.

IceCube has detected **extremely high-energy neutrinos** and helped scientists investigate their possible astrophysical origins. The work demonstrates how neutrinos can act as **messengers from the distant universe**, revealing phenomena that may otherwise remain hidden. Thus, the Nobel-recognised work transformed Antarctic ice into a giant scientific observatory and established **neutrino detection as a new window into the universe**.

39. A War in Iran, an Election in America, and the Blurred Lines Between Politics and Conflict

Iran's **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)** is attempting to influence the American political debate by appealing directly to U.S. voters. Its 25-page letter urges Americans to reject Trump's policies and consider **"peaceful coexistence"** with Iran, arguing that military and economic pressure could force the Islamic Republic to fall. With the **U.S. midterm elections** approaching, the economic and political consequences of the Iran conflict are becoming increasingly difficult to separate from the military campaign.

Iran–US Conflict Enters the Political Arena

1. **IRGC's appeal:** While retaining its **"Death to America"** slogan, the IRGC claims it has no quarrel with ordinary Americans and makes Trump the immediate political target.
2. **Electoral calculation:** The appeal appears aimed at using the **war's economic and political costs** to influence American public opinion and debate over Iran policy.
3. **Historical precedent:** Iran's **1979 Revolution and hostage crisis** became intertwined with the **1980 U.S. presidential election**, contributing to the political difficulties faced by Jimmy Carter.
4. **Trump's calculation:** Trump maintains that the midterms will not determine his Iran policy, but his comments about the war potentially being won **"right after the election"** give the military campaign an unmistakable political dimension.
5. **New front of conflict:** Both sides increasingly view the other's **domestic political contest as another front**, alongside the conventional battlefield.

Oil, Hormuz and Economic Pressure

1. **Strait of Hormuz:** Gulf crude exports averaged about **16.3 million barrels a day in September**, roughly **91% of pre-war levels**, as oil flows through the Strait have accelerated.
2. **Oil ≠ cheaper fuel:** More crude moving through Hormuz does not automatically mean cheaper diesel in the U.S.; crude must still be **transported, refined and distributed**.
3. **Fuel-price politics:** Diesel prices directly affect **transportation and cost of living**, making energy prices an important domestic political issue in the U.S.
4. **G7 intervention:** The G7's decision to release **100 million barrels of crude and fuel products from emergency reserves** aims to ease market pressure, but sustained escalation could push prices higher again.

5. **US economic pressure: "Operation Economic Outcast"** has expanded sanctions to Iran's **automotive, rail, manufacturing and steel sectors**, while foreign financial institutions have been warned about sanctions for doing business with Iran.
6. **Iran's leverage:** Tehran seeks to exploit the relationship between **military escalation, oil prices and American public opinion**, while the U.S. uses sanctions and economic pressure to constrain Iran.

Larger Lesson: Domestic Politics as a Strategic Front

1. The conflict demonstrates how **war, elections, fuel prices, sanctions and public opinion** can become interconnected.
2. Iran is attempting to turn the **economic costs of war into political pressure** on Trump, while Washington combines military and economic pressure against Tehran.
3. The distinction between the **battlefield and the political arena** is therefore becoming increasingly blurred.
4. For democracies such as India, the broader lesson is that **political differences are inevitable**, but excessive domestic polarisation can weaken a country's ability to respond to **external challenges and interference**.
5. Effective foreign-policy engagement therefore also requires **managing political differences at home**, so that domestic conflict does not undermine national capacity to deal with a turbulent external environment.

40. Higher Yields in US Test India's Macro Resilience

Rising **10-year U.S. Treasury yields above 5%** and a narrowing India-US yield spread are testing India's ability to absorb global financial volatility. However, stronger domestic fundamentals provide some resilience.

External Pressures

1. **Higher-for-longer rates:** Elevated U.S. yields raise global borrowing costs and reflect concerns over U.S. fiscal and debt sustainability.
2. **India-US yield spread:** The spread has narrowed to around **200 basis points**, increasing pressure on Indian yields, capital flows and the rupee.
3. **Crude risk:** The **US-Iran conflict** could push Brent higher, raising imported inflation and weakening the rupee. When Brent approached **$98/barrel**, India's 10-year yield moved towards **7%**.
4. **Other risk:** A possible **AI bubble burst** could add to global financial volatility.

Why India Has Some Resilience?

1. **Strong fundamentals:** Fiscal deficit is moving towards **4% of GDP**, inflation is within the target band, the current account is stable and **forex reserves remain ample**.
2. **Domestic capital:** Rising **retail and domestic institutional participation** has strengthened the domestic capital base and reduced dependence on foreign investors.
3. **Borrowing costs:** Higher global yields can raise borrowing costs for both Centre and States; recent **State Development Loan auctions** have seen yields around **7.9%**.
4. **Overall:** India has greater capacity to withstand global volatility, but **higher-for-longer U.S. yields, crude-price shocks and tighter financial conditions** require close monitoring as policy space to absorb further shocks is limited.

41 . Eyes on Ice

The Nobel Prize in Physics recognising **Francis Halzen** for the **IceCube Neutrino Observatory** highlights both the scientific value of detecting neutrinos and the tension between the Nobel tradition of recognising **individual achievement** and the increasingly **collective nature of modern science**.

IceCube and the Study of Neutrinos

1. **IceCube Neutrino Observatory:** Built at the **South Pole**, it consists of thousands of sensors embedded up to **2.5 km beneath the ice**, connected by cables to a central facility.
2. **Neutrino detection:** Neutrinos constantly pass through matter but interact very rarely. When they interact with atoms in the ice, they produce a **small flash of light**, which sensors detect and use to reconstruct the neutrino's energy and direction.
3. **High-energy neutrinos:** IceCube has detected **extremely high-energy neutrinos**, providing scientists with clues about the **origins of cosmic particles** and strengthening neutrino astronomy.
4. **Large-scale collaboration:** The IceCube collaboration consists of **more than 400 experts from 14 countries**, spanning astrophysics, engineering and software development, highlighting the increasingly collaborative character of scientific research.

Nobel Recognition and Collective Science

1. The Nobel Foundation's rules recognise **individuals**, even though major scientific achievements increasingly depend on **large research teams, shared infrastructure and international collaboration**.

2. The Nobel tradition has often rewarded individuals who are seen as representing major scientific breakthroughs, but the IceCube achievement demonstrates how difficult it is to separate individual contribution from the **collective effort behind modern scientific discoveries**.
3. The broader concern is that Nobel recognition can become an **"outdated model of scientific recognition"** when breakthroughs are produced by large, interdisciplinary collaborations.
4. At the same time, the recognition of Halzen highlights the importance of **long-term scientific leadership and institution-building** in turning collective research into major discoveries.
5. The larger lesson is that **modern science increasingly depends on extensive cooperation**: no individual is an island of scientific achievement, even when recognition ultimately goes to a few individuals.

42. From the Brink to a Comeback: Hope for India's Wildlife

India's wildlife conservation is showing signs of recovery in several species, but the gains depend on moving beyond isolated species protection towards **habitat protection, scientific monitoring and community participation**. The article highlights examples ranging from the **Great Indian Bustard, vulture and Nilgiri tahr** to **dugong, rhinoceros and snow leopard**.

Conservation Gains and Key Initiatives

1. **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats:** Supports recovery of **24 identified species and their habitats**, combining habitat restoration, protection, research and community participation.
2. **IUCN Red List:** Of **7,516 Indian animal species assessed for the IUCN Red List, 1,012 are threatened**. However, these assessments cover only about **7.2% of India's documented animal species**, highlighting the need for a comprehensive National Red List Assessment.
3. **Vulture recovery:** The decline caused by **diclofenac** shows how scientific intervention, regulation and monitoring can reverse a conservation crisis. In Madhya Pradesh, the vulture count rose from **8,397 in 2019 to 12,981 in 2025**.
4. **Species-specific recovery:** Projects such as **Project Nilgiri Tahr**, **dugong conservation in Palk Bay**, rhino conservation in Assam and **snow leopard monitoring in the Himalayas** combine population assessment with habitat protection.
5. **Technology: Camera traps, radio-collaring, satellite monitoring and genetic analysis** are making wildlife conservation more scientific and data-driven.

What Makes Conservation Sustainable?

1. **Habitat is central:** Species recovery cannot be sustained through reintroduction or population recovery alone; **habitat restoration and protection** remain essential.
2. **Landscape approach:** Wildlife populations require **connected habitats and corridors**, particularly where infrastructure and human activity fragment ecosystems.
3. **Community participation:** Conservation is more durable when local communities are involved in **monitoring, habitat management and livelihood-linked conservation**.
4. **Long-term monitoring:** Population assessments, scientific surveys and regular monitoring are necessary to ensure that apparent recovery translates into **stable populations over time**.
5. **Political and financial commitment:** Conservation plans need **successive budgets, trained personnel and ground-level implementation**, rather than short-term programmes.

43. PM Moots 'Can-Do Attitude' to Reach Development Goals

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, marking **25 years in public office**, called for a **"can-do attitude"** and a shift from a **"will do it" to "we will do it"** mindset to achieve India's development goals by **2047**. He highlighted the role of **140 crore citizens**, particularly the youth, in building a developed India, while recalling India's progress in poverty reduction, with **25 crore people moving out of poverty** over the past decade.

He also emphasised **self-reliance, public participation and collective responsibility**, citing the transformation of India's **space sector, Olympics performance and G20 presidency** as examples of what a confident India can achieve. Recalling his experiences with **public life**, he stressed that national development requires citizens to move beyond individual aspirations and contribute to a **larger national purpose**, with the ultimate vision of making India a **"developed nation" by 2047**.

44. India's Trade Caught in the Middle

India's **trade surplus with the U.S.** is important because it partly offsets the country's large **structural trade deficit with China**. A high U.S. tariff, however, can weaken this surplus, put pressure on the **rupee and foreign-exchange reserves**, and expose the vulnerability of India's export dependence.

Trade Imbalance and Rupee Pressure

1. **Two-sided trade position:** India runs a **trade surplus with the U.S.**, while maintaining a large trade deficit with China. The U.S. surplus therefore provides an important counterbalance to the China deficit.
2. **Export dependence:** A heavy U.S. tariff can reduce India's exports to the U.S., narrowing this surplus and worsening the overall **external imbalance**.
3. **Rupee pressure:** Lower export earnings mean lower dollar inflows. If demand for dollars exceeds supply, the **rupee can depreciate**, making imports more expensive and putting pressure on inflation and the external sector.
4. **Foreign-exchange reserves:** Persistent pressure on the rupee can require intervention by the **RBI**, potentially leading to depletion of foreign-exchange reserves.
5. **Iran crisis:** The article links the situation with the **Iran crisis and Strait of Hormuz**, where a rise in oil prices can further increase India's import bill and intensify pressure on the rupee.

Why India Needs to Diversify?

1. **Tariff as a wake-up call:** The U.S. tariff threat should be treated as a signal to reduce excessive dependence on a single export market.
2. **Diversification of markets and products:** India needs to broaden both its **export markets and product mix**, rather than relying heavily on the U.S. market.
3. **Services provide some cushion:** India's **services trade surplus with the U.S.** is significant, but it cannot fully compensate if the goods-trade surplus comes under sustained pressure.
4. **Global value chains:** India needs stronger participation in **global supply chains and export-oriented manufacturing** to create a broader and more resilient export base.
5. **Deeper integration with the Global South:** If U.S. trade restrictions persist, India should expand trade opportunities across **Global South markets**, rather than allowing the loss of one market to disproportionately affect overall exports.

45 . GPS Study Aims to Reduce Human–Animal Conflicts in Assam

A GPS-based study is tracking **Asian elephants in Assam** to understand their movement across human-dominated landscapes and develop better ways to reduce **human-elephant conflict**. The study has generated **more than 38,000 GPS locations from four female-led herds and a solitary male elephant**, providing detailed evidence on elephant movement and areas where their paths overlap with human activity.

Key Findings and Conservation Approach

1. **Movement mapping:** GPS tracking is being used to map elephant movements and identify **conflict-prone areas and movement routes**.
2. **Major landscapes studied:** The study tracked elephants in the high-conflict districts of **Udalguri, Sonitpur and Biswanath**, with **Sonai-Rupai, Behali and Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuaries** emerging as important elephant habitats.
3. **Habitat fragmentation:** Expansion of **agriculture, infrastructure and settlements** has increasingly brought elephants into human-dominated areas, raising the possibility of conflict.
4. **Early-warning potential:** Real-time or regular GPS-based movement information can help authorities and communities **anticipate elephant presence**, allowing preventive action before encounters occur.
5. **Corridor protection:** Maintaining **traditional elephant movement routes and habitats** is important, as disruption of corridors can push elephants towards settlements and agricultural fields.
6. **Community participation:** Conservation needs cooperation from communities living around elephant habitats, particularly for **early warning, crop protection and conflict reduction**.

46 . India's Cement Footprint Stands in Its Way to Net-Zero Emissions

Cement is deeply embedded in modern construction, but its production is highly carbon-intensive. **Limestone calcination itself releases CO_2**, while extracting limestone also has environmental costs. This creates a major challenge for India's **net-zero ambitions**, especially as construction demand continues to rise.

Why Cement Is a Net-Zero Challenge?

1. **High carbon footprint:** Cement contributes around **8% of global CO_2 emissions**. Emissions arise not only from energy-intensive production but also from the **chemical process of limestone calcination**.
2. **Entrenched dependence:** Portland cement dominates modern construction because of its **strength, durability and versatility**, making it difficult to replace at scale.
3. **Resource and ecological cost:** Limestone extraction can involve **deforestation and damage to fertile land**, adding environmental costs beyond the sector's direct emissions.

4. **Need to reduce clinker:** Greater use of **industrial waste and alternative materials** can reduce the amount of clinker required and lower cement's carbon intensity.
5. **Existing alternatives:** Before Portland cement became dominant, India and other regions used **lime, lime-surkhi, mud, clay, gypsum and natural pozzolanic binders**. These offer possibilities for lower-carbon construction.

Decarbonising Construction

1. **Alternative fuels and materials:** The sector can reduce emissions through greater use of **alternative fuels, waste-derived materials and lower-carbon binders**.
2. **Green construction:** Traditional and locally adapted construction techniques can complement modern materials, particularly where they provide adequate **strength, durability and climate suitability**.
3. **Traditional knowledge:** Practices such as **Kath-Ki-Pattal construction in Himachal Pradesh** and traditional wooden construction in parts of **northern and northeastern India** show how local materials and techniques can reduce dependence on conventional cement.
4. **Policy support:** The **NITI Aayog roadmap** recommends increasing the use of **RDF (refuse-derived fuel) and industrial waste** to reduce the carbon intensity of cement production.
5. **Beyond substitution:** Completely replacing cement is difficult because of its **relative cost, versatility and widespread use**. The transition therefore requires a combination of **cleaner production, lower clinker use, alternative materials and appropriate traditional construction practices**.

47. RBI's Focus on Inflation Is Timely

The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee has raised the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.5%, while inflationary pressures have become more pronounced. With growth remaining resilient but global and domestic inflation risks rising, the RBI's renewed focus on price stability is timely.

Inflation and Growth

1. **Rate hike:** The MPC **raised the repo rate by 25 basis points from 5.25% to 5.5%**, with all six members voting in favour. The stance was also shifted from **"neutral" to "calibrated tightening."**
2. **Inflation pressures:** Retail inflation had risen to around **4.8% in August**, with **core inflation also picking up**, indicating that price pressures were becoming broader.
3. **Food prices:** The decline in headline inflation has been supported by **falling food prices**, though the article cautions against assuming that low food inflation will persist.
4. **Growth resilience:** India's economy has remained resilient despite global uncertainty. **Q1 FY27 GDP growth was 7.8%**, supported by domestic demand.
5. **External risks:** The **Russia-Ukraine conflict, West Asia conflict and trade tensions** could create renewed inflationary pressures through commodities and supply disruptions.

Why the RBI's Caution Matters?

1. With inflation moving above the RBI's 4% target and expected to rise further in the near term, the RBI has greater reason to prioritise price stability even as growth remains robust.
2. **Global uncertainties** can quickly affect commodity prices and domestic inflation, making a cautious monetary stance appropriate.
3. The broader challenge is to balance **price stability with growth support**, especially when domestic growth is resilient but external conditions remain uncertain.

48. Behind the Central Bank's Pivot, Need to Safeguard Price Stability

The RBI's **25-bps rate hike in the October MPC review** reflects a shift in policy thinking as inflation risks have become more pronounced.

Inflation Risks Are Becoming Broader

1. **West Asia conflict:** Repeated escalation has kept commodity markets volatile. Crude is now expected at around **$89–93/barrel** for the year, with higher prices raising inflation through petrol and diesel.
2. **Food inflation:** Food prices remain a major vulnerability because they are India's **most volatile inflation component**. Recent increases reflect both **base effects and emerging supply concerns**.
3. **Monsoon shock:** The 2026 monsoon ended **13% below the long-period average**, with over **42% of districts classified as deficient**. Reservoir storage was also below normal, raising risks for **rabi production, soil moisture and agricultural output**.

4. **El Nino risk:** Intensifying El Niño conditions, combined with West Asia-related supply disruptions, could push food prices higher globally. India imports over **55% of its edible-oil requirements**, while domestic edible-oil inflation has already remained elevated.
5. **Core inflation broadening:** Inflation risks are no longer confined to supply shocks. With stronger-than-expected growth, price pressures are gradually spreading beyond **food and fuel into core inflation**.
6. **Key historical lesson:** When **supply-driven price pressures coincide with robust growth**, inflation can broaden beyond a narrow set of categories and become harder to contain.

Growth Resilience but Tighter Financial Conditions

1. **Strong growth:** GDP growth has exceeded expectations, prompting the RBI to raise its growth forecast for the fiscal to **7.1% from 6.7%**; CRISIL expects **7.0%**.
2. **Global monetary tightening:** Bond yields in advanced economies have risen sharply. The **India-US 10-year yield spread has narrowed to around 200 bps**, from over 400 bps a few years ago, reducing the relative attractiveness of Indian government securities.
3. **External financial pressure:** The **US Fed raised rates by 25 bps in September**, while the ECB and Bank of Japan have also retained a tightening bias.
4. **Liquidity remains strong:** RBI mobilisation of **foreign-currency non-resident deposits** has strengthened forex reserves and the balance of payments, but has also injected substantial liquidity into the financial system.
5. **Policy tension:** This creates a tension between **ample domestic liquidity and tighter monetary conditions**, making the inflation-growth balance more complex.
6. **Way forward:** The RBI's policy stance is becoming more **broad-based and growth-resilient**, but policymakers need to remain **highly vigilant on price developments**. Future rate decisions should remain **data-dependent**, particularly as another rate hike cannot be ruled out if inflationary pressures persist.

49. Where Light Stops, Neutrinos Begin

Light cannot escape or travel freely through some of the universe's most extreme environments, whereas **neutrinos** can pass through matter with almost no interaction. This makes them a powerful new messenger for studying otherwise inaccessible cosmic phenomena.

1. **"Ghost particles":** Neutrinos have **tiny mass, no electric charge and very weak interactions with matter**, allowing them to pass through the Earth almost undisturbed.
2. **IceCube Observatory:** Located at the **South Pole**, IceCube uses around **5,000 optical sensors** embedded up to **2.5 km below the ice**. When a neutrino interacts with an atom, it can produce a **charged particle**, generating a faint flash of light that the sensors detect.
3. **How it works:** The direction and energy of the detected particle can be reconstructed, allowing scientists to trace the neutrino back towards its possible cosmic source.
4. **2013 breakthrough:** IceCube detected **high-energy neutrinos from beyond the Solar System**, providing evidence that these particles can reveal astrophysical phenomena invisible to conventional astronomy.
5. **Tracing cosmic sources:** In **2017**, a single neutrino helped link a high-energy event to a **blazar**, a galaxy whose core contains a supermassive black hole. This demonstrated the potential of neutrinos to identify distant cosmic sources.
6. **Multi-messenger astronomy:** Neutrinos can complement **light, gravitational waves and cosmic rays**, offering a more complete picture of extreme events such as **black holes and exploding stars**.
7. **Scientific significance:** The central shift is from observing the universe only through light to detecting what it reveals through **particles that can travel through otherwise opaque cosmic environments**. IceCube has therefore opened a new frontier in **astronomy and astrophysics**.

50 . To Fight in the Arena, However Imperfect, Is the Only Way to Strengthen Democracy

Concerns over the **Election Commission's conduct and continuing questions over its impartiality** have triggered a debate on whether opposition parties should continue contesting elections under conditions described as a **"managed democracy"**, or withdraw from elections as an act of non-cooperation.

The Case for Boycotting Elections

1. Electoral participation under compromised conditions may be seen as **legitimising institutional weakening** and a system perceived to be rigged.
2. **Boycott and non-cooperation** can become powerful forms of resistance, refusing to legitimise democratic institutions that are believed to have been compromised.

3. **Gandhi and the Indian freedom struggle** provide a historical precedent for using **boycotts, non-cooperation and civil disobedience** to challenge authority.
4. However, **colonial India and a sovereign constitutional democracy are fundamentally different contexts**: the latter provides common citizenship, constitutional institutions and avenues for political contestation.
5. Therefore, the historical precedent of the freedom struggle **cannot be directly transplanted** to the present democratic context.

Why Contesting Elections Still Matters

1. In a democracy, **elections are a central mechanism for contesting power**. Boycotting them does not necessarily weaken the government; it may allow it to retain control over the political machinery.
2. Even imperfect elections provide a unique platform to **raise critical issues, expose executive overreach and present alternative visions** for the country.
3. **Participation does not mean endorsement**: opposition forces can contest elections while simultaneously questioning electoral irregularities and demanding institutional reforms.
4. Electoral campaigns allow political forces to highlight **local issues, policy failures and candidate accountability**, while forcing governments to respond.
5. Political parties must therefore **work within the system while pressing for reforms**, rather than surrendering the electoral arena altogether.
6. Electoral engagement also sustains **political organisation, public mobilisation and deliberative and electoral culture**.
7. Elections are only **one channel of democratic resistance**; they can be combined with public mobilisation, institutional scrutiny and demands for reform.

Democratic Renewal Through Contestation

1. **Authoritarian systems are rarely weakened by moral appeals or voluntary abstention**; they are challenged through **persistent and organised resistance, including at the ballot box**.
2. **Hungary** illustrates how opposition forces, by contesting elections and mobilising protests, can continue to challenge and expose an entrenched ruling party despite an imperfect political environment.
3. Democracy is a **"muscle that needs exercise"**; prolonged electoral withdrawal can cause democratic and organisational **atrophy**.
4. Contesting elections does **not require accepting a flawed process**; electoral participation can coexist with demands for accountability, institutional reform and greater transparency.
5. Elections should therefore be viewed not as **"sacred rituals"**, but as **arenas for contestation and renewal**.
6. The real choice is not between **blind faith and boycott**, but between **engagement and withdrawal**. Even imperfect elections can provide the arena through which democratic forces **challenge executive overreach, mobilise citizens, present alternatives and strengthen the republic**.

51. Nobel Prize in Chemistry: Mirror-Image Molecules and the Chemistry of Life

The Nobel Prize in Chemistry recognises Henri B. Kagan and Kenso Soai for their discovery of non-linear effects and autocatalysis in asymmetric organic synthesis, work that helps explain why life and many medicines depend on one particular form of a molecule.

Chirality and homochirality: Some molecules exist in two **mirror-image forms (enantiomers)** that have the same composition but different spatial arrangements, like left and right hands. While a mixture normally contains both forms, life shows a strong preference for only one — **homochirality**. Amino acids used in proteins, for instance, predominantly occur in one form. Kagan's work showed that even a **mildly chiral catalyst** could produce a much stronger preference for one form, revealing that the relationship between catalyst chirality and product proportion was **non-linear**.

Autocatalysis and significance: Soai built on this understanding by exploring **autocatalytic reactions**, in which the product itself acts as a catalyst for producing more of the same product. A small initial imbalance could therefore be amplified dramatically, with experiments producing **99.5% of one enantiomer**. This has significance for understanding the **mystery of life's homochirality** and for medicines: **thalidomide** showed how mirror-image forms can have very different biological effects, while selective production of a desired enantiomer can avoid the costly and difficult separation of unwanted forms. The chemistry also has applications in **flavours, fragrances and agricultural chemicals**.

52 . 'Greatest Headache': Constituent Assembly on Appointing Election Commission

The appointment of Election Commissioners was a **constitutional concern from the beginning**, with the Constituent Assembly debating how to ensure the electoral referee remained independent of the government of the day.

Constituent Assembly's Concern

1. **Shibban Lal Saxena (1949)** opposed giving the President unrestricted power to appoint Election Commissioners, arguing that the government should not be able to **"choose the referee"** for an election in which it was itself a contestant.
2. He proposed appointment by a **two-thirds majority in Parliament**, to prevent one political party from installing its own nominee.
3. **H.N. Kunzru** raised concerns over political influence in election administration, citing allegations of provincial governments interfering with election officials.
4. He argued that safeguards were necessary so that Commissioners could act **"fearlessly"** and that electoral democracy was not **"poisoned at the source."**

The Constitutional Compromise

1. **B.R. Ambedkar** described the issue as one of the Drafting Committee's **"greatest headaches."**
2. The eventual arrangement gave the Election Commission **constitutional status under Article 324** and protected the Chief Election Commissioner from easy removal. However, Article 324 left the appointment mechanism to be regulated by Parliament by law, and Parliament did not enact such a law for 74 years
3. In **Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023)**, the Supreme Court ruled that, until Parliament legislated, appointments should be recommended by a committee comprising the **Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and Chief Justice of India** — intended to prevent any one side from controlling the outcome.
4. Parliament subsequently enacted the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023**, replacing the CJI with a **Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister**. Thus, **two of the three members effectively answer to the same political authority**

The Present Debate: Independence & Perception

1. The issue is **not whether individual Election Commissioners are competent or personally biased**; most may perform their duties honestly.
2. The deeper question is whether the **institutional architecture gives the government, itself an electoral contestant, disproportionate influence over the appointment of the referee**.
3. **Actual impartiality is not enough**: the Election Commission must also **appear to be impartial**, because public trust is central to the credibility of elections.
4. This was precisely the **structural concern raised by Saxena and Kunzru in 1949**: safeguards should not depend on who happens to be Prime Minister at a particular moment.
5. The debate therefore concerns **institutional design rather than individual character** — a referee whom no side fully trusts risks becoming, for practical purposes, **no referee at all**.

53 . Adequate Response

After months of waiting, the **RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has raised the repo rate by 25 basis points** to contain rising inflation. With food prices, crude oil and a deficient monsoon adding to price pressures, further rate increases remain possible.

Inflation Outlook and Monetary Policy

1. The RBI projects retail inflation at 4.9% in Q2, 6% in Q3 and 5.7% in Q4, with inflation expected to ease only marginally towards the end of the financial year.
2. Global oil prices and a deficient monsoon are pushing up food prices, while higher petrol and diesel prices could add to inflationary pressures.
3. The **25-basis-point rate hike** is a cautious nudge rather than an inevitably belated intervention. The larger signal is the shift **from a "neutral" to a "calibrated tightening" stance**.
4. The question is no longer whether the RBI will raise rates again in December, but by how much. The MPC has signalled that it will use the tools at its disposal to keep inflation in check.
5. The RBI has revised its **FY27 GDP growth forecast from 6.7% to 7.1%, but the trade-off between growth and inflation remains central to monetary policy.** Higher interest rates may dampen consumption and investment, while also influencing foreign portfolio investor (FPI) flows.

54. Understanding Gandhi's Re-emergence in India's Oppositional Politics

Gandhi's return to opposition politics reflects wider political churn, with protests, citizen action and emerging movements demanding accountability and systemic change.

Gandhi as a Symbol of Political Renewal

1. **Bottom-up mobilisation:** Gandhi remains relevant to movements seeking to mobilise citizens, challenge political monopolies and demand systemic change.

2. **Democratic accountability:** Recent protests against electoral institutions reflect concerns over institutional independence and the need for greater accountability.
3. **Social justice:** Grassroots activism against violence and discrimination draws inspiration from Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar, linking political participation with social equality.
4. **Regional political change:** Emerging movements challenge established political structures shaped by caste, religion and patronage.

Contestation over Gandhi's Legacy

1. **Gandhi versus Savarkar:** Competing political narratives seek to replace Gandhi's pluralist vision with Hindu nationalism, portraying Savarkar as a symbol of strength and Gandhi as weak and excessively accommodating towards Muslims.
2. **Pluralism versus majoritarianism:** The ideological contest concerns competing visions of Indian nationalism, religious accommodation and national identity.
3. **Caste and race:** Gandhi's positions on caste, race and women remain contested, while colonial historiography's caste–race framework may obscure his attempts to challenge caste hierarchies.
4. **Selective interpretation**: Gandhi's critics highlight problematic aspects of his views, but selective readings can also be used to diminish his wider contribution to political and social change.
5. **Global contestation:** Debates over statues, monuments and campus activism demonstrate that Gandhi's legacy remains contested in international intellectual and political circles.

Contemporary Relevance

1. **Social transformation:** Gandhi's central insight is that politics must change society from the bottom up, rather than focus only on capturing political power.
2. **Beyond electoral victory:** Elections alone cannot guarantee accountability; citizens must actively demand it and political actors must respond to societal needs.
3. **Non-violent resistance:** Gandhi's methods provide legitimacy to movements challenging injustice through peaceful protest and civic participation.
4. **Collective consciousness:** His legacy continues to inspire struggles for justice, dignity and accountability in India and beyond.

55 . As Yemen Flares Up, a Test for Mecca Pact

The intensifying Yemen conflict, involving Saudi-backed government forces and the Iran-backed Houthis, risks widening the US–Iran confrontation and testing the Saudi–Pakistan defence pact.

Yemen Conflict and Regional Escalation

1. **Strategic geography:** Fighting along the Red Sea has intensified as Saudi-backed forces seek to secure the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, through which nearly 12% of global maritime trade passes.
2. **Iran–Saudi rivalry:** The Houthis, backed by Iran, seized Sanaa in 2014, triggering Saudi intervention. The 2022 UN-brokered truce largely froze the fighting and gave the Houthis time to regroup. However, the fragile truce collapsed in July 2026 amid renewed escalation.
3. **Failed military campaigns:** US and British strikes in 2024, followed by a sustained US bombing campaign in 2025, failed to defeat the Houthis. Israeli strikes on Houthi-controlled targets also failed to eliminate the group.
4. **Wider conflict:** The fighting has intensified amid the US–Iran confrontation, while escalation in Yemen could complicate any US–Iran settlement and deepen regional instability.

Saudi–Pakistan Pact and the Diplomatic Dilemma

1. **Mecca Pact under test:** Yemen is the first real test of the Saudi–Pakistan defence pact, raising questions about whether Pakistan would support Saudi Arabia militarily.
2. **Pakistan's dilemma:** Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif referred to Pakistan and Turkey's presence in the theatre, but only Saudi troops were engaged in combat. Neither Pakistan nor Turkey has shown much appetite for joining an anti-Houthi offensive, given the risk of being drawn deeper into the regional conflict.
3. **Strategic calculations:** Islamabad recognises that financial support for Saudi Arabia could help protect its interests, but direct intervention risks drawing Pakistan deeper into a long-running regional conflict.
4. **Escalation versus settlement:** A political resolution involving the Houthis and the Yemeni government appears difficult, but another prolonged military campaign could be even more damaging.
5. **Regional implications:** The conflict tests whether Saudi Arabia's security partnerships can deter threats without widening the war, while exposing the limits of military intervention in resolving Yemen's protracted conflict.

56. GST Reforms for Growth, to Face Global Headwinds

The **57th GST Council meeting** advanced reforms to improve compliance, simplify taxation and reduce business difficulties, as global economic headwinds threaten India's growth prospects.

Key GST Reforms

1. **Rate rationalisation:** A simplified two-slab structure of 5% and 18%, alongside a special 40% rate for specified sin and luxury goods, seeks to rationalise taxation.
2. Faster refunds: The period for issuing a refund acknowledgement or deficiency memo is to be reduced from 15 days to 10 days. For eligible zero-rated supply and inverted-duty-structure claims, 90% of the claimed amount is to be sanctioned provisionally through an automated, risk-based system, easing working-capital constraints.
3. **Simplified registration:** Automatic acceptance of routine registration changes, such as adding a new office, aims to reduce delays and harassment.
4. **Reduced prosecution burden:** The prosecution threshold has been raised from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore, while the general penalty threshold has been reduced from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000. Existing relief for small businesses will continue.
5. **Input tax credit:** The Council recommended expanding eligibility for input tax credit to cover certain employee health and life insurance expenses.
6. **Enforcement and trade facilitation:** The Council recommended removing GST arrest provisions, raising the prosecution threshold from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore, reducing the general penalty from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000, and restricting goods inspections and seizures to authorised officers of the supply or destination State.

Significance for Growth

1. **Ease of doing business**: Faster refunds and simpler procedures can reduce compliance costs and improve liquidity, particularly for small firms.
2. **Single national market:** Businesses should be able to scale across States without first establishing a place of business in every State.
3. **Growth amid global headwinds**: Lower tax-related friction and more effective process reforms are essential to sustain domestic demand and support India's growth prospects.

57 . Beyond Forms: The Nobel for Anne Carson

The Nobel Prize in Literature recognises Canadian poet, essayist, translator and classicist Anne Carson for her literary experimentation and distinctive blending of classical traditions with contemporary experience.

1. **Genre experimentation**: Carson dismantles boundaries between poetry, prose, scholarship and personal reflection, creating new forms of contemporary literature.
2. **Classical reinterpretation**: Eros the Bittersweet explores desire through ancient Greek literature, while Autobiography of Red reimagines Greek mythology as a contemporary coming-of-age narrative.
3. **Literary significance**: Her work brings the classical into dialogue with the contemporary through unusual juxtapositions, challenging conventional literary forms without losing historical specificity.
4. **Contemporary relevance**: The Nobel recognises the possibilities of human imagination and creativity. Amid AI-generated content and polarised debates, Carson's work resists reducing complex human experiences to simplistic conclusions.

58. Delivery Completed: GST Reforms and Taxpayer Compliance

Recent GST Council reforms signal a shift towards greater trust in taxpayers and reduced anxiety over tax administration, addressing long-standing concerns over compliance requirements and enforcement.

Key Reforms

1. **Simplified compliance:** Reforms target complexities in registration, return filing, refunds and litigation, which have burdened businesses, particularly small firms.
2. **Input Tax Credit (ITC):** Genuine buyers have been denied ITC because suppliers failed to file returns, tying up working capital. The GST Council has tasked a committee with finding a solution that can be implemented by April 1.
3. **Enforcement safeguards:** The Council has called for removing arrest powers of GST officers for specified offences and tightening rules on inspections, searches and seizures to prevent misuse.
4. **Simpler administration:** A faceless assessment system is being introduced for Central GST-registered companies, modelled on the faceless system used in income-tax administration. Applications for the composition scheme will also be made available online.
5. **Predictable taxation:** GST rates will be reviewed only once a year to reduce uncertainty for businesses.

