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Mains Marathon

1st Week September, 2025

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
POLITY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

INDEX

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Despite improved forecasting, floods take a worrying toll. Examine how the failure to use scientific knowledge exacerbates the socio-geographical vulnerabilities and policy gaps in effective disaster management.

Introduction

India is the **second-most flood-prone country globally**, with nearly **12% of its landmass vulnerable** (NDMA, 2023). Despite advances in forecasting—IMD now provides **5-day probabilistic forecasts with 70% accuracy**—inadequate application of science worsens the toll, highlighting systemic policy and governance gaps.

Science vs. Policy: The Persistent Disconnect

1. **Improved Forecasting:** IMD's Doppler weather radars, GIS-based flood mapping, and **ensemble forecasting models** have enhanced early warning accuracy. ISRO's **satellite-based flood hazard zonation** identifies high-risk zones.
2. **Policy Gaps:** Authorities often disregard alerts. Example: **Kishtwar (2024) & Vaishno Devi (2024)** cloudburst deaths despite IMD warnings. **Uttarakhand (2013)** disaster: HC directives to restrict floodplain construction ignored, leading to repeated vulnerability in 2025 Dharali floods.

Socio-Geographical Vulnerabilities Aggravated by Non-Compliance

1. **Himalayan Fragility:** Young fold mountains with **unstable slopes, moraine-dammed lakes, and seismic activity** magnify risks. **Unregulated tourism and hydropower projects** undermine slope stability.
2. **Urban Flooding:** Encroachment on **floodplains, wetlands, and stormwater drains**—e.g., Mumbai 2021 & Bengaluru 2022—converts heavy rain into catastrophe.
3. **Floodplain Neglect:** Case: Dharali market built on an **alluvial fan**, a natural safety valve, washed away in 2025 floods.
4. **Agrarian Distress:** Punjab-Haryana waterlogging shows how **canal mismanagement + intense monsoon variability** disrupts food security.

Climate Change Intensifies the Challenge

1. **Changing Monsoon Dynamics:** Extension of **Western Disturbances** into monsoon season—15 such systems in 2024—aggravates rainfall variability.
2. **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs):** Melting Himalayan glaciers form unstable moraine lakes (ICIMOD, 2023). Chamoli (2021) disaster—triggered by glacier-rock avalanche—highlighted climate-driven risks.
3. **Global Evidence:** Pakistan floods (2022)—displacement of 33 million—show climate vulnerability in South Asia.

Failure to Use Science: Missed Opportunities

1. **Early Warning Systems:** GSI completed **landslide susceptibility mapping** for Himalayas, but implementation at local level remains absent.
2. **Forecast Utilisation:** Lack of **last-mile connectivity**—alerts fail to reach vulnerable communities in time.
3. **Institutional Fragmentation:** Multiplicity of agencies (IMD, CWC, NDMA, state DMAs) creates **coordination deficit**.
4. **Construction Policy:** Despite floodplain zoning acts proposed since **1975**, no nationwide legislation has been enforced.

Pathways Forward: Science-Led Disaster Governance

1. **Strengthen Forecast Utilisation:** Integrate IMD alerts with district-level SOPs, mock drills, and digital platforms.
2. **Enforce Floodplain Zoning:** Mandate eco-sensitive construction norms; penalise encroachments.

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3. **Invest in Early Warning Systems:** Expand Doppler radar network; deploy **community-based real-time sensors**.
4. **Nature-Based Solutions:** Restore wetlands, river buffers; adopt **Room for the River** model (Netherlands).
5. **Integrated Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework, 2015–30):** Focus on **resilience-building**, not just relief.

Conclusion

As **C. P. Snow observed in *The Two Cultures*, ignoring science imperils governance**. India must transform improved forecasts into actionable policy, bridging the gap between knowledge and resilience to safeguard lives.

Critically examine the statement "Despite a diplomatic thaw, the historical territorial-cum-border dispute remains at the core of India-China relations. Examine how this unresolved issue shapes their bilateral security framework and foreign policy."

Introduction

India-China relations, encompassing 3,488 km of disputed border, remain shadowed by unresolved territorial disputes. Despite "diplomatic thaw" moments post-Kazan and Tianjin, Galwan 2020 reaffirmed LAC fragility, shaping enduring mistrust in security and foreign policy.

Historical Legacy and Core Dispute

1. The **territorial-cum-border dispute**, dating to colonial cartographic legacies (McMahon Line 1914, Johnson-Ardagh vs. Macartney-MacDonald lines in Aksai Chin), remains central.
2. Since the **1962 war**, efforts—Special Representative talks (2003), Agreement on Political Parameters (2005)—have not produced a final settlement. **Galwan clashes (2020)** underscored the absence of **mutually acceptable resolution**, despite prior CBMs (1993, 1996 agreements).

Shaping Bilateral Security Framework

1. **Security Dissonance and Strategic Mistrust**: Border contestation compels India to maintain large-scale **forward deployment** in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. PLA's assertiveness, coupled with India's military modernisation (e.g., **BRO's DSDBO road**), perpetuates a **security dilemma**.
2. **Border Talks: Work in Progress**: Despite disengagement in areas like Pangong Tso and Gogra, friction persists at Depsang Plains and Demchok. The **17th round of Corps Commander-level talks (2022)** shows incremental progress but no structural resolution.
3. **External Balancing and Strategic Autonomy**: Border tensions push India towards **coalition-building**: QUAD, India-US foundational defence pacts (LEMOA 2016, COMCASA 2018, BECA 2020). Yet, India also pursues "**multi-alignment**" via SCO and BRICS to avoid bloc politics.