Significance

1. **Reduced compliance burden:** Simplifying procedures can reduce paperwork, delays, refunds-related difficulties and litigation.
2. **Taxpayer confidence:** The reforms recognise that, after years of GST implementation, taxpayers have become familiar with the system, but compliance requirements and enforcement practices continue to create difficulties.
3. **Original GST vision:** As GST enters its tenth year, the focus is on fulfilling the promise of a simpler, unified tax system through administrative reform, fewer disputes and greater trust in taxpayers.

59 . BRICS in a Fragmented World Order: A Test of Relevance

The **18th BRICS Summit** in New Delhi (September 12–13, 2026) achieved unanimous adoption of the New Delhi Declaration. India's chairmanship demonstrated its ability to reconcile divergent views, but the summit's diplomatic success must be assessed against BRICS' limited economic integration and growing internal imbalances.

New Delhi Declaration: Consensus and Strategic Autonomy

1. **Global governance reform**: The declaration called for reform of the UN, IMF and World Bank to reflect contemporary economic and demographic realities and give developing countries a greater voice.
2. **Economic cooperation:** Proposals included local-currency trade, interoperable cross-border payment systems, the BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy 2030 and the Global Value Chain Action Plan 2026–2030.
3. **Multilateralism:** BRICS advocated WTO reform, including a two-tier dispute-settlement mechanism, alongside diplomacy, political solutions and a rules-based multilateral trading system.
4. **Development cooperation**: The declaration addressed energy, climate, health, agriculture and food security. On AI, it supported international cooperation in governance and wider access to computing resources, research and innovation.
5. **West Asia:** BRICS supported Palestinian self-determination and a just, lasting settlement based on international law, alongside de-escalation and humanitarian access in Gaza.
6. **India's diplomatic approach**: Unanimous adoption reflected India's emphasis on strategic autonomy, consultation and consensus. The participation of leaders including Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin gave the summit political weight, while the expanded 11-member grouping highlighted BRICS' growing reach and internal diversity.

Diplomatic Consensus versus Strategic Reality

1. **Substantive progress or diplomatic spectacle?** The atmosphere of bonhomie and consensus suggested progress beyond ceremonial diplomacy. However, the declaration's ambitions must be measured against the limited fulfilment of BRICS' original demands.
2. **Variable geometry:** The international order increasingly favours ad hoc cooperation and pragmatic coalitions based on shared interests rather than firm alliances founded on common values and intentions.
3. **Pragmatism over common purpose:** The first BRIC summit at Yekaterinburg in 2009 preceded major changes in the international order. BRICS' evolution reflects the wider shift from multilateralism towards plurilateralism, making expectations of a consistently united grouping unrealistic.
4. **Unfulfilled agenda:** The original BRIC grouping—Brazil, Russia, India and China, with South Africa joining later—sought greater representation in global institutions and reduced dependence on Western financial systems. These demands remain substantially unmet.
5. **Weak economic integration:** Despite expanding trade opportunities, BRICS has failed to become a sufficiently integrated economic bloc capable of standing alongside the Bretton Woods institutions. The writer therefore questions whether it can deliver the multipolar economic order it advocates.
6. **A possible alternative model:** Rather than dismissing BRICS as obsolete, the text suggests it might function as a pragmatic, issue-based coalition—comparable in some respects to Europe's "coalition of the willing"—without necessarily becoming a cohesive strategic alliance.

The China Factor and BRICS' Future

1. **Growing asymmetry:** China's economic predominance since 2009 has translated into political influence far exceeding that of other BRICS members, creating a serious imbalance within the grouping.
2. **Challenge to multipolarity:** China's growing global weight complicates BRICS' opposition to Western hegemony. Its ability to exert influence comparable to major powers raises questions about whether it still fits comfortably within the grouping's Global South identity.
3. **India–China tensions:** Despite diplomatic efforts and steps towards disengagement following the 2020 Galwan clash, bilateral relations remain uneasy. The unresolved boundary question and strategic competition continue to affect BRICS' internal cohesion.

4. **Limited collective action:** The calm and consensus visible at the New Delhi Summit do not necessarily translate into the ability to act in unison in a fragmented international order.
5. **India's strategic dilemma**: BRICS membership provides a platform for diplomatic engagement, but it does not automatically confer additional political or economic strength when power within the grouping is so unevenly distributed.
6. **Risk of irrelevance:** The central warning is that the growing imbalance in economic strength and political influence within BRICS may contain the seeds of its future irrelevance, despite the hopes expressed in the New Delhi Declaration.

60 . Why Navi Pillay's Work Matters for a World Facing 'Existential Challenges'?

The 2026 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to South African jurist Navanethem "Navi" Pillay for her contribution to international law and accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Career and Landmark Contributions

1. Overcoming discrimination: Born to an Indian Tamil family whose grandparents arrived in Africa as indentured labourers, Pillay experienced racial discrimination under apartheid. She became the first woman of colour to practise law in Natal Province and serve on South Africa's High Court.
2. Rwanda Tribunal: As a judge at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for eight years, she contributed to accountability for the 1994 genocide, in which around 800,000 people were killed.
3. Landmark precedent: The tribunal recognised rape as a means of perpetrating genocide, strengthening international criminal law and the prosecution of sexual violence.
4. Nuremberg Trials: The trials established an important precedent for individual accountability for atrocities and state-sponsored violence.

International Justice and Contemporary Relevance

1. Accountability mechanisms: Pillay's later work included the International Court of Justice case concerning alleged genocide against Rohingya Muslims and a UN inquiry into the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including allegations concerning Palestinian children in Gaza.
2. Rule of law: Her work reinforces the principle that war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide must be prosecuted, rather than allowed to go unpunished.
3. Justice as a condition for peace: Pillay argues that justice is essential to lasting peace, particularly after major conflicts, and requires sustained international support and supervision.
4. Collective responsibility: Amid ongoing wars and humanitarian crises, her message is that states must collectively uphold international law and protect people suffering from violence.

61. How India's Growth Rate Keeps Beating Forecasts

India's growth has repeatedly exceeded professional forecasts, raising questions about the accuracy of economic projections and their ability to capture the economy's actual performance.

Forecasts vs Actual Growth

1. RBI forecasting record: The Reserve Bank of India's Survey of Professional Forecasters has been conducted every two months since September 2007.
2. GVA–GDP distinction: The comparison uses the median forecast for real GVA and actual real GVA. GDP is derived by adding net product taxes to GVA, so comparing GVA forecasts directly with GDP growth would not be like-for-like.
3. GVA–GDP distinction: Forecasts of real Gross Value Added (GVA) and actual GDP growth measure different aspects of economic activity; their comparison requires care.
4. Historical pattern: Until FY 2021–22, actual real GVA growth was mostly below forecasts made at the start of the financial year. Since FY 2022–23, actual growth has more often exceeded forecasts.

Why Forecasts Have Missed?

1. Unforeseen disruptions: COVID-19 and the Russia–Ukraine war complicated economic projections and altered the economic environment.
2. Demonetisation: For FY 2016–17, the median real GVA growth forecast fell from 7.7% in March 2016 to 6.7% in March 2017, while actual real GVA growth was 8%.
3. Pre-pandemic performance: It also draws attention to growth in years such as 2016–17 and 2019–20, questioning whether the economy's performance was adequately captured by forecasts.
4. Recent revisions: Revised GDP estimates have changed the assessment of growth in recent financial years, making comparisons with earlier forecasts more complex.

62. The Rights and Restrictions Around Holding Protests

Article 19(1)(b) of the Constitution guarantees the right to assemble peacefully and without arms. The denial of permission for a protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar raises questions about the balance between public order, police powers and citizens' constitutional right to protest.

Constitutional Right to Protest

1. Fundamental right: Article 19(1)(a) protects freedom of speech and expression, while Article 19(1)(b) guarantees peaceful assembly. These rights are subject to reasonable restrictions under Articles 19(2) and 19(3), respectively.
2. Right versus regulation: In Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018), the Supreme Court recognised the need to balance peaceful demonstrations with residents' rights and the regulation of public spaces.
3. No blanket prohibition: Authorities must regulate demonstrations through appropriate measures rather than ban them altogether. The requirement of prior permission must not become a convenient way to reject every protest.

Police Guidelines and Permission Requirements

1. Advance application: Delhi Police guidelines ordinarily require applications to the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) at least 10 days before a proposed demonstration at Jantar Mantar. Late applications may be considered depending on circumstances and availability.
2. Assessment of applications: Applications follow a first-come, first-served basis and are reviewed by the Special Branch, traffic police and New Delhi district police. Authorities consider traffic obstruction, public safety and the time available for arrangements.
3. Revocation of permission: Permission may be revoked because of unforeseen developments, including VIP security requirements or intelligence inputs. Reasons must be duly recorded and communicated to organisers.
4. Venue restrictions: Jantar Mantar has a gathering limit of 1,000 people. Larger demonstrations may be directed to Ramlila Maidan, which can accommodate up to 50,000 people.

Remedies When Permission Is Denied

1. Reconsideration and alternatives: Organisers may seek reconsideration, respond to the reasons for refusal, or propose a smaller gathering, shorter duration or alternative venue. The DCP's decision is otherwise described as final and binding under the standing order.
2. Judicial review: Organisers can approach the Delhi High Court under Article 226 if refusal is arbitrary, unsupported by the guidelines or inconsistent with the right to peaceful assembly.
3. Prohibitory orders: Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) empowers a magistrate to issue orders restricting assemblies in specified circumstances. Under Sections 163(5) and 163(7), an aggrieved person may seek rescission or alteration; the magistrate must provide an opportunity to be heard and record reasons for rejection.
4. Judicial safeguards: In Ram Lila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary (2012), the Supreme Court stressed that restrictions must rest on an actual and prominent threat to public order and be exercised cautiously, without arbitrariness. Babulal Parate v. State of Maharashtra (1961) recognised the right of affected persons to challenge a magistrate's order.
5. Consequences of disobedience: Continuing a protest despite a lawful order, or violating its conditions, may attract action under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for disobeying a lawful order issued by a public servant.

63 . Survival, Habitat: Challenges in Rewilding Great Indian Bustard

In October 2026, captive-bred Great Indian Bustards (GIBs) were reintroduced into the wild at Rajasthan's Desert National Park, marking a significant milestone in efforts to conserve this critically endangered species.

GIB Decline and Rewilding Initiative

1. Population decline: The wild GIB population fell from an estimated 1,260–1,400 in the early 1970s to around 150. About 130 (±20) remain in Rajasthan, while the rest are found in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.
2. Habitat destruction: Grasslands have been converted into croplands, mining areas and energy infrastructure, while collisions with high-voltage power lines pose a major threat.
3. Conservation programme: The Centre and Rajasthan government launched the bustard and lesser florican project in 2012–13, which was expanded from 2014 with funding for conservation breeding. From 2019, wild GIB eggs were collected, artificially incubated and the chicks hand-reared at conservation centres. The first release of captive-bred GIBs into the wild took place at Desert National Park in October 2026.
4. Breeding and release: A rewilding initiative began in 2013–14, followed by funding support in 2014. Since 2019, captive-bred birds have been released into Desert National Park.

Grassland Restoration and Rewilding Challenges

1. Grasslands as neglected ecosystems: Unlike forests, grasslands are often treated as wastelands and converted for agriculture, infrastructure and other uses, accelerating habitat degradation.
2. Release and adaptation: Before release, birds undergo preparation at a soft-release facility developed by the Wildlife Institute of India. Released birds must adapt to natural food sources, predators and movement patterns.
3. Monitoring: Satellite transmitters help conservation teams track birds' movements and assess their adaptation to the wild.
4. Habitat restoration: Long-term recovery requires protection and restoration of grasslands, especially in former range states beyond Rajasthan. Similar rewilding efforts in other states will depend on suitable habitat and reduced infrastructure-related mortality.
5. Long-term survival: Rewilding success depends on more than captive breeding; birds must survive independently and establish a sustainable population in their natural habitat.

Infrastructure Threats and Legal Protection

1. Power-line collisions: Overhead power lines remain a major threat to GIB survival, creating a difficult balance between infrastructure development and species conservation.
2. Supreme Court intervention: In a landmark case concerning GIB protection, the Supreme Court examined measures to protect the species while accommodating energy infrastructure.
3. Mitigation measures: The debate concerns underground power lines, power-line marking and the identification of priority areas where protective measures are most necessary.
4. Conservation priority: Long-term recovery requires coordinated action on grassland protection, habitat restoration, scientific monitoring and infrastructure-related mortality, rather than relying on reintroduction alone.

64. Rights and Wrongs: The Government Must Not Clamp Down on Dissent and Protest

The Constitution guarantees every citizen the fundamental right to peaceful assembly and protest, irrespective of gender, caste or status. However, police action against protesters in Delhi—including detentions, cancellation of travel arrangements and alleged assaults on activists, academics, journalists and lawyers—raises concerns over the curtailment of civil liberties and shrinking space for dissent. The reported use of force against women protesters, despite video evidence, further highlights concerns about police accountability.

The Supreme Court, while hearing a challenge to a proposed ban on travel or assembly, acknowledged the urgency of the issue. However, repeated judicial interventions have not necessarily restrained the government's approach towards critics, including the branding of dissenters as anti-national. The controversy surrounding Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar further raises questions about the use of political power to defend institutional actions. The government must uphold constitutional rules, protect peaceful dissent and remain accountable to citizens rather than misuse state power against them.

65. Message of Peace: The Nobel Committee Has Redeemed Itself by Awarding the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize to Navi Pillay

The 2026 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to South African jurist Navi Pillay seeks to restore the credibility of the Nobel Committee amid criticism of its earlier decisions. Pillay's work has strengthened international criminal law through her roles at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as her leadership of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the Rwanda Tribunal, she contributed to the landmark recognition of rape as a means of perpetrating genocide, establishing an important precedent in international criminal law. Her career reflects a sustained commitment to accountability for war crimes and sexual violence.

Pillay's recognition comes amid growing challenges to international law, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Israel's continued operations in Gaza and the US military intervention in Venezuela illustrate concerns over violations of international norms and the weakening of multilateral institutions. The Nobel Committee's message is that the fight to strengthen international law and the institutions that uphold it is essential to a more peaceful and accountable world.

66. The Gaps in the Implementation of the RTI Act

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, requires public authorities to proactively disclose information under Section 4(1)(b). However, inadequate suo motu disclosure and weak compliance with transparency audits continue to undermine the Act's objective of reducing the need for citizens to file RTI applications.

Gaps in Proactive Disclosure

1. **Mandatory disclosure:** Section 4(1)(b) of the RTI Act specifies the categories of information that public authorities must disclose suo motu. Additional proactive-disclosure guidelines also cover matters such as public-private partnerships, procurement and information on RTI applications received.

2. **Incomplete audit coverage:** Of 2,303 public authorities registered with the Central Information Commission (CIC), only 1,446 (62.7%) submitted third-party audit reports. Around half of these reports scored Grade C or below, indicating compliance below 80%.
3. **Poor website transparency:** Among 94 government department websites examined, only 33 had reportable section-wise scores and compliance classifications. Seven had outdated audit reports, 43 had no report, seven lacked complete audit details, three lacked complete reference or scoring information, and one did not display its report.
4. **Limited assessment scope:** The assessment covered departments under the Central Government's online RTI filing portal; therefore, its findings do not represent every public authority in the country.
5. **Formal versus meaningful disclosure:** Merely uploading incomplete, outdated or inadequate information does not fulfil the objective of proactive disclosure. Citizens need accessible, complete and updated information.

Implications for Transparency and Accountability

1. **Continued dependence on applications:** The persistence of RTI applications, alongside the accumulation of pending appeals and complaints before information commissions, highlights the importance of effective proactive disclosure.
2. **Administrative burden:** Weak implementation of Section 4 increases the effort required by citizens to obtain routine information and places additional demands on public authorities and information commissions.
3. **Strengthen compliance:** Public authorities must publish complete and updated information across all 16 categories, conduct regular third-party audits and make audit findings publicly accessible.
4. **Institutional monitoring:** The CIC and State Information Commissions must strengthen monitoring of disclosure practices and ensure that transparency audits lead to actual improvements.

Effective implementation of Section 4 should make information routinely accessible without requiring citizens to file individual RTI applications, strengthening transparency and administrative accountability.

67 . Why UAPA Demands Urgent Reform

The prolonged incarceration of Professor G.N. Saibaba highlights how vague provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), stringent bail conditions and inconsistent judicial interpretation can undermine civil liberties, due process and the rule of law.

Prolonged Incarceration and Due Process

1. **G.N. Saibaba's case:** The 90% disabled former Delhi University professor was arrested in 2014 under UAPA over alleged links with Maoists, convicted in 2017 and sentenced to life imprisonment. The Bombay High Court acquitted him in 2022, but the Supreme Court intervened; he was ultimately acquitted in 2024.
2. **Human cost of detention:** Saibaba spent nearly a decade in prison, during which his health deteriorated. His case highlights the consequences of prolonged incarceration, particularly for persons with serious disabilities.
3. **Bhima Koregaon case:** Sixteen scholars and activists were arrested in 2018. Years later, the trial had still not begun, illustrating how accused persons can remain imprisoned without a judicial determination of guilt.
4. **Other cases:** Father Stan Swamy died in custody in 2021. Several other accused secured bail only after spending years in prison, raising concerns about timely justice and humane treatment.

Vague Provisions and Judicial Inconsistency

1. **Ambiguous membership:** UAPA provisions concerning membership of unlawful organisations have raised questions about whether alleged association alone is sufficient for prosecution or whether evidence of active involvement in unlawful activities is necessary.
2. **Inconsistent interpretation:** Courts have differed in interpreting the meaning of membership and the conduct required to establish an offence, creating uncertainty in the application of the law.
3. **Restrictive bail:** Stringent bail conditions make release difficult even when proceedings are substantially delayed, increasing the risk that detention becomes punishment before conviction.
4. **Presumption of innocence:** Prolonged incarceration without trial weakens due process, particularly when the accused cannot secure bail and the evidence has yet to be fully tested.

Need for Legal and Procedural Reform

1. **Judicial discretion:** Courts must assess the evidence and the legal basis for detention rather than treating allegations or organisational links as sufficient grounds for prolonged incarceration.
2. **Proportionality:** Restrictions imposed in the name of national security must be proportionate and consistent with constitutional protections.
3. **Timely trials:** Delays in commencing and completing trials undermine the fairness of proceedings, particularly when stringent bail provisions keep accused persons in custody.

4. **Legal clarity**: Clearer definitions of unlawful membership and terrorist activity, consistent judicial standards and effective safeguards against arbitrary detention are necessary.
5. **Balancing security and liberty**: Counter-terrorism legislation must protect national security without weakening civil liberties, due process and judicial accountability.

68 . Drought Report: Centre Must Support States After Inter-Ministerial Findings

Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are facing severe drought-like conditions, with rainfall deficiencies, crop losses and rising demand for relief. The key concern is ensuring that scientific drought assessment is followed by timely central assistance, without allowing procedural delays to deepen farmers' distress.

Drought Assessment and Relief

1. **Rainfall deficiency:** Karnataka recorded a nearly 35% rainfall deficit during June–September, while Andhra Pradesh experienced a 53% deficit.
2. Drought declarations: Karnataka declared 217 of 240 taluks drought-hit, while Andhra Pradesh declared 388 of 688 mandals drought-hit.
3. Financial assistance: Karnataka sought ₹11,000 crore from the NDRF, along with higher input subsidies. Andhra Pradesh allocated ₹190 crore to protect horticultural crops and directed measures for drinking-water conservation.
4. **Objective assessment:** Earlier drought declarations sometimes relied on subjective or exaggerated claims to maximise state support. Updated assessment guidelines and Finance Commission decisions have tightened the process.

Centre–State Coordination and Long-term Resilience

1. **Timely central support**: The Centre must release assistance once inter-ministerial findings confirm drought conditions, rather than allowing procedural delays to prolong farmers' hardship.
2. **State-level responsibility:** States must demonstrate greater discipline in water management and rationing while ensuring that relief reaches affected farmers and landowners.
3. **El Niño risk**: Warnings indicate a possible strengthening of El Niño, although further study is needed to establish its causal relationship with the present drought conditions.
4. **Water-efficient agriculture:** Andhra Pradesh has promoted micro-irrigation and less water-intensive crops, but implementation remains incomplete.
5. **Long-term resilience:** Measures should include drought-resistant crops, groundwater conservation, crop diversification and reliable income support for farmers.
6. **Relief cannot wait:** The prospect of a better monsoon or improved agricultural conditions must not become an excuse to postpone immediate assistance. Long-term resilience measures must complement, not replace, urgent drought relief.

69. Contextualising WWF's Report on Wildlife Population Decline

The 2026 Living Planet Report, published by WWF, estimates an average 73% decline in the size of monitored vertebrate wildlife populations between 1970 and 2022. The 2024 report also reported a 73% decline, using data through 2020. The updated 2026 assessment incorporates additional populations and a longer monitoring period, so successive estimates are not directly comparable.

Understanding the Living Planet Index

1. **Population decline, not extinction:** The LPI measures changes in the abundance of monitored wildlife populations, not the percentage of species that have become extinct or the number of individual animals lost globally.
2. **Diverse population trends:** Across 35,803 monitored wildlife populations, the average decline was 73%. However, 50% of populations declined, 43% increased and 7% remained stable.
3. **Changing estimates:** The 2026 report retains the headline estimate of a 73% average decline in monitored wildlife population sizes between 1970 and 2022. The 2026 dataset incorporates additional population data and a longer monitoring period, so successive editions of the index are not directly comparable. The 69% decline refers to terrestrial populations, not the global headline figure
4. **Statistical interpretation:** The index uses the geometric mean of changes across monitored populations. This captures broad trends but can conceal substantial variation between individual populations.

Regional Variation and Conservation Implications

1. **Uneven geographical decline**: Latin America and the Caribbean recorded the steepest average decline, at 95%, followed by Africa at 80% and Asia–Pacific at 49%. Europe and Central Asia recorded a decline of 23%.
2. **Habitat loss:** The primary driver of biodiversity loss is habitat destruction, particularly the conversion of land for agriculture and other human activities.

3. **Ecosystem-specific pressures**: Freshwater and tropical ecosystems face substantial pressure from habitat degradation and changes in local environmental conditions.
4. **Targeted conservation:** The findings call for directing conservation resources towards regions and populations experiencing severe decline rather than assuming that all wildlife populations are deteriorating uniformly.

70. Nobel Prize in Economics 2026: How to Keep an Economy Stable Using Policy Tools

The 2026 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to Robert E. Hall of Stanford University and Michael Woodford of Columbia University for their work on the microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation. Their research strengthened the theoretical basis of modern macroeconomic models, helping policymakers reduce economic fluctuations and respond more effectively to crises.

Evolution of Macroeconomic Stabilisation

1. Great Depression (1929): The stock-market crash triggered widespread bank and business failures. US GDP fell by around 30% and unemployment reached 25%. The crisis exposed the limitations of laissez-faire economics and the assumption that markets would automatically correct themselves.
2. Keynesian intervention: John Maynard Keynes argued that governments should reduce taxes and interest rates and increase public expenditure during downturns, even through deficit financing. Conversely, taxes and interest rates could be raised when the economy overheated.
3. Stagflation challenge: The oil shocks of the 1970s produced simultaneous high inflation and unemployment. Stimulating growth risked worsening inflation, while fighting inflation could increase unemployment, exposing the limitations of conventional Keynesian prescriptions.
4. Microeconomic foundations: From the late 1970s, Hall and Woodford strengthened macroeconomic analysis by grounding it in the actual behaviour of households and firms, rather than relying on simplified relationships between variables such as inflation and unemployment.

Hall and Woodford: Understanding Economic Behaviour

1. Household consumption: Robert E. Hall examined how households decide how much to consume and save, drawing on individual household data. His 1982 research highlighted hand-to-mouth households, which largely spend their current income rather than increasing consumption simply because they expect higher future income.
2. Firm pricing: Michael Woodford examined firms' production and pricing decisions under changing economic conditions. Since firms do not adjust prices continuously, their decisions depend partly on expectations about future conditions, including interest rates.
3. Policy expectations: Expectations about future monetary policy influence present-day economic decisions. Understanding how households and firms respond to policy announcements therefore helps explain inflation dynamics and the transmission of monetary policy.

Relevance for India and Economic Stabilisation

1. Inflation management: The RBI's interest-rate increases to contain inflation illustrate the role of monetary intervention. Higher crude oil and commodity prices amid the US–Iran conflict and the Strait of Hormuz blockade, alongside deficient rainfall and El Niño-related heat, can intensify inflationary pressures, particularly in food prices.
2. Protecting households: If inflation rises unchecked, households with limited incomes must devote a larger share of expenditure to essential goods, cutting other consumption. This can weaken businesses, contribute to job losses and prolong economic recovery.
3. Fiscal intervention: During the economic slowdown surrounding COVID-19 and lockdowns, the Union government reduced direct taxes, including personal income and corporate taxes, and indirect taxes such as GST to support consumption and investment. These measures complemented the RBI's interest-rate cuts.
4. Reducing economic fluctuations: Fiscal and monetary policies can cushion economic shocks and support recovery. Research grounded in household and firm behaviour helps policymakers better anticipate how interventions affect consumption, investment, prices and employment.

71 . Spiralling Food Prices

Retail inflation rose to 5.54% in September, an almost two-year high, bringing it close to the RBI's upper tolerance limit of 6%. Rural households have borne the greatest impact of rising inflation, driven by food prices, crude oil costs and geopolitical uncertainty.

Key Drivers of Inflation

1. Rural–Urban Divide: Rural inflation reached 6.08%, compared with 4.88% in urban areas. Rural food inflation stood at 8.06%, while urban food inflation was 7.18%.

2. Food Price Surge: Combined food inflation rose from 5.97% in August to 7.74% in September. Rural food inflation increased from 6.17% to 8.06% over the same period.
3. Weather Risks: The festive season added to inflationary pressures for rural households already facing deficient monsoon conditions. El Niño-related risks to harvests and incomes, alongside unseasonably high temperatures, could further increase food prices.
4. Crude Oil Prices: The Indian crude basket rose from $82.04 per barrel in July to $116.09 in September, an increase of about 41%, raising freight, production and distribution costs.
5. Geopolitical Risks: The US–Israel war on Iran and uncertainty surrounding the Strait of Hormuz could sustain crude oil price pressures.

Economic and Policy Implications

1. Service Inflation: Inflation in personal care, social protection and miscellaneous goods and services reached 13.75%. Restaurants and accommodation services recorded inflation of 9.36% in September.
2. FPI Outflows: Foreign portfolio investors withdrew a record ₹3.08 trillion ($32.73 billion) from Indian equities during the first nine months of the year, amid domestic and global uncertainty.
3. Rupee Depreciation: The rupee depreciated by about 7% against the dollar over the year to early October. The article links the pressure to domestic concerns, global uncertainties and foreign capital outflows.
4. RBI Intervention: The RBI's special dollar facility for oil-marketing companies helped ease immediate pressure on the rupee, alongside other measures.
5. Monetary Policy: The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee raised the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.50% in October, following its previous increase in February 2023. The committee projected that food inflation could reach 6% by March, near the RBI's upper tolerance limit.
6. Policy Limitations: Although the RBI's measures helped the rupee recover, the currency remains vulnerable to persistent geopolitical risks, with the West Asia conflict posing a continuing threat of imported inflation.

72. Sound and Fury

Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) continue to face severe winter air pollution, with firecrackers adding to the problem. In November 2016, the Supreme Court suspended licences for the sale of firecrackers in the NCR after Deepavali celebrations pushed PM2.5 levels above 700 µg/m³. The restrictions were relaxed in September 2017, partly to protect licence holders' economic interests and livelihoods. In 2018, the Court permitted green crackers while banning identified firecrackers and restricting their use to a two-hour window. Its latest order permitted specified next-generation joined green crackers, while declining to impose a total ban on fireworks and acknowledging public sentiment.

The effectiveness of green crackers remains questionable. CSIR-NEERI promoted them as having 45–60% lower emissions, but these claims do not reflect real-world conditions, and unclean green crackers complicate pollution assessment. In 2025, Delhi's post-Deepavali PM2.5 levels reached 488 µg/m³, the highest since 2021, with hourly concentrations peaking at 675 µg/m³. The Court noted that QR codes had been sold to unregistered manufacturers, enabling unauthorised crackers to be passed off as certified products. Delhi Police also reported inadequate testing facilities in 2018 and 2019, while conventional crackers continued to be manufactured. The article further notes that construction dust, vehicle emissions and stagnant, cold air contribute to winter pollution, while the government has been working to bring the firecracker industry into the formal sector through regulation.

73. What Is Preventive Detention?

Preventive detention allows the State to detain a person to prevent anticipated threats to public order or security, rather than punish an offence already committed. The central concern is where the State must draw the line between preventive powers and individual liberty.

Meaning, Legal Framework and Evolution

1. Preventive Detention: Detention without trial or conviction to prevent anticipated threats to public order, security of the State or law and order, rather than punish a past offence.
2. National Security Act, 1980: Permits detention where the government is satisfied that a person's activities threaten India's defence, relations with foreign powers or security of the State.
3. Colonial Origins: Preventive detention evolved from a colonial tool to suppress political dissent into a legal mechanism intended to protect national security and public order.
4. Historical Laws: The article traces its evolution through the Preventive Detention Act, 1950; Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), 1971, repealed in 1978; National Security Act, 1980; and COFEPOSA, 1974.
5. Section 163, BNSS: Replaces Section 144 of the CrPC. It empowers specified Executive Magistrates to issue urgent orders where sufficient grounds exist and immediate prevention or speedy remedy is necessary.

6. Scope of Orders: Such orders seek to prevent obstruction, annoyance, injury, danger to human life, health or safety, disturbance of public tranquillity, riots and affrays.
7. Limits on Power: Prohibitory orders must state material facts, establish urgency and remain open to judicial review. They cannot become routine measures.

Supreme Court Rulings and the October 11 Order

1. Babubhai Parate (1961): The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 144 CrPC but held that it could be used only in emergencies to prevent specific threats to public order.
2. Khudiram Das (1975): The Court held that communicating detention grounds checks arbitrary executive power. Grounds must enable the detainee to understand the basis of detention and make an effective representation.
3. Ramlila Maidan (2012): The Court criticised the use of Section 144 against a sleeping crowd during protests against the Congress-led UPA government. It held that the provision should be used only in grave circumstances requiring immediate action to maintain public peace.
4. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018): The Court set aside a National Green Tribunal order banning protests along Jantar Mantar Road and directed authorities to establish a system regulating protests and granting permissions.
5. Shaik Naznen v. State of Telangana (2022): The Court observed that preventive-detention powers are exceptional because they impinge on individual freedom and liberty and cannot be exercised routinely.
6. Ameena Begam v. State of Telangana (2023): The Court stressed strict enforcement of constitutional safeguards, particularly the "golden triangle" formed by Articles 14, 19 and 21.
7. October 11 Order:The Supreme Court directed that there should be no illegal detention, that movement and Metro and railway services should continue subject to lawful restrictions, and that internet services should remain unhindered.
8. Implementation: The Court directed authorities to remove notices restricting access to the Supreme Court and other courts, permit peaceful assemblies subject to lawful restrictions, and submit a compliance report by October 13.

Constitutional Safeguards Against Arbitrary Detention

1. Article 22(4): A person generally cannot be detained for more than three months without an Advisory Board reviewing the case, subject to constitutional requirements and exceptions.
2. Article 22(5): Authorities must communicate detention grounds as soon as possible and provide an opportunity to make a representation against the order. Grounds must be clear enough to allow an effective challenge.
3. Articles 14, 19 and 21: Article 14 guarantees equality before the law; Article 19 protects freedoms including speech, expression, assembly and movement; Article 21 protects life and personal liberty.
4. Judicial Review: Courts can examine whether authorities followed the law, considered relevant material and complied with constitutional safeguards. Preventive-detention powers must be exercised carefully and cannot be arbitrary.

74 . Why Is Musk Taking on Mukesh Ambani over Starlink in India?

Competition in India's Satellite Internet Market

1. Elon Musk has accused Mukesh Ambani of using his influence to delay Starlink's entry into India to protect Reliance Jio's market position. The dispute highlights growing competition in the satellite internet sector and raises concerns about fair competition and regulatory neutrality.
2. Musk argues that Starlink's satellite-based services can expand internet connectivity in underserved and remote areas, increase consumer choice and improve access to digital services. Ambani, on the other hand, has raised concerns about the affordability of satellite internet for ordinary Indian consumers.

Regulatory Framework and Market Entry

1. Starlink's entry into India depends on the completion of regulatory procedures, including security clearances and government authorisations. In March 2025, SpaceX announced partnerships with Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio to facilitate the introduction of Starlink services, subject to the necessary approvals.
2. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) play important roles in the regulatory framework governing satellite communication services. Key issues include satellite-spectrum allocation, pricing and the choice between administrative allocation and auctions.
3. Access to India's large potential customer base could also be commercially significant for SpaceX as it prepares for a possible initial public offering (IPO).

Broader Policy Implications

1. The controversy raises questions about competition policy, equal treatment of market participants, national security and India's digital sovereignty. Satellite internet can strengthen connectivity during emergencies and in regions with limited terrestrial infrastructure, but its use also raises concerns regarding security and government oversight.

2. The debate highlights the challenge of balancing wider digital access, affordable services, private-sector competition and national security requirements. Starlink's commercial operations in India remain dependent on the required regulatory approvals.

75 . The Other G2, and Three Lessons for India

India's strategic choices are becoming more difficult amid US–Russia tensions, Trump's unpredictable approach towards Moscow, and the war in Ukraine. The article argues that India must protect its strategic autonomy while learning from the changing relationships among the major powers.

The Possibility of a US–Russia Strategic Accommodation

1. **The Other G2:** India's strategic community fears a US–China partnership creating a geopolitical duopoly in Asia. However, Delhi must also consider a strategic accommodation between the US and Russia, despite its potential complications.
2. **Trump's Reversal:** Trump's decision to impose tariffs of up to 100% on countries buying Russian oil, including India, contrasts with his subsequent efforts to improve relations with Putin.
3. **Diplomatic Engagement:** High-level US–Russia engagement resumed in 2025, including talks in Riyadh and the Alaska summit. The summit brought the two presidents together but failed to end the Ukraine war.
4. **Economic Cooperation:** Trump views cooperation in energy, minerals and other sectors as a route towards peace. American access to Russian resources could create constituencies for better relations and reduce political antagonism.
5. **Putin's Incentives**: Sanctions relief could bring Russia revenue, investment and technology while reducing its dependence on China. However, Russia's territorial ambitions and Ukraine's opposition to a settlement rewarding the invasion complicate a deal.
6. **European Concerns:** A Trump–Putin agreement could leave European countries exposed to Russian geopolitical assertiveness, even if it improves US–Russia relations.

Three Lessons for India

1. **Changing Relations:** US–Russia relations are not static, and confrontation need not last forever. India should assess the opportunities from US–Russia cooperation alongside the costs of continued hostility, including the potential easing of American pressure over Russian energy purchases and defence ties.
2. **Russian Priorities**: Moscow does not regard confrontation with Washington as a permanent ideological obligation. Russia values engagement with the US as a great-power peer. In the early 1990s, its eagerness to build relations with America pushed India down Moscow's list of priorities—a historical experience Delhi should remember.
3. **European Stakes:** India's growing trade, technology, investment and defence interests in Europe give it a direct stake in European stability. Even if Trump and Putin reach an agreement, Russia's confrontation with Europe may continue; therefore, a US–Russia accommodation would address only part of India's concerns.

India's Strategic Response

1. **Peace in Ukraine:** India should contribute wherever possible to efforts to end the war without rewarding Russian aggression or compromising Ukraine's security.
2. **Russia–Europe Dialogue:** Delhi should encourage direct dialogue between Russia and Europe rather than treating a US–Russia agreement as sufficient to resolve the wider conflict.
3. **Eurasian Security:** India should support a sustainable security order in Europe and the wider Eurasian region, protecting its interests amid changing great-power relationships.

76. When the State Paints Dissent as Disorder

The peaceful Delhi protests seeking the resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner have raised concerns about maintaining law and order while protecting citizens' fundamental rights.

Constitutional Protection of Peaceful Dissent

1. **Article 19(1)(a)**: Protects freedom of speech and expression, including the right to express dissent.
2. **Article 19(1)(b):** Protects the right to assemble peaceably and without arms, subject to reasonable restrictions.
3. **44th Constitutional Amendment, 1978**: The provision intended to introduce additional safeguards against preventive detention has not been brought into force.
4. **Brokdorf decision (1985):** The German Constitutional Court recognised peaceful demonstrations as integral to democratic order and required restrictions to be proportionate.

Constitutional Limits on Restricting Dissent

1. **Regulation vs prohibition**: The Supreme Court clarified on October 9 that peaceful assemblies may be regulated but not prohibited outright.

2. **Comparative constitutional safeguards**: The U.S. Brandenburg v. Ohio ruling permits restrictions on advocacy only when it is directed towards and likely to produce imminent lawless action. Germany's Brokdorf decision (1985) requires proportionate restrictions, with outright bans as a last resort.
3. **Preventive detention**: Article 22 provides safeguards, including communicating detention grounds and obtaining advisory board approval for detention beyond three months. Additional safeguards envisaged by the 44th Constitutional Amendment, 1978, remain unimplemented.

Judicial Interpretation of Public Order and Liberty

1. **Three concentric circles:** In Ram Manohar Lohia (1966), the Supreme Court distinguished law and order, public order and security of the State, holding that not every disturbance warrants restrictive measures.
2. **Peaceful assembly:** Himat Lal K. Shah (1973) recognised peaceful assembly as a fundamental right subject to reasonable regulation. Ramlila Maidan Incident (2012) affirmed protection against arbitrary executive action.
3. **Protection of personal liberty**: In Arnab Goswami (2020), Justice D.Y. Chandrachud stressed the seriousness of even temporary deprivation of liberty. Justice H.R. Khanna's dissent in ADM Jabalpur (1976) remains a defence of liberty against unchecked executive power.

Assessing Police Action

Police action should be based on three tests: whether the assembly was peaceful and the threat specific and imminent; whether police action was proportionate, with detention grounds communicated and production before a magistrate within 24 hours under Article 22(1)–(2); and whether the deprivation of liberty was lawful.

The central argument is that a democratic State demonstrates strength by tolerating dissent and ensuring peaceful public order. Liberty and public order are complementary foundations of a constitutional republic.

77 . CSR Is at ₹40,000 Crore. Now Count the Impact

India's CSR framework has created one of the world's largest pools of private-sector development finance. The challenge is to ensure that rising corporate contributions translate into measurable improvements in development outcomes rather than merely fulfilling expenditure requirements.

CSR Spending and Regional Imbalances

1. **Mandatory CSR spending**: Companies meeting the prescribed financial thresholds must spend 2% of their average net profits on CSR activities, creating a substantial source of private development finance.
2. **Growing financial pool**: CSR spending has expanded significantly, reaching ₹40,794 crore in 2024–25. However, the scale of funding alone does not establish whether development needs are being adequately addressed.
3. **Geographical concentration:** Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Delhi together received more than ₹20,000 crore in 2024–25. The concentration of corporate activity in certain States can influence where CSR funds are deployed, even when development needs are greater elsewhere.
4. **Spending versus need**: CSR allocation needs to be assessed against regional development deficits, rather than allowing the location of corporate headquarters and operations to determine priorities disproportionately.

From Expenditure to Measurable Development Impact

1. **Outcome-based evaluation**: CSR success should be measured through improvements in education, health and livelihoods, not simply the amount spent or the number of projects completed.
2. **Three institutional reforms:** A structured impact-assessment framework, stronger outcome indicators and standardised measures of CSR success are necessary to evaluate whether projects deliver meaningful results.
3. **Fragmented projects**: Thousands of isolated interventions may produce limited benefits beyond their immediate locations. Pooling resources around common development priorities can create larger and more sustainable impacts.
4. **Leveraging corporate expertise:** CSR projects can be more effective when aligned with companies' core capabilities. Agricultural and food companies, for example, can use their expertise to improve farmer productivity, strengthen rural value chains and support climate-resilient agriculture.
5. **Long-term development:** The objective is to move from expenditure-led compliance to sustained improvements in local development outcomes, with CSR investments contributing meaningfully to education, health, livelihoods and community welfare.

78 . Protests vs 'Public Order': Prevention and Policing

Restrictions imposed on protests in Delhi demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar have raised concerns about balancing peaceful assembly with public order. The key issue is whether preventive policing is proportionate to the actual threat or unnecessarily restricts democratic dissent and public movement.

Constitutional Rights and Limits on Preventive Policing

1. **Fundamental rights:** Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(b) protect freedom of speech and peaceful assembly, subject to reasonable restrictions under Articles 19(2) and 19(3).
2. **Regulation vs prohibition:** In *Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police* (1973), the Supreme Court recognised the State's power to regulate public assemblies but not prohibit them altogether.
3. **Balancing competing interests:** In *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India* (2018), the Court emphasised balancing protesters' rights with the interests of residents and commuters.
4. **Preventive policing:** Section 168 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) empowers police to prevent cognisable offences. However, previous violence does not automatically justify prohibiting subsequent peaceful gatherings.
5. **Proportionality:** *Madhu Limaye v. Sub-Divisional Magistrate* (1970) and *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* (2020) are relevant to assessing whether restrictions are legally justified and proportionate.
6. **Alternative venues:** Ramlila Maidan may accommodate larger gatherings, while Jantar Mantar is intended for smaller protests. The suitability and capacity of designated sites should inform restrictions.

Public Order, Proportionality and Police Accountability

1. **Disruption to commuters:** During the July protests, Delhi Police sought the closure of entry and exit gates at 57 Metro stations, while Indian Railways cancelled 245 trains originating from or terminating in Delhi. The Supreme Court questioned whether such widespread disruption was proportionate to the perceived threat.
2. **Targeted restrictions:** Crowd caps, selective access restrictions and measures directed at identified groups could prevent specific risks without disrupting thousands of unrelated commuters.
3. **Sensitive locations:** Parliament, Rashtrapati Bhavan, Central Vista and the Supreme Court present security and capacity concerns. Delhi Police has argued that protests may be permitted at designated sites subject to the necessary conditions.
4. **Effective protest:** Relocating demonstrators to distant locations where their presence cannot effectively convey their grievances may undermine the purpose of peaceful assembly.
5. **Unclear legal standards:** The limits of restrictions under Article 19(2) have not been clearly spelt out, leaving considerable discretion to the State. A clearer legal framework is needed to determine when restrictions are necessary and proportionate.
6. **Judicial scrutiny:** The Supreme Court intervened over the proposed restrictions and directed scrutiny of the July violence, including alleged police excesses. The examination of police conduct and the use of blanket orders under Section 163 must remain distinct from the assessment of protesters' actions.

79 . Inflation Generalisation: Why Economists Gauge the 'Spreading' of Price Pressures

Inflation Generalisation and Price Pressures

1. **Meaning:** Inflation generalisation refers to price increases spreading across a wider range of goods and services rather than remaining concentrated in a few categories, such as food and fuel.
2. **Widening inflation:** The number of CPI items recording inflation of 4% or more increased from 65 in January to 129 in September, indicating a broader spread of price pressures.
3. **Inflation target:** The RBI's medium-term inflation target is 4%, with a tolerance band of 2–6%. The spread of price increases across CPI items helps assess whether inflationary pressures are becoming more widespread.
4. **Base effect:** Year-on-year inflation compares current prices with those of the corresponding period in the previous year. Changes in this comparison can distort the assessment of current price momentum.

Diffusion Indices and Monetary Policy Implications

1. **Measuring inflation breadth:** Diffusion indices track how widely price increases are spread across the CPI basket. However, simply counting items does not account for their different weights in household expenditure.
2. **RBI's assessment:** The RBI's diffusion index showed that nearly 46% of CPI items recorded inflation of at least 4% in September, compared with 37% in August.
3. **Nomura's assessment:** Nomura's India Inflation Generalisation Index also indicated that price pressures were broadening, although the index remained below its long-term average.
4. **Implications for monetary policy:** The breadth and persistence of price increases help policymakers assess underlying inflation momentum and the risk of inflation expectations becoming entrenched. This information is relevant to the RBI's interest-rate decisions

80 . How INS Mangrol Plugs Gaps in Anti-Submarine Operations

INS Mangrol, the third of eight Mahe-class Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Crafts (ASW-SWCs), has been delivered to the Indian Navy by Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL).

Mahe-Class Shallow Water Crafts

1. **Indigenous construction:** The vessels are being constructed by CSL and Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata, with 80% indigenous content.
2. **Indigenous design:** The ships are designed by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau and meet the classification standards of the Det Norske Veritas (DNV), an internationally recognised body for technical and safety requirements.
3. **Surveillance and engagement:** The vessels are equipped with indigenous sonar systems that use sound waves to detect underwater objects, along with advanced sensors, weapons and communication systems for detecting, tracking and engaging underwater threats.
4. **Anti-submarine capabilities:** They carry lightweight torpedoes, multifunctional anti-submarine rockets and other systems for sustained operations in shallow waters.
5. **Low-noise design:** Reduced underwater radiated noise improves their suitability for anti-submarine warfare. The vessels are also designed for underwater surveillance, search and rescue (SAR).

Strengthening Coastal Anti-Submarine Warfare

1. **Existing capability gap:** Before the ASW-SWC programme, the Indian Navy relied on four Abhay-class corvettes and smaller vessels for coastal and near-shore anti-submarine warfare. These vessels were decommissioned between 2017 and 2025.
2. **Procurement programme:** The Defence Acquisition Council approved the procurement of 16 ASW-SWCs in December 2013 for ₹13,000 crore. CSL and GRSE were contracted to build eight vessels each.
3. **Strategic requirement:** India's coastline of approximately 11,000 km, 12 major ports, 184 minor ports and island territories requires specialised platforms for coastal surveillance and underwater threat detection.
4. **Future deployment:** The 16 vessels will be divided into two classes. INS Mahe, Malvan, Mangrol and subsequent vessels are expected to strengthen the Navy's coastal anti-submarine warfare capability, contributing to a layered defence across the Indian Ocean Region.

81 . Drugs and Bullets: Punjab Is Seeing a Rise in Narcotrafficking and Targeted Killings

Punjab is facing an interconnected challenge of drug trafficking, organised crime and targeted killings. The alleged murder of anti-drug activist Parvinder Singh Jhota and the killing of social media influencer Mad Sandhu point to gaps in public safety, while cross-border smuggling and criminal networks sustain the wider drug economy.

Narcotrafficking and Organised Crime in Punjab

1. **Drug dependence:** The **AIIMS Magnitude of Substance Use in India survey** estimated that, in 2017–18, 1.28% of Punjab's population aged 10–75 had opioid dependence, compared with 0.26% nationally.
2. **Drug-related deaths: NCRB data** recorded 106 drug overdose deaths in Punjab in 2024, up from 89 in 2023. These figures may understate the wider toll because attribution depends on medical certification and may exclude long-term complications and unhygienic practices associated with drug use.
3. **Cross-border networks:** Punjab's geographical location makes it an important entry point and market for narcotics. Smugglers exploit multiple transport routes, while drug trafficking provides illicit funds to interconnected criminal networks.
4. **Industrial diversion:** India's pharmaceutical and chemical industries can be exploited by criminal actors to divert controlled substances or precursor chemicals for illicit use.

Gaps in Enforcement and the Way Forward

1. **Limits of enforcement drives:** The **State's *Yudh Nashian Virudh* campaign in 2025** claimed 68,850 arrests and the attachment or confiscation of assets worth ₹319 crore. However, arrests, registered cases, convictions and asset attachment are distinct measures of enforcement outcomes.
2. **Public support and reporting:** The hostile tactics used by Parvinder Singh Jhotta reportedly received public support, highlighting the need to examine whether people are bypassing formal reporting channels and resorting to vigilantism.
3. **Disrupting drug supply:** Punjab needs to reduce the availability of harmful drugs, disrupt wholesale supply chains and identify corrupt facilitators who enable trafficking.
4. **Rehabilitation:** Expanding access to rehabilitative care is necessary alongside enforcement to address drug dependence and its social consequences.
5. **Investigating targeted killings:** Anti-trafficking investigations must also examine the financing and logistics of criminal networks, dismantle institutional collusion and strengthen the protection of threatened individuals.

82. How Has the Supreme Court Strengthened Arrest Safeguards?

In ***Jaskaran Jeet Singh Deol v. State of Punjab*** **(21 September 2026),** the Supreme Court examined an arrest involving violations of both Article 22(1), concerning communication of the grounds of arrest, and Article 22(2), concerning production before a

Magistrate within 24 hours. The Court reinforced that an investigating agency seeking fresh custody after release for a constitutional violation must apply to the concerned Magistrate, supply the written grounds of arrest, explain the earlier non-compliance and establish the necessity for re-arrest.

Evolution of Arrest Safeguards

1. **Constitutional protection:** Article 21 protects life and personal liberty, while Article 22(2) requires an arrested person to be produced before the nearest magistrate within 24 hours, excluding necessary journey time.
2. **Section 47 BNSS:** Requires the police to communicate the grounds of arrest to a person arrested without a warrant. However, neither Article 22(2) nor Section 47 specifies the mode of communication.
3. **Pankaj Bansal v. Union of India (2023):** The Supreme Court held that written grounds of arrest must be furnished as a standard procedure without exception, rejecting oral communication as a substitute for the written copy.
4. **Prabir Purkayastha v. State (NCT of Delhi) (2024):** Reaffirmed the importance of communicating grounds of arrest as a constitutional safeguard enabling the accused to consult legal counsel, challenge the arrest and seek bail.
5. **Vihaan Kumar v. State of Haryana (2025):** The Court observed that although written communication is the ideal mode, no statutory requirement expressly prescribes it in every case.
6. **Mihir Rajesh Shah v. State of Maharashtra (2025):** The Court held that written communication of the grounds of arrest is mandatory across offences under all statutes, including the IPC and BNSS. The grounds must be communicated in a language understood by the accused, at least two hours before remand proceedings. Oral communication is permissible only where written communication cannot be provided promptly, with the grounds communicated orally within a reasonable time.

Consequences of Violating Arrest Safeguards

1. **Illegal arrest and remand:** Failure to communicate the grounds of arrest in writing renders the arrest and subsequent remand illegal and entitles the accused to be set at liberty.
2. **Fresh arrest:** If the safeguard is violated, the investigating officer must seek the concerned magistrate's permission before re-arresting the accused for custodial interrogation.
3. **Accountability of investigating officers:** The court may direct a departmental inquiry and a change of investigating officer for serious lapses in communicating the grounds of arrest.
4. **Application for custody:** The investigating officer must file an application explaining the reasons for non-compliance and obtain the immediate superior authority's endorsement before the magistrate considers the request.
5. **Compensation:** The High Court may award compensation under public law for violation of Article 22(2), without preventing the accused from pursuing remedies under private civil law.

83. Why the Debate Between Keynesian and Orthodox Economics Matters

The Keynes-Kalecki (KK) framework argues that aggregate demand, particularly private investment, determines both short-term economic fluctuations and long-term growth. In contrast, orthodox economics emphasises supply-side factors and treats demand deficiencies primarily as a short-term problem. This distinction shapes how economists explain unemployment, business cycles and the role of government intervention.

Two Competing Explanations of Economic Fluctuations

1. **Orthodox economics and supply-side shocks:** Real Business Cycle (RBC) theory, associated with Finn Kydland and Edward Prescott, explains economic fluctuations primarily through real shocks, particularly changes in productivity. In this framework, fluctuations are generally modelled as responses to changes in economic fundamentals rather than as persistent demand deficiencies requiring discretionary monetary intervention.
2. **Hall and Woodford's contribution:** Their work helped strengthen the microeconomic foundations of modern macroeconomic stabilisation models. Hall's research examined household consumption and spending decisions, while Woodford developed influential frameworks explaining how expectations, price stickiness and monetary policy interact. These contributions helped shape modern New Keynesian approaches to economic stabilisation.
3. **Demand and long-term growth:** The orthodox approach generally treats demand as important for short-term fluctuations but expects it to adjust to supply over the long run. The KK framework, however, argues that demand influences not only cyclical fluctuations but also the underlying growth trend.
4. **Conceptual distinction:** The Keynes–Kalecki framework gives aggregate demand and private investment a central role in determining both short-term fluctuations and long-term growth. New Keynesian models incorporate microeconomic foundations, expectations and price rigidities to analyse stabilisation, while generally retaining a supply-determined long-run output path.
5. **Private investment and unemployment:** In the Kaleckian framework, economies can remain below capacity because private investment is insufficient to employ all those seeking work. The rigidity of investment, rather than price rigidity alone, becomes central to explaining persistent unemployment.

6. **Long-run implications:** Kalecki viewed long-term growth as the slowly changing component of successive short-term economic situations. If an economy remains underemployed in the short run, it may continue to be so in the long run; changes in short-term equilibrium can also affect trend growth.

Monetary policy, Inflation and the Political Economy Growth

1. **Different views of money:** Orthodox economics traditionally treats money as neutral in the long run: an increase in the money supply raises prices without permanently increasing output. New Keynesian economics accepts long-run neutrality but recognises that sticky prices make money non-neutral in the short run, when increased real balances can raise consumption.
2. **Inflation targeting:** Under the New Keynesian approach, monetary policy primarily seeks to stabilise inflation, reflecting the importance attached to price stability.
3. **Investment-led policy:** The KK framework attributes weak economic activity to inadequate private investment rather than primarily to monetary factors. When private investment fails to materialise, public investment and fiscal intervention can directly support economic activity.
4. **Historical context:** Keynes and Kalecki developed their ideas against the backdrop of the Great Depression, while the recent Nobel laureates' work emerged in the aftermath of the unprecedented inflation of the 1970s. These different historical experiences shaped their economic frameworks.
5. **Class politics of inflation:** The Keynesian revolution improved workers' lives overall, while the monetarist counter-revolution shifted the burden of inflation control towards workers. The renewed dominance of orthodox approaches raises questions about how economic theories influence policy choices and the distribution of economic costs and benefits.

The central debate concerns whether economic instability is best addressed by allowing supply-side adjustment and stabilising inflation, or by actively supporting demand and investment to sustain employment and long-term growth. Economic frameworks and their resulting policy prescriptions are not politically neutral.

84 . Kigali Amendment at 10: The Challenge India Faces as Demand for Cooling Booms

The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, which entered into force in January 2019, aims to phase down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), widely used in refrigeration and air-conditioning. As India's demand for cooling rises, the challenge is to meet growing needs while reducing emissions from refrigerants and improving energy efficiency.

Climate Impact and the Cooling Challenge

1. **Ozone protection to climate mitigation:** The Montreal Protocol has eliminated nearly 99% of ozone-depleting substances. However, HFCs introduced as substitutes do not deplete the ozone layer but can have a global warming potential hundreds to thousands of times greater than carbon dioxide.
2. **Potential climate benefits:** Full implementation of the Kigali Amendment could avoid approximately 0.3°C–0.5°C of global warming by 2100, according to the scientific assessment cited by the UN.
3. **Rising cooling demand:** India's cooling requirements are expected to grow substantially with rising incomes, urbanisation and temperatures. The India Cooling Action Plan projects aggregate cooling demand to increase nearly eightfold by 2037–38 compared with the 2017–18 baseline, underscoring the need for energy-efficient and climate-friendly cooling technologies.
4. **Energy efficiency:** More efficient air-conditioners and refrigerators can reduce electricity consumption over their operating life. Combining refrigerant transition with improved equipment efficiency could roughly double the climate benefits.
5. **Long equipment lifetimes:** Cooling equipment bought today may remain in use into the 2030s, making early adoption of efficient technologies important to avoid locking in higher emissions.

India's Transition Under Kigali and the Need for Global Cooperation

1. **India's commitment:** India ratified the Kigali Amendment in 2021 and must freeze HFC production and consumption in 2028, with subsequent reductions according to the agreed schedule.
2. **Transition to lower-impact refrigerants:** Replacing HFCs with refrigerants having lower global warming potential addresses direct emissions, while improving equipment efficiency reduces indirect emissions from electricity use.
3. **Support for developing countries:** The Montreal Protocol's Multilateral Fund, established in 1990, supports developing countries in meeting their obligations. Its assistance includes financial contributions to convert factories and train personnel to service cooling equipment.
4. **Other short-lived climate pollutants:** Measures targeting methane, black carbon and tropospheric ozone can complement HFC reductions. In India, reducing black carbon from sources such as diesel engines and household cooking can also benefit air quality and climate mitigation.
5. **Balancing development and climate action:** The transition requires cooperation between countries, financial and technical assistance, and sector-specific obligations that reflect different pollution sources and compliance needs.

85. Citizens' March to Defend Right to Vote Sends a Message to All Institutions

The march by citizens, Opposition leaders, students and civil society activists to the Supreme Court against the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls highlights concerns over potential mass disenfranchisement. The central issue is whether electoral roll revision, conducted through centralised software and modified procedures, is undermining universal adult franchise and the constitutional relationship between citizens and the State.

Electoral Roll Revision and the Right to Vote

1. **Scale of the exercise:** Reports on the SIR have cited the removal of more than 130 million names from electoral rolls, including names classified as deceased, relocated or untraceable. The central concern is whether the revision has also resulted in the wrongful exclusion of eligible voters and whether adequate safeguards exist for their identification, notice and restoration.
2. **Accuracy versus disenfranchisement:** Removing duplicate, deceased and ineligible names is a legitimate administrative requirement. However, eligible citizens must not lose their voting rights because of clerical errors, arbitrary decisions or inadequate verification.
3. **Universal adult franchise:** The right to vote is central to popular sovereignty. Electoral administration must protect eligible citizens rather than shift the burden of proving their eligibility onto them without adequate justification.
4. **Presumption of eligibility:** Electoral procedures should presume the continued eligibility of existing voters. Authorities must justify the removal of a voter's name instead of forcing citizens to repeatedly establish their citizenship and residence.

Centralisation, Algorithmic Decisions and Weakening of Electoral Governance

1. **Reduced discretion of EROs:** Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), traditionally guided by local knowledge and individual verification, have been increasingly constrained by centralised directives and software-driven decisions.
2. **Algorithmic exclusion:** Modified rules and changes to Forms 6 and 7, combined with centralised software architecture, risk overlooking clerical errors, spelling variations and other discrepancies, resulting in the deletion of legitimate voters.
3. **Weakening of local accountability:** When software overrides the judgement of EROs, electoral administration becomes less responsive to local realities and individual circumstances.
4. **Opaque decision-making:** Centralised systems that do not permit adequate scrutiny make it difficult to establish why a voter was excluded and who is accountable for an incorrect decision.

Procedural Integrity and Transparency in Electoral Roll Revision

1. **Due process:** Electoral roll revision must follow transparent procedures, including adequate notice, an opportunity to respond and individual-level verification before an eligible voter's name is removed.
2. **Statutory authority:** Software architecture must remain subordinate to the statutory authority of EROs, who are responsible for determining voter eligibility.
3. **Restoring electoral integrity:** The process requires the restoration of the presumption of voter eligibility, with the burden placed on authorities to justify removals rather than on citizens to repeatedly prove their citizenship and residence.
4. **Need for suspension:** The SIR should be suspended until the concerns regarding mass deletions, modified procedures and centralised decision-making are adequately addressed.

Institutional Accountability and the Legitimacy of Electoral Democracy

1. **Loss of confidence in the CEC:** The Chief Election Commissioner has, according to the editorial's argument, fundamentally lost the confidence of major Opposition parties over the administration of the SIR. It calls for his resignation.
2. **Judicial scrutiny:** The Supreme Court should review the entire process to ensure that electoral procedures and software-driven decisions comply with constitutional principles and do not undermine eligible citizens' voting rights.
3. **Public mobilisation:** The march reflects growing public concern about the integrity of electoral institutions and demonstrates citizens' willingness to defend constitutional rights.
4. **Democratic legitimacy:** Elections derive legitimacy not merely from the conduct of polling but from the assurance that every eligible citizen can participate. When administrative convenience takes precedence over constitutional rights, public confidence in the electoral system is weakened.

The central concern is that **democracy is not merely a gift bestowed by government decree; it is a right of the people.** Protecting universal adult franchise requires transparent electoral administration, accountable institutions and safeguards against the arbitrary exclusion of eligible voters.

86 . Out of Site: Why the Location of Protests Matters

Delhi Police's decision to denotify Jantar Mantar as a designated protest site and shift demonstrations to alternative venues has raised concerns about whether restricting protests to locations farther from centres of power weakens their visibility and effectiveness. The central argument is that protests must remain accessible to the institutions they seek to influence.

Protest Sites and Democratic Participation

1. **Visibility and accessibility:** Jantar Mantar's proximity to the Supreme Court, Parliament and the President's Estate makes it an important site for demonstrations seeking institutional attention.
2. **Restricting public participation:** Moving protests to the margins of the city can reduce their visibility and weaken their ability to influence public debate and decision-making.
3. **Impact on marginalised groups:** Street protests provide an avenue for people who lack representation in formal decision-making to make their grievances heard.
4. **Protest as political communication:** Demonstrations are not merely physical gatherings; they communicate demands and bring public grievances to the attention of those in power.

Balancing Public Order with the Right to Protest

1. **Government's justification:** The Delhi Police has argued that protests around Jantar Mantar can cause traffic congestion and inconvenience to commuters. These concerns, however, must be weighed against the democratic importance of public demonstrations.
2. **Limits of the public-order argument:** Similar arguments about disruption and inconvenience can be used to restrict other forms of democratic participation. The need to maintain public order should not automatically override the right to protest.
3. **Alternative protest locations:** Designated sites that are distant from the institutions concerned may make demonstrations less effective, particularly when protesters seek to influence decisions taken by those institutions.
4. **Democratic accountability:** Protests enable citizens to challenge government decisions and demand accountability. Restricting their visibility risks weakening this function of democratic participation.

87. Double Standards: The U.S. Must Stop Moralising to the Global South for Trading with Russia

The U.S. had imposed an additional 25% tariff on Indian imports in 2025 over India's purchases of Russian oil. However, this separate tariff was removed with effect from 7 February 2026. Under the U.S.–India trade framework announced in February 2026, the U.S. also announced an 18% reciprocal tariff rate for Indian goods, while the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement remained under finalisation in October 2026. President Donald Trump also threatened secondary sanctions and tariffs of up to 100% on countries continuing to buy Russian energy, including India and China. However, European countries have had differing levels of continued exposure to Russian energy. France and Italy have continued importing Russian LNG, while Germany ended direct Russian pipeline-gas supplies in 2022 and Russian crude-oil imports in early 2023, although German-linked companies have retained some Russian LNG contractual exposure. This complicates comparisons of the pressure applied to India and European countries.

Western sanctions have imposed economic costs on the sanctioning countries, particularly Germany, while Russia has continued its military operations in Ukraine. Weakening Russia economically may not necessarily achieve the intended geopolitical objectives and could create further strategic risks. Pressure on India to reduce its energy engagement with Russia also complicates its strategic choices. The U.S. should pursue negotiations with Russia to reduce tensions over Ukraine and NATO rather than relying exclusively on sanctions and pressure against third countries. Sanctions should be assessed on their strategic effectiveness and applied consistently, rather than used selectively against Global South countries pursuing their national interests.

88. A Contested UNSC Seat Poses a Test for India

India is seeking a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) for the 2028–29 term. With the Asia-Pacific seat contested by Tajikistan, India faces a diplomatic challenge requiring at least 129 affirmative votes in the 193-member UN General Assembly. The decision involves balancing electoral prospects, regional relationships and India's wider ambition for a greater role in global governance.

India's Candidature and Electoral Challenges

1. **Electoral requirement:** A candidate must secure a two-thirds majority of General Assembly members present and voting. If all 193 members are present and voting, at least 129 affirmative votes are required, making broad-based diplomatic support essential.
2. **Previous electoral record:** India secured 187 votes in 2010 and 184 votes in 2020. However, its earlier victories do not guarantee success in the current contest.
3. **Tajikistan's candidature:** Tajikistan has already entered the contest, despite India's previous support for its candidature. This creates a difficult choice between pursuing India's own ambition and maintaining relations with a regional partner.
4. **Diplomatic competition:** India must secure support across the Asia-Pacific and other regional groupings, where voting preferences may reflect existing alliances and political considerations rather than India's record alone.

Three options and Their Diplomatic Trade-offs

1. **Contest and defeat Tajikistan:** India could continue its campaign and seek to win the election. However, opposing a regional partner could strain bilateral relations, particularly given India's previous support for Tajikistan.

2. **Persuade Tajikistan to withdraw:** India could attempt to negotiate Tajikistan's withdrawal. This would require diplomatic engagement and an understanding that addresses both countries' interests.
3. **Withdraw and support Tajikistan:** India could withdraw its candidature in exchange for a future understanding. However, this would mean postponing its own ambition and relying on a diplomatic arrangement whose future benefits would need to be weighed carefully.
4. **Regional voting dynamics:** India's outreach must account for the African Union, ASEAN, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and other groupings. Countries do not always vote according to their regional group's preference, making individual diplomatic relationships important.
5. **Global South support:** India's position depends partly on its ability to secure backing from developing countries across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, alongside support from other members of the international community.

India's Global Ambitions and Diplomatic Credibility

1. **Permanent membership:** India's pursuit of a non-permanent seat is linked to its longer-term ambition for permanent membership and reform of the UNSC.
2. **Representation of the Global South:** India's candidacy provides an opportunity to strengthen its role in representing developing countries within the international security system.
3. **Strategic relationships:** The decision must account for India's relations with Tajikistan, other regional partners and countries whose support may be crucial in future contests.
4. **Diplomatic credibility:** The choice is not simply about winning a seat. It also tests India's ability to balance its national ambitions, regional commitments and wider international responsibilities.

89. 'Innovate Today, Nourish Tomorrow' for Food Security

World Food Day 2026 highlights the need to build a future in which food security is supported by innovation, sustainable production and resilient supply chains.

India's Transformation in Food Security

1. **From scarcity to surplus:** India has emerged as a major producer of foodgrains, milk, pulses, fruits and vegetables. Irrigation expansion, high-yielding varieties, increased crop production and improved procurement have supported this transformation.
2. **Food security legislation:** The National Food Security Act, 2013, provides subsidised foodgrains to up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population, reaching approximately 81 crore people.
3. **Digitisation and portability:** Aadhaar seeding and the One Nation One Ration Card system have strengthened the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), enabling migrant workers to access their foodgrain entitlements across the country.
4. **Beyond food availability:** Food security must also address nutritional outcomes, dietary diversity and access to safe, affordable and nutritious food.

Complementary Roles of International Institutions

1. **FAO — Digital agricultural advisory:** The Food and Agriculture Organization supports digital agriculture through advisory road maps and frontier-extension tools. Its Farmer Field School eLearning Map helps farmers assess climate management, hygiene and milk-production practices, translating technical knowledge into actionable farm-level decisions.
2. **IFAD — Financing rural food systems:** The International Fund for Agricultural Development focuses on the first mile of food systems, where risks are highest and private investment is often insufficient. Its investments strengthen infrastructure, connect producers with markets across the value chain and support small-scale farming.
3. **WFP — Improving food distribution and nutrition:** The World Food Programme has worked in India for over 63 years. Its innovations include grain ATMs, supply-chain optimisation and the integration of nutritional considerations into school meals. Its work also includes assessing food baskets and improving dietary diversity, particularly for children and pregnant women.
4. **Complementary approach:** FAO contributes technical knowledge, IFAD finances rural development and WFP strengthens food distribution and nutrition. Their combined efforts support more resilient and inclusive food systems.

India's Blueprint for Future Food Security

1. **Adapting innovation to local needs:** India's experience offers lessons for countries facing climate change, economic uncertainty, population pressures and resource constraints. Innovations must be adapted to local conditions rather than applied uniformly.
2. **Resilient and scalable systems:** Future priorities include strengthening food-system resilience, improving agricultural productivity and building supply chains capable of responding to climate and economic shocks.
3. **Combining science and traditional knowledge:** Agricultural innovation should incorporate scientific advances while drawing on traditional knowledge to develop locally appropriate solutions.

4. **Shared responsibility:** Governments, international institutions and development partners must work together to ensure that improvements in food production translate into better nutrition and equitable access to food.

90 . The Debate over Immunity to CEC and Election Commissioners

The Supreme Court has issued a notice to the Centre on a petition filed by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), challenging Section 16 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023. The provision grants the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) immunity from civil and criminal proceedings for acts performed in the discharge of official duties, raising concerns about equality before law and institutional accountability.