Impact on Foreign Policy

1. **Constraining Economic Cooperation**: Bilateral trade crossed **$136 billion (2022)**, yet trust deficit persists with restrictions on Chinese investments in India post-Galwan (via **FDI policy amendments 2020**). India banned **300+ Chinese apps**, linking economic policy to security concerns.
2. **Regional Geopolitics and Connectivity Rivalry**: China's **CPEC corridor through PoK** challenges India's sovereignty. India counters via **Chabahar Port** and participation in **IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor, 2023)**.
3. **Indo-Pacific Theatre and Strategic Balancing**: China's Indo-Pacific assertiveness and maritime forays (Hambantota, Gwadar, "String of Pearls") shape India's **SAGAR doctrine** and partnerships with ASEAN, Japan, and Australia. Modi's **Tokyo-Tianjin diplomacy (2024)** highlights simultaneous outreach—deepening with Japan while cautiously normalising with China.

Critical Examination

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While **summitry diplomacy** (Kazan, Tianjin, Wuhan informal summits) generates symbolic warmth, **structural impediments** remain:

1. **Asymmetry in Power**: China's $18 trillion GDP vs. India's $3.7 trillion limits bargaining parity.
2. **Alliance Patterns**: Beijing's "all-weather" ties with Pakistan directly impinge on India's security.
3. **Strategic Culture Clash**: India's **strategic autonomy** vs. China's **hegemonic worldview** obstruct trust.

Thus, despite engagement in multilateral forums (SCO, BRICS, G20), the **border dispute is the prism** through which bilateral security and foreign policy choices are refracted.

Conclusion (30 words)

As it is being suggested by many think tanks, India-China ties oscillate between cooperation and confrontation; until the border dispute resolves, true strategic trust will remain elusive.

In an era of rising trade barriers, fragmented carbon pricing risks massive compliance costs. Examine how a coherent carbon tax framework can be designed to be both environmentally effective and economically fair."

Introduction

The **IMF (2021) warns** that fragmented carbon pricing could raise **global trade costs by 12–15%.** With **EU and UK CBAMs** emerging, India must design a coherent carbon tax ensuring both equity and efficiency.

Why Fragmented Carbon Pricing is Problematic

1. **Trade Competitiveness:** India's steel and aluminium exports face a 20–40% cost increase under the UK-CBAM (2027), despite tariff-free access under the FTA.
2. **Asymmetric Carbon Prices:** India's projected carbon price (CCTS: $8–10/tCO$_2$) is far below the UK ($66/tCO$_2$), leading to compliance burdens.
3. **Global Supply Chains Disruption:** Fragmented carbon markets risk "carbon leakage," shifting industries to low-cost jurisdictions without reducing emissions.
4. **Violation of Multilateral Principles:** CBAMs undermine the **Paris Agreement's principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR-RC)** by imposing unilateral standards.

Designing a Coherent Carbon Tax Framework

Environmental Effectiveness

1. **Unified Carbon Pricing System:** Merge coal cess, renewable purchase obligations, and sectoral levies into the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS). This ensures better price discovery and streamlined monitoring.
2. **Progressive Taxation:** Implement a gradually increasing carbon tax trajectory (e.g., ₹500/tonne in 2025, rising to ₹2,500/tonne by 2035) aligned with **India's Net Zero 2070 target**.
3. **Sectoral Differentiation:** Hard-to-abate sectors (steel, cement, fertilisers) should face higher rates, with rebates for clean tech adoption.

Economic Fairness

1. **Revenue Recycling:** Plough back carbon tax revenues into: Industrial decarbonisation (green hydrogen, CCS, electrification). Just transition for workers in coal-dependent states (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh).
2. **Equity Across Nations:** Support IMF's **International Carbon Price Floor (ICPF)** – $25/t for low-income, $50 for middle-income, $75 for high-income economies – addressing developmental disparities.
3. **Avoiding Trade Disruption:** Negotiate CBAM flexibilities, as seen in the **U.S.-EU Green Steel Agreement (2023)**, to protect domestic exporters.

Global Coordination

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1. **Regional Carbon Market Linkages:** Connect CCTS with China's ETS (world's largest) and ASEAN carbon schemes to create an Asian carbon market, reducing fragmentation.
2. **Standardised MRV (Monitoring, Reporting, Verification):** Adopt WEF's (2022) recommendation for harmonised reporting standards to build trust in India's carbon credits internationally.
3. **Technology Transfer:** Use carbon pricing revenues to fund **R&D in green hydrogen and carbon capture**, ensuring cost parity with developed economies.

Way Forward

1. **Institutional Strengthening:** Empower the Bureau of Energy Efficiency as India's central carbon market regulator.
2. **Climate Finance Taxonomy:** Finalise MoF's taxonomy to channel domestic and foreign investments into low-carbon infrastructure.
3. **Public Acceptance:** Communicate co-benefits—clean air, energy efficiency, job creation—so that carbon pricing is not viewed as merely a trade compliance burden.

Conclusion

As **William Nordhaus in *The Climate Casino* argues**, coherent carbon pricing is humanity's best bet—balancing climate justice with growth. For India, coherence ensures competitiveness, equity, and environmental sustainability.