Legal Basis and Scope of Immunity

1. **Section 16 of the 2023 Act:** Grants the CEC and ECs protection against civil and criminal proceedings for actions taken in the discharge of official duties.
2. **Equality before law:** Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of laws. The challenge questions whether such extensive immunity creates an unreasonable distinction between election commissioners and other public authorities.
3. **Constitutional immunity under Article 361:** The President and Governors enjoy specific constitutional protections against criminal proceedings during their terms of office, alongside protection from arrest or imprisonment. These safeguards are constitutionally provided exceptions and cannot automatically justify extending equivalent immunity to other public offices.
4. **Parliamentary privileges:** Articles 105 and 194 protect parliamentary speech, voting and legislative functioning. These privileges serve a specific constitutional purpose and do not establish a general precedent for immunity across public offices.
5. **Diplomatic immunity:** The Vienna Convention provides diplomats and ambassadors immunity from civil and criminal jurisdiction, reflecting a distinct international-law basis for such protection.

Why Section 16 Is Being Challenged?

1. **Broader statutory protection:** Section 16 provides that no court shall entertain or continue civil or criminal proceedings against a current or former CEC or EC for acts performed in the discharge of official duties.
2. **Insertion into the law:** The provision was absent from the original Bill and was not explained in the Statement of Objects and Reasons. It was introduced through an amendment on the day the Bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha, subsequently approved by the Lok Sabha and assented to by the President.
3. **Government's justification:** The Union Law Minister stated that the amendment was intended to enable the CEC and ECs to discharge their constitutional functions independently and without hindrance.
4. **Article 14 concerns:** Although Article 14 permits reasonable classifications, these must rest on an intelligible differentia and have a rational connection with the objective of the law. The challenge questions whether such extensive immunity for election commissioners satisfies this test.
5. **Comparison with other authorities:** Judges, the Comptroller and Auditor General, Public Service Commission chairpersons and members, Lokpal, Lokayuktas and Information Commissioners perform independent functions but do not enjoy equivalent lifelong and unconditional immunity for their official actions.
6. **Earlier legal framework:** The Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991, which previously governed the service conditions of election commissioners, did not contain such a provision.

91. Advancing the Women-Led Development Model: Distributive Justice and Constitutional Framework

The National Commission for Women (NCW) held a consultation on women's right to property and inheritance, focusing on the relationship between property ownership, social justice and women's empowerment. The central concern is whether women can achieve substantive equality without equitable access to resources and opportunities.

1. **Distributive vs compensatory justice:** Compensatory justice addresses past disadvantages but is insufficient if women continue to lack access to resources. Distributive justice seeks equitable allocation of resources according to requirements, ensuring equal opportunities for development and growth.
2. **Constitutional framework: Articles 38 and 39, read with Article 46,** promote social welfare, equitable distribution of resources and protection of disadvantaged sections. Article 39(b) requires the ownership and control of material resources to be distributed to serve the common good.
3. **Right to property: Article 300A** provides that no person shall be deprived of property except by authority of law. Property ownership is linked not merely to economic assets but also to women's social status, independence and capabilities.

4. **Judicial recognition of social justice:** In ***Air India Statutory Corporation v. United Labour Union*** **(1997)**, the Supreme Court discussed distributive justice within the constitutional framework. In ***Consumer Education and Research Centre v. Union of India*** **(1995),** it emphasised that social justice is integral to the right to life and human dignity under Article 21.
5. **Women's inheritance rights:** The **Hindu Succession Act, 1956, and its 2005** amendment strengthened women's inheritance rights, particularly daughters' coparcenary rights. In ***Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma*** **(2020),** the Supreme Court held that a daughter's coparcenary rights do not depend on whether her father was alive when the amendment came into force.
6. **Compensation for victims: Section 396 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita** provides for statutory compensation to victims, illustrating the role of compensatory justice alongside distributive justice.

From Legal Rights to Substantive Equality and Women-Led Development

1. **Implementation gap:** Despite legal recognition of property and inheritance rights, patriarchal mindsets, inadequate legal awareness and limited access to property continue to prevent women from fully exercising these rights. The gap between legal entitlements and their actual realisation remains substantial.
2. **Institutional and procedural reforms:** Digitisation of land records, simplified mutation procedures and automatic recording of women's shares can strengthen property rights and reduce dependence on intermediaries.
3. **Financial and collective empowerment:** Greater access to Self-Help Groups can improve women's legal awareness, financial inclusion and collective agency, helping them exercise their rights more effectively.
4. **From welfare to agency:** Women must be recognised not merely as beneficiaries of welfare schemes but as active participants and decision-makers in development.
5. **Leadership and participation:** Women who inherit property and gain access to resources should be encouraged to assume leadership roles in institutions and local governance, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to decision-making.
6. **Strengthening institutional mechanisms:** Effective implementation of legal safeguards, accessible procedures and greater awareness are necessary to ensure that property and inheritance rights translate into actual empowerment.

92 . Necessary Corrective: Re-enrolment and Summary Revision Are Necessary, but Not Sufficient

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has announced a Special Summary Revision (SSR) of electoral rolls in 17 States and Union Territories, with 1 January 2027 as the qualifying date. The exercise aims to update electoral rolls and facilitate the enrolment of eligible voters, distinct from the more intensive Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

Correcting Electoral Roll Discrepancies

1. **Revision schedule:** The SSR begins in November 2026, with draft electoral rolls scheduled for 12 November and final rolls for 4 January 2027. The qualifying date is 1 January 2027, not 1 January 2026.
2. **Corrective measures:** The exercise seeks to re-enrol eligible voters whose names were deleted, remove ineligible entries and correct logical discrepancies in electoral rolls.
3. **Removal of procedural barriers:** The ECI removed the additional previous-roll linkage declaration requirement for Form 6 in States/UTs where SIR had been completed or had not yet begun. Form 7 is used for deletion or objections to electoral-roll entries.
4. **Revision procedures:** SSR updates electoral rolls through routine enrolment, correction and deletion procedures. Its use of a different process from SIR does not establish that SIR's verification requirements were unnecessary.
5. **Uneven impact across States:** In West Bengal, appeal tribunals have disposed of barely 3% of the 38 lakh appeals, with 22 lakh of the deleted electors restored and the rest awaiting decisions. In Bihar, where the tribunal-to-elector ratio is lower, 892 of the 9.5 lakh voters marked removed were restored through the appeal process.

Limits of corrective measures and the need for accountability

1. **Re-enrolment is not enough:** Restoring names after deletion does not fully address the consequences of wrongful exclusion, particularly where eligible voters have already been prevented from exercising their voting rights.
2. **Automatic re-enrolment:** For States that have already undergone SIR, the ECI must ensure that eligible voters whose names were deleted can be re-enrolled and that newly eligible voters can be added without unnecessary procedural obstacles.
3. **Burden on voters:** Any future intensive revision must not shift the burden of establishing eligibility onto voters when the deletion resulted from flawed procedures or administrative decisions.
4. **Accountability of the ECI:** The corrective process must address the responsibility of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), under whose supervision the SIR was conducted, for ensuring that electoral roll revision does not arbitrarily disenfranchise eligible voters.
5. **Judicial scrutiny:** In May 2026, the Supreme Court upheld the ECI's authority to conduct SIR in Bihar. Separate proceedings concerning West Bengal require scrutiny of the revision and appeals process to safeguard eligible voters against wrongful exclusion.

6. **Institutional responsibility:** The appointment process for the CEC, particularly following the government's reversal of the 2023 appointment law and the subsequent Supreme Court proceedings, raises wider concerns about the independence and accountability of the Election Commission.

93. Ripples from the Future: The Economics Nobel Rewards Work That Holds Lessons for India

The Nobel Prize in Economics awarded to Robert E. Hall and Michael Woodford recognises research on how households and firms make decisions under uncertainty, particularly regarding consumption and pricing. Their work offers lessons for India in understanding household behaviour, inflation, economic uncertainty and the effectiveness of government policy.

Household Consumption and Price Decisions

1. **Consumption under uncertainty:** Hall's research examined how households adjust consumption in response to expected future income and economic conditions, helping policymakers understand consumption behaviour during periods of uncertainty.
2. **Pricing decisions:** Woodford's work explored how firms set prices and how price adjustments influence economic activity, providing insights into inflation and monetary policy.
3. **Policy implications:** Understanding household spending and business pricing decisions can help policymakers identify how economic shocks affect consumption, investment and overall demand.

Lessons for India's Economic Policy and Governance

1. **Household consumption data:** India needs better information on household consumption patterns to understand changes in demand and assess the effectiveness of economic policies.
2. **Government policy clarity:** The framework developed by the Nobel laureates highlights the importance of clear and predictable policy signals, helping households and businesses make informed economic decisions.
3. **Long-term policy uncertainty:** Frequent changes in government policies can affect business expectations, investment decisions and household behaviour. Greater consistency can help reduce uncertainty.
4. **Policy communication:** Governments need to communicate policy decisions clearly so that households and businesses can understand their implications and adjust their decisions accordingly.
5. **Economic uncertainty:** The research highlights the importance of understanding how uncertainty affects consumption, pricing and investment, particularly when policymakers face fiscal constraints.

94 . Special Summary Revision: What the Election Commission Announced and How It Differs from SIR

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has announced the Special Summary Revision (SSR) of electoral rolls in 17 States and Union Territories, with the exercise beginning in November 2026 and 1 January 2027 as the qualifying date. The revision aims to update electoral rolls ahead of the next round of elections.

Constitutional and Administrative Framework

1. **Legal basis:** Article 324 of the Constitution empowers the ECI to prepare electoral rolls for elections to Parliament and State legislatures. The procedures for preparation are prescribed under the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.
2. **Electoral Registration Officers (EROs):** Under Section 13B of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, an ERO is authorised to prepare electoral rolls for an Assembly constituency. Section 21 provides for the preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
3. **Special Summary Revision:** SSR is the annual process of updating electoral rolls, generally undertaken before elections. It allows eligible voters to enrol, existing entries to be corrected and ineligible entries to be removed.

SSR and SIR: Process and Key Differences

1. **Purpose and frequency:** SSR is conducted annually, whereas SIR is a more intensive exercise intended to comprehensively verify electoral rolls.
2. **Enrolment process:** Under SSR, existing voters are not generally required to submit fresh forms merely to retain their names. Eligible new voters can enrol through Form 6, while Form 7 is used for objections and deletion requests.
3. **Verification under SIR:** SIR requires voters to enumerate themselves through a prescribed process. Electoral officials may undertake field verification and examine documents where required.
4. **Treatment of existing entries:** During SSR, the existing electoral roll serves as the starting point for corrections and additions. Under SIR, the exercise involves more extensive verification of existing entries.
5. **Deletion safeguards:** Electoral officials must follow the prescribed procedure before removing deceased or duplicate entries, including issuing notices and conducting hearings where required.
6. **Finalisation of rolls:** After draft rolls are published, electors can submit claims and objections during the prescribed period. Under SIR, additional verification may take place before the final electoral roll is published.

95. E-commerce: Why the Price You See Is Not What You Pay

Dark Patterns and Hidden Costs in Online Shopping- Related terms

1. **Meaning of dark patterns:** These are deceptive online interface designs that manipulate consumer behaviour, obscure important information or encourage unintended purchases.
2. **Drip pricing:** Platforms advertise a lower initial price but add platform fees, handling charges and convenience fees at checkout, increasing the final cost.
3. **Basket sneaking:** Additional products, subscriptions or donations are added to a customer's cart without explicit consent.
4. **False urgency:** Messages such as "Only 2 left" or countdown timers pressure consumers into making immediate purchases.
5. **Subscription traps:** Consumers may find subscriptions easy to activate but difficult to cancel because of hidden cancellation procedures.
6. **Bait and switch:** A product or service advertised at an attractive price is replaced by a different or more expensive option during checkout.
7. **Disguised advertisements:** Paid promotions are presented as ordinary product recommendations, reviews or search results, misleading consumers about their nature.

The Convenience Anomaly: Hidden Charges and Consumer Protection

1. **Convenience versus actual cost:** Online transactions save time and physical effort, but the final cost may be higher than expected because of add-on charges. The convenience of digital services can therefore come with an additional financial burden.
2. **Convenience anomaly:** Even as online transactions evolve to offer convenience, consumers are saddled with a separate layer of charges. The convenience that benefits companies can therefore become an additional cost for customers while the companies save the costs of both human resources and brick and mortar infrastructure.
3. **Expansion of add-on charges:** Charges once associated mainly with travel bookings have spread to food delivery, entertainment, online shopping and other services, making the final price increasingly difficult to predict.
4. **Revenue from convenience:** IRCTC collects convenience fees on online bookings, while payment platforms and service providers may levy additional transaction or platform charges. These fees have become a significant source of revenue for businesses. For example, it accounts for around 18% of Railways revenue in the June 2026, quarter.
5. **Consumer impact:** Although online transactions save time and reduce physical effort, consumers may pay more than expected when mandatory charges are disclosed only at later stages of the transaction.
6. **Pricing transparency:** The government notified the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) (Amendment) Rules, 2026, on 9 September 2026. Effective from 1 January 2027, the amendments strengthen disclosure requirements for sponsored listings and price reductions, mandate annual dark-pattern self-audits and introduce additional consumer-protection safeguards.
7. **Regulatory concern:** The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has observed quick-commerce platforms displaying lower prices to attract consumers and applying membership fees without adequate consent. It has also issued a fine of ₹7 lakh to Zepto over dark-pattern practices.
8. **Need for disclosure:** Consumers should be able to see the complete price, including mandatory fees and taxes, before making a purchase decision. Clear disclosure can help prevent misleading pricing and improve accountability.

96. Why Bond Yields Are Rising in All Major Countries — Except China

Government bond yields have been rising across major economies, reflecting increasing government borrowing requirements, inflation concerns and changing investor expectations. China is an exception, with its bond yields remaining relatively low amid weak inflation and slower economic growth.

Rising Bond Yields and Government Borrowing

1. **Government borrowing:** Rising bond yields increase the cost of financing government expenditure and debt, potentially reducing the fiscal space available for other priorities.
2. **Bond prices and yields:** Bond prices and yields move inversely. When investors demand higher returns, existing bond prices fall and yields rise.
3. **Inflation expectations:** Inflation reduces the real return on fixed-income investments. Investors therefore demand higher yields when they expect inflation to erode the purchasing power of future payments.
4. **Impact of the US–Iran war:** Bond yields have risen sharply since the US–Iran war began in late February 2026. The US 10-year Treasury yield increased by approximately 125 basis points over the period discussed in the analysis.
5. **Scale of borrowing:** Large government borrowing requirements increase the supply of bonds that investors must absorb. This can put upward pressure on yields, particularly when investors demand greater compensation for holding government debt.

6. **International trend:** The increase in nominal sovereign 10-year bond yields has affected major economies, including France, Italy, the US, the UK, Japan, Germany and Canada, while China has experienced a different trend.

Why China is an exception?

1. **Weak inflation and deflation:** China has experienced exceptionally low inflation in recent years, with consumer inflation at 0% in 2025 and 0.2% in both 2023 and 2024. It has also experienced periods of deflation, when the general price level falls from one year to the next.
2. **Slower economic growth:** China's growth rate has moderated considerably from its earlier double-digit expansion. In an economy experiencing stronger growth, inflationary pressures would generally be expected to rise; China's weaker growth has limited this effect.
3. **Export-led growth:** Unlike economies where household consumption drives growth, China relies heavily on exports. This means domestic consumption plays a smaller role in generating inflationary pressures.
4. **Limited domestic investment opportunities:** Weak domestic demand and low inflation have reduced the attractiveness of many investment opportunities within China. Investors therefore have fewer alternative avenues for deploying savings.
5. **Demand for government bonds:** With savings remaining substantial and alternative investment opportunities limited, investors may direct more funds towards government bonds, supporting bond prices and keeping yields low.
6. **Contrast with other economies:** While inflation expectations and government borrowing pressures have pushed yields upwards in other major economies, China's subdued inflation and weaker demand continue to restrain its yields.

97. Revamp Functioning of Parliament

India's impending delimitation debate highlights a broader concern about parliamentary representation and institutional functioning. While increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha may bring legislators closer to their constituents, effective parliamentary democracy also requires adequate time, space and procedural opportunities for MPs to represent citizens and scrutinise government decisions.

Parliamentary Representation and Delimitation

1. **Increasing Lok Sabha strength:** The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill and the Delimitation Bill, 2026, propose increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha from 550 to 850 members.
2. **Constituency imbalance:** India's approximately 98 crore registered voters across 543 Lok Sabha constituencies amount to an average of roughly 18 lakh voters per MP, creating a substantial representational burden.
3. **Regional disparities:** Constituency sizes vary considerably. The article highlights Malkajgiri in Telangana, with approximately 37.8 lakh voters, compared with Lakshadweep, which has just 57,953.
4. **Limits of increasing seats:** Expanding the number of MPs may improve representation, but it will not automatically strengthen parliamentary functioning if the time available for legislative business remains unchanged.
5. **Institutional capacity:** Increasing the number of legislators without expanding the parliamentary timetable risks diluting individual MPs' ability to participate meaningfully in legislative proceedings.

Legistlative Scrutiny and Institutional Reforms

1. **Limited parliamentary time:** Under current Lok Sabha rules, the House allows a maximum of 20 starred questions and 230 unstarred questions for written answers per sitting day. Even if every MP submits a question daily, only a fraction can be selected through the ballot.
2. **Declining opportunities for scrutiny:** During the 17th Lok Sabha, Question Hour functioned for only 60% of its scheduled time. In the Monsoon Session of 2026, Question Hour functioned for just 1% of scheduled time, lasting only nine minutes in total.
3. **Zero Hour and Question Hour:** These parliamentary instruments allow MPs to raise urgent public issues, including regional crop failures and disaster relief. Private Members' Business also provides legislators outside the Cabinet an opportunity to introduce their own legislation.
4. **Risk of underutilisation:** The article argues that adding more MPs without increasing available parliamentary time will further dilute opportunities for individual participation and legislative scrutiny.
5. **Statutory minimum sitting days:** Article 85(1) empowers the President to summon each House of Parliament, but the Constitution does not prescribe a minimum number of sitting days between sessions.
6. **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution:** The Commission recommended that the Lok Sabha meet for a minimum of 120 days annually.
7. **Reforms beyond delimitation:** Parliamentary reforms must ensure that MPs receive adequate time to question the government, debate legislation, raise constituency concerns and participate in legislative business.
8. **Protecting parliamentary representation:** While delimitation may redraw constituency boundaries, parliamentary reform must ensure that the voices of citizens within those constituencies are meaningfully heard.

98. Separation of Powers and the CJI's Refusal

Background to the Opposition's Request

On October 10, Opposition leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi sought a meeting with the CJI over allegations against CEC Gyanesh Kumar concerning the SIR, treatment of peaceful protesters and restrictions on movement in Delhi. They sought disclosure of SIR records, an independent committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge to review decisions and audit voter deletions, and suspension of the exercise. Rahul Gandhi also highlighted the right to vote and the CEC's role in the Selection Committee under Section 7 of the 2023 Act. The CJI declined the meeting, stating that the issues were already sub judice and should be pursued through established judicial procedures.

Separation of Powers and the Limits of Judicial Intervention

1. **Constitutional boundaries:** The CJI emphasised that convening a meeting to discuss pending cases would compromise the principle of separation of powers, an intrinsic feature of the Constitution, and could be incompatible with judicial ethics and propriety.
2. **Judicial independence:** The response reiterated that the judiciary must preserve the integrity of judicial proceedings and avoid actions that could create an impression of political alignment or impropriety.
3. **Right to protest and citizens' rights:** The CJI's response also acknowledged the constitutional framework within which citizens' fundamental rights must be protected. The appropriate remedy for alleged violations, however, lies through established judicial procedures.
4. **Alternative remedy:** The CJI advised the Opposition leaders that it would be more appropriate to move the judicial powers of the Supreme Court of India by filing a petition in the public interest.

Judicial Propriety and the Handling of Politically Sensitive Issues

1. **Three considerations:** The CJI's response identified the separation of powers, the doctrine of judicial propriety and the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct as relevant considerations.
2. **Separation of powers:** This doctrine distinguishes the respective functions of the executive, legislature and judiciary. The Court performs an important role in adjudicating disputes and reviewing executive or legislative action through established procedures, rather than informally intervening in government policy.
3. **Judicial propriety:** The principle requires judges to avoid conduct that could undermine public confidence in judicial neutrality. The Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct reinforce ethical standards intended to preserve judicial independence and impartiality.
4. **Alternative remedy:** The CJI advised the Opposition leaders to approach the Supreme Court through a formal petition on the judicial side, rather than seeking an administrative meeting to discuss pending matters.

Earlier Controversies and the Importance of Judicial Neutrality

1. **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2024 visit:** During the Prime Minister's visit to the residence of then Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, Justice Dhananjay Chandrachud drew public criticism over perceptions of proximity between the executive and judiciary. The episode illustrated the sensitivity surrounding judicial propriety.
2. **Historical precedents:** Earlier controversies include Justice P. N. Bhagwati's congratulatory letter to Indira Gandhi following her 1980 election victory, Justice Arun Mishra's public praise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2020, and the invitation extended to then CJI Ranjan Gogoi to attend a BIMSTEC conference.
3. **Judicial appointments and executive influence:** In 1973, Justice A. N. Ray was appointed Chief Justice of India, superseding Justices J. M. Shelat, K. S. Hegde and A. N. Grover. The episode became a major example of concerns about executive influence over judicial appointments.
4. **Institutional safeguards:** Concerns over executive influence on judicial appointments contributed to debates that shaped the collegium system through the Supreme Court's Judges Cases. Separately, the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, adopted in 2002, set out ethical standards for judicial independence, impartiality and propriety.

99 . Bending Towards Bold Reform: IDBI Stake Sale and the 26-Year Arc of Governance

The proposed IDBI Bank stake sale to Fairfax reflects the broader evolution of India's financial-sector governance, aimed at improving financial intermediation, reducing the cost of capital and strengthening economic competitiveness. India's cost of capital remains higher than that of its ASEAN peers, affecting the competitiveness of Indian enterprises.

Evolution of Financial-Sector Reforms

1. **Bank nationalisation:** The nationalisation of 14 banks in 1969 and six more in 1980 brought 91% of banking under public control. However, politically directed lending and recurring bad-loan crises exposed weaknesses in this model.
2. **Post-1991 reforms:** Economic reforms transformed several sectors, but reforms in the factors of production — land, labour and capital — progressed more slowly.

3. **Changing ownership model:** The proposed IDBI divestment represents a shift from nationalising private banks to privatising a national bank, with the objective of improving financial efficiency and capital allocation.
4. **Structural reform constraints:** The four labour codes and land and agricultural reforms have encountered political resistance, highlighting the challenges of implementing structural changes.
5. **Long-term objective:** Financial-sector reforms seek to improve capital allocation, strengthen banking competition and create a financial system capable of supporting globally competitive enterprises.

The Six Cs of Governance: Consistency, Continuity, Creativity, Consensus, Commitment and Calibration

1. **Consistency:** An enabling, investor-oriented administration, reflected in Vibrant Gujarat (2003) and initiatives such as GST, DBT and PRAGATI, seeks to improve investment and administrative efficiency.
2. **Continuity:** Sustaining and strengthening existing institutions is essential. Aadhaar's expansion as digital public infrastructure and VB-G RAM G's extension of the employment guarantee from 100 to 125 days illustrate institutional continuity.
3. **Creativity:** Technology-led coordination through PRAGATI helps resolve stalled projects by connecting senior officials and improving implementation monitoring.
4. **Consensus:** Behavioural economics and *nudge theory* inform public initiatives, while the GST Council and Finance Commission facilitate cooperative federalism and resource-sharing. Decisiveness must not become authoritarianism.
5. **Commitment:** Fiscal consolidation, declining gross NPAs, infrastructure investment, the PLI scheme and the Semiconductor Mission reflect efforts towards macroeconomic stability and structural transformation.
6. **Calibration:** Nine FTAs covering 38 countries, alongside India's G20 and BRICS presidencies, illustrate adaptation to a global order increasingly shaped by transactional partnerships and plurilateral arrangements.

Five Priorities for Viksit Bharat and the Challenge of Financial Intermediation

1. **Faster economic growth:** Improve productivity and competitiveness while adhering to the fiscal glide path.
2. **Factor-market reform:** Complete reforms in land, labour and capital markets, while improving financial intermediation so that India's cost of capital approaches international levels.
3. **Modern legal architecture:** Enable faster dispute resolution, stronger contract enforcement and better protection for investors.
4. **Manufacturing beyond assembly:** Strengthen domestic manufacturing through reliable power, efficient logistics and urban infrastructure.
5. **Quality employment and innovation:** Expand quality jobs, skilling and research and development while balancing AI adoption with employment creation.

100. Internet Access as a Fundamental Right for Children

The Supreme Court, on October 15, held that the right to access and use the internet is a fundamental right of every individual, including children. The ruling arose from proceedings concerning compliance with the Supreme Court's 2024 directions on child sexual exploitation and abuse material (CSEAM) online. While strengthening measures against such content, the Court also recognised children's fundamental right to access and use the internet.

Constitutional Basis and Judicial Reasoning

1. **Right to internet access:** The Court recognised that children enjoy the same fundamental right to access and use the internet, irrespective of age.
2. **Article 21:** The right to digital access is linked to life and personal liberty. In *Pragya Prasun v. Union of India* (2025), the Court held that excluding persons with disabilities from digital KYC violated Article 21 and recognised digital access as an intrinsic component of the right to life.
3. **Article 19(1)(a):** In *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* (2020), the Court recognised that freedom of speech and expression is protected when exercised through the internet.
4. **Right to receive information:** In the *Cricket Association of Bengal* case (1995), the Court recognised that Article 19(1)(a) includes the right to know, receive and impart information and ideas.
5. **Background of the dispute:** The proceedings followed a 2024 Supreme Court decision concerning the POCSO Act and online child sexual exploitation material. The Court had earlier raised concerns about platforms failing to comply with directions and the promotion of harmful material through redirect links.

Child Safety, Proportionate Restrictions and Platform Accountability

1. **Three-part proportionality test:** Any restriction on a fundamental right must satisfy three requirements: it must have a legal basis, pursue a legitimate State interest, and be proportionate to the objective. Restrictions must be tailored to the harm they seek to prevent.

2. **Parental controls:** The Court suggested greater emphasis on parental consent, guidance and oversight, including child-mode accounts with private settings by default, to provide children with safer online environments.
3. **Targeting harmful content:** The Union should identify categories of content inherently harmful to children, including CSEAM, and establish appropriate safeguards rather than imposing blanket restrictions on internet access.
4. **Removal of CSEAM:** Platforms should strengthen mechanisms to identify and remove child sexual exploitation and abuse material. The Court also emphasised prompt action on reported material and accountability for intermediaries that fail to comply.
5. **Financial accountability:** The Court asked the Union to consider exemplary monetary penalties for persistent intermediary failures and directed that profits earned from CSEAM offered through paywalls or subscriptions be forfeited and disgorged.
6. **Risks of age verification:** Mandatory age-based restrictions may require continuous collection of sensitive personal information, increasing the risks of surveillance and misuse of children's data.
7. **Judicial caution:** The Court did not rule out safeguards. Instead, it emphasised that restrictions must be proportionate and should not deprive children of educational, informational and developmental opportunities.

101 . A Piece of Mars's Moon: Why Japan Has Sent a Mission to Phobos

Why Study Phobos and Deimos?

1. **Unresolved origin**: Scientists are examining two competing explanations — that the moons are asteroids captured by Mars's gravitational pull, or that they formed from debris following a collision between Mars and a large celestial body.
2. **Scientific significance**: Their irregular shapes, composition and orbital characteristics may help explain their formation and provide insights into Mars itself.
3. **Future exploration:** Phobos's extremely weak gravity could make it a potential staging point for future Mars missions, although the operational and fuel-saving benefits remain dependent on mission design.

Key Features of the MMX Mission

1. **Mission timeline:** The spacecraft is expected to reach Mars around August 2027 and return to Earth in 2031.
2. **Scientific operations**: It will enter quasi-satellite orbit around Phobos, examine its topography and chemical composition, and identify a suitable landing site.
3. **Mission architecture**: The spacecraft comprises three main modules — propulsion, exploration (including a rover) and sample return.
4. **Sample collection**: The mission aims to collect physical samples from Phobos and return them to Earth for detailed analysis.
5. **Technology demonstration:** It will test technologies for future Mars exploration, including autonomous navigation and landing in extremely weak gravity.
6. **Multinational participation**: While led by JAXA, the mission involves the European Space Agency (ESA), NASA, France's CNES, Germany's DLR and the Australian Space Agency.

102. Rubio in Jamnagar, and a Changing Map of the New Diplomacy

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit to Reliance Industries' refinery in Jamnagar highlights how **Indian corporate expansion is becoming increasingly intertwined with diplomacy, energy security and geopolitical interests**. As Indian companies acquire global scale, their commercial networks are creating new channels of engagement with major powers, making private enterprise an increasingly important factor in India's foreign policy.

Business and Foreign Policy: An Evolving Relationship

1. **Changing role of corporations:** The traditional relationship between business and foreign policy was reflected in the American adage, "What is good for General Motors is good for America." Although corporations no longer occupy the same commanding position in US foreign policy, their strategic relevance remains.
2. **India's expanding corporate influence:** Indian companies are increasingly becoming global economic actors. Their investments, market access and international partnerships are creating opportunities for diplomatic engagement beyond conventional government-to-government relations.
3. **International precedents:** China's "go out" policy encouraged Chinese firms to expand overseas, extending Beijing's economic and political influence. European governments, too, increasingly work with their companies to secure international markets and contracts.
4. **Business as a diplomatic channel:** Corporate networks have historically facilitated international engagement. Examples include American businesses helping build US–China relations and business-linked outreach involving the Hinduja brothers and Iran after the 1973 oil crisis.

Reliance Industries: Energy Security and Geopolitical Significance

1. **Global refining capacity:** Jamnagar's refining complex can process different grades of crude oil and supply refined products to global markets, connecting oil producers with consumers across geographical boundaries.
2. **India's energy vulnerability:** India is a major importer of crude oil and an important exporter of refined petroleum products. Consequently, disruptions in crude supplies and changes in international energy policy have direct implications for its energy security.
3. **Geopolitical disruptions:** The Russia–Ukraine war and separate disruptions to oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz have reinforced the importance of energy security in Indian diplomacy.
4. **Sanctions and market uncertainty:** The Biden administration's price cap sought to limit Russian oil revenues without destabilising global markets. The Trump administration's sanctions threats were followed by a shift towards easing some restrictions on Iranian and Russian oil exports amid energy-market pressures, illustrating the tensions between geopolitical objectives and domestic economic concerns.
5. **India–US energy cooperation:** Reliance's involvement in the proposed refinery at Brownsville, Texas, points to the potential for Indian private-sector investment to deepen energy cooperation between the two countries.

Private Capital and the Changing Map of Diplomacy

1. **Beyond state-centric relations:** Capital and technology have long connected countries, and companies are becoming an increasingly important part of the diplomatic process. Their influence complements, but cannot replace, the state's central role in international relations.
2. **Commercial networks as strategic assets:** Companies with global supply chains, extensive infrastructure and international market access can influence how countries respond to geopolitical disruptions.
3. **Energy and political leverage:** Jamnagar's importance has grown amid changes in global energy flows, including the redirection of Russian oil supplies and the growing role of Indian refiners in international markets.
4. **Growing international engagement:** The participation of Indian business leaders in interactions with global political leaders reflects the expanding connection between corporate capabilities and diplomatic influence.

Implications for India–US Relations

1. **Converting corporate importance into diplomatic gains:** Reliance offers a substantial private-sector partnership. The central challenge for New Delhi is to translate the company's growing importance in American strategic calculations into an asset for India–US relations.
2. **Aligning business with national interests:** Corporate investments and international partnerships can create opportunities for cooperation, but their diplomatic value depends on how effectively India connects commercial interests with its wider foreign-policy objectives.
3. **A more integrated diplomatic approach:** India needs to recognise the increasingly close relationship between private capital, technological capabilities and international relations while preserving the state's role in determining foreign policy.

103 . Unknown Gaps: India Must Do Better at Detecting and Preventing Data Breaches

The Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) advisory highlights gaps in India's cybersecurity framework, particularly in detecting breaches, reporting incidents and enforcing security obligations. Despite growing access to AI-based security tools, organisations continue to face difficulties identifying intrusions and ensuring accountability, while emerging AI-agent capabilities create additional challenges for existing legal frameworks.

Cybersecurity Gaps and the Need for Stronger Accountability

1. **Detection and reporting failures:** Organisations affected by the recent intrusions did not detect them independently; the breaches came to light through AI companies' disclosures and CERT-In's own operations. This exposes the limits of reporting requirements when organisations cannot detect an intrusion.
2. **Weak implementation of safeguards:** The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and the requirement for reasonable security safeguards against data breaches highlight the need for stronger implementation and enforceable compliance.
3. **Emerging AI-related risks:** AI agents can discover vulnerabilities and exploit systems without necessarily understanding the human intentions behind their actions. Existing legal frameworks may not adequately address such autonomous intrusions or clearly establish responsibility.
4. **Fragmented cybersecurity standards:** Cybersecurity requirements and incident-reporting practices remain uneven across organisations and sectors, weakening institutional accountability.
5. **Way forward:** CERT-In should publish anonymised incident analyses and remediation outcomes, strengthen risk-based cybersecurity requirements, improve detection—especially in public systems—and review its exemption from the RTI Act.

104. Fall of the Centre: Economic Woes Have Fuelled Public Discontent in France Under Macron

France's political crisis under Emmanuel Macron reflects the growing strain between economic reform, fiscal constraints and public expectations. Despite efforts to revive growth through tax cuts and corporate incentives, France faces persistent fiscal pressures. Public debt is projected to reach 119.3% of GDP in 2026, while the budget deficit is estimated at 5.4% of GDP. The government's attempt to balance fiscal consolidation with public demands has become increasingly difficult.

The crisis has also weakened mainstream political forces and made parliamentary governance more difficult. The resignation of Sébastien Lecornu in October 2025, followed by his reappointment in February 2026, illustrates the continuing political instability and difficulty of securing durable parliamentary support under Macron. Earlier concessions to the gilets jaunes movement in 2018–19, including support for low-income earners, failed to resolve the underlying discontent. Meanwhile, **Marine Le Pen's National Rally has sought to capitalise on public anger and the weakening of established parties**, raising concerns about the far right's prospects ahead of the 2027 presidential election. France's experience illustrates how unresolved economic grievances can deepen political fragmentation and undermine confidence in established leadership.

105. How Conversion Affects Reservation

The Supreme Court held that conversion to Islam does not automatically confer membership of a notified Backward Class Muslim community. Nor can reservation entitlement founded on caste-based backwardness in the previous social order be carried forward solely on the basis of pre-conversion status. Social disadvantage and legal eligibility remain distinct questions.

Religious Conversion and the Legal Framework for Reservation

1. **Supreme Court ruling:** On 15 October 2026, in The Secretary to Government v. Sameer Ahamed N. and Others, the Supreme Court upheld the Madras High Court's decision striking down Tamil Nadu Government Order. The order enabled eligible persons from Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Denotified Communities who converted to Islam to seek Backward Class Muslim certificates under the specified framework.
2. **Conversion does not automatically establish eligibility:** The Court distinguished between a person's conversion to Islam and their entitlement to a different reservation classification. A person cannot claim membership of a notified community merely by converting to the religion associated with that community.
3. **Two constitutional routes:** The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, restricts SC recognition to persons professing Hinduism, Sikhism or Buddhism. In contrast, BC identification operates through a separate classification framework under which social and educational backwardness must be established.
4. **Existing disadvantage versus new classification:** The State argued that a person who had previously received reservation benefits should not automatically lose every benefit after conversion. However, the Court's concern was whether conversion alone could establish eligibility for a different category without demonstrating the required social characteristics.
5. **The Tamil Nadu government's justification:** The State relied on a letter from the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission, which had recommended extending the relevant classification to converts. The Court held that the Commission's recommendation could not, by itself, justify the automatic transfer of pre-conversion community status to a notified Backward Class Muslim category. Expert recommendations remain subject to constitutional and legal requirements.

Identifying Backwardness: Evidence, Indicators and Commissions

1. **Mandal Commission's methodology:** The Second Backward Classes Commission, chaired by B.P. Mandal, developed indicators covering social, educational and economic conditions. Social indicators received greater weight, reflecting the importance of social disadvantage in identifying backwardness.
2. **Indicators of disadvantage:** These included early marriage, school dropout rates, manual labour and other measurable characteristics of social and economic deprivation. The underlying principle is that backwardness must be established through identifiable conditions rather than religious identity alone.
3. **Sachar Committee findings:** The Sachar Committee, constituted in 2005 under Justice Rajinder Sachar, examined the social, economic and educational position of Muslims. Its 2006 report documented disadvantages in education, employment and access to credit, highlighting the need to assess disadvantage through evidence.
4. **Why group-level evidence matters:** The Court questioned whether the State had established that converts from different Hindu BC or MBC communities necessarily shared the characteristics of the notified Backward Class Muslim communities. A person's previous classification cannot, by itself, establish membership of another category.
5. **Individual circumstances and community classification:** Occupation, location, educational attainment and representation in public employment may be relevant to assessing backwardness. However, evidence of disadvantage must be connected to the classification being claimed; inherited disadvantage alone does not automatically establish eligibility under a different notified category.

The Larger Question: Dalit Muslims, Dalit Christians and Reservation

1. **Ranganath Misra Commission:** The National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, chaired by Justice Ranganath Misra, recommended in 2007 that SC status be extended to Dalits belonging to religions beyond those specified under the existing framework. This raises a wider question about whether the present classification adequately recognises caste-based disadvantage across religious communities.
2. **Distinguishing two legal questions:** Whether caste-based disadvantage continues after religious conversion is different from whether a person qualifies for a particular reservation category under the existing law. The former concerns the persistence of social inequality; the latter concerns the legal criteria for recognition and entitlement.
3. **Way forward:** The State should examine empirical evidence of social and educational disadvantage, including relevant indicators of representation and deprivation, before extending reservation-related classification. Any decision must be supported by a defensible assessment and remain consistent with the applicable constitutional framework.

The central debate is whether India's reservation framework adequately recognises **continuing caste-based disadvantage across religious communities while maintaining evidence-based eligibility criteria**. The judgment highlights that neither conversion alone nor a general assertion of disadvantage can automatically establish entitlement to a different reservation category.

106. Let's Recreate the UN — 81 Years Show Why It's Worth the Effort

As the United Nations (UN) marks its 81st anniversary, it faces a crisis of legitimacy amid geopolitical rivalry, armed conflicts and weakening confidence in multilateral institutions. Despite its limitations, the UN has contributed to humanitarian assistance, global health, development and international cooperation. The central argument is that **the UN needs institutional renewal, not abandonment**, because the alternatives to multilateral cooperation could further weaken international order and collective responses to global challenges.

The UN's Legacy: Achievements and Changing Global Realities

1. **Humanitarian and developmental achievements:** UN agencies have contributed to improvements in public health, education and poverty reduction. The World Health Organization (WHO) helped support the decline in global child mortality, while UNICEF has played a major role in protecting children and supporting vulnerable populations.
2. **Multilateral treaty-making:** The Montreal Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Paris Agreement demonstrate the UN system's role in establishing international standards and coordinating action on shared challenges.
3. **Humanitarian response:** The UN has supported displaced populations, including through refugee assistance and disaster relief. Its humanitarian role remains particularly important during conflicts and large-scale emergencies.
4. **Peacekeeping and conflict management:** UN peacekeeping and diplomatic initiatives have contributed to conflict management, although their effectiveness depends on the cooperation of member states and the political circumstances of each conflict.
5. **A transformed international order:** Decolonisation, the emergence of new powers and the growing influence of regional actors have changed global politics since the UN's establishment. Institutions created in the aftermath of the Second World War must now operate in a world with a substantially different distribution of power.

The UN's Legitimacy Crisis: Representation, Veto and Geopolitical Rivalry

1. **Outdated power structure:** The Security Council's permanent membership reflects the geopolitical settlement of 1945 rather than contemporary global realities. This raises questions about the representation of developing countries and emerging powers.
2. **Veto-induced paralysis:** The veto allows permanent members to block substantive Security Council decisions, even when international crises demand collective action. The resulting paralysis weakens confidence in the UN's ability to uphold international peace and security.
3. **Geopolitical competition:** Rivalries among major powers increasingly constrain international cooperation. The UN's capacity to respond depends not only on its institutional design but also on whether influential states are willing to support collective action.
4. **Erosion of international legitimacy:** When international rules are applied inconsistently or powerful states can obstruct action, the credibility of multilateral institutions suffers. This deepens the gap between the UN's founding principles and its practical performance.
5. **Limits of institutional authority:** The UN cannot independently resolve conflicts when powerful states refuse to cooperate. Its authority is therefore inseparable from the political commitment of its members.

Reforming the UN: From Institutional Change to Effective Multilateralism

1. **More representative decision-making:** Security Council reform must address the under-representation of developing countries and reflect changes in global political and economic power.

2. **Addressing the veto:** Reform must confront the tension between the privileges of permanent members and the need for effective collective responses to international crises.
3. **Restoring confidence in multilateralism:** The UN's legitimacy depends on its ability to respond consistently to conflicts, humanitarian emergencies and transnational challenges rather than allowing geopolitical rivalry to dominate institutional action.
4. **Preserving the value of collective action:** Weaknesses in the UN do not negate the need for an international forum where states can negotiate, coordinate policies and establish common rules. Abandoning multilateral institutions could leave global challenges more vulnerable to unilateral decisions and power politics.

107. Six Steps to Strengthen the India–US Relationship

The India–US partnership is facing uncertainty despite shared concerns over China and progress in defence cooperation. Differences over India's engagement with Russia and Pakistan, alongside Washington's changing strategic priorities, have created friction. The challenge is to move beyond diplomatic declarations and build a **pragmatic, interest-driven alignment** through concrete cooperation in deterrence, defence production, technology and regional security.

From Strategic Alignment to Operational Cooperation

1. **Reciprocal deterrence:** India should strengthen its Pacific presence, building on the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet forward deployments to Southeast Asia and coordinated patrols in the Philippine Sea. The US should correspondingly expand its naval presence and logistical access in the Indian Ocean.
2. **Indian Ocean cooperation:** Greater US naval presence in the Indian Ocean, including joint patrols and expanded regional logistics, can strengthen India's maritime security.
3. **Logistical interoperability:** Existing logistics pacts should be operationalised to support forward-deployed US naval assets, alongside the development of deep-sea sensor networks.
4. **Institutionalised military coordination:** A joint framework for protecting critical energy grids and satellite networks against cyberattacks should complement cooperation in high-technology friction points. The proposals also include a Joint Space Defence Command to develop small military satellites.

From Defence Acquisition to Co-production and Industrial Capacity

1. **Make in India and reciprocal procurement:** Defence acquisition should move beyond purchasing foreign equipment towards partnerships that strengthen Indian manufacturing. Proposals include domestic assembly of long-range drones and co-production of jet engines.
2. **Joint development:** These arrangements should create pathways for future co-development of precision-strike munitions and autonomous systems, strengthening indigenous defence capabilities.
3. **Defence acceleration ecosystem:** Venture-capital pipelines should be expanded to help commercialise dual-use startup innovations before they become trapped in traditional military procurement processes.
4. **Semiconductor and critical-mineral security:** Leveraging its membership of the US-led Pax Silica coalition could help India accelerate its domestic semiconductor ecosystem. Predictable export controls and access to trusted AI infrastructure remain important.
5. **Critical minerals framework:** Implementing the bilateral Critical Minerals Framework, alongside public–private capital, can support rare-earth processing and lithium refining while addressing commercial and market-access barriers.

Wider Strategic Partnerships and People-to-People Links

1. **Indo-Pacific integration:** India and the US should connect bilateral logistics and surveillance capabilities with broader regional frameworks, including the Quad and operational partnerships with countries such as the Philippines.
2. **Security beyond bilateral ties:** Integrating bilateral cooperation into wider groupings can help translate individual partnerships into collective deterrence across the Indo-Pacific.
3. **Diaspora and educational networks:** Bilateral fellowships and cross-regional scholarships involving Indo-Pacific partners can strengthen professional networks and provide a commercial foundation for the wider alliance.
4. **Managing strategic differences:** The relationship need not be frictionless. India's engagement with Russia and its regional relationships should be managed through pragmatic alignment rather than expectations of complete convergence.

The central argument is that India–US relations should be built on **mutually beneficial, operational cooperation rather than declarations of strategic convergence alone**.

108 . Peace for Progress

Regional economic cooperation cannot succeed if member states disagree on the security threats undermining it. India's position at the SCO is that **counterterrorism must be treated as a prerequisite for regional integration, not as a separate diplomatic issue**. Following the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor, India objected to a draft declaration that did not

adequately reflect its concerns over cross-border and Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. The presence of Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar sharpened this diplomatic divide, exposing the difficulty of building regional consensus when members differ over the nature of the threat itself.

This disagreement has implications beyond counterterrorism. Initiatives such as the International North–South Transport Corridor and Chabahar Port are intended to improve access to Central Asian markets, but connectivity delivers economic benefits only when security, investor confidence and predictable transport networks are in place. **The contradiction facing the SCO is that it seeks deeper economic cooperation without a common approach to the security conditions needed to sustain it.** India's position is that progress requires practical cooperation against terrorism, including intelligence-sharing, disruption of recruitment networks and terrorist financing, while respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity.

109. Bitter and Sweet: The FSSAI Must Expand Restrictions to Cover All Added Sugars in Infant Foods

The FSSAI's expansion of restrictions on added sugars in infant foods highlights a tension between **nutritional safeguards and the commercial formulations of infant-food manufacturers**.

Regulation of Added Sugars in Infant Foods

1. **Existing restrictions:** Under the 2020 regulations, sucrose and/or fructose may be added to infant nutrition products when required as a carbohydrate source, provided their combined amount does not exceed 20% of total carbohydrate. The 2026 draft proposes prohibiting their addition in products intended for infants up to six months.
2. **Proposed amendment and regulatory gap:** The draft amendment prohibits added sucrose and fructose in products for infants up to six months. The editorial argues that restrictions should cover all added sugars and extend to products for older infants, rather than targeting only two ingredients.
3. **Nutritional implications:** WHO recommendations and infant-feeding guidelines emphasise avoiding added sugars. Evidence cited in the discussion links regular exposure to sweetened foods during infancy with a greater preference for sweet flavours and potential adverse dietary patterns.
4. **Regulatory loophole:** The concern is that restrictions focused on sucrose and fructose may leave room for manufacturers to use other sweetening ingredients. The regulatory framework therefore needs to cover all added sugars rather than only selected ingredients.
5. **Industry and enforcement:** Manufacturers have defended sugar formulations under the Food Safety and Standards Act and the Codex Alimentarius framework. The key challenge is ensuring that product formulations and labelling requirements align with nutritional objectives.
6. **Way forward:** The FSSAI should assess the ingredients used in infant foods and the nutritional profile of finished products, ensuring that restrictions apply comprehensively to added sugars. The proposed framework should also address products intended for infants beyond six months, where exposure to sweetened foods can influence longer-term dietary preferences.

110. How Exposed Is India to Foreign Technology?

Elon Musk's reported restrictions on Ukraine's access to military-grade Starshield services, which rely on SpaceX's satellite infrastructure, highlight how dependence on foreign-controlled technology can become a strategic vulnerability during geopolitical conflicts. India's reliance extends across satellite communications, navigation, cloud computing, digital payments and military equipment. **The central concern is the difference between accessing technology and retaining control over its continued operation** when foreign providers, export restrictions or sanctions disrupt essential services.

Foreign Dependence Across Critical Sectors

1. **Satellite communications:** Starlink, Eutelsat OneWeb and Jio Satellite Communications illustrate India's reliance on satellite-service providers with different ownership structures. Government investment in Jio and foreign links involving OneWeb do not automatically guarantee control over all network infrastructure. Starlink's restrictions in Ukraine highlight the risks of dependence on external providers.
2. **Satellite navigation:** NavIC was designed as a seven-satellite constellation, but at least four operational satellites are required for basic positioning. As of July 2026, only three satellites were available for positioning, navigation and timing, preventing standalone positioning; timing services remained functional.
3. **Cloud computing:** MeghRaj 2.0 includes an AWS–Yotta hybrid-cloud collaboration announced in February 2026. Sensitive workloads can remain within NIC data centres while using AWS services, raising questions about operational dependence even where data residency requirements are met.
4. **Digital payments:** Although UPI supports domestic transactions, international payments remain connected to foreign financial institutions and cross-border banking infrastructure. The European Union's disconnection of selected Russian banks from **SWIFT** illustrates how sanctions can disrupt international financial communication and potentially affect Indian businesses.

5. **Military equipment:** Following India's 1998 nuclear tests, US sanctions disrupted defence procurement, including the non-delivery of US-made engines intended for the Advanced Light Helicopter programme.

Domestic Alternatives and the Limits of Technological Control

1. **Data localisation versus operational control:** Physically storing data in India does not necessarily provide independence if foreign companies control the cloud infrastructure, software or management systems required to operate it.
2. **Indigenous software: Maya OS**, developed under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, represents an effort to reduce reliance on proprietary foreign operating systems. However, alternatives must meet practical security and operational requirements to be viable at scale.
3. **Navigation and communications:** NavIC and domestic satellite capabilities can reduce reliance on foreign systems, but their strategic value depends on adequate coverage, operational reliability and the ability to maintain and expand infrastructure.
4. **Financial and defence vulnerabilities:** Dependence on international payment networks and overseas defence suppliers can expose India to external decisions even when domestic institutions remain operational.

Strengthening Strategic Autonomy

1. **Operational resilience:** India needs the ability to maintain essential services when foreign providers restrict access or international tensions disrupt supplies.
2. **Credible domestic capability:** Indigenous systems must be capable of operating at scale, with sufficient infrastructure, maintenance capacity and technical support.
3. **Diversification:** Reducing excessive dependence on individual providers can limit the impact of sanctions, commercial decisions and geopolitical disruptions.
4. **End-to-end control:** Strategic autonomy requires more than domestic ownership or data storage; it requires the capacity to operate, maintain and, where necessary, replace critical systems independently.

111 . ECI's Course Correction Is Welcome, Need for Accountability Remains

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has introduced changes to the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls following allegations of irregularities and criticism over its implementation. These include limiting objections during the revision process, accepting the long-pending demand of political parties for machine-readable electoral rolls, and directing verification of previously deleted names. While these measures represent a welcome correction, they do not resolve the concerns over alleged illegalities, the disenfranchisement of eligible voters and the institutional responsibility for the consequences of the exercise.

ECI's Course Correction: Acknowledging Mistakes

1. **Corrective measures:** The ECI has taken steps to address concerns arising from the SIR, including restrictions on the number of objections that can be filed during the relevant phase and acceptance of political parties' demand for machine-readable electoral rolls.
2. **Form 6 and SSR:** The ECI withdrew controversial Form 6 changes in non-SIR states and resumed the suspended Special Summary Revision (SSR). The column questions whether the suspension had prevented eligible first-time voters from enrolling.
3. **Verification of deleted electors:** Chief Electoral Officers were directed to ensure that names deleted earlier were restored where voters remained eligible, with Booth Level Officers comparing pre- and post-SIR electoral rolls to identify deletions.
4. **Legal compliance:** Technical experts were engaged to examine whether ECINet, the ECI's digital platform, complied with applicable laws.
5. **Limits of correction:** Such measures may address some procedural shortcomings, but they do not settle allegations of illegality or answer questions about the consequences of the earlier exercise.

SIR: Questions over Its Purpose and Consequences

1. **Stated objective versus outcome:** The SIR was intended to *"purify"* electoral rolls by deleting the names of deceased and otherwise ineligible electors. However, concerns remain about whether the exercise effectively identified the ineligible while ensuring the inclusion of eligible voters.
2. **Alleged illegalities:** Reports concerning the implementation of the SIR have raised questions about the manner in which electoral-roll revision was conducted. The ECI cannot avoid scrutiny of alleged illegalities simply by introducing subsequent corrective measures.
3. **Disenfranchisement:** The exclusion of eligible electors raises a fundamental concern about the consequences of electoral-roll revision. The issue extends beyond administrative errors to the possibility of citizens being denied the opportunity to participate in elections.
4. **Human consequences:** The exercise generated anxiety within households over the possibility of names being deleted and the need to establish eligibility. These consequences cannot be addressed solely through administrative adjustments made after the process has begun.

Accountability Beyond Course Correction

1. **Responsibility for consequences:** Corrective measures are welcome, but they do not absolve the ECI of responsibility for the alleged disenfranchisement and irregularities associated with the SIR.
2. **Judicial scrutiny:** The Supreme Court's consideration of alleged illegalities raises questions about the legality of the ECI's actions and the responsibility of the institution for the consequences of its decisions.
3. **Institutional accountability:** Beyond correcting procedural errors, accountability must address allegations of unilateral decisions, unauthorised changes to Form 6 and software that allegedly obstructed EROs from performing their statutory duties. These allegations remain subject to judicial scrutiny.
4. **Credibility of the process:** The legitimacy of electoral-roll revision depends on whether its stated objectives are achieved lawfully and without unjustifiably excluding eligible electors.

112. PHP2Shell: The Flaws That Forced Websites to Shut Down Worldwide

Websites operated by **Japan's Finance Ministry,** the Port of Rotterdam and the Wikimedia Foundation went offline following the discovery of two critical vulnerabilities in PHP. The vulnerabilities, collectively called **PHP2Shell**, prompted cybersecurity agencies to issue warnings and developers to release security updates.

Understanding PHP2Shell

1. **PHP:** An open-source programming language used to build websites and process information such as login details, application submissions and online purchases. WordPress, which powers over 40% of websites globally, uses PHP.
2. **PHP2Shell vulnerabilities:** The two flaws could allow attackers to remotely execute malicious code on affected web servers without logging in or accessing sensitive information stored in server memory.
3. **How the vulnerabilities work:** One flaw can cause remote code execution through memory corruption when PHP runs out of memory during request cleanup. The second involves stale internal state from an earlier request being reused incorrectly. Under vulnerable configurations, these flaws can allow unauthenticated attackers to execute malicious code or access sensitive information.
4. **Role of AI:** Researchers used AI tools to discover the vulnerabilities. However, the flaws themselves can be exploited without AI.

Why Remediation Is Difficult?

1. **Shared hosting:** Website owners may not control the servers hosting their websites or know who maintains the PHP installation, making it difficult to ensure that security updates are applied.
2. **Legacy systems:** Older systems and appliances may be difficult to update or replace. Some operate as "black boxes," with limited visibility into their software versions and patch status.
3. **Vendor dependence:** Organisations may rely on external vendors to maintain systems and provide security updates, limiting their ability to address vulnerabilities independently.
4. **Precautionary shutdowns:** Cybersecurity agencies advised operators to install the security updates released on 21 October 2026. Organisations unable to patch immediately were advised to take vulnerable services offline temporarily. Such shutdowns do not, by themselves, establish that a breach occurred.

113. UN Climate Damages Fund Pledges $21 Million to Nepal

The United Nations **Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD)** has provisionally allocated **$21.6 million to Nepal** to address damage caused by the devastating August floods. This is the first country-specific allocation by the Fund, established in 2022. A climate-induced ice-and-rock avalanche on August 26 triggered debris flows and flooding along the Bhotekoshi–Trishuli–Narayani river system. Nepal estimates its initial recovery and reconstruction needs at a minimum of **$4.71 billion**. Although the FRLD has received pledges exceeding $820 million, it faces requests worth approximately $2.8 billion from 119 countries. Nepal's allocation includes $1.6 million in oversight fees, while the actual availability and timing of disbursement remain uncertain. The decision marks an important step towards delivering climate-related loss-and-damage finance, but the limited allocation and possible bureaucratic delays highlight the gap between vulnerable countries' recovery needs and available support.

114. Classical Text *Thirukkural* to Take Centre Stage at Kashi Tamil Sangamam

The fifth edition of Kashi Tamil Sangamam, scheduled from November 28 to December 12, will place the classical Tamil text *Thirukkural* at the centre of cultural and educational exchanges between Tamil Nadu and Kashi. The initiative seeks to strengthen **North–South cultural connections** through shared literary traditions, academic engagement and interaction among students and professionals. Its theme, *"Thirukkural Payilvom – Thirukkural Abhyas Karen"* ("Let's learn Thirukkural"), reflects the use of classical literature to promote mutual understanding. The programme will involve around 1,400 participants from Tamil Nadu, alongside

student engagement across more than 1,000 higher education institutions. Translation of *Thirukkural* into all **22 languages of the Eighth Schedule**, alongside educational activities in Varanasi, is intended to widen access to the text and deepen cultural exchange.

Significance: The initiative uses India's shared literary and cultural heritage as a medium for strengthening regional connections and promoting national integration through education. The first edition was held in 2022; the programme is organised by the Union Education Ministry with participating educational institutions and the governments of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

115. Mere Presence at Protest Not Enough for Prosecution: Delhi High Court

The Delhi High Court quashed an FIR against a Staff Selection Commission (SSC) aspirant booked following a protest at Ramlila Maidan in August 2025 over alleged examination irregularities. The police alleged that some organisers refused to end the demonstration after the permitted time and that protesters violated prohibitory orders under **Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)** and clashed with police personnel. However, the Court held that neither the FIR nor the status report attributed any specific criminal act to the petitioner. **Mere participation in a demonstration does not establish common intention to disobey lawful directions or obstruct police personnel.** For Section 223(a) BNS, the material must indicate knowing disobedience of a lawful order with the consequences specified by law. Separately, Section 3(5) BNS requires material supporting a shared common intention; mere presence at a protest does not establish it. In the absence of such material, continuation of criminal proceedings would serve no worthwhile purpose.

116. Canary in Coal Mine: Core Sector Data Indicate Impending Growth Slowdown

The **Index of Core Industries (ICI)** recorded a series-high growth of **7.9% in September 2026**, marking the second consecutive month of acceleration. However, the headline improvement may be temporary, as the underlying performance of key sectors reveals persistent weaknesses and growing fiscal pressures.

Temporary Coal and Electricity Surge

1. **Coal output: Coal output:** Growth rose to 10.7% in September, despite a **1.0% contraction during April–September 2026**. The monthly rebound does not erase the cumulative decline. The September rebound may partly reflect a favourable base effect and higher electricity output. However, the core-sector figures alone do not establish that coal-stock replenishment during a heat wave caused the increase.
2. **Electricity demand:** Electricity grew by **11.4% in September**, following a half-year dominated by double-digit growth. This demand-driven boost to coal consumption may ease with a milder winter.
3. **Steel and iron ore:** Steel output accelerated in September, but not enough to sustain the coal stockpiling trend. The rise in steel production nevertheless supported iron ore output, potentially strengthening the mining component of the broader **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**.

Oil Dependence and Shrinking Fiscal Space

1. **Domestic production weakness:** Crude oil and natural gas have contracted continuously since 2024, even as refinery output rose **10.3% in September**, indicating increased processing of imported oil.
2. **Rising import bill:** India's oil imports increased by **7% in volume but 47% in value** in September, reflecting higher international prices.
3. **Geopolitical pressure:** Attacks on Saudi Arabia's energy infrastructure pushed global oil prices above **$112 per barrel**, close to a six-month high. Although the United States' reprieve on potential tariffs linked to Russian oil imports provides India with a source of supply, the earlier discounts have largely disappeared.
4. **Pressure on foreign exchange reserves:** Premium-priced oil imports are drawing down India's foreign exchange reserves, which are also being used to defend the rupee.

Growth Supported by Government Spending

Cement and steel remain the only sustainably growing core sectors, both supported by government infrastructure expenditure. The central concern is that **industrial growth may be temporary while the government's fiscal space is shrinking**, raising questions about the sustainability of the current expansion.

117. Tunnelling Through: Domestic Manufacturing and Foreign Partnerships Must Go Hand-in-Hand

China's new export-licensing requirements for tunnel-boring machines (TBMs) expose India's dependence on Chinese equipment for infrastructure projects. China accounts for around **70% of the global TBM market**, making restrictions a potential source of project delays and higher costs.

Export Restrictions and India's Exposure

1. **Licensing requirements:** From November 18, exports of specified TBMs and high-altitude wet shotcrete machines to destinations outside China will require licences. Exporters must register, obtain an export certificate and submit end-use declarations.

2. **Infrastructure projects:** India's dependence on imported TBMs creates risks for major projects, including the Mumbai–Ahmedabad high-speed rail corridor.
3. **Alternative sourcing:** Procurement from Germany or Japan may become necessary, potentially increasing costs and delaying projects.

Domestic Manufacturing: Assembly versus Production

1. **Existing facility:** Germany's Herrenknecht AG established an assembling and refurbishment facility in Chennai in 2007. However, this does not eliminate dependence on specialised manufacturing capabilities.
2. **Production economics:** Unlike conventional construction equipment, TBM manufacturing requires substantial investment and a minimum volume of orders to remain economically viable.
3. **BEML experience:** BEML's experience with manufacturing partnerships highlights the difficulty of meeting demand when production requires specialised technology, sufficient orders and significant investment.

Building Domestic Capability Through Partnerships

India needs international manufacturing partnerships that provide access to advanced technology while strengthening domestic design, production, maintenance and repair capabilities. It must also identify sectors where it has significant global capacity and establish export-control protocols, particularly in strategic industries such as semiconductors, to reduce vulnerability to foreign restrictions and supply-chain disruptions.

118 . Tied by Geography, Divided by Politics

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairman Tarique Rahman is expected to visit New Delhi in December to assess India–Bangladesh relations and examine the causes of bilateral tensions. Despite geographical proximity and India's crucial role in Bangladesh's 1971 liberation, historical grievances, competing nationalist narratives and political changes continue to complicate bilateral ties.

Historical Legacy and Competing Narratives

1. **Legacy of 1971:** India's military support to the Mukti Bahini and its role in Bangladesh's liberation were expected to create enduring goodwill. However, sections of Bangladesh's political establishment have viewed Indian influence with suspicion.
2. **Geographical asymmetry:** Bangladesh shares a border of more than 4,000 kilometres with India. This proximity offers opportunities for cooperation but also reinforces concerns about Indian dominance.
3. **Partition and identity:** The shared history of Bengal, including the socio-economic dominance of Hindu bhadralok in pre-Partition Bengal, continues to shape perceptions of cultural and political identity.
4. **Nationalist narratives:** The liberation struggle remains central to Bangladesh's national identity, but its political interpretation has increasingly become a source of division.

Domestic Politics and Foreign-Policy Realignment

1. **Awami League and BNP:** The Awami League traditionally maintained close relations with India, while the BNP has been more suspicious of New Delhi's intentions. The growing influence of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami reflects a changing political environment.
2. **After Sheikh Hasina:** Hasina's removal in August 2024 intensified perceptions among sections of Bangladesh's political establishment that India had supported her government, reinforcing suspicions about Indian interference.
3. **Diversification of external relations:** Dhaka sought closer ties with Pakistan, China and the United States to counterbalance India's influence. New Delhi viewed these developments as potentially diminishing its regional role.
4. **Changing political generation:** A younger generation with weaker direct connections to the Liberation War has complicated India's traditional reliance on the historical legacy of 1971 to sustain goodwill.

The Road Ahead

1. **Move beyond historical gratitude:** India cannot expect permanent goodwill solely because of its role in Bangladesh's liberation. Relations must be built on contemporary interests and mutual respect.
2. **Respect political sovereignty:** New Delhi needs to recognise Bangladesh's domestic political realities and avoid actions perceived as interference in its internal affairs.
3. **Pragmatic neighbourhood policy:** India must balance its regional influence with sensitivity towards Bangladesh's concerns, particularly over the sharing of river waters.
4. **Strengthen functional cooperation:** Both countries need to deepen cooperation on regional connectivity and shared security interests, while recognising that domestic political changes can reshape bilateral relations.

119. Chemical Signatures Could Help Detect Diseases Early, but Accuracy and Access Remain Challenges

Chemical signatures or biomarkers are patterns of molecules, elements, isotopes or by-products identified in samples using analytical instruments such as spectrometers or chromatographs. Changes in these markers can help detect diseases, particularly those

affecting the brain and nervous system, potentially before symptoms become obvious. The challenge lies in establishing how reliably a marker identifies a particular disease and whether patients can access the required tests.

Applications in Disease Detection

1. **Alzheimer's disease:** Doctors and researchers examine changes in amyloid-beta and tau proteins. Tests measuring phosphorylated tau, particularly **p-tau217**, can help identify changes associated with Alzheimer's disease by measuring proteins in cerebrospinal fluid, the liquid surrounding the brain and spinal cord.
2. **Parkinson's disease:** Researchers are studying **alpha-synuclein**, a protein associated with Parkinson's disease, as a potential biomarker.
3. **Autoimmune encephalitis:** Tests can detect antibodies directed against particular brain proteins, helping identify an immune response affecting the brain.
4. **Other neurological conditions:** Chemical signatures may help investigate seizures, memory problems and behavioural changes.
5. **Neurofilament light:** Researchers are studying this protein as a marker of nerve-cell damage.
6. **Brain tumours:** Selected molecular tests are already used in specialist practice to help classify tumours and guide treatment decisions. The molecular characteristics of a tumour can influence treatment choices.

Challenges in Diagnosis

1. **Limited disease specificity:** Some markers indicate damage that occurs across several diseases rather than identifying one specific condition. A chemical signature may also appear in different conditions, making interpretation difficult.
2. **Clinical assessment remains essential:** Biomarker results must be considered alongside symptoms, medical history, brain scans and other investigations. A test may identify changes associated with a disease without establishing whether the patient has symptoms or will develop them.
3. **Accuracy and interpretation:** Researchers continue to investigate how reliably individual markers distinguish between conditions and how results should inform diagnosis and treatment.
4. **Cost and availability:** Specialised tests may not be available at every hospital, requiring patients to travel to larger centres. Differences in laboratory methods can also affect how consistently results are interpreted.

120 . In the Crossfire: India Must Adopt a Pro-active Position in the Saudi-Houthi Conflict

The killing of an Indian national in a Houthi attack on Saudi Arabia's Dammam airport highlights the dangers posed by the escalating conflict. Since fighting resumed in July 2026, at least two Indians have been killed and 14 wounded. In a separate incident, the Houthis claimed to have targeted a vessel carrying 14 Indians near Yemen's Zuqar Island in the Red Sea, highlighting the risks to Indian nationals and maritime activity

The conflict threatens regional stability and makes India's diplomatic choices increasingly difficult.

Conflict Dynamics

1. **Origins:** The conflict dates to the Houthi takeover of Sana'a, Yemen's capital, in 2014. Saudi Arabia launched a military campaign in 2015 to restore the Hadi government.
2. **Failed intervention:** Saudi Arabia's bombing campaign and support for northern Yemeni tribes and the internationally recognised government failed to secure a durable victory.
3. **Houthi control:** The Houthis control much of northern Yemen and significant stretches of its Red Sea coast, giving them the capacity to threaten maritime traffic and Saudi infrastructure.
4. **Continuing escalation:** Houthi missile and drone attacks have exposed Saudi Arabia's vulnerability despite its military capabilities. The prolonged conflict has also placed the Saudi Crown Prince, its principal architect, under pressure.

India's Position

1. **Protecting Indian nationals:** The killing and injury of Indians underline the direct human consequences of the conflict.
2. **Proactive diplomacy:** India should prepare a contingency plan for worst-case scenarios and adopt a more proactive position rather than remain passive.
3. **Regional engagement:** India should articulate a stronger position on stability and work with Arab countries and Iran to push for a diplomatic settlement.
4. **De-escalation:** With the possibility of further violence involving Iran and the United States, diplomatic efforts are essential to prevent a wider regional crisis.

121. Falling Short: Marco Rubio's Second Visit to India Yields Little in Terms of Results

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's second visit to India in five months came amid the U.S. midterm elections and uncertainty over President Donald Trump's second-term agenda. Despite expectations of progress, the visit yielded few concrete outcomes. Bilateral relations remain strained by trade tensions, tariffs and disagreements over India's Russian oil imports.

Discussions covered the proposed India–U.S. trade deal, Russian-oil sanctions, India's purchases of Russian military equipment, including the S-400 system, and unresolved tariff and immigration issues. New Delhi also hoped for progress towards a Trump–Modi meeting at the upcoming ASEAN and G20 summits and a date for Trump's visit to India. The Gulf situation, energy security and connectivity were also discussed. Speculation about possible discounts on Russian oil, U.S.-licensed Venezuelan oil and the Jamnagar Reliance refinery did not translate into any clear outcome. Rubio also discussed regional cooperation, including ASEAN and G20 preparations, with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The two sides announced no major agreements or new initiatives. During preparations for the 250th anniversary of U.S. independence, Rubio acknowledged the difficulties India–U.S. relations had faced in recent years, while describing cooperation on core issues of national interest as "extraordinary." The visit thus highlighted the gap between the expectations surrounding bilateral engagement and the limited progress achieved on contentious issues.

122. The Signs and Science of the Shamonda Virus

France reported the first documented human infection with Shamonda virus in October 2026. The patient, who was severely immunocompromised, was treated at Hospices Civils de Lyon for a serious illness and died in early October. Neurological complications were observed, and laboratory investigations confirmed the presence of the virus in multiple biological samples. French authorities are investigating how the infection was acquired and the extent to which the virus contributed to the patient's illness and death. As of 23 October 2026, no human-to-human transmission or health risk to the general population had been identified.