A dissent on a Collegium elevation highlights the need for a new framework. Examine how a transparent, criteria-based system for judicial appointments can enhance the accountability and legitimacy of the judiciary.

Introduction

India has nearly **400 vacancies across High Courts (Department of Justice, 2024)**. Recent dissent within the Collegium highlights that opaque judicial appointments undermine legitimacy, demanding a transparent, criteria-based system ensuring accountability, diversity, and independence.
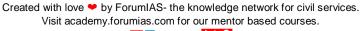
The Context: Justice Nagarathna's Dissent

1. Justice B.V. Nagarathna, the lone woman Supreme Court judge, dissented against the elevation of Justice Pancholi (2025), questioning the criteria, diversity, and past credibility concerns.
2. She invoked the **NJAC Judgment (2015, 4:1)** where the Court struck down parliamentary oversight but emphasised *"independence of the judiciary"* as the basic structure.
3. The dissent raised concerns about **regional imbalance, lack of women representation, opaque transfer records, and ignoring seniority norms** — all indicators of systemic opacity in appointments.

Why the Collegium Faces a Legitimacy Deficit

1. **Opaque Functioning:** Collegium resolutions lack detailed reasoning, creating a perception of arbitrariness.
2. **Regional & Gender Imbalance:** As of 2024, women constitute only **12% of SC judges** and several High Courts remain unrepresented (J&K, Orissa, Jharkhand, NE states).
3. **Executive-Legislative Tug of War:** While NJAC was struck down, the executive continues to delay appointments and transfers (Law Commission, 230th Report).
4. **Erosion of Meritocracy:** Concerns of favouritism and lack of transparency (e.g., lawyers' delegation influencing transfers in Gujarat HC, 2023) threaten institutional credibility.

Need for a Transparent, Criteria-Based Framework

1. Clear, Codified Criteria: Parameters should include: **merit (judgments, integrity, case disposal rates), diversity (region, gender, marginalised communities), and constitutional values**. Similar to **UK's Judicial**

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Appointments Commission (JAC) that publishes vacancy notices, conducts interviews, and uses scoring rubrics.

2. Transparent Procedures: Publish Collegium deliberations with *reasoned justifications*, barring sensitive inputs. Adopt **RTI-compliant disclosure norms**, while protecting judicial independence (2nd Administrative Reforms Commission, 2009).

3. Broader Consultation Mechanism: Mandate consultations with non-Collegium judges familiar with regional HCs (as per SC's own "Role of Collegium" guidelines). Create **independent secretariats** under the Collegium to verify service records and complaints.

4. Diversity and Inclusivity as Constitutional Imperatives: Justice Nagarathna's dissent highlighted under-representation of women and smaller HCs. Only 11 women have ever been SC judges, and none from NE HCs. Constitutional principle of **"reflective representation"** demands a judiciary that mirrors India's social diversity.

External Models and Best Practices
1. **UK JAC & South Africa JSC:** open advertisements, interviews, and parliamentary scrutiny.
2. **Kenya's Judicial Service Commission:** publishes shortlists and conducts televised interviews.
3. India could adopt a **hybrid model**: retain judicial primacy but incorporate structured evaluations and limited external oversight.

Way Forward
1. Codify appointment criteria through a **Judicial Appointments Charter** endorsed by the SC and Parliament.
2. Digitise performance metrics (disposal rate, pendency) for objective assessment.
3. Establish an **Independent Collegium Secretariat** for data, diversity tracking, and complaints review.
4. Institutionalise **annual diversity audits** to ensure inclusivity and balanced representation.

Conclusion

As **Alexis de Tocqueville argued in** *Democracy in America*, legitimacy flows from transparency and accountability. For India's judiciary, **codified, criteria-based appointments** can safeguard credibility, independence, and democratic trust.

India aims to become a competitive semiconductor hub by building a full value chain. Examine the challenges and policy imperatives in achieving technological self-reliance and economic growth in this strategic sector.

Introduction

Global semiconductor revenues crossed **$600 billion in 2022 (SEMI Report)**, underscoring their role as the "oil of the digital age." India's ambition to build a full value chain is central to Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Semiconductors: A Strategic Sector
1. Backbone of **AI, 5G, EVs, defence, space, healthcare**, and Industry 4.0.
2. India consumes $30+ billion worth of chips annually but imports nearly **100% of finished semiconductors (MeitY, 2024)**.
3. Pandemic-induced shortages exposed vulnerabilities, affecting India's auto and electronics sectors, costing billions.

Current Progress in India
1. **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM):** ₹76,000 crore PLI scheme supporting fabs, OSAT (outsourced semiconductor assembly and testing), and design.
2. **10 fabs approved**, pilot line already functioning at **Sanand (Gujarat)**; SCL Mohali being modernised.

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3. **Design strength:** India houses **20% of global chip design talent**, with 60,000+ engineers trained on Electronic Design Automation tools.
4. **Start-ups:** Mindgrove (IoT chips, IIT-Madras' SHAKTI processor), Netrasemi (₹107 crore VC funding).
5. **Global investment:** Applied Materials, Lam Research, AMD, and Merck committing over $1.1 billion for R&D.
6. **International collaborations:** US, Japan, Taiwan, EU under **CHIPS4 alliance** and India–US iCET partnership.

Challenges in Building a Full Value Chain

1. **Capital Intensity:** Setting up a fab costs **$5–10 billion**, with long payback periods.
2. **Technological Dependence:** Advanced lithography machines are monopolised by **ASML (Netherlands)**; India lacks indigenous capability.
3. **Supply Chain Fragility:** Dependence on Taiwan, Korea, and Japan for raw wafers, chemicals, rare earths.
4. **Talent Shortage:** Global shortage of 1 million chip professionals by 2030 (SEMI), India must scale beyond design to manufacturing expertise.
5. **Energy & Infrastructure Needs:** Fabs require **stable 24x7 power, ultra-pure water, and high-class logistics**, still inconsistent in India.
6. **Geopolitical Pressures:** US-China tech war, export controls, and CBAM-type carbon pricing may increase compliance costs.
7. **Fragmentation:** Lack of coordination among PLI, DLI, and state incentives risks duplication and inefficiency.

Policy Imperatives

1. Strengthen Manufacturing Ecosystem: Integrate ISM with **National Electronics Policy** for a seamless value chain from **design → fab → ATMP → end-product**. Provide tax holidays, cheaper land/power, and infrastructure corridors (Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu).

2. Talent & Skill Development: Expand semiconductor curriculum across **IITs, NITs, IIITs**, and polytechnics. Public–private skilling partnerships like **Lam Research's 60,000 engineer training program**.

3. International Partnerships & Tech Transfer: Leverage India–US **iCET**, Japan–India Semiconductor MoU (2023), and Quad supply chain resilience initiatives. Negotiate IP-sharing and R&D collaborations instead of just FDI.

4. R&D and Start-up Ecosystem: Scale up **Design Linked Incentive (DLI)**, promote fabless chip design start-ups. Invest in indigenous processors like **SHAKTI (IIT-M) and VEGA (CDAC)**.

5. Raw Material and Energy Security: Diversify sources of rare earths through ties with **Australia and Africa**. Invest in renewable-powered fabs for sustainability.

6. Governance & Coordination: Establish an **Integrated Semiconductor Task Force** for inter-ministerial and state coordination. Encourage **PPP models** with Indian conglomerates (Tata, Vedanta, Reliance) leading investments.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen notes in Development as Freedom**, technology underpins sovereignty. A coherent semiconductor ecosystem can secure India's digital future, balancing self-reliance, global integration, and sustainable economic growth.

Reliance on biomedical scoring for disability overlooks the lived reality of sickle cell disease. Critically analyze how this undermines disability justice and the purpose of recognising the condition under relevant Acts.

Introduction

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India has nearly **20 lakh sickle cell disease (SCD) patients (ICMR, 2022)**, disproportionately among Adivasi and Dalit groups. Over-reliance on biomedical scoring excludes many from protections promised under the RPWD Act, 2016.

Understanding Sickle Cell Disease and Disability Justice

1. **SCD:** A genetic blood disorder causing recurrent pain crises, anaemia, organ damage, and reduced life expectancy.
2. **Disability Justice:** A rights-based framework that goes beyond medical impairments to include **social, economic, and cultural exclusion** (UNCRPD, 2006).
3. The **RPWD Act, 2016** expanded disability recognition to 21 conditions, including blood disorders, aligning with India's **constitutional promise of equality (Article 14 & 21)**.

Biomedical Scoring: The Narrow Lens

1. **Rigid Thresholds:** Disability certification under the Act requires **40% benchmark disability**, quantified by episodic symptoms like transfusion needs or pain scores. Many SCD patients fall below this despite severe daily challenges.
2. **Subjective Assessment:** Studies (NITI Aayog, 2023) show inconsistent grading across hospitals, leading to exclusion due to **medical subjectivity** rather than lived disability.
3. **Invisible Disabilities:** Episodic pain, fatigue, and stigma are not easily "measured," making SCD invisible in the biomedical lens, though socially and economically devastating.
4. **Access Barriers:** For tribal patients in **Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh**, reaching tertiary hospitals for certification is itself exclusionary.

How This Undermines Disability Justice

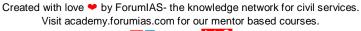1. **Denial of Rights:** Without benchmark recognition, SCD patients are denied **4% public job quota, higher education reservations, and land/poverty alleviation benefits** envisioned under RPWD Act.
2. **Exclusion from Social Protection:** Schemes like **Section 80U of Income Tax Act** or state pensions (Odisha, Himachal Pradesh) demand medical certificates, inaccessible to rural patients.
3. **Perpetuating Structural Inequalities:** SCD largely affects **Adivasi and Dalit communities**, compounding caste, class, and geographic exclusion with medical under-recognition.
4. **Contradiction to Rights-Based Approach:** RPWD aimed to move beyond medicalisation towards **capabilities approach (Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum)**, yet reliance on biomedical scoring reverts to a narrow, clinical model.

Global & National Perspectives

1. **UNCRPD (2006):** Defines disability as interaction between impairments and social barriers, not just medical thresholds.
2. **South Africa's disability policies** explicitly account for fluctuating conditions like HIV, setting an example India could adapt.
3. **WHO (2021):** Recommends multi-dimensional assessment frameworks considering **social participation, livelihood, and well-being**, not just clinical severity.

Policy Imperatives

1. **Reform Certification Framework:** Move towards a **multi-criteria assessment** including lived experiences, socioeconomic barriers, and episodic nature of illnesses.
2. **Inclusive Quotas:** Extend **job and education reservations** to blood disorders, recognising them as benchmark disabilities.
3. **Community-Based Certification:** Local health centres and mobile medical units should certify disabilities for rural and tribal patients.
4. **Holistic Support Systems:** Integrate SCD into **Ayushman Bharat, PM-JAY**, and state insurance schemes for financial relief.