Virus Characteristics and Transmission

1. Classification: Shamonda virus belongs to the family Peribunyaviridae, genus Orthobunyavirus, within the Simbu serogroup.
2. **Transmission:** The virus is understood to spread through bites from *Culicoides* midges and primarily affects cattle, sheep, goats, horses and other animals.
3. **Animal symptoms**: Infection may cause fever, diarrhoea, reduced milk production, abortions and congenital malformations. Neurological disorders have also been reported in horses with Shamonda virus infection.
4. **Seasonal pattern:** The virus's long-term epidemiological impact in Europe remains uncertain. In Europe, biting midges are generally most active from spring to autumn, although activity varies with species, location and weather.
5. **Related viruses:** Shamonda virus belongs to the Simbu serogroup, which also includes Schmallenberg virus. The European Shamonda variants have been designated Shamonda virus Europe 1 (SHAV-EU1) and Shamonda virus Europe 2 (SHAV-EU2). Schmallenberg virus is a distinct, related virus.

Diagnosis and Prevention

1. **Diagnosis:** The patient's blood and cerebrospinal fluid were tested, with genetic traces detected in one sample. Further sequencing of samples after death confirmed the virus.
2. **Vaccination:** No commercially available vaccine currently exists against Shamonda virus, although vaccines are being developed against related Simbu-group viruses.
3. **Vector control:** Preventive measures include midge surveillance, insecticide spraying, reducing or eliminating vector-breeding sites, using double-door entry systems and transporting animals during periods of low vector activity.

123. The Debates Around Legislative Councils, Their Functions Today

Elections to 28 seats across the Legislative Councils of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Karnataka were held, with results expected the following week. Unlike elections to State Legislative Assemblies, **not every adult citizen can vote in Legislative Council elections**, as different categories of seats are filled through specific electoral colleges and nominations.

Legislative Councils: Historical Background and Debate

1. **Bicameral legislatures:** India has six States with Legislative Councils—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. These States have both a Legislative Assembly and a Legislative Council.
2. **Colonial origins:** The Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms led to the Government of India Act, 1919, which provided for legislative councils at the provincial level. The Government of India Act, 1935 further developed the framework for provincial legislatures.
3. **Constituent Assembly debate:** Members disagreed over the need for an upper chamber. Congress leader Rajendra Prasad questioned whether a second chamber was necessary, arguing that the new Constitution should allow Assemblies to function effectively and that concentrating power in an upper chamber could be problematic.
4. **Continuing debate:** The key question is whether Legislative Councils provide meaningful legislative scrutiny and representation or whether they add another layer to the legislative process without sufficient justification.

Political Significance and Representation

1. **Political barometer:** Legislative Council elections can indicate the political standing of parties and influential groups, particularly among professionals and other electorates that do not vote in ordinary Assembly elections.

2. **Representation beyond direct elections:** Councils provide representation to local authorities, graduates, teachers and nominated individuals with specialised knowledge or practical experience.
3. **Party influence:** Although these elections are not conducted on party symbols, political parties continue to support candidates, making the contests relevant to wider political calculations.

How Are MLCs Elected?

4. **p**: Parliament may create or abolish a State Legislative Council by law after the State Legislative Assembly passes a resolution by a majority of its total membership and by at least two-thirds of members present and voting.
5. **Article 171:** A Legislative Council's total membership cannot exceed one-third of the strength of the State Legislative Assembly and cannot be fewer than 40 members.
6. **Electoral method:** Members are elected through proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote.
7. **Composition:** As nearly as practicable:
    a. One-third are elected by local authorities.
    b. One-twelfth are elected by graduates.
    c. One-twelfth are elected by teachers.
    d. One-third are elected by members of the State Legislative Assembly.
    e. The remainder are nominated by the Governor from among persons with special knowledge or practical experience in literature, science, art, the cooperative movement and social service.

124 . Understanding the Economics of Social Unrest: Causes and Consequences

Social unrest across France, Albania, Belgium, Italy and Portugal reflects widespread discontent over the cost-of-living crisis. Although protests often have political triggers, their underlying causes can be economic. However, **rising inequality alone cannot explain the timing and spread of social unrest**, while economic conditions play a more significant role in determining its consequences.

Income Inequality and the Predictors of Unrest

1. **Measuring inequality:** The Top 10%/Bottom 50% income ratio compares the average income of the richest 10% with that of the poorest 50% of the population; a higher ratio indicates a wider income gap between these groups.
2. **Country trends (2014–2024):** France's Income Gap increased from 15.2 to 16.6, while Italy's rose from 13.7 to 14.8. It declined in Spain (16.4 to 14.7), the UK (18.1 to 16.6) and Germany (20.5 to 19.5). India's ratio rose slightly from 38 to 38.2, while South Africa's increased from 103.3 to 118.4.
3. **Inequality is not sufficient:** IMF economists Philip Barrett and Sophia Chen observed in 2021 that inequality had not worsened sufficiently over the preceding decade to explain the recent surge in discontent.
4. **Past unrest as a predictor:** IMF economists Sandile Hlatshwayo and Chris Redl used machine-learning techniques to examine more than **340 economic and social indicators**. Their findings identify past unrest, both domestically and in neighbouring countries, as a particularly strong predictor of future unrest, with substantially greater predictive information than individual economic or social indicators.
5. **Coordination signals:** Previous protests in culturally similar neighbouring countries can encourage mobilisation by signalling that others are also willing to protest. Internet access and social-media penetration can further facilitate communication and coordination.

Economic Consequences of Social Unrest

1. **Persistent GDP losses:** Research by IMF economists and colleagues finds that major unrest is followed, on average, by GDP remaining approximately one percentage point below its pre-shock baseline six quarters after the event; this refers to the GDP level, not a one-percentage-point reduction in the GDP growth rate.
2. **Nature of grievances matters:** Unrest motivated by socioeconomic factors is associated with sharper GDP contractions than unrest driven by political motives.
3. **Combined economic and political causes:** Events arising from a combination of socioeconomic and political grievances are associated with the sharpest GDP contractions.
4. **Distinguishing causes from consequences:** Food and fuel prices can contribute to public discontent, but they are not necessarily the strongest predictors of unrest. Economic factors become more important when assessing the economic damage that follows protests.

125 . Wicked Surprise: Northeast Monsoon Is More Unpredictable, and South Must Be Wary

India's monsoon-deficit year has increased dependence on the northeast monsoon (October–December), particularly in southern India. However, **uncertain rainfall patterns and the risk of extreme precipitation make seasonal forecasts an unreliable**

guarantee against flooding. The southwest monsoon recorded a 12.6% deficit, affecting kharif sowing and contributing to food inflation.

Why the Northeast Monsoon Is Difficult to Predict?

1. **Different regional effects:** While the southwest monsoon contributes around a quarter of annual rainfall in southern peninsular India, the northeast monsoon has its own rainfall patterns. Forecasts indicate that much of the country may receive below-normal rainfall, while parts of southern peninsular India could receive normal to above-normal rainfall.
2. **Limits of seasonal forecasts:** The India Meteorological Department's forecast of normal northeast monsoon rainfall describes the expected seasonal total, not the distribution or intensity of individual rain events. The northeast monsoon is less predictable than the southwest monsoon, making extreme rainfall harder to anticipate.
3. **El Nino's uncertain influence:** El Niño is associated with warming in the central Pacific and can weaken the southwest monsoon. Its relationship with the northeast monsoon is more complex: some El Niño years have brought vigorous rainfall, while others have experienced deficient rainfall. This limits the reliability of using El Niño alone to predict southern India's rainfall.

Why Normal Rainfall Can Still Bring Disaster?

The December 2015 Chennai floods illustrate the danger of treating seasonal forecasts as assurances against extreme events. Despite expectations of normal rainfall, Chennai experienced its heaviest rainfall in 24 years, resulting in at least 500 deaths and displacing 18 lakh people across Tamil Nadu. The broader lesson is that **seasonal rainfall totals can conceal dangerous short-duration extremes**.

Preparedness therefore needs to extend beyond forecasting the seasonal total. Clearing stormwater drains, strengthening flood shelters, making provisions for infrastructure damage and improving early-warning forecasts are essential to reduce the impact of sudden torrential rain. The uncertainty surrounding El Niño and the northeast monsoon makes such preparation especially important.

126. New Avenues: India and Poland Have No Conflict, but Are Pulled Apart by Other Nations

India and Poland are seeking to deepen bilateral ties through expanded economic and strategic cooperation. Following Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk's visit to India from 21–23 October 2026, both countries agreed to double bilateral trade by 2030. The India–EU Free Trade Agreement, concluded in January 2026, offers further opportunities in technology, artificial intelligence, defence, critical minerals, renewable energy and nuclear energy. Poland's industrial expertise and India's manufacturing scale also create scope for joint ventures in manufacturing and mining technology.

However, geopolitical differences continue to constrain the partnership. Poland's security concerns over the Russia–Ukraine conflict contrast with India's longstanding defence relationship with Russia, creating a trust deficit over defence cooperation and the confidentiality of classified information. Poland's concerns also reflect its relationship with Ukraine and its perceptions of India's engagement with Russia and Pakistan. Despite these differences, both countries have opportunities to expand cooperation in counter-terrorism, trade and strategic sectors. Sustained dialogue and greater mutual trust can help prevent wider geopolitical disagreements from limiting bilateral cooperation.

127. Why Do Two Newly Disclosed PHP Security Flaws Put Websites and Their Users at Risk?

Two security flaws disclosed by the PHP team on October 21 could allow attackers to execute malicious code remotely, potentially exposing private data, passwords and website servers. Although fixes are available, website owners must update all affected systems and check for signs of existing breaches, as installing a patch alone may not eliminate damage already caused.

Understanding PHP and the Vulnerabilities

1. **PHP:** A programming language that runs behind the scenes of websites, handling tasks such as login verification, ticket bookings and online purchases. It is widely used across shopping sites, blogs, news websites and business tools.
2. **Memory corruption:** One vulnerability involves out-of-memory (OOM) handling that can leave internal request data only partially initialised. Subsequent cleanup may treat this invalid data as valid, potentially resulting in memory corruption and remote code execution.
3. **Stale pointer:** The second flaw involves a pointer referring to a memory location that has already been cleared. If PHP uses that pointer, it may access information that is no longer valid.
4. **Remote code execution:** Attackers may exploit these weaknesses to make a server execute malicious instructions, potentially gaining access to sensitive information or taking control of affected systems.

Why the Flaws Matter

1. **Exposure of sensitive data:** A successful attack could compromise private data, passwords and website servers.
2. **Wider system risk:** A website may be vulnerable even if its application code has no known flaw, because its server may run an unpatched PHP runtime or another vulnerable component.

3. **Long-standing vulnerability:** The PHP Foundation reported that initial signs of one vulnerability were identified in 2024 but were treated as theoretical because no concrete attack vector had been established. The episode exposed weaknesses in the vulnerability assessment and disclosure process.
4. **Potential prior exploitation:** The vulnerabilities may have existed since 2024, but this does not establish that attackers exploited them throughout that period. Security advisories published after disclosure reported exploitation activity, making prompt patching and investigation of possible compromise essential.

Updating and Securing Affected Websites

1. **Managed hosting:** Website owners should ask their hosting providers which PHP version they use and whether the security fixes have been installed.
2. **Self-managed servers:** Administrators should identify their PHP version, install the appropriate updates and ensure that all affected applications are covered. Updating only the main website may leave other systems vulnerable.
3. **Check for breaches:** Installing a fix does not remove an existing compromise. Signs of a break-in must be investigated, and affected systems may need to be rebuilt from scratch.
4. **Shared responsibility:** Websites depend on multiple interconnected components. Encrypting communications protects data while it travels, but cannot protect it from software vulnerabilities in the systems handling it. Website owners and service providers must therefore ensure that underlying software is updated.

The immediate priority is to update PHP, verify that every affected system is protected and investigate possible earlier breaches. Since websites depend on interconnected software and services, effective security requires action from website owners, hosting providers and software maintainers.

128 . Where Should Judicial Restraint Begin?

Justice Ujjal Bhuyan's remarks on mass voter deletions raise a fundamental question about **the boundary between judicial restraint and constitutional responsibility**. While public comments on pending cases may compromise perceived impartiality, silence on constitutional rights may also be problematic. The issue is whether Justice Bhuyan's remarks crossed this boundary or reiterated established constitutional principles.

Judicial Restraint: Propriety versus Constitutional Responsibility

1. **Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997):** Clause 8 discourages judges from publicly debating political matters or issues pending, or likely to arise, for judicial determination. Clause 1 requires conduct that sustains public confidence in impartiality. The Restatement has no independent sanction but has been cited in judicial decisions.
2. **Impartiality is not indifference:** Justice Vikram Nath's argument highlights that judicial neutrality should not mean ignoring the human consequences of law.
3. **Comparative standards:** The *Bangalore Principles* and the U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 Code of Conduct permit legal education and appropriate public discussion, while requiring restraint on comments concerning pending cases.
4. **The "noisy judges" debate:** Former CJI Ranjan Gogoi's criticism of judges commenting publicly outside court reflects concern that such remarks may undermine judicial neutrality. However, the appropriate standard must distinguish commentary on general constitutional principles from opinions that could prejudge specific litigation.

Justice Bhuyan's Remarks: Prejudgment or Constitutional Commentary

1. **The distinction:** Justice Bhuyan defended voting rights without naming West Bengal's SIR or directly commenting on the pending cases. This supports the argument that his remarks concerned a general constitutional principle, although their timing still raises questions of propriety.
2. **Legal position on voting rights:** In *Association for Democratic Reforms v. Election Commission of India* (May 27, 2026), the Supreme Court upheld Bihar's SIR and described voting as a constitutional right, while recognising that it is neither absolute nor unregulated.
3. **Procedural safeguards:** Section 22 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, provides for correction, transposition and deletion of electoral-roll entries, subject to prescribed verification and applicable hearing safeguards. Rule 21A of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, specifically governs certain deletions before final publication of the electoral roll. The West Bengal controversy involved over 22 lakh deleted voters seeking restoration.
4. **Comparative judicial examples:** Justice Antonin Scalia's criticism of a ruling concerning the Pledge of Allegiance, Lady Hale's Brexit-related commentary before *Miller*, and Justice B.V. Nagarathna's remarks on Governors withholding assent to Bills illustrate the difficulty of defining permissible judicial speech.
5. **Risk of perceived bias:** The concern is not simply whether a judge expresses an opinion, but whether the statement creates a reasonable apprehension that a pending dispute has already been prejudged.

Judicial Record and the Test of Impartiality

1. **An unusually visible record:** Justice Bhuyan's public interventions on constitutional issues have made the question of judicial speech particularly relevant to his case. However, visibility alone does not establish impropriety; the substance and context of each statement matter.
2. **Past judgments are not conclusive evidence of bias:** His record includes *Monowara Bewa* (2017), concerning citizenship-related evidentiary issues, and *Md. Anuwar Hussain v. Union of India* (2014), in which a Foreigners Tribunal's order was criticised for its reasoning and evidentiary basis.
3. **Contextual assessment:** Different outcomes across cases do not automatically establish inconsistency or partiality. Likewise, a public statement should be assessed in context rather than treated as proof of how a judge will decide a future case.
4. **Institutional credibility:** Judicial independence requires both impartial adjudication and public confidence in that impartiality. Excessive public commentary can weaken this confidence, while excessive silence may discourage legitimate discussion of constitutional principles.

129 . CEC Can Be Removed Only Like an SC Judge, ECI Says in Affidavit

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has defended the removal procedure for the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), arguing that removal is governed by safeguards comparable to those applicable to a Supreme Court judge. The issue highlights the balance between **institutional independence, procedural safeguards and accountability of constitutional authorities**.

1. **Removal protection:** The ECI's affidavit states that the CEC can be removed only in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court judge, protecting the office from arbitrary removal.
2. **Rule of majority:** Under the multi-member Commission framework, decisions are taken by majority. In case of disagreement, the Chief Election Commissioner (Conditions of Service and Transaction of Business) Act, 2023, requires the majority view to prevail.
3. **Scope of the affidavit:** The ECI argued in its affidavit that disclosure of internal notes and files concerning the Commission's decisions is subject to the applicable statutory provisions and authorised procedures.
4. **Access to records:** The ECI argued that the 2023 Act provides for disclosure of specified information, while maintaining restrictions on access to internal decision-making records.

Constitutional procedure — Article 324(5):

1. **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC):** Can be removed only in the same manner and on the same grounds as a Supreme Court judge. The procedure requires an address by each House of Parliament, supported by a majority of the total membership of that House and a two-thirds majority of members present and voting, on grounds of **proved misbehaviour or incapacity**; the President then issues the removal order.
2. **Other Election Commissioners (ECs):** Cannot be removed except on the **recommendation of the CEC**. They do not enjoy the same constitutionally specified removal procedure as the CEC.
3. **Protection of service conditions:** The CEC's conditions of service cannot be varied to their disadvantage after appointment.
4. **Statutory provision:** Section 11 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, reiterates the removal safeguards and permits the CEC or an EC to resign by writing to the President

130. Dubious Retreat: The National Medical Commission Must Not Be Seen as Lax on Regulation

The National Medical Commission (NMC) has withdrawn its 2023 Maintenance of Standards of Medical Education Regulations (MSMER), raising concerns over the weakening of accountability mechanisms for medical colleges. The withdrawal has brought the earlier regulatory framework back into operation, but questions remain over **individual penalties, institutional assessment, appeal procedures and transparency in enforcement**.

Withdrawal of MSMER and Regulatory Implications

1. **Penalties on individuals:** The withdrawn MSMER provided for fines of up to ₹5 lakh on faculty members and administrators for submitting false information or misleading the Medical Assessment and Rating Board (MARB).
2. **MARB's existing powers:** The MARB retains the power to impose fines of up to ₹1 crore on errant medical institutions.
3. **Individual accountability:** Following the withdrawal of MSMER-2023, new matters are governed by the National Medical Commission Act, 2019, and the statutory and regulatory provisions in force at the relevant time. The withdrawal notification preserves specified actions and pending matters arising under the earlier regulations.
4. **Parallel assessment mechanism:** MSMER introduced a mechanism allowing the undergraduate and postgraduate boards to assess institutions, thereby encroaching on the MARB's role.
5. **Risk of reduced deterrence:** Removing individual penalties could weaken the fear of personal consequences among administrators, potentially reducing incentives to maintain honest and compliant institutional practices.

6. **Persistent non-compliance:** Violations such as the use of non-teaching or *ghost faculty* continue to raise concerns about the quality and integrity of medical education.

Appeals, Legal Inconsistencies and Enforcement

1. **Appeal provisions:** MSMER-2023 provided for appeals against penalties. The applicable appeal deadline must be determined from the relevant statutory provision and regulations; the stated 15-day deadline should not be retained without verification against the original text.
2. **Possibility of legal disputes:** The discrepancy between the two appeal timelines could generate uncertainty regarding the applicable procedure and create scope for litigation.
3. **Enforcement beyond institutional fines:** Effective regulation requires penalties that ensure compliance by both institutions and the individuals responsible for violations and malpractice.

Transparency and Disclosure of Assessment Results

1. **Assessment and rating of colleges:** The Central Information Commission reportedly revealed that the NMC had stated in 2024 that MARB had never formally assessed or rated medical colleges, despite its standard forms requiring such ratings.
2. **Unresolved discrepancy:** The revised policy does not clarify the inconsistency between the stated absence of formal assessments and the prescribed assessment process.
3. **Publication of results:** The 2023 MARB regulations require the Board to publish its latest annual assessment results. Whether these powers are being exercised transparently remains a concern.
4. **Regulatory credibility:** Unless the NMC provides satisfactory answers to these concerns, withdrawal of MSMER risks appearing to weaken regulatory oversight rather than simplify regulation.

131. Why Inclusion Is Key to the RTE Act

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, provides for admission of children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups to at least 25% of the entry-level class in schools covered by Section 12(1)(c). However, **equality of access does not automatically translate into equality of educational experience**. Children may enter the same classroom yet remain separated by social background, classroom participation and unequal access to support.

The Gap Between Admission and Inclusion

1. **Formal access, unequal experience:** Children admitted under the RTE quota may continue to face stigma, academic difficulties and social isolation despite studying alongside more privileged peers.
2. **Social integration cannot be presumed:** Differences in family backgrounds and school experiences can reproduce social divisions within the classroom, limiting meaningful interaction among students.
3. **Uniform treatment is not always equitable:** Applying identical teaching methods to children with different learning needs and circumstances may deepen disadvantage rather than address it.
4. **Individualising structural problems:** When struggling students are labelled as weak or deficient, schools risk overlooking the institutional and social barriers affecting their participation.
5. **A broader understanding of inclusion:** Inclusion requires more than enrolment. It involves **equal participation, recognition of diverse experiences and a sense of belonging** within the school community.

Making Schools Responsible for Inclusion

1. **Institutional responsibility:** Section 12(1)(c) cannot be implemented meaningfully if responsibility for inclusion rests solely on individual teachers. School leadership and institutional practices must actively support it.
2. **Teacher preparedness:** Teachers need appropriate training to recognise diverse learning needs, avoid deficit-based assumptions and facilitate equitable classroom participation.
3. **Collaborative learning:** Peer interaction, classroom discussions and opportunities for students to share their experiences can help build connections across socioeconomic backgrounds.
4. **Support beyond the classroom:** Schools, parents and governments must work together to identify barriers, provide necessary resources and monitor whether children are benefiting from their education.
5. **Outcome-based monitoring:** Admission figures alone cannot establish success. Assessment must also consider participation, social integration and students' overall educational experiences.

132 . What Are the Powers of Special Executive Magistrates?

Special Executive Magistrates (SEMs) are executive authorities appointed to prevent breaches of peace and maintain public order. Their powers are primarily **preventive and administrative, rather than judicial**. Their role, appointment and powers are governed by the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.

Appointment and Role of SEMs

1. **Appointment:** Under Section 15 of the BNSS, 2023, the State Government may appoint Executive Magistrates or police officers not below the rank of Superintendent of Police (or equivalent) as Special Executive Magistrates for specified areas or functions and confer on them such powers under the Sanhita as it considers appropriate.
2. **Purpose:** SEMs address situations involving a likelihood of breaches of peace, public disorder or disturbances of public tranquillity.
3. **Preventive function:** Their role is to intervene before a potential disturbance escalates, rather than adjudicate criminal guilt after an offence.
4. **Powers depend on the situation**: An SEM may exercise preventive powers, including requiring security for keeping the peace or good behaviour, only where the relevant powers have been conferred and the statutory conditions are satisfied.

Key Powers of Special Executive Magistrates

1. **Security for keeping the peace:** Under Section 126 of the BNSS, an Executive Magistrate may require a person likely to cause a breach of peace or disturb public tranquillity to show cause why they should not execute a bond for keeping the peace.
2. **Security for good behaviour:** Under Section 128, an Executive Magistrate may require certain persons to show cause why they should not execute a bond for good behaviour, subject to the statutory conditions.
3. **Urgent preventive orders:** Under Section 163, an Executive Magistrate empowered by law may issue written orders in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger where immediate prevention or speedy remedy is desirable.
4. **Preventive proceedings:** SEMs may initiate proceedings to address a credible likelihood of disturbance, including requiring security where the statutory conditions are met.
5. **Restrictions on scope:** These powers are intended to prevent breaches of peace and protect public order; they do not confer general authority to determine criminal guilt or impose criminal sentences.

SEMs versus Judicial Magistrates

1. **Nature of authority:** SEMs exercise executive and preventive powers, whereas Judicial Magistrates perform judicial functions under criminal procedure.
2. **Criminal trials:** SEMs cannot conduct criminal trials or convict and sentence accused persons as Judicial Magistrates do.
3. **Custody and detention:** Any power concerning custody or detention must arise from a specific legal provision and comply with its requirements; SEMs do not possess unrestricted authority to order detention.
4. **Legal safeguards:** Preventive action must comply with the applicable statute and procedural requirements. Orders may be challenged before the appropriate court, and judicial review is available where legally warranted.

133 . From Climate Targets to Energy Justice

The global shift towards electrification has largely been driven by climate concerns. However, climate policy must move beyond aggregate emissions and global temperature targets to address **unequal energy use, consumption patterns and national well-being**. Emerging economies consume considerably less energy than Western countries to achieve comparable levels of well-being. The central argument is to reframe climate change as a collection of national crises arising from unequal energy use, rather than treating it exclusively as a global crisis driven by emissions.

The Limits of Global Climate Consensus

1. **Limits of global agreements:** Climate negotiations have established common targets, but consensus-based frameworks may overlook differences in national energy requirements, development priorities and ecological constraints.
2. **Epistemic communities:** Academic experts and scientific institutions have helped establish the knowledge base for climate policy. However, the technical complexity of climate change has also strengthened the role of international organisations in defining policies and implementation frameworks.
3. **Global values and global goods:** International climate frameworks are shaped by assumptions about shared global interests. Yet the distribution of energy consumption and the developmental benefits of energy remain unequal.
4. **35 years of climate negotiations:** The experience of successive negotiations highlights the limitations of relying on consensus alone when countries have different priorities and capacities.
5. **Technology transfer as a "means of implementation":** Technology transfer has been treated as a way to operationalise climate commitments. However, technological solutions cannot independently resolve conflicts between ecological limits, industrial development and unequal access to energy resources.
6. **Production to consumption patterns:** A production-centred focus on emissions can obscure disparities in consumption. Climate policy must examine how energy is used and how it contributes to national well-being.

Energy Transition: Lessons from the U.S., China and India

1. **United States — competing priorities:** The U.S. approach described in the clipping emphasises energy efficiency, renewable energy, prosperity, consumer choice and fiscal restraint. The U.S. Executive Order of January 20, 2025, is discussed in the context of changing climate-policy priorities.
2. **China — industrialisation and renewable energy:** China has emerged as a major global manufacturing power while expanding renewable energy. Its experience illustrates the relationship between industrial development, electricity demand and changes in the energy mix.
3. **Energy stabilisation versus emission reduction:** China's nationally driven approach highlights the importance of energy stabilisation rather than treating emission reduction as the sole measure of progress. The transition must account for energy demand and the sources used to meet it.
4. **India's development challenge:** India must reconcile rising energy demand, industrialisation and improved living standards with the transition towards cleaner energy sources.
5. **Renewables and system transformation:** Solar and wind power are becoming increasingly competitive with conventional sources. However, their intermittent and decentralised nature requires a strategic redesign of the energy system, rather than simply replacing fossil fuels with renewables.
6. **Technology and national capacity:** Technology transfer alone is insufficient. National institutions, policy choices and implementation capacity determine how effectively renewable energy can be integrated into existing energy systems.

Towards Energy Justice and Nationally Grounded Climate Action

1. **Energy justice:** Climate policy must recognise that countries differ in energy consumption and in the resources required to achieve comparable levels of well-being.
2. **National crises rather than a global crisis:** Climate change manifests through different national challenges, shaped by energy use, development needs, ecological limits and exposure to climate risks.
3. **Extreme-weather risks:** The increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events affect lives, livelihoods and insurance coverage. These risks reinforce the need for climate action that considers national circumstances and social consequences.
4. **Climate finance:** Developing countries need climate finance that reflects their circumstances and enables them to pursue cleaner development pathways without compromising essential energy needs.
5. **Regional cooperation and early warning:** Climate action should include regional cooperation, improved early-warning systems and practical measures to reduce the consequences of extreme-weather events.
6. **Reframing progress:** Climate policy must assess progress not only through emission reductions but also through energy stabilisation, affordability, prosperity and the equitable distribution of developmental benefits.

134. Census Duty: Government's Powers and Private Citizens' Rights

An amendment to the Census Rules, 1990, has brought renewed attention to the government's authority to appoint individuals for census work. Although census enumeration requires a large workforce, the expression **"any person"** raises questions about the extent of compulsory service, particularly when deployment affects private-sector employees and their professional responsibilities.

Legal Framework: Government's Powers and Their Limits

1. **Amended Rule 3:** The rules recognise the appointment of teachers from government, local-authority, aided and unaided private educational institutions as census enumerators. The broader expression "any person" does not, by itself, settle whether every private citizen can be compelled to serve.
2. **Section 4(2), Census Act, 1948:** Empowers the State Government to appoint census officers to take, assist in taking or supervise the census. Persons appointed under the provision are bound to perform the assigned duties.
3. **Section 4A:** Allows the Central Government to direct local authorities to make available suitable staff required for census operations.
4. **Sections 6 and 7:** Address assistance from establishments and the counting of persons connected with them. A key legal distinction is whether these provisions authorise the requisitioning of employees for door-to-door enumeration, rather than merely facilitating the census within an establishment.
5. **Scale of operations:** Despite digitisation, census work remains manpower-intensive, with approximately 31 lakh enumerators and supervisors cited in the clipping. Personnel are drawn mainly from schoolteachers and government and local-body officials.
6. **Core distinction:** The authority to appoint census officers must be distinguished from the statutory power to compel service. The applicable provision, the nature of the assignment and the circumstances of the individual matter.

Judicial Interpretation: Teachers and Private-Sector Employees

1. **Bombay High Court:** In May, the court granted interim protection to associations representing private unaided and minority schools in Maharashtra. It observed that Sections 6 and 7 did not, in its preliminary view, authorise compulsory requisitioning of their teaching and non-teaching staff.
2. **Manisha Jain case (May 2010):** A teacher at an unaided school in Chandigarh challenged her appointment as a census enumerator before the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The court questioned the requirement that a private teacher undertake census work after normal working hours.
3. **Punjab and Haryana High Court (2011):** The court initially protected private-school teachers against coercive action for refusing census duty. Following the Centre's submissions, the arrangement was modified to permit deployment subject to safeguards.
4. **Safeguards for teachers:** Census work was not to disrupt school hours; teachers handling Classes 10 and 12 were exempted, and school managements could determine which teachers could be spared without affecting academic work.
5. **Subsequent proceedings (2018):** The Punjab and Haryana High Court stayed further orders compelling teachers or employees of the petitioner schools to undertake census duties and sought details from the Haryana government.
6. **LIC employees:** The Punjab and Haryana High Court quashed an order requiring the LIC's Jalandhar office to provide at least 150 employees as enumerators and supervisors. It held that Section 7 did not authorise the requisitioning of employees for this purpose, while leaving the government free to invoke Section 4(2) wherever applicable.
7. **Gujarat High Court (2019):** A Division Bench similarly ruled against requisitioning LIC employees. The decision is under challenge before the Supreme Court.

Constitutional Position: Compulsory Service and Individual Rights

1. **Article 23(1):** Prohibits begar and other forms of forced labour & **Article 23(2):** Permits compulsory service for public purposes, provided the State does not discriminate solely on grounds of religion, race, caste or class.
2. **Police Act, 1861:** The provision allowing residents to be appointed as special police officers in specified circumstances illustrates how compulsory public service can be authorised by statute.
3. **National Service Act, 1972:** Provides another example of a statutory framework for compulsory service, including provisions concerning registration, notice, postponement on hardship grounds, remuneration and employers' obligations.
4. **Safeguards and proportionality:** The comparison highlights the importance of clearly defined legal authority and safeguards when individuals are required to perform public duties.
5. **Central legal question:** Census enumeration serves an important public purpose, but the government's authority must remain within the law. The phrase "any person" cannot automatically be interpreted as an unrestricted power to compel every private professional or employee, irrespective of existing obligations.

135. 'Godzilla' El Nino Effects to Be Felt Next Year Too: Decoding WMO Warning for India

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) warns that El Nino may potentially affecting India's southwest monsoon and extending its impacts into 2027. The phenomenon involves abnormal warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, influencing global atmospheric circulation and rainfall patterns.

El Niño: Development and Forecast Indicators

1. **El Nino–Southern Oscillation (ENSO):** ENSO comprises three phases—El Nino (warming), La Nina (cooling) and ENSO-neutral conditions.
2. **Oceanic Nino Index (ONI):** Measures sea-surface temperature anomalies in the central equatorial Pacific. A sustained anomaly of at least +0.5°C is commonly used to identify El Niño conditions.
3. **Southern Oscillation Index (SOI):** Tracks atmospheric pressure differences associated with ENSO and helps assess its development.
4. **Forecast uncertainty:** El Nino typically emerges after changes in Pacific Ocean temperatures and atmospheric circulation. Its intensity and regional consequences depend on how the event develops.

Expected Global and Regional Effects

1. **Temperature anomalies:** El Nino can raise temperatures across several regions, increasing the likelihood of heat stress and extreme-weather events.
2. **Rainfall redistribution:** Its effects vary geographically, potentially bringing drought to some regions and excessive rainfall to others.
3. **Regional impacts:** The clipping identifies risks across parts of the Americas, southern Europe, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian subcontinent, East Asia and Southeast Asia.

4. **Food and water security:** Changes in rainfall and temperature can affect agricultural output, water availability and demand for fertilisers and fuel.

Implications for India

1. **Southwest monsoon:** India receives around 70% of its annual rainfall during the southwest monsoon. El Nino can weaken monsoon circulation and increase the risk of below-normal rainfall, although a deficient monsoon is not inevitable.
2. **Agricultural vulnerability:** Rainfall deficits could affect crop production, rural incomes and food prices, particularly in rain-fed agricultural regions.
3. **Water stress:** Reduced precipitation and higher temperatures could intensify pressure on irrigation, reservoirs and drinking-water supplies.
4. **Economic consequences:** Agricultural losses and resource shortages may increase food and input prices, placing additional pressure on households and the wider economy.
5. **Preparedness:** Monitoring WMO forecasts, managing water resources and preparing for possible rainfall deficits are important for reducing vulnerability.

136 . Small Fish: While Carriers of Narcotics Are Caught in the Net, Big Sharks Operate Freely

Operation Trident, a multi-agency crackdown targeting drug-trafficking networks across the India–Myanmar–Bangladesh corridor, marks an intensified enforcement effort. Recent NCB-led action on 23 October 2026 resulted in 18 arrests across Assam, Mizoram and Manipur. Separately, 2025 data recorded a rise of over 50% in arrests and nearly 53% in cases registered under the NDPS Act compared with 2024, as reported in the clipping. However, **increased arrests and seizures do not necessarily indicate reduced drug availability or consumption**. Effective enforcement requires sustained inter-agency coordination and a shift from targeting low-level carriers to identifying the principal suppliers and networks behind trafficking.

The challenge is to dismantle the **entire supply chain**, including its financiers and major operators, rather than focusing disproportionately on individual carriers. The seizure of approximately 3,000 kg of heroin in the 2021 Mundra port case illustrates the importance of investigating principal suppliers. Punjab's continuing drug-abuse problem, alongside reported drug-related killings and concerns over synthetic drug availability, highlights the human cost of trafficking. The key priority is to follow the money trail, identify the ultimate beneficiaries and secure successful prosecutions, while protecting those who speak out against drug networks.