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5. **Awareness and Anti-Stigma Programs:** Education campaigns to reduce social discrimination, particularly in Adivasi belts.

Conclusion

As **Martha Nussbaum notes in Frontiers of Justice**, dignity requires capability equality. Unless India redefines disability beyond biomedical scoring, sickle cell patients risk symbolic recognition without substantive justice.

The debate over exceeding the 50% reservation cap questions constitutional equality. Critically analyze the legal and social justifications for extending reservations, balancing principles of formal and substantive equality.

Introduction

With over **59.5% current reservations at the Centre (OBC 27%, SC 15%, ST 7.5%, EWS 10%)**, debates on breaching the **50% judicial cap** reflect tensions between formal and substantive equality.

Constitutional Provisions & Equality Framework

1. **Article 15 & 16**: Ensure equality in education and employment, while permitting affirmative action for SCs, STs, OBCs, and socially disadvantaged groups.
2. **Formal Equality:** Treats everyone the same, irrespective of background.
3. **Substantive Equality:** Recognises historical discrimination and enables differential treatment to ensure genuine equal opportunity (N.M. Thomas, 1975).
4. **Dr B.R Ambedkar's Constituent Assembly speech: reservations necessary but limited to minorities** to preserve equality of opportunity.
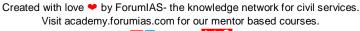
Judicial Position on the 50% Cap

1. **Balaji v. State of Mysore (1962):** Affirmed reservations must be "reasonable" and within 50%.
2. **Indra Sawhney (1992):** 9-judge bench upheld 27% OBC quota, set **50% cap**, introduced creamy layer, upheld caste as a marker of backwardness.
3. **Janhit Abhiyan (2022):** Upheld **10% EWS quota**, effectively breaching 50%, but justified as a new category outside backward classes.
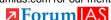4. **Davinder Singh (2024):** Suggested exploring creamy layer within SC/ST, highlighting internal inequities.

Legal Justifications for Extending Reservations

1. **Substantive Equality Principle:** Formal equality perpetuates privilege; substantive equality requires differential treatment to overcome structural barriers.
2. **Exceptional Circumstances Doctrine:** Indra Sawhney allowed breach of 50% in extraordinary cases, e.g., states with higher backward class populations (Tamil Nadu has **69% quota under 9th Schedule**).
3. **Caste Census Demand:** Empirical data is needed; Rohini Commission (2018) found **97% OBC benefits captured by 25% sub-castes**, justifying **sub-categorisation**.
4. **Evolving Understanding:** SC in EWS case acknowledged that equality jurisprudence evolves with social realities, allowing flexibility beyond rigid ceilings.

Social Justifications for Extending Reservations

1. **Demographic Realities:** Backward classes constitute **more than 60% of India's population (Mandal Commission, 1980)**; limiting reservations to 50% ignores ground realities.
2. **Unfilled Quotas:** Government replies show **40–50% reserved posts in Central jobs remain vacant**, reflecting systemic exclusion beyond just percentage limits.
3. **Marginalisation Within Groups:** SC/ST/OBC benefits concentrated in dominant sub-castes; need for **two-tier or sub-categorised reservation** to ensure intra-group equity.

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4. **Global Parallel:** Affirmative action in the U.S. and Brazil extends beyond quotas to scholarships, targeted recruitment, and holistic diversity frameworks.

Challenges in Extending Beyond 50%

1. **Formal Equality Concerns:** Breach risks violating Articles 14–16 by appearing discriminatory against unreserved groups.
2. **Political Instrumentalisation:** Risk of competitive populism (e.g., Bihar's promise of **85% reservation**) diluting meritocratic principles.
3. **Creamy Layer Debate:** Without internal exclusion, dominant elites within backward classes monopolise benefits, undermining social justice.
4. **Employment Constraints:** Shrinking public sector jobs limit reservation efficacy; real empowerment requires **skill development and private sector inclusion**.

Way Forward

1. **Caste Census 2027:** Empirical basis for rationalising quotas.
2. **Sub-Categorisation:** Implement Rohini Commission to ensure equitable distribution.
3. **Two-Tier Reservations for SC/ST:** Prioritise most marginalised.
4. **Skill & Education Focus:** Expand opportunities beyond quotas, especially in private sector.
5. **Balance Equality Principles:** Reservations should be seen as **continuation of equality of opportunity**, not exception, aligning with substantive equality vision.

Conclusion

As **Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed in EWS case,** equality is **"contextual, not abstract."** Breaching 50% must ensure distributive justice, echoing **Amartya Sen's Idea of Justice on equity over uniformity.**
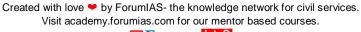
Theaterisation aims to integrate the three services under unified commands. Examine the potential benefits and challenges of this reform in enhancing India's military effectiveness and resource optimisation.

Introduction

After the **Kargil Review Committee Report (1999)** exposed gaps in inter-service coordination, India initiated higher defence reforms. Theaterisation seeks unified command integration, **ensuring "jointness" for resource optimisation and combat readiness** in increasingly multi-domain warfare.

Potential Benefits of Theaterisation

1. **Operational Synergy & Jointness**: Presently, 17 single-service commands operate with limited coordination. Unified **theatre commands will integrate land, sea, air, cyber, and space assets**, enabling joint operational planning. **Example: Andaman & Nicobar Command (2001)** has showcased tri-service synergy in the Indo-Pacific.
2. **Resource Optimisation**: Avoids duplication of logistics, training, procurement. **HQIDS (2001) estimates** theatre commands could cut administrative overlap and improve efficiency of scarce assets, **especially IAF's combat aircraft.**
3. **Future-Ready Force Structure**: Adapts to **multi-domain warfare:** drones, AI-enabled targeting, cyber threats, and space militarisation. **Ukraine war (2022–ongoing) highlights** integrated employment of missiles, drones, and electronic warfare—validating India's need for unified commands.
4. **Enhanced Deterrence Posture**: Dedicated **China-specific and Pakistan-specific** theatre commands could ensure rapid mobilisation on both fronts, reducing response time in **"two-front war" scenarios. Maritime Command** would consolidate Navy's role in securing sea lanes in the Indo-Pacific, aligning with **India's Act East Policy.**

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5. **Global Precedents**: **U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM)** demonstrates efficiency of joint structures. **PLA reforms (2016),** China reorganised into theatre commands for integrated combat readiness—India risks lagging behind without reform.

Challenges of Theaterisation

1. **Inter-Service Rivalry & Doctrinal Concerns**: IAF fears fragmentation of its limited 30 fighter squadrons across multiple theatres. **Former Air Chief R.K.S. Bhadauria:** "IAF is not a supporting arm, but a strategic force."

2. **Command and Control Dissonance**: Debate over whether **service chiefs retain operational roles or theatre commanders** get full autonomy. Risk of longer decision-making chains, weakening responsiveness.

3. **Institutional Resistance**: Dismantling legacy structures of **70+ years faces bureaucratic** inertia. It is being highlighted ongoing differences—Army favors speed, IAF prefers gradual integration, Navy is conditionally supportive.

4. **Resource & Technology Gaps**: Jointness demands integrated **C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance)** systems—currently inadequate. Without adequate indigenous platforms, reforms may remain structural rather than transformational.

5. **Risk of "One-Size-Fits-All" Approach**: Blind imitation of **U.S./China models may not fit** India's unique strategic geography and threat matrix. ACM A.P. Singh cautioned against "copy-paste" theatre structures.

Way Forward

1. Adopt a **phased approach**: start with Air Defence and Maritime Commands before adversary-specific land theatres.

2. Build **joint logistics nodes & training academies** before full integration.

3. Invest in **indigenous technologies (**AI, drones, cyber defence) to ensure functional rather than cosmetic jointness.

4. Conduct **Parliamentary oversight & civilian consultation** for legitimacy and transparency.

Conclusion

As **Stephen Cohen argued in The Indian Army**, military reforms succeed when context-specific. India's theaterisation must balance synergy with autonomy, ensuring pragmatic, future-ready jointness.

The new GST rate cuts aim to boost consumption amid export challenges. Critically analyze the potential of this policy to stimulate economic growth and its implications for fiscal revenue.

Introduction

India's domestic consumption contributes nearly **60% of GDP (World Bank, 2024)**. In September 2025, sweeping GST rate cuts were announced to stimulate demand, strengthen purchasing power, and offset sluggish exports and private investment.

Potential of GST Rate Cuts to Stimulate Growth

1. **Boost to Consumption Demand**: **Lower indirect tax burden → higher disposable income → potential multiplier effect** on aggregate demand. *Budget 2025 **income-tax cuts + GST cuts*** create a combined stimulus package. ***Example**:* FMCG, textiles, and white goods sectors expected to benefit, spurring rural and urban demand.

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2. **Correcting Structural Anomalies:** Removal of **inverted duty structures** reduces cost distortions for manufacturers, especially in textiles, footwear, and electronics. Simplification enhances compliance and lowers litigation.
3. **Encouragement for Formalisation**: GST rationalisation incentivises smaller firms to join the formal tax net. According to *RBI's Annual Report (2024)*, GST revenues have improved tax buoyancy despite global headwinds.
4. **Counter-Cyclical Policy Tool**: With **merchandise exports declining (-4.2% YoY in 2024-25)** due to weak global demand, boosting domestic consumption acts as an internal growth engine. *Keynesian economics*: fiscal stimulus through tax cuts can revive aggregate demand in slowdown periods.
5. **Comparative Global Practices**: *UK (2008 crisis)* and *Japan (2014 slump)* reduced VAT rates temporarily to counter falling demand. Evidence shows short-term consumption spikes, though sustainability varies.

Challenges and Fiscal Implications

1. **Revenue Loss for Centre & States**: Government estimates ₹48,000 crore annual impact (based on 2023-24 consumption), but likely understated. Loss of **compensation cess** strains State finances; dependency shifts to the **16th Finance Commission**.
2. **Risk of Fiscal Slippage**: India's **fiscal deficit target: 5.1% of GDP (Budget 2025-26)**. Revenue foregone may push deficit higher unless offset by buoyancy or expenditure cuts.
3. **Unequal Benefits Across Sectors**: While middle-class consumption may rise, luxury items (e.g., high-end motorcycles, apparel) see higher GST. Raises concern over whether demand stimulus is inclusive across income groups.
4. **Need for Anti-Profiteering Mechanism**: Without effective monitoring, firms may not pass on tax cuts to consumers. Reviving *National Anti-Profiteering Authority* could ensure benefits reach end-users.
5. **Limited Multiplier Without Supply-Side Support**: Tax cuts alone insufficient if investment sentiment, job creation, and credit flow remain weak. *Economic Survey 2024-25*: **sustainable growth** requires synergy between demand-side stimulus and structural reforms.