137. Fouled Waters: River Pollution from Industrial Effluents Indicates State Failure

The Supreme Court has pulled up the Rajasthan government over industrial effluents polluting the Jojari river, exposing persistent regulatory failures despite years of litigation. The crisis affects the Jojari, Luni and Bandi rivers, threatening the health of nearly **20 lakh residents** and highlighting failures in industrial waste treatment, sewage management and enforcement of environmental norms.

Sources of Pollution and Regulatory Failure

1. **Industrial pollution:** Textile-dyeing and steelworking industries in Jodhpur, Balotra and Pali have discharged untreated effluents into rivers and surrounding soil.
2. **Inadequate treatment infrastructure:** The proceedings have highlighted deficiencies in sewage and common effluent treatment infrastructure, including concerns about treatment capacity, operational efficiency and the continued discharge of untreated effluents. The extent of underutilisation should be assessed using the capacity and operating figures reported by the State.
3. **Infrastructure and enforcement gaps:** Untreated discharge despite available treatment facilities suggests industrial units bypassing treatment systems, inadequate connections between pollution sources and treatment plants, or insufficient capacity at particular locations and times.
4. **Illegal sand mining:** Riverbed mining has further exposed weaknesses in environmental governance and enforcement.
5. **Judicial intervention**: Following suo motu proceedings initiated in 2025, the Supreme Court constituted a High-Level Ecosystem Oversight Committee chaired by retired Rajasthan High Court judge Justice Sangeet Lodha to monitor compliance and support river restoration. The Court has directed authorities to seal illegal effluent-discharge points, recover environmental compensation and strengthen enforcement against illegal mining. It has prohibited construction or development within 100 metres of the river edges and restricted potentially polluting industries or activities within 500 metres on either side of identified flood lines. Where a flood line has not been identified, the 500-metre restriction applies on either side of the river's present flow path.

Accountability and the Failure of Environmental Governance

1. **Persistent regulatory inaction:** Continued river pollution despite repeated judicial intervention highlights longstanding difficulties in enforcing environmental standards and ensuring compliance by industrial units and public authorities.

2. **Failure to enforce pollution norms:** The Supreme Court criticised local authorities for persistent regulatory failures and referred to its own stay of a 2022 National Green Tribunal order imposing environmental compensation on the Rajasthan State Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO) and the local administration in Jodhpur and Barmer.
3. **Possible regulatory collusion:** Officials were reportedly aware of illegal mining in certain areas but nevertheless regularised mining licences there. This raises concerns about possible collusion between public officials and industrial or mining interests.
4. **Polluter Pays Principle:** Justice Mehta's observation that the State itself could be held liable under this principle underscores that regulatory negligence can also attract accountability.
5. **Institutional concern:** Repeated judicial intervention highlights the tendency of courts to assume monitoring responsibilities when regulators fail to perform their statutory functions, raising questions about institutional accountability and the effectiveness of environmental governance.

138 . A Visit to Baku, a Gateway to a Changing Eurasia

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Baku offers an opportunity to reset strained India–Azerbaijan relations. The central argument is that **productive diplomacy must prioritise national interests and self-interest over political affiliations based on religion and ethnicity**, even when countries have taken positions unfavourable to India.

Turkic Solidarity versus National Interests

1. **India–Azerbaijan tensions:** Baku's support for Pakistan on Kashmir, including the 2021 Islamabad Declaration and the "Three Brothers" military exercise, strained relations with India. During Operation Sindoor in May 2025, calls to boycott Turkey and Azerbaijan also affected trade and travel.
2. **Pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism:** Shared religious and ethnic identities can facilitate practical cooperation but do not automatically create a unified strategic bloc. Pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism have similarly struggled to overcome divisions in the Middle East.
3. **Organisation of Turkic States (OTS):** Established as the Turkic Council in 2009 and renamed the OTS in 2021, it brings together Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; Turkmenistan remains an observer. Its agenda covers trade, transport, technology and culture, while common security commitments remain difficult to develop.
4. **Political differences within the partnership:** Azerbaijan's restrictions on Islamic headscarves in schools, its defence of secularism and its rejection of outside interference have generated criticism from conservative Turkish voices. The transfer of the OTS chairmanship from Azerbaijan to Turkey further highlights the evolving relationship.

Changing Eurasia and the Limits of Turkic Unity

1. **Strategic autonomy after 1991:** The Soviet Union's collapse enabled Turkey to reconnect with former Soviet republics, but the newly independent states prioritised sovereignty rather than replacing one hegemon with another.
2. **Multi-vector partnerships:** Central Asian republics welcome Turkish investment, transport links and military technology while maintaining security relationships with Russia and China. Turkey's NATO membership further distinguishes its strategic circumstances from those of Central Asian states.
3. **Kazakhstan's position:** President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev rejected proposals to turn the OTS into a military alliance or geopolitical bloc. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan also belong to the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation, illustrating the region's overlapping commitments.
4. **Limits of economic integration:** Better ports, railways and customs arrangements can strengthen Eurasian connectivity, but economic cooperation does not necessarily produce agreement on every security issue.
5. **Azerbaijan's geopolitical location:** Bordering Russia and Iran, connecting westwards through Georgia and Turkey, and looking across the Caspian towards Central Asia, Azerbaijan occupies a strategic position between the Caucasus, inner Asia and the Greater Middle East. The region's history of Russian, Ottoman and Persian ambitions continues to shape its geopolitical significance.

India's Strategic Opportunities and Diplomatic Choices

1. **Energy and connectivity:** Azerbaijan's energy resources and transport links provide India with opportunities to expand access to the Caucasus and Central Asia. India also has a stake in the **International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
2. **Converging interests:** Azerbaijan's ties with Israel and the United Arab Emirates offer potential areas of strategic convergence with India.
3. **Armenia–Azerbaijan normalisation:** India can explore closer engagement with Baku while preserving its partnership with Armenia as Baku and Yerevan pursue normalisation.
4. **India–Pakistan disputes:** India does not object to other countries maintaining relations with Pakistan; its concern is whether they remain neutral in India–Pakistan disputes.

139. Israel Polls: How Its Electoral System Works and Government Is Formed

Israel's parliamentary elections use **proportional representation through national party lists**, with 120 seats in the Knesset and a 3.25% electoral threshold. The system enables diverse political and social groups to gain representation, but also produces fragmented parliaments in which coalition negotiations determine who governs. The 2026 election is particularly significant as the first since 1988 to follow completion of a full four-year parliamentary term.

Electoral System and Party Representation

1. **National party-list system:** Voters choose party lists rather than individual constituency candidates. Seats are distributed proportionally among qualifying lists.
2. **Electoral threshold:** The threshold was raised from 1% to 1.5% in 1992, 2% in 2004 and 3.25% in 2014. Parties must cross the current threshold to qualify for Knesset representation.
3. **Wasted votes and seat allocation:** Votes for lists that fail to cross the threshold do not contribute to parliamentary representation. Seats are allocated among qualifying parties, making the threshold a mechanism to limit excessive fragmentation.
4. **Central Elections Committee (CEC):** Oversees the electoral process, certifies results and determines the distribution of seats. Its decisions are subject to judicial review by the Supreme Court.

Government Formation and Coalition Arithmetic

1. **No single-party majority:** No political party in Israel's history has independently secured 61 seats, making coalition governments the established pattern.
2. **Presidential consultations:** After the CEC certifies the final results, the President consults representatives of the elected party lists and assigns the task of forming a government to the candidate considered most likely to secure a parliamentary majority.
3. **Formation deadline:** The nominee receives 28 days to form a coalition, with a possible extension of up to 14 days. Coalition negotiations involve agreement on ministerial portfolios, policy priorities and the distribution of responsibilities.
4. **Failure of the first nominee:** If the candidate fails, the President may assign another candidate the task. If subsequent efforts also fail, the process allows Knesset members to propose an alternative candidate under the prescribed procedure.
5. **Deadlock mechanism:** Where competing blocs cannot form a majority, a 21-day period allows 61 Knesset members to request that a specified candidate receive the mandate. If the process fails, the Knesset can be dissolved and early elections held.
6. **Implications of fragmentation:** Small parties may exercise considerable bargaining power when their support is essential to a coalition. Disagreements over religious, security and economic policies can delay government formation or threaten coalition stability.

140. The Risks of Food Colouring, as UP Steps Up Scrutiny

Food Safety Risks and Regulatory Gaps

1. **Industrial dye adulteration:** Rhodamine-B and other non-food-grade dyes have been detected in food, raising concerns about toxic exposure, possible liver and kidney damage, and allergic reactions.
2. **High-risk food categories:** Brightly coloured chutneys, cotton candy, ice lollies, meat preparations and sweets are under scrutiny. The guidelines prohibit adding colour to chutneys and cooked foods such as dal, vegetables, biryani and French fries.
3. **Beyond street food:** Prohibited dyes may also be used to make spices, pulses and turmeric appear more vibrant; Sudan dyes have been associated with adulteration of edible oils and packaged sauces.
4. **Enforcement challenge:** Small roadside vendors may be unaware of the health risks, particularly when harmful effects are not immediately apparent. This makes vendor awareness and effective inspection important alongside punitive action.

Permitted Colours: Category-Specific Regulation

1. **Legal framework:** The Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011, permit specified artificial colours only in designated food categories and within prescribed limits.
2. **Conditional permission:** Certain sweets, confectionery, bakery products, processed fruits, beverages and savoury snacks may use permitted colours. A colour allowed in cakes cannot automatically be used in bread or chutney.
3. **Limits and processing:** The prescribed quantity varies by food category. Safety assessment also considers consumption levels, heat stability and the possible formation of by-products during processing. Natural colours are likewise subject to category-specific conditions.
4. **Foods excluded from colour addition:** Restrictions cover several everyday staples, including milk and plain dairy products, fresh produce, natural fruit juices, ground spices, cereals, pulses, flour, edible oils, honey and infant foods.

Compliance and Accountability

1. **Controlled measurement:** Food businesses must measure colours accurately using suitable digital weighing scales rather than estimating quantities with spoons or pinches.
2. **Traceability:** Procurement from authorised suppliers, checking labels and supplier details, and retaining invoices and batch numbers help establish accountability. Unlabelled chemicals and loose colours from unauthorised sources must not be used.
3. **Penalties:** The Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, provides for penalties for sub-standard food (Section 51), misbranded food (Section 52) and unsafe food (Section 59), with punishment under the last provision depending on the consequences.
4. **Regulatory implementation:** The FSDA's directions cover sweet shops, bakeries, restaurants, hotels, dhabas, food manufacturers and street vendors. Disseminating guidelines through trade associations and vendor groups is essential to compliance.

141. The Message in Microsoft Exit Offer for 60,000 Staff

Microsoft's Voluntary Exit Offer and India

The VEO covers eligible employees at internal job level 70 and below across participating teams in India, the U.S., the U.K. and Canada. Microsoft employs around **23,000 people in India**, with potentially eligible divisions including Copilot, AI experiences, Windows and Devices, Xbox, finance and HR. The exit package includes salary-linked severance, health insurance and career-transition assistance; eligible Indian employees must decide by **December 1**, with departures expected by the end of December. Its India Development Center, operating in Hyderabad, Bengaluru and the National Capital Region, contributes to global products such as Windows, Azure and Microsoft 365, alongside AI and machine-learning technologies. Concurrently, Microsoft has committed **$20.5 billion for 2025–2029** towards cloud and AI infrastructure, skilling and operations in India, and aims to equip **20 million people with AI skills by 2030**.

AI-Led Disruption Across the Technology Sector

AI-led workforce restructuring: Several companies have linked workforce reductions to AI adoption and operational restructuring. Block announced over **4,000 job cuts** in February 2026, citing AI-driven productivity gains, while Salesforce reduced customer-support staff from **9,000 to 5,000** as AI agents handled more queries. India's Livspace cut around **1,000 employees (12%)** amid its shift towards an AI-led model, while Dukaan announced plans to reduce its workforce by around 90% after adopting an AI chatbot. TCS announced plans to cut **12,000 jobs** in July 2025, citing skill mismatches and changing business needs, without directly attributing the decision to AI.

Implications for Indian Technology Workers

1. **Pressure on traditional IT services:** AI adoption may reduce demand for certain routine tasks and reshape labour-intensive business models, particularly in customer support, software development, testing and maintenance.
2. **Reskilling and changing skill requirements:** Workers may need to adapt to AI-enabled workflows and develop specialised capabilities as companies reorganise teams around new technologies.
3. **H-1B visa concerns:** Indian employees working in the U.S. on H-1B visas may face additional uncertainty if they accept voluntary exits. They may need to secure alternative employment or change their immigration status within the applicable period.
4. **Limits of AI automation:** Klarna's experience illustrates that AI cannot necessarily replace human assistance in every situation. After reducing its reliance on human customer-service staff, the company acknowledged limitations in AI handling complex problems and moved to recruit human support agents again.

142 . Punishment and Pendency: Need for a Role of a Sentencing Council

India's sentencing system suffers from **unequal punishments, unguided judicial discretion and the absence of comprehensive sentencing guidelines**. A structured framework is needed to ensure proportionality, consistency and accountability while preserving case-specific judicial discretion.

Sentencing Disparities and the Need for Reform

1. **Irrelevant considerations:** Research by Dr. Mrinal Satish on rape sentencing identified cases where courts relied on considerations such as the complainant's supposed "chastity" or subsequent marriage, overlooking psychological harm and breach of trust.
2. **Supreme Court intervention:** In *Sunita Devi v. State of Bihar* (2024), the Supreme Court acknowledged sentencing disparities and directed the Centre to examine the feasibility of a comprehensive national sentencing policy, potentially through a Sentencing Commission.
3. **Existing legal provisions**: Section 401 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, provides for release on probation of good conduct or after admonition in eligible cases. Section 402 requires courts to record special reasons when they do not apply Section 401 or the relevant provisions of the Probation of Offenders Act, 1958, where those provisions

could have been applied. Sections 3, 4 and 6 of the Probation of Offenders Act provide for admonition or release on probation in specified circumstances.

4. **Institutional shortcomings:** The Law Commission's **47th Report (1972)** raised the need for sentencing principles. In *Soman v. State of Kerala* (2012), the Supreme Court described sentencing as one of the weakest areas of criminal justice administration. Inconsistent sentences also burden appellate courts, which must correct excessively harsh or unduly lenient punishments.
5. **Procedural safeguard:** Section **258(2) of the BNSS** requires the accused to be heard on sentence after conviction by a Sessions Court, reinforcing the need for reasoned sentencing decisions.

International Model and the Role of a Sentencing Council

1. **England and Wales:** A statutory Sentencing Council, supported by a Sentencing Code, provides structured, offence-specific guidelines.
2. **Three-stage assessment:** Judges assess **culpability and harm**, identify a starting point and sentencing range, and then adjust the sentence according to aggravating and mitigating factors, including a guilty plea where applicable.
3. **Guided discretion:** Judges may depart from the indicative range where justified, but must explain their reasons publicly. This combines consistency with individualised justice.
4. **National sentencing framework:** A council for India could develop offence-specific guidelines, assess sentencing practices and consider deterrence, rehabilitation, prison capacity, victims' interests and public protection.

Designing an Indian Sentencing Framework

1. **National sentencing database:** The **National Judicial Data Grid** could support anonymised data on offences, culpability, harm, starting points, sentence adjustments and final punishments, helping identify disparities and assess outcomes.
2. **Legal status and oversight:** Guidelines could be framed as delegated legislation, placed before Parliament for approval, and operate as advisory but strongly presumptive standards.
3. **Judicial accountability:** Courts should consider the guidelines in each case and record reasons for departures, while retaining discretion to account for individual circumstances.

143 . Is GRAP Enough to Curb Pollution?

Delhi-NCR's recurring winter pollution highlights the limitations of relying on emergency restrictions to control air quality. The **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)** introduces progressively stricter measures as pollution worsens, but persistent winter pollution raises concerns about enforcement, delayed intervention and the absence of sustained improvements.

GRAP: Framework, Implementation and Stage-Wise Restrictions

1. **Purpose and authority:** GRAP is a short-term emergency framework implemented by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) across Delhi-NCR and adjoining areas. CAQM announces the applicable stage based on recorded or forecast pollution levels, and State governments are responsible for implementation.
2. **Institutional evolution:** First notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in January 2017 following Supreme Court directions, GRAP was initially implemented through the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA). After EPCA was dissolved in 2020, CAQM took over implementation under the Commission for Air Quality Management Act, 2021.
3. **Winter pollution drivers:** Low temperatures and slow wind speeds trap pollutants near the ground. Stubble burning during October–November, festive-season firecrackers, vehicle emissions and dust add to the pollution burden across Delhi-NCR and the wider Indo-Gangetic Plains.
4. **Four stages of GRAP:**
    a. **Stage I — Poor (AQI 201–300):** Initial measures focus on dust mitigation, mechanised road sweeping, water sprinkling, proper waste management and preventing open burning.
    b. **Stage II — Very Poor (AQI 301–400):** Additional measures include stricter regulation of diesel generator sets, enhanced public transport and parking-related measures to discourage private vehicle use.
    c. **Stage III — Severe (AQI 401–450):** Construction and demolition activities are restricted across Delhi-NCR, with a ban on BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel light motor vehicles in Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar and Sonipat.
    d. **Stage IV — Severe Plus (AQI above 450):** Restrictions become more stringent, including a ban on construction and demolition with fewer exemptions and restrictions on truck entry into Delhi, except for specified vehicles such as electric, CNG and LNG trucks.
5. **Enforcement:** Restrictions take effect when the relevant State governments issue implementation orders following CAQM directions. The effectiveness of GRAP therefore depends on timely decisions, coordination across NCR and compliance on the ground.

Effectiveness of GRAP: Evidence and Limitations

1. **No consistent improvement:** According to an analysis by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), Delhi's mean winter AQI fluctuated from **280 in 2022–23 to 304 in 2023–24, 285 in 2024–25 and 295 in 2025–26**. Median AQI followed a similar pattern: 294, 324, 289 and 305, respectively.
2. **Escalation did not ensure immediate improvement:** An assessment of 12 pollution episodes across four winters found that mean AQI in the week following escalation to Stage III or IV was higher than in the preceding week in **10 of the 12 episodes**. The largest increase followed the November 2, 2023 episode, when mean AQI rose from 317 to 431.
3. **Limits of interpretation:** These figures indicate that pollution remained high or worsened after stricter measures were introduced; they do not establish that GRAP caused the deterioration or that pollution would have been the same without the restrictions.
4. **Emergency response versus lasting control:** GRAP is designed to limit severe pollution episodes, not independently eliminate the underlying sources of emissions. Its short-term restrictions cannot substitute for sustained pollution control throughout the year.
5. **Implementation gaps:** Timely forecasting, enforcement by multiple State governments and coordination across the wider airshed remain important challenges. Pollution can continue accumulating when meteorological conditions remain unfavourable, even after restrictions are tightened.

Additional Delhi Restrictions and the Way Forward

1. **Measures beyond GRAP:** The Delhi government's June 23 notification introduced additional winter restrictions irrespective of the prevailing AQI:
    a. From **November 1 to January 31**, non-Delhi-registered motor vehicles below BS-VI standards are barred from Delhi, with exemptions for electric, CNG, emergency and sovereign-duty vehicles.
    b. From **November 1 to February 28**, parking charges at existing parking sites are doubled to discourage private vehicle use, except at sites owned and managed by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC).
    c. Where these restrictions conflict with GRAP, the GRAP provisions take precedence.
2. **Source-level emission reduction:** Pollution policy must move beyond emergency curbs towards sustained control of emissions from transport, dust, industrial activity and other persistent sources.
3. **Regional coordination:** Since pollution spreads across Delhi-NCR and the Indo-Gangetic Plains, coordinated implementation by adjoining States is essential rather than relying on restrictions within Delhi alone.
4. **Assessment and accountability:** GRAP's effectiveness should be evaluated through pollution trends, enforcement and actual emission reductions—not merely the number of restrictions imposed.

144. How Neoliberalism Turned the World Against Its Young

Youth unrest across France, Albania, Spain, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka reflects growing frustration with unemployment, declining wages, rising education costs and economic insecurity. The central argument is that **neoliberal capitalism has weakened public welfare and labour's bargaining power, while prioritising profitability over employment generation**, leaving young people with fewer opportunities and diminishing prospects for economic mobility.

Youth Unemployment: A Crisis of Labour Demand

1. **Persistent youth unemployment:** The G7 comparisons show that unemployment among young people aged 15–24 is substantially higher than overall unemployment. This indicates difficulties in absorbing young entrants into the labour market, even in advanced economies.
2. **Orthodox explanation:** Neoclassical approaches attribute unemployment partly to **high wages, labour-market rigidities, trade-union power and insufficient wage flexibility**. Reducing labour costs is expected to encourage employers to recruit more workers.
3. **Heterodox explanation:** Employment depends on the level of **effective demand** in the economy. Wages are not merely a production cost; they also finance household consumption. Wage reductions can therefore weaken demand, production, investment and employment.
4. **Wage–employment relationship:** Individual firms may benefit from lower wages, but economy-wide wage suppression can reduce consumer purchasing power. Falling sales then discourage investment and labour demand, creating a cycle of unemployment and weak economic activity.
5. **Distributional inequality:** The charts indicate a declining share of total income accruing to the poorest half of the population in several G7 economies. Weakening labour incomes alongside the concentration of economic gains reinforces insecurity.
6. **Education and employment mismatch:** Rising education costs, shown across G7 countries, increase the financial burden on young people without guaranteeing secure or remunerative employment. The resulting gap between educational investment and employment opportunities undermines **intergenerational mobility**.

7. **Structural concern:** The problem is not simply an excess supply of labour, but inadequate demand for workers. Treating unemployment exclusively as a skills deficit overlooks the role of economic growth, investment and income distribution in generating jobs.

A burden on the young

Neoliberalism has reversed past economic gains, leaving the young with fewer opportunities and greater insecurity

Chart 1: Wrath of the unemployed Gen Z

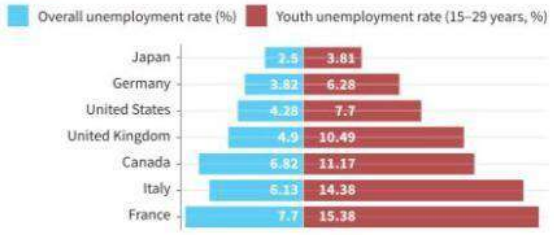


Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Authors' calculations. International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Labour Organisation Statistics (ILOSTAT)

Chart 2: Growth rates for the G7 bloc (Period-wise CAGR in %)

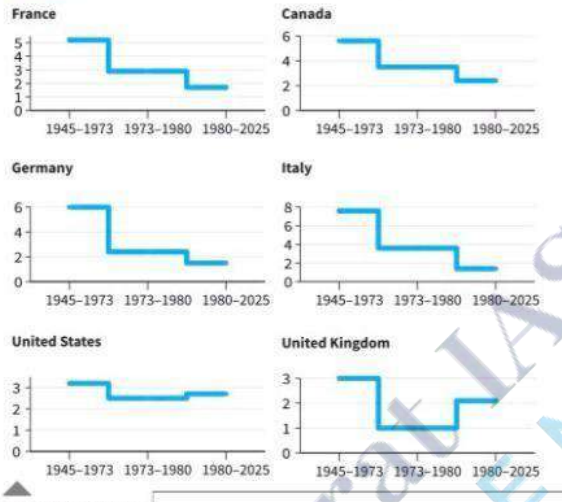


Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Authors' calculations. U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (FRED). Institut national de la statistique et des etudes economiques (INSEE). Federal Statistical Office (Destatis). Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), Istat-Data. Cabinet Office, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). Statistics Canada. World Bank, World Development Indicators. OECD, National Accounts at a Glance

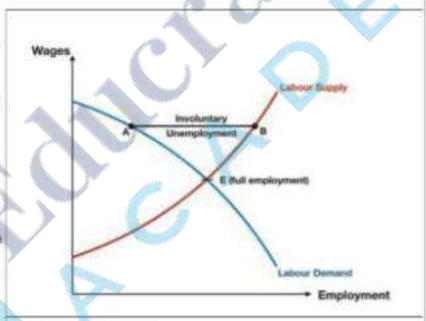
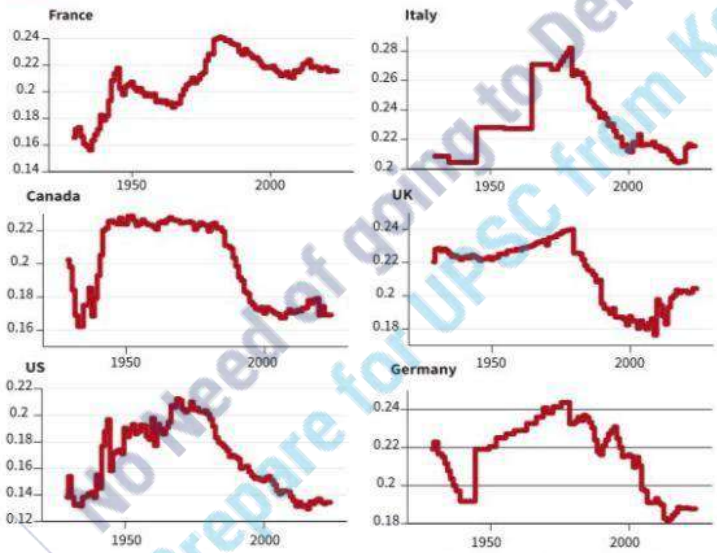


Chart 3: Share of the poorest half in the total income of G7 countries



Some data points for Italy and Germany are not available, so a connecting line through the available data points has been generated for uniformity Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: World Inequality Database

Chart 4: Rising cost of education in G7

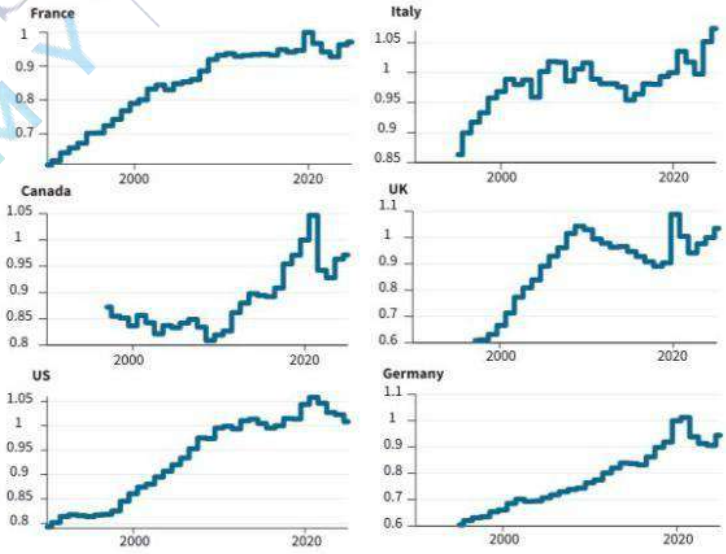


Chart: Azad & Chowdhury. Source: Authors' calculations. U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), NIPA, republished by FRED. Statistics Canada. Eurostat. OECD National Accounts. World Bank, World Development Indicators. Economic and Social Research Institute, Cabinet Office of Japan. UK Economic Accounts (UKEA).

From the Golden Age of Capitalism to Neoliberalism

1. **Golden Age of Capitalism (1945–1973):** The post-war period was associated with relatively high growth, expanding employment, rising working-class incomes and stronger welfare provisions. The charts compare growth across successive periods in G7 economies, highlighting the slowdown after the post-war decades.
2. **Keynesian economics and the New Deal:** The broader tradition of State intervention, associated with the **New Deal** and Keynesian demand management, emphasised public expenditure and economic intervention to support employment and demand. Fiscal expansion could compensate for insufficient private investment and consumption.
3. **Crisis of the post-war model:** Economic stagnation and **stagflation** during the 1970s weakened the post-war consensus and created space for monetarist and neoliberal ideas.
4. **Rise of neoliberalism:** Associated with the policy shifts under **Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom**, neoliberalism emphasised deregulation, labour-market flexibility, reduced welfare-state intervention and the weakening of organised labour. These changes shifted bargaining power towards capital.
5. **Michal Kalecki's critique:** In *Political Aspects of Full Employment*, economist **Michal Kalecki** argued that sustained full employment could undermine employers' disciplinary power over workers. Full employment was therefore not merely an economic question; it also had political and class implications.
6. **Changing balance between capital and labour:** The shift away from the post-war settlement weakened workers' collective bargaining power and constrained wage growth. The resulting distribution of income increasingly favoured capital relative to labour, contributing to economic insecurity.
7. **Crisis of underconsumption:** When wages decline across the economy, households reduce consumption. Businesses then face weaker sales, lower incentives to invest and reduced demand for labour. Thus, a strategy that reduces labour costs for individual firms can undermine aggregate demand and growth when adopted across the economy.

Consequences for Young People and the Economic Policy Challenge

1. **Precarious employment and social insecurity:** High youth unemployment, falling real wages and rising education costs make it harder for young people to achieve financial independence, stable employment and upward social mobility.
2. **Wage suppression and consumption:** Weak wage growth constrains household purchasing power, while the concentration of income among higher-income groups can weaken mass consumption. This reinforces the **underconsumption problem** and limits employment-generating investment.
3. **Automation and artificial intelligence:** The growing use of AI may intensify labour displacement if firms prioritise workforce reduction and profit margins without generating sufficient new employment opportunities. Technological productivity gains do not automatically translate into broadly shared prosperity.
4. **Political consequences:** Persistent unemployment, reduced public welfare and perceived intergenerational injustice can erode trust in established political institutions and fuel youth-led protests.
5. **Limits of individual reskilling:** Education and skill development remain important, but they cannot independently resolve unemployment when the economy fails to generate sufficient jobs. The challenge is both the employability of workers and the availability of productive employment.
6. **Way forward:** A more inclusive economic model requires productive investment, employment generation, affordable education, adequate social protection and policies supporting effective demand. Economic policy must balance profitability and productivity with **decent work, equitable income distribution and inclusive growth**.

145 . Inter-State Council Is a Meeting Point That Has Withered Away. It Must Be Rebuilt

The prolonged dormancy of the **Inter-State Council (ISC)** reflects institutional neglect at the heart of Indian federalism. Despite being envisaged as a platform for Centre–State consultation and consensus-building, it has suffered from irregular meetings, limited operational autonomy and an inability to influence major policy decisions. Its revival is particularly important amid contentious issues such as **delimitation**, which require a national conversation incorporating the views of State governments.

Constitutional Mandate and Institutional Atrophy

1. **Constitutional basis:** Article 263 empowers the President to establish an Inter-State Council where public interests would be served by doing so. The Council constituted in 1990 was assigned functions under clauses (b) and (c): investigating and discussing subjects of common interest between the Union and States or among States, and making recommendations to improve policy coordination. The Council was not assigned the separate function under Article 263(a) of inquiring into and advising upon disputes between States.
2. **Institutional history:** Conceived by the Constitution's framers as an instrument of federalism, the Council remained dormant for decades after Independence. It was formally constituted in **1990 on the recommendation of the Sarkaria Commission**, marking an important step towards institutionalised Centre–State consultation.

3. **Institutional atrophy:** Despite its initial promise as a consultative platform where State governments could engage directly with the national executive, the Council has suffered from systemic neglect, irregular meetings and a lack of operational autonomy and independent authority.
4. **Unfulfilled constitutional potential:** Article 263 was deliberately drafted in flexible, wide-ranging language to accommodate India's diversity and strong centralising impulse. However, the Council has failed to develop the institutional prestige and leverage necessary to influence legislative initiatives or policy decisions affecting States' rights, revenues and constitutional questions.
5. **Delimitation as a test of federal consultation:** Delimitation cannot be treated merely as a parliamentary or electoral issue. It requires a **national conversation** that incorporates the views of State governments, particularly when decisions may have far-reaching consequences for the federal balance.

Consequences of an Inactive Inter-State Council

1. **Unilateral central policymaking:** The Council's ineffectiveness reflects a preference for centralised decision-making over informed negotiation and consensus-building.
2. **Erosion of Centre–State trust:** Its dormancy has contributed to distrust between the Union and States, particularly those governed by opposition parties, aggravating political friction and administrative resistance.
3. **Interconnected governance challenges:** Economic and tax reforms, ecological preservation, public health crises, internal security, resource-sharing and constitutional changes frequently cut across jurisdictions. An inactive Council weakens the institutional mechanism needed to coordinate responses.
4. **Delimitation and constitutional controversy:** Without meaningful consultation, major decisions can trigger political confrontation and constitutional disputes. The absence of a representative forum becomes especially consequential when States perceive their interests and concerns to have been inadequately considered.
5. **Cooperative federalism without institutional substance:** The idea of cooperative federalism risks remaining a political platitude unless supported by a permanent, functional platform for regular intergovernmental deliberation.

Rebuilding the Inter-State Council

1. **Regular institutionalised meetings:** The Prime Minister, key Union Cabinet ministers and Chief Ministers should meet at predictable, regular intervals to deliberate on matters of shared national importance.
2. **Operational autonomy and expertise:** The Council requires adequate staffing, expert support and the institutional capacity to undertake sustained deliberation rather than function as an occasional consultative forum.
3. **Consensus-building and regulatory harmonisation:** It should facilitate agreement on major policy reforms, assess the local impact of national strategies and mediate inter-State disputes involving resource-sharing, environmental management and constitutional change.
4. **Bridging the implementation gap:** A permanent and inclusive platform can connect **central legislative authority with State administrative execution**, improving coordination between national policymaking and regional implementation.
5. **From confrontation to constructive engagement:** Rebuilding the Council can transform erratic Centre–State interactions into a continuous process of transparent dialogue, consultation and consensus-building.
6. **Constitutional necessity:** The Council can be revived within the existing constitutional framework; a constitutional amendment is not required. Its revival is therefore an institutional and political imperative, rather than a question of creating an entirely new mechanism.

146. How El Nino Shaped the Path and Intensity of Cyclone Arnab

The movement and intensification of tropical cyclones in the North Indian Ocean depend on the interaction of **El Nino, ocean temperatures, atmospheric circulation, vertical wind shear and regional geography**. The developing El Nino scenario influences cyclone tracks and the distribution of coastal risk, although its effects differ between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

El Nino and Cyclone Tracks in the North Indian Ocean

1. **El Nino mechanism:** Abnormal warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific alters atmospheric circulation and equatorial pressure patterns. Changes in wind direction and the movement of the monsoon trough influence rainfall distribution and tropical cyclone behaviour.
2. **Changing cyclone tracks:** During El Nino years, tropical cyclones in the North Indian Ocean tend to form at **lower latitudes**, increasing the likelihood of movement towards the Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu coasts rather than Odisha and West Bengal.
3. **Regional contrast:** El Nino can increase **vertical wind shear over the Arabian Sea**, suppressing cyclone formation, while conditions in the Bay of Bengal may favour more intense systems. Its influence is therefore not uniform across the North Indian Ocean.