Way Forward

1. States should diversify revenue sources (e.g., property tax, excise on luxury goods).
2. **Targeted GST reductions** in labour-intensive sectors can simultaneously boost demand and employment.
3. Pair tax cuts with **infrastructure spending, skilling programmes, and MSME support** to magnify multiplier effects.
4. Transparent **Centre-State coordination** critical under the GST Council framework to avoid fiscal stress.
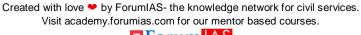
Conclusion

As *Keynes* emphasized, **demand management is vital in downturns**. GST rate cuts may revive consumption, but balanced fiscal prudence and structural reforms ensure sustained, inclusive growth.

Trump's tariff war presents a geo-economic opportunity for the Global South. Examine the strategic imperatives for India to leverage this unfolding polycrisis to reshape the global architecture."

Introduction

Trump's tariff war, involving sanctions on **30+ nations and tariffs on 70**, disrupts global trade flows. For the Global South, particularly India, this polycrisis offers a rare chance to redefine geo-economic and strategic architecture.

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Why the Tariff War is an Opportunity for the Global South

1. **Rebalancing Globalisation**: Tariffs expose fragility of neoliberal globalisation: rising inequality, wealth concentration, and dependency on G-7 economies. Global South can push for **multipolarity** in trade governance.
2. **Erosion of U.S. Hegemony**: Despite controlling **26% of global GDP**, U.S. actions alienate partners. China's rise (**17% of global GDP**) and BRICS expansion create space for South-led alternatives.
3. **Precedent of Protectionism**: U.S. tariffs of **350% on tobacco, 200% on dairy, 120% on fruits** highlight Global North's double standards. India and peers can question WTO asymmetries and demand fairer market access.

Strategic Imperatives for India

1. **Champion Multipolarity**: Move from symbolic non-alignment to **multi-alignment**, engaging U.S., EU, BRICS, ASEAN, AU simultaneously. Lead Global South platforms (G-20, BRICS+) to advocate debt relief, trade equity, and fair climate finance.
2. **Recalibrate U.S. Ties**: Avoid over-reliance on the **India-U.S. strategic partnership**, given Washington's tilt towards Pakistan and conditionality on defence/tech transfer. Assert sovereignty by resisting unilateral diktats (e.g., oil bans on Iran, Venezuela).
3. **Strengthen Domestic Economic Base**: Manufacturing at a four-decade low; unemployment at **7–8% (CMIE 2025)**. Focus on **Atmanirbhar Bharat 2.0** with investment in R&D, MSMEs, and strategic PSU deployment like China's SOEs.
4. **Leverage Geo-economic Instruments**: Diversify trade with Global South (Africa, Latin America, ASEAN). Negotiate in rare earths, food security, pharma, and digital trade to increase bargaining power with U.S. and China.
5. **Forge South-South Solidarity**: Push for a **New Economic Deal** addressing sovereign debt, taxation justice, and development financing. Example: **International Solar Alliance** as a template for South-led collective institutions.
6. **Diplomatic Realignment**: Invest in bipartisan consensus at home and multiparty diplomacy abroad. Shed over-personalised diplomacy; strengthen institutional foreign policy for credibility.

Way Forward

1. Use BRICS+ and SCO to build financial alternatives to the dollar (de-dollarisation momentum).
2. Advocate at WTO for structural reforms ensuring equity in agricultural subsidies, technology access, and dispute settlement.
3. Build coalitions in the Global South against **neo-mercantilist tariffs** and champion climate justice as part of economic justice.

Conclusion

True autonomy lies in **restructuring unequal dependencies**. India must harness Trump's tariff disruptions to lead the Global South toward an equitable, multipolar economic order.

As the global order shifts, India's pursuit of strategic autonomy is challenged by a multipolar world. Examine the foreign policy imperatives for balancing relations with the United States, China, and Russia.

Introduction

India's quest for **strategic autonomy**, rooted in Nehru's **Non-Alignment and evolving into today's multi-alignment**, is tested in a multipolar **world where U.S.-China rivalry and Russia's revisionism** reshape **global geopolitics.**

Foreign Policy Imperatives in a Multipolar Order

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Managing U.S. Partnership without Subservience

1. **Imperative:** Deepen ties while avoiding dependency.
2. **Context:** India-U.S. trade crossed **$200 billion (2023)**; defence pacts like **LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA** enhance interoperability.
3. **Challenges:** Tariff disputes (Trump era), CAATSA sanctions threat, U.S. pressure on Russia ties and oil imports from Iran.
4. **Response:** Use platforms like **Quad, I2U2, IMEC** to advance Indo-Pacific strategy, but assert sovereignty — as in India's neutral stance on the Ukraine war.

Balancing China: Deterrence with Engagement

1. **Imperative:** Prevent escalation, maintain economic leverage.
2. **Context:** Post-**Galwan clashes (2020)**, trust deficit widened; India bans Chinese apps, boosts border infrastructure. Yet, bilateral trade reached **$118 billion in 2023**, showing interdependence.
3. **Approach:** Pursue **cautious engagement** through BRICS, SCO, RCEP dialogue, while fortifying partnerships with Japan, ASEAN, Australia for Indo-Pacific resilience. Following **"Competitive coexistence"** — deterrence on borders, selective cooperation in multilateral platforms.