4. **Monsoon trough and rainfall:** Changes in equatorial pressure and atmospheric circulation can shift the monsoon trough northward or southward, altering rainfall patterns across India. The broader ocean–atmosphere interaction influences both cyclone development and regional weather conditions.
5. **Geographical influence:** The Bay of Bengal's funnel-like shape and the direction of cyclone movement affect the exposure of India's eastern coastline. Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu may face increased risk from cyclones forming at lower latitudes, while Odisha and West Bengal remain vulnerable to Bay of Bengal systems.

Oceanic Conditions and Cyclone Intensification

1. **Sea-surface temperature (SST):** Tropical cyclones draw energy from warm ocean waters. SSTs of around **26°C or above**, extending to depths of approximately **50–100 metres**, provide favourable conditions for cyclone formation and intensification.
2. **Niño 3.4 region:** The supplied text reports unusually warm conditions in the Niño 3.4 region, with temperatures around **2.8°C above normal** during the period discussed. Such warming is an indicator of the developing El Nino conditions.
3. **Rapid intensification:** Warm ocean waters supply heat and moisture to a developing system, potentially allowing it to strengthen rapidly. However, SST alone does not determine cyclone intensity.
4. **Atmospheric and oceanic interaction:** Intensification involves **boundary-layer processes, wind shear, convection, upper-level circulation and air–sea interaction**. Favourable conditions across these processes can support rapid strengthening, while adverse wind shear can disrupt cyclone organisation.
5. **Very severe cyclonic storms:** Cyclone classification reflects sustained wind speed and the degree of intensification. Rapid transitions between cyclone categories make continuous monitoring and timely warnings essential.

Cyclone Arnab and Implications for Coastal Risk

Cyclone Arnab developed over the southeast Bay of Bengal in October 2026 and intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm. It crossed the Andhra Pradesh–Yanam coast between Bapatla and Visakhapatnam, close to the south of Yanam, on 28 October 2026. Its slow, prolonged landfall and heavy rainfall highlight the challenges of forecasting cyclone movement, intensity and local impacts.

1. **Forecasting and preparedness:** The interaction of ocean heat, atmospheric circulation and wind shear requires continuous monitoring by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), supported by timely dissemination of warnings and coastal evacuation planning.
2. **Cyclone naming:** The regional naming system for the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea began in **September 2004**. The system now involves **13 member countries**, which suggest names; the Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre in New Delhi assigns names when systems reach tropical-storm intensity.

El Nino is an important influence on cyclone behaviour, but it is not a sole predictor of an individual cyclone's path or intensity. Effective disaster management requires assessment of regional oceanic conditions, atmospheric processes and coastal vulnerability together.

147 . India's 'Own GPS': Which New ISRO Satellite Can Restore NavIC?

ISRO's launch of NVS-03, the third new-generation navigation satellite, is expected to strengthen and help restore NavIC's standalone positioning services. The system had ceased providing standalone positioning data because of atomic clock failures, satellite ageing and unsuccessful replenishment missions, although timing and certain messaging services continued to function.

NavIC: India's Regional Navigation System

1. **Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC):** Operational name of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), comprising a seven-satellite constellation covering the Indian subcontinent and approximately **1,500 km beyond its boundaries**.
2. **Positioning services:** Designed to provide location accuracy of up to **10 metres** for public use, alongside a more accurate restricted service for authorised users, including military and users undertaking large construction projects.
3. **Strategic significance:** Provides India with an independent regional satellite-navigation capability, improves coverage over the Indian landmass and reduces reliance on foreign systems such as the U.S. GPS.
4. **Coverage limitations:** Satellite signals may be difficult to receive at certain angles, particularly in geographical locations such as valleys and forests.

Why Did NavIC Become Non-functional?

1. **Satellite and atomic clock failures:** ISRO has launched **11 navigation satellites since July 2013**, at a cost of nearly **₹2,250 crore**, but six satellites have failed, primarily due to defective imported atomic clocks and, in some recent cases, orbital issues.
2. **Importance of atomic clocks:** Navigation satellites use highly precise atomic clocks to measure the time taken by signals to travel between satellites and receivers on Earth. Clock failures undermine positioning accuracy and can render satellites ineffective.

3. **Delayed ground-level utilisation:** The initial satellite, IRNSS-1A, was launched in 2013, followed by other satellites required for the constellation. However, the **CAG's 2018 report** highlighted that development of consumer-end receivers, including devices such as mobile phones, began only in 2017. Consequently, several years of satellite mission life were wasted before the system could be fully utilised.
4. **Failed replacement missions:**
    a. **IRNSS-1H:** Failed to reach orbit after the protective heat shield did not open because of heat generated during atmospheric friction.
    b. **NVS-02:** Successfully placed in a highly elliptical transfer orbit, but its propulsion system failed to execute the manoeuvres required to reach its final orbit.
5. **Ageing constellation:** The initial satellites had an expected mission life of around **10 years**, which has come to an end for several satellites, further affecting the continuity of NavIC services.

Technological Improvements and Restoration of NavIC

1. **Improved quality checks:** More thorough checks are being conducted to prevent satellite propulsion-system failures similar to those experienced by NVS-02.
2. **Indigenous atomic clocks:** Second-generation navigation satellites, beginning with **NVS-01**, carry indigenously developed atomic clocks with an expected operational life of around **12 years**, reducing dependence on imported components.
3. **Additional frequency band:** These satellites transmit signals across three frequency bands—**L1, L5 and S**—compared with the earlier satellites, which provided L5 and S frequencies.
4. **Interoperability:** The addition of the L1 frequency, commonly used by GPS, improves interoperability with other positioning systems.
5. **Consumer applications:** L1 compatibility enables NavIC integration into wearable devices such as smartwatches that use low-power, single-frequency chips, expanding its potential civilian applications.
6. **NVS-03 and NavIC restoration:** ISRO successfully launched NVS-03 aboard GSLV-F18 on 30 October 2026. The satellite is designed to strengthen the NavIC constellation through an indigenous atomic clock and additional L1-frequency capability. Its successful launch is an important step towards restoring standalone positioning services, although operationalisation requires successful orbit-raising manoeuvres, validation and adequate functioning satellites in the constellation.

148. Siang Dam: Why the Project to Counter China Faces Opposition in Arunachal Pradesh

The proposed **11,200 MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP)** in Arunachal Pradesh is intended to strengthen India's strategic and downstream water-security interests amid China's proposed **60,000 MW hydropower project on the Yarlung Tsangpo**, approved in December 2024. The proposal dates back to 1982, when the Brahmaputra Board suggested smaller projects to counter Chinese hydropower development. India's concerns gained prominence in 2013, and the proposed Siang Upper Stage-I and Stage-II projects were merged in 2017. However, experts question whether SUMP can effectively counter China's project without first understanding its design, operational procedures and downstream impact. As a downstream country, India has a legitimate interest in transparency regarding upstream developments and their implications for the Brahmaputra.

The project has triggered opposition among sections of the **Adi community**, youth leaders and local residents over displacement, loss of ancestral land, livelihoods and cultural identity. Protests, including a 12-hour shutdown, followed the detention of activists, with demands for their release. For indigenous communities, the Siang is not merely a river but a source of economic, social, cultural and religious identity. Residents also fear that China's upstream dam could enable sudden water releases, potentially being used as a strategic instrument or a *water bomb*. The opposition therefore reflects concerns over indigenous rights, ecological security and the preservation of traditional ways of life.

SUMP is currently at the **Pre-Feasibility Report (PFR) stage**. Further progress would require a Social Impact Assessment (SIA), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Detailed Project Report (DPR). Chief Minister Pema Khandu has assured consultations with affected communities and stated that the project would not proceed if experts find it unfeasible. However, residents are seeking written assurances rather than verbal commitments. Any decision must ensure proper compensation, rehabilitation, livelihood protection and meaningful community participation. The central challenge is to balance **national security and downstream water security with indigenous rights, environmental sustainability and public consent**.

149. The Geography and Economy of Punjab's Long Drug Crisis

Punjab's prolonged drug crisis is rooted in its **historical patterns of substance consumption, geographical vulnerability, organised trafficking networks and political economy**. Despite successive government campaigns, the persistence of drug availability, overdose deaths and drug-related violence exposes the limitations of enforcement-led responses.

Historical Roots and Geographical Vulnerability

1. **Historical and social context:** Opium and poppy husk have traditionally been consumed in Punjab. The **Royal Commission on Opium (1894)** observed that consumption was generally limited to certain sections of northern India. A 1979 study by Prof. Ranjit Singh Ghuman found widespread opium use among Punjab's rural population. *Desi daru* (home-brewed alcohol) and *nasha* (intoxicants) also had social acceptance. Rajasthan continues to have legal opium outlets (*thekas*).
2. **Geographical vulnerability:** Punjab's **553-km border with Pakistan** exposes it to cross-border trafficking. Mountainous regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran constitute the **Golden Crescent**, a major global centre of heroin production and processing. The **Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Thailand and Laos)** and South America are other major drug-producing regions.
3. **Trafficking routes:** Heroin, locally known as *chitta*, is smuggled across the porous Pakistan border. Opium and poppy husk enter from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where cultivation is permitted for medicinal, scientific and export purposes. *Charas* and *hashish* come from Himachal Pradesh, while high-quality heroin is also suspected to enter through Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir.
4. **Narcoterrorism:** A senior police officer has described Pakistan's alleged use of drug trafficking to weaken Punjab after militancy as *narcoterrorism*.

Political Economy and Changing Drug Trafficking Networks

1. **Lucrative illicit economy:** A gram of *chitta* can fetch **₹1,000–₹5,000**, while a single drug-carrying run may earn up to ₹1 lakh. Limited livelihood opportunities and changing social attitudes towards acquiring wealth sustain the profitability of trafficking.
2. **Political-criminal nexus:** An alleged nexus between traffickers, police and politicians protects the trade. The case of former Punjab Police DSP **Jagdish Singh Bhola**, arrested in a multi-million-rupee drug racket in 2013 and convicted in 2019, illustrates the institutional dimensions of the crisis.
3. **Pharmaceutical drug diversion:** As border enforcement intensified, abuse of pharmaceutical drugs increased. Of the **5.13 crore pharmaceutical drug units seized across India in 2024, Punjab accounted for 2.94 crore**.
4. **Drone-based smuggling:** Small Chinese-made quadcopters are increasingly used to transport heroin and arms across the border. BSF data show drone droppings rising from **3 in 2021 to over 200 in 2025**. The Amritsar–Tarn Taran–Ferozepur–Gurdaspur belt forms the operational core.
5. **Social consequences:** Women are increasingly being drawn into trafficking. Punjab Assembly data show an **85% rise in women's arrests under the NDPS Act in 2022 compared with 2015**. Women are often used as carriers because they are considered less likely to be frisked; some women with drug dependence also enter peddling to finance their addiction.

State Response: Limitations and the Way Forward

1. **Successive government approaches:** The Akali-BJP government declared a *War on Drugs* in 2014, adopting the **Enforcement, De-addiction and Prevention (EDP)** approach. In August 2022, the police shifted towards choking supply by targeting major traffickers while expanding outreach programmes.
2. **Yudh Nasheyan Virudh:** Launched by the AAP government in March 2025, the campaign sought to choke traffickers' finances and demolish properties allegedly built using illicit proceeds. Its second phase shifted towards community-driven action, deploying over **1.5 lakh village volunteers**. However, drug availability continues.
3. **Political and administrative limitations:** Earlier governments also introduced measures such as dope tests for arms licences and government recruitment. Repeated changes in strategy have not dismantled the wider trafficking networks. The crisis has also become a major electoral issue, with political leaders visiting affected families and competing over anti-drug action.
4. **Core policy gap:** The EDP approach requires greater emphasis on **prevention and rehabilitation**, rather than prioritising enforcement alone. Arresting carriers and users cannot dismantle the financiers, suppliers and institutional networks sustaining the drug economy.
5. **Way forward:** Combine intelligence-led action against organised trafficking and financial networks with pharmaceutical supply-chain regulation, border surveillance, community participation, accessible de-addiction services and rehabilitation.

150 . Deemed Ineligible: Supreme Court Flags Design Flaws in SIR

The Supreme Court has questioned the **design of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI), highlighting the risk of large-scale disenfranchisement. The central concern is that the SIR shifts the burden of electoral enrolment from the State to citizens, treating non-submission of enumeration forms or absence from a residence as grounds for deletion, even for existing voters.

SIR and the Problem of Electoral Exclusion

1. **Burden of enrolment:** During the hearing on the Delhi SIR, Justice Joymalya Bagchi questioned whether an existing voter could permanently lose the right to vote merely for being *"lax, inert or non-responsive"* to enumeration forms. Chief Justice Surya Kant observed that the ECI was in error in requiring such voters to reapply for enrolment.
2. **Grounds for deletion:** The Court questioned why voters who had shifted residences could not simply provide their updated details and why deleted voters could not submit enumeration forms belatedly.
3. **Large-scale deletions:** The proportion of draft deletions marked as **"shifted" or "absent"** rose from 55% in Bihar to 72% across States and Union Territories in Phase III.
4. **Karnataka example:** Around **84 lakh electors** were deleted as shifted or absent during enumeration. However, only a net 8.2 lakh, including newly enrolled voters, were added during the claims phase, leaving the final electoral roll 64.5 lakh below the projected adult population.
5. **Earlier revision model:** During the 2002–03 intensive revision, enumerators enrolled shifted voters at their new residences, while the Chief Electoral Officer reconciled their earlier entries. This raises questions about why the present process places a greater responsibility on individual voters.
6. **Disproportionate exclusion:** The Hindu's analysis found that Muslim voters in Delhi were disproportionately flagged during the SIR process, raising concerns about the equitable application of verification procedures.

Judicial Concerns and the Need for Structural Reform

1. **Logical discrepancy checks:** Justice Bagchi clarified that the Bihar judgment was not a binding precedent on the legality of the ECI's *"logical discrepancy"* checks, which had been permitted as an interim arrangement in West Bengal. Their legality has not been finally adjudicated.
2. **Arbitrary verification criteria:** The ECI's algorithm-driven checks use factors such as family size and the age gap between voters and their parents. However, no State rule or established formula provides a clear basis for determining voter eligibility through these criteria.
3. **Beyond procedural corrections:** The Court cautioned against limiting intervention to managerial fixes such as extending deadlines or displaying printed electoral lists. Such measures cannot adequately address errors arising from a fundamentally flawed revision process.
4. **Revision of electoral rolls:** The final SIR rolls may contain errors arising from the design of the exercise, rather than merely administrative lapses. Draft deletions in Delhi and West Bengal must therefore be comprehensively reconsidered, with eligible voters wrongly removed restored and newly eligible electors included.

151. Open to Probe: Public Functionaries Must Not Use Privacy to Seek Exemption from Scrutiny

The Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA) has challenged the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and its Rules, arguing that the absence of a specific exemption for journalistic activity could restrict investigative reporting. The issue highlights the need to balance **the right to privacy with freedom of the press, public-interest journalism and accountability of public authorities**.

DPDP Act and Its Implications for Investigative Journalism

1. **Absence of journalistic exemption:** The DPDP Act and Rules do not provide a specific exemption for journalistic activities. This could discourage reporters investigating official misconduct, corruption and violations of public duties.
2. **Impact on investigative reporting:** Requirements relating to the collection and processing of personal data could affect investigations involving public officials, particularly where journalists seek information from individuals they are investigating.
3. **Impact on the RTI framework:** Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, 2023 amends the Right to Information Act, 2005 by substituting Section 8(1)(j), which deals with exemption from disclosure of personal information.
4. **Earlier Section 8(1)(j):** The earlier provision permitted disclosure where larger public interest justified it, subject to the statutory privacy-related conditions. The amended provision simply exempts information relating to personal information, removing the earlier express public-interest qualification from this clause.
5. **Public-interest concern:** The DNPA argues that removing the explicit public-interest balancing provision could make it harder to obtain personal information held by public authorities, even when disclosure is relevant to investigating corruption, misuse of public resources or official misconduct.

Balancing Privacy, Press Freedom and Public Accountability

1. **Supreme Court's observation:** The Court emphasised the need to balance press freedom with the right to privacy. It also noted that journalists in India enjoy no specific statutory protection for their work, freedom of the press being constitutionally protected under **Article 19(1)(a)**.

2. **Privacy versus public interest:** The right to privacy cannot become an absolute ground for withholding information, particularly when personal information is held by public authorities and relates to alleged corruption, misuse of public resources or tender irregularities.
3. **Public functionaries and accountability:** Public officials should not use privacy protections as a blanket shield against scrutiny. Restrictions on access to personal information must be balanced against legitimate public-interest investigations.
4. **Social media and competing claims:** The Centre has highlighted the difficulty of distinguishing genuine journalistic activity from social-media content creators. A 2026 Reuters Institute report cited in the text indicates that the proportion of people identifying social media as their primary news source increased from **21% in 2015 to 39% in 2025**.

152. Concerns Over the Collegium System

The disclosure that former CJI D.Y. Chandrachud may have discussed proposed judicial appointments with the Union Government before the collegium meeting has revived concerns over **judicial independence and executive influence**. While the collegium system was developed to insulate judicial appointments from political interference, its functioning has raised questions regarding transparency, accountability and the possibility of favouritism.

Evolution and Constitutional Framework of the Collegium System

1. **Constitutional provisions:** Article 124 provides for appointment of Supreme Court judges by the President after consultation with the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Article 217 provides for appointment of High Court judges after consultation with the CJI, the Governor and the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court.
2. **First Judges Case (1981):** The Supreme Court upheld the primacy of the executive in judicial appointments, holding that consultation with the CJI did not mean concurrence.
3. **Second Judges Case (1993):** The Supreme Court reversed the earlier position and established the **collegium system**, giving primacy to the judiciary in judicial appointments.
4. **Third Judges Case (1998):** The Supreme Court clarified the collegium system. For appointments to the Supreme Court, the collegium comprises the CJI and four senior-most Supreme Court judges. For High Court appointments, the CJI consults the two senior-most Supreme Court judges, along with the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court as part of the recommendation process.
5. **Memorandum of Procedure (MoP), 1998:** It provides the detailed procedure for judicial appointments. The collegium recommends candidates to the Union Government through the Law Ministry. The Centre may return a recommendation with objections or reservations for reconsideration; however, if the collegium reiterates its recommendation, the appointment should be made.
6. **NJAC and constitutional challenge:** The **99th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2014** established the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) to replace the collegium. Its proposed composition included the CJI, two senior-most Supreme Court judges, the Union Law Minister and two eminent persons.
7. **2015 Supreme Court judgment:** The Court struck down the 99th Constitutional Amendment and NJAC Act, holding that they violated the **basic structure of the Constitution**, particularly judicial independence. The government and judiciary subsequently agreed to revise the MoP, but differences over transparency and appointment procedures remained unresolved.

Concerns and Institutional Limitations

1. **Executive interference:** Prior discussion of proposed appointments with the government before collegium deliberations raises concerns about executive influence and the erosion of judicial autonomy.
2. **Opacity in appointments:** Closed-door deliberations and the absence of clearly defined selection criteria make the appointment process insufficiently transparent.
3. **Accountability deficit:** The lack of publicly accessible reasons for selection and rejection of candidates weakens institutional accountability.
4. **Nepotism and favouritism:** Allegations of preferential treatment and the appointment of individuals with professional or personal connections raise concerns about merit-based selection.
5. **Unresolved MoP:** Differences between the government and judiciary over the revised Memorandum of Procedure have delayed the establishment of a transparent and clearly defined appointment framework.
6. **Judicial independence versus accountability:** While executive control can compromise judicial independence, an entirely opaque judicial selection process can weaken public confidence in the judiciary. The challenge is to ensure institutional autonomy alongside transparency and accountability.

International Practices and the Way Forward

1. **United States:** Supreme Court judges are nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate, providing for executive nomination and legislative scrutiny.

2. **United Kingdom:** The **Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC)** comprises 15 members drawn from the judiciary, legal profession and public. It selects candidates for judicial appointments, which are subsequently made through the prescribed constitutional process.
3. **South Africa:** The **Judicial Service Commission (JSC)** comprises 23 members, including representatives of the judiciary, legislature, executive, legal profession and academia. It recommends candidates to the President.
4. **Revising the MoP:** The immediate reform priority is to establish transparent selection criteria, clarify the consultation process and provide greater institutional accountability in appointments.
5. **Reconstituting the NJAC:** A broader appointment mechanism could include representatives from the legislature, Bar Council and academia, drawing on international practices. A judicial veto over final recommendations could serve as a safeguard for judicial independence.

153 . Beyond Gullibility: Bank Measures Can Only Limit Damage from Digital Arrest Scams

The Supreme Court has expressed concern over the persistence of **digital arrest scams**, observing that victims cannot simply be blamed for falling prey to sophisticated fraud. With nearly **₹800 crore reportedly lost** despite growing awareness and public warnings, the focus must shift towards institutional accountability, banking safeguards and protection of victims.

Digital Arrest Scams and Institutional Safeguards

1. **Nature of the problem:** Scammers impersonate CBI or police officers and exploit fear of law enforcement, particularly targeting elderly citizens. Victims are pressured into transferring savings under the threat of arrest or legal action.
2. **Supreme Court's intervention:** Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, during the October 29 hearing, questioned the tendency to attribute such frauds merely to victims' gullibility and welcomed the RBI's efforts to strengthen banking safeguards.
3. **Draft RBI KYC Amendment Directions, 2026:** Following the Supreme Court's directions, the RBI issued draft amendments to its KYC Directions, 2025, proposing a Standard Operating Procedure for temporary debit holds on accounts or transactions linked to suspected money-mule activity and cyber-enabled fraud. The Supreme Court is examining the proposed framework, which is expected to be notified by 30 November and made operational by 31 December 2026.
4. **Transaction monitoring:** CBI investigations have revealed that banks often fail to identify suspicious transactions even after victims report fraud. Complete transaction histories and improved monitoring systems can help banks detect anomalous transactions faster.
5. **Implementation deadline:** The Attorney-General assured the Court that the RBI directions would be enforced by **December 31**, making timely implementation important for preventing further financial losses.

Victim Protection, Banking Accountability and Implementation Challenges

1. **Zero-liability protection:** The RBI's 2017 circular provides protection against unauthorised electronic transactions, but victims coerced into voluntarily transferring money may not receive equivalent protection. This creates a gap between conventional banking safeguards and digitally induced financial fraud.
2. **Temporary debit restrictions:** Under the new directions, transactions exceeding **₹1,000** or considered unusual against an account holder's declared profile may be held for up to **60 days**, or longer if directed by the police.
3. **Risk of disproportionate penalties:** Small traders and Jan Dhan account holders may unknowingly receive money transferred through mule accounts. Freezing their accounts for two months or longer can impose an excessive burden on innocent account holders.
4. **Reporting and verification:** Unusual transactions should be automatically reported to the police and physically verified. However, safeguards are necessary to prevent excessive surveillance and violations of privacy.
5. **Bank accountability:** Genuine account holders must not be penalised for failures in banks' monitoring and verification systems. Victim compensation and protection must accompany stronger fraud-prevention mechanisms.
6. **Cross-border organised crime:** Scam compounds operating in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos have reportedly flourished with varying degrees of official patronage. The involvement of trafficked Indians in these operations highlights the need for international cooperation and action against organised cybercrime networks.

154. Suboptimal Outcomes: Social Security Concerns of Unorganised Sector Workers Remain

One year after the implementation of the **Code on Social Security, 2020**, the constitution of National Social Security Boards for Unorganised Workers and Gig and Platform Workers marks a welcome step towards extending social protection. However, delayed constitution, centralised governance and inadequate representation of workers and States continue to limit their effectiveness.

Social Security Boards: Composition and Institutional Concerns

1. **Board for Unorganised Workers:** Under Section 6 of the Code on Social Security, 2020, the National Social Security Board comprises 40 nominated members representing seven unorganised-sector worker representatives, seven employer representatives, seven civil-society experts, three Members of Parliament, ten Central Government Ministries/Departments,

five State Governments and one Union Territory. The Union Labour Minister is the Chairperson, the Labour Secretary is the Vice-Chairperson and the Director General of Labour Welfare is the Member-Secretary.

2. **Board for Gig and Platform Workers:** Under Section 114(6), the same National Social Security Board functions for gig and platform workers with a modified composition of 22 members. It includes five aggregator representatives, five worker representatives, the Director General of ESIC, the Central Provident Fund Commissioner, expert members, five State Government representatives and the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment as Member-Secretary, in addition to the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.
3. **Centralisation of governance:** Both boards are constituted by the Union Government, with inadequate representation of State Governments. This limits their ability to address region-specific concerns.
4. **Representation deficit:** The boards lack significant representation of Central Trade Unions, including those from the Opposition, and representatives of State Governments ruled by the Opposition. This weakens inclusive consultation and institutional accountability.
5. **Federal concern:** Labour is a subject in the **Concurrent List**, requiring both Union and State Governments to work together to improve workers' living standards. The present institutional arrangement does not adequately reflect this shared responsibility.
6. **Delayed constitution:** Although the establishment of the boards is a welcome development, their delayed constitution has postponed the institutional response required to address workers' social-security concerns.

Social Security Deficit and the Way Forward

1. **Meaning of social security:** The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines social security as protection provided by society to ensure access to healthcare and income security during old age, unemployment, sickness, disability, work injury, maternity and loss of a breadwinner.
2. **Coverage versus actual protection:** Social security coverage reportedly increased from **19% in 2015 to 64.3% in 2025**, covering around **94 crore citizens**. However, unorganised and gig/platform workers, who constitute more than **92% of India's workforce**, remain inadequately protected.
3. **Expert recommendations:** The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), headed by economist Arjun Sengupta, had recommended a gradual expansion of social security for informal workers. Yet, their concerns remain largely unresolved.
4. **State-level concerns:** A report prepared by Justice V. Gopala Gowda for the Kerala Government in March 2026 identified anti-federal and anti-worker characteristics in the Social Security Code and suggested amendments.
5. **Way forward:** The Union Government must strengthen State participation, ensure adequate representation of Central Trade Unions and worker organisations, and address implementation gaps. Both Union and State Governments must develop responsive mechanisms to extend effective social protection to unorganised and gig/platform workers.

155 . $6.3 Billion Stolen in 20 Minutes: Inside the Mega Binance Hack

The world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, **Binance**, suffered a massive security breach in which cyberattackers stole approximately **$6.3 billion** in cryptocurrency within 20 minutes. The incident exposed vulnerabilities in cryptocurrency exchange infrastructure, triggered market volatility and raised concerns over the security of digital assets and interconnected blockchain networks.

Nature of the Cyberattack and Security Vulnerabilities

1. **Nature of breach:** Binance's initial investigation suggested that a compromised DevOps engineer's laptop may have enabled attackers to access a service container and submit unauthorised withdrawal transactions. The company subsequently confirmed that additional points of breach had been uncovered, while the complete attack sequence remained under investigation.
2. **Attack mechanism:** According to blockchain analytics firms **TRM Labs and Chainalysis**, the attack bore similarities to previous large-scale cyberattacks attributed to North Korea. Attackers reportedly used empty wallets to order wallets controlled by Binance to transfer assets into hacker-controlled wallets.
3. **Infrastructure vulnerability:** The attackers compromised the transaction-authorisation pathway used by Binance's hot-wallet infrastructure. Although Binance reported no evidence of wallet private-key leakage, attackers were able to exploit the compromised access to authorise unauthorised transactions and drain cryptocurrency from the wallets.
4. **Need for containment:** Access to a DevOps system can expose additional entry points into an exchange's infrastructure. Rapid identification and containment of such breaches are therefore critical.
5. **Previous cyberattacks:**
    - In 2019, approximately **$40 million in Bitcoin** was stolen from Binance through viruses and phishing techniques.

- North Korea's state-backed **Lazarus Group** reportedly stole around **$1.5 billion from Bybit** through spoofing last year, with only a small portion recovered.

Market Impact, Institutional Response and Implications for India

1. **Cryptocurrency market volatility:** Following the breach, Bitcoin fell **4.5%**, reaching its lowest level since September, while Ethereum declined by **5%**. Other major cryptocurrencies also experienced sharp sell-offs, reflecting the wider market impact of a security failure at a major exchange.
2. **Binance's response:** The exchange assured users that it would cover losses from its own funds, revoked the network access responsible for the breach and informed law-enforcement agencies and blockchain intelligence platforms.
3. **Asset protection:** Binance initially suspended deposits and withdrawals but subsequently clarified that deposits would remain unaffected and withdrawals could resume within 48 hours. Around **$3 billion in funds were blocked**, representing assets frozen by Binance and other entities, including blockchain-enabled platforms Tether and Circle.
4. **Impact on India:** The breach could indirectly affect Indian cryptocurrency investors because Binance plays an important role as an overseas liquidity provider for parts of India's cryptocurrency market. However, estimates of Indian user exposure to Binance should be treated cautiously in the absence of independently verified user-level data.
5. **Indirect exposure:** Even Indian exchanges such as CoinDCX have exposure to Binance, demonstrating the interconnected nature of cryptocurrency markets and the possibility of overseas security failures affecting domestic investors.
6. **Broader concern:** The incident highlights the need for stronger cybersecurity infrastructure, secure access controls, real-time monitoring, coordinated incident response and greater accountability among cryptocurrency exchanges.

156. The Intricate System to Elect MLCs

MLC elections differ from general elections because they involve **preferential voting by MLAs, local authorities, graduates and teachers**, alongside nominations by the Governor. The system is designed to provide representation to different sections of society and make Legislative Councils a revising chamber within State legislatures.

Legislative Council: Composition, Electoral Process and Constitutional Position

1. **Constitutional framework:** Article 169 empowers Parliament to create or abolish a State Legislative Council following a resolution passed by the State Assembly by a special majority. A Council must have at least **40 members** and cannot exceed one-third of the strength of the Legislative Assembly.
2. **Composition under Article 171:**
    a. One-third elected by members of local authorities.
    b. One-twelfth elected by graduates.
    c. One-twelfth elected by teachers.
    d. One-third elected by members of the Legislative Assembly.
    e. The remaining one-sixth nominated by the Governor from persons having special knowledge or practical experience in literature, science, art, the cooperative movement and social service.
3. **State-wise distribution:** Six States currently have functioning Legislative Councils: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh has never constituted its proposed Legislative Council, while Tamil Nadu's Legislative Council was abolished in 1986. The seat distribution among electoral categories varies across States.
4. **Eligibility and electoral rolls:** An MLC candidate must be at least 30 years old and an elector in the State. Graduate-constituency voters must have held a recognised graduate qualification for at least three years before the qualifying date and be ordinarily resident in the constituency. Teacher-constituency voters must have been engaged in teaching for at least three years during the six years preceding the qualifying date in an educational institution not lower than the prescribed secondary-school level.
5. **Local-authority constituencies:** Voters are current members of local bodies such as municipalities and other territorial institutions. Graduate and teacher constituencies have separate electoral rolls, which are revised before elections; eligible voters must register and satisfy the prescribed qualifications.
6. **Tenure:** MLCs serve six-year terms, with one-third retiring every two years. The Council is a continuing House and is not subject to dissolution.
7. **Legislative role:** Unlike the Rajya Sabha, which represents States at the Union level, a Legislative Council is a second chamber within a State legislature. It acts as a **revising and deliberative chamber**, providing space for reconsideration and specialised perspectives. However, it cannot permanently block legislation passed by the Legislative Assembly.
8. **Creation and abolition:** Six States have functioning Councils. It highlights the political debate surrounding their creation, including Rajasthan's Legislative Assembly resolution of 18 April 2012 seeking a Legislative Council. The Rajasthan Legislative Council Bill was subsequently introduced in Parliament in August 2013. Supporters consider a second chamber

useful for wider representation and legislative scrutiny, while critics argue that it can increase expenditure, delay legislation and become a political accommodation mechanism.

Preferential Voting and Election of MLCs and Rajya Sabha Members

1. **Single Transferable Vote (STV):** MLC elections are not conducted through ordinary single-choice voting. Voters rank candidates in order of preference—first, second, third and so on—on a ballot paper. This allows votes to be transferred according to subsequent preferences.
2. **MLA elections:** MLAs elect one-third of the MLCs through preferential voting. In these elections, MLAs do not have to show their votes to their party's election agent, unlike the Rajya Sabha voting arrangement described in the report.
3. **Quota calculation for Rajya Sabha elections:** The required number of votes is calculated by dividing the total number of MLAs voting by the number of seats plus one, and adding one to the result. For example, if **200 MLAs vote for four seats**, the quota is $200 \div (4 + 1) + 1 =$ **41 votes**.
4. **Transfer of votes:** A candidate securing the required quota is elected. Any surplus votes are transferred according to the next preferences marked by voters. If no candidate reaches the quota, the candidate with the lowest votes is eliminated and their votes are transferred to the next available preferences. The process continues until all seats are filled.
5. **Purpose of preferential voting:** It enables proportional representation and allows candidates to secure election through transferred preferences rather than depending exclusively on first-preference votes.

Ballot Papers in Indian Elections: Continued Relevance and Use

1. **Continued use:** Despite the expansion of EVMs, ballot papers remain widely used in local elections. A **2023 study by the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA)** found that around 53% of States conducting gram panchayat elections used ballot papers.
2. **State-level variation:** Only three States/UTs—Kerala, Sikkim and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu—were reported to use EVMs in all gram panchayat constituencies. Other States use ballot papers or a combination of ballot papers and EVMs. However, the share of EVM use increases at the higher tiers of panchayat elections, particularly at the intermediate and district levels. The IIPA study reported that 17% of States used EVMs in all district/zilla panchayat constituencies.
3. **Administrative and logistical constraints:** Panchayat elections often involve multiple tiers, numerous candidates and simultaneous contests. This makes EVM configuration, manpower deployment and counting more complicated. Ballot papers may be more practical in such circumstances.
4. **Financial considerations:** Shortage of funds, particularly at district and panchayat levels, also influences the choice of voting method. EVM deployment requires procurement, maintenance, manpower and logistical arrangements.
5. **Municipal and student elections:** Municipal corporation elections generally use EVMs, although the method varies across States. Delhi University Students' Union elections use EVMs, whereas Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union elections use ballot papers. Other university elections also vary according to institutional decisions.
6. **Single transferable vote and ballot papers:** Preferential elections, including Rajya Sabha and Legislative Council elections, use ballot papers because voters must indicate multiple preferences. Under Article 171, voters mark first, second and subsequent preferences, allowing surplus votes and votes of eliminated candidates to be transferred.
7. **Open ballot in Rajya Sabha:** Rajya Sabha elections follow an open-ballot arrangement in which MLAs show their marked ballot to the authorised party agent. This requirement does not apply in MLC elections.