Sustaining Russia Ties amid Sanctions and Isolation

1. **Imperative:** Preserve historical strategic depth without global backlash.
2. **Context:** Russia remains India's largest defence supplier (approx. **45% of imports**, SIPRI 2023). Discounted oil imports from Russia cushioned India during energy shocks.
3. **Challenge:** Russia-China "no-limits partnership" narrows India's maneuvering space. Western scrutiny of India's Moscow ties complicates U.S. and EU relations.
4. **Response:** Diversify energy partnerships (Middle East, U.S.) and defence sourcing (France, Israel) while retaining **Russia linkages for strategic hedging**.

Domestic Resilience as Foundation of Autonomy

1. Strategic autonomy requires **economic strength, defence indigenisation (Atmanirbhar Bharat), digital sovereignty and tech capacity**.
2. Example: India's push for **semiconductor self-reliance, 5G/6G development, and critical mineral partnerships (with Australia, Africa)** enhances bargaining power.
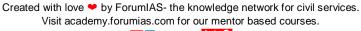
Multilateral Activism and Global South Leadership

1. India must amplify its **G-20 presidency legacy**, promoting debt justice, climate finance, and digital inclusion.
2. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's emphasis on "**interest-based multi-alignment**" reflects India's effort to act as a **civilisational pole** rather than a camp follower.

Way Forward

1. Institutionalise strategic autonomy through bipartisan consensus and consistent policies beyond leadership styles.
2. Invest in **hard power (military modernisation, defence R&D)** and **soft power (diaspora, cultural diplomacy)**.
3. Strengthen **regional leadership in South Asia and Indian Ocean Region** to consolidate influence against external encroachment.

Conclusion

In *World Order*, equilibrium requires **balance, not dominance.** For India, strategic autonomy means **walking the tightrope with confidence — engaging all powers, aligning with none.**

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The regulation of commercial speech on digital platforms raises constitutional questions. Critically analyze the challenges of regulating such speech based on subjective concepts like 'dignity', while upholding freedom of expression.

Introduction

Digital platforms today host **over 820 million Indian users (TRAI, 2024)**, where speech is **increasingly monetised.** Regulating such **"commercial speech"** through subjective notions like **"dignity" risks colliding** with **constitutional guarantees** of free expression.

1. Constitutional Position of Free Speech

1. Article **19(1)(a)** protects freedom of speech and expression.
2. Article **19(2)** permits **"reasonable restrictions"** on defined grounds: public order, decency, morality, security of the state, etc.
3. **Dignity**, though constitutionally significant under **Article 21**, is not an explicit ground for restricting speech.
4. *Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India* **(2016):** Court upheld criminal defamation by linking it to dignity, **but not as an independent restriction.**

2. Commercial Speech and Judicial Recognition

1. **Sakal Papers v. Union of India (1962):** State's attempt to regulate newspaper size struck down; circulation is intrinsic to free speech.
2. **Tata Press v. MTNL (1995):** Affirmed commercial advertisements as part of Article 19(1)(a), as they aid consumer choice in a **"democratic economy."**
3. Today, **digital monetisation** blurs the line: comedy shows, influencer content, or YouTube skits are simultaneously artistic, political, and commercial.

3. Challenges of Using 'Dignity' as a Regulatory Standard

1. **Subjectivity:** Dignity lacks a clear legal definition, making it prone to arbitrary interpretation.
2. **Chilling Effect:** Artists, satirists, and comedians may self-censor, undermining creativity and critical discourse.
3. **Judicial Ambiguity: Divergent precedents (*polyvocality*)** lead to inconsistent application — e.g., quashing FIRs against satire **(Imran Pratapgadhi case, 2024)** versus upholding restrictions in other contexts.
4. **Risk of Overreach:** Government-driven guidelines, like the proposed **Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill**, may enable executive censorship under the guise of dignity protection.

4. Balancing Dignity with Free Expression

1. **Persons with Disabilities:** Protecting dignity of marginalised groups is a legitimate social concern (UNCRPD, 2007). However, remedies should be **narrowly tailored**.
2. **Proportionality Doctrine:** Restrictions must meet tests of legality, necessity, and least-intrusive means **(Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, 2017).**
3. **Alternative Remedies:** Civil defamation, hate speech laws (BNS 2023 provisions), and targeted takedowns under **Section 69A IT Act** provide tools without requiring dignity-based censorship.

5. Safeguards for Regulation

1. **Transparency:** Mandatory disclosure of takedown orders, currently opaque **under IT Rules (2009).**
2. **Stakeholder Consultation:** Regulations must include creators, civil society, and users, not only industry bodies.
3. **Independent Oversight:** Avoid excessive executive discretion; consider quasi-judicial review boards.
4. **Case Studies:** EU's **Digital Services Act (2022)** balances harmful content regulation with procedural safeguards like notice and appeal.

Way Forward

1. Shift focus from **broad dignity-based bans** to **targeted harm-based regulation**.

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2. Encourage **self-regulation codes** with independent audits, as in the **Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI).**
3. Invest in **digital literacy and counterspeech** as democratic correctives instead of **heavy-handed censorship.**

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen notes in** *The Idea of Justice*, **dignity must coexist with liberty**. India's regulatory framework must prevent harm without diluting free expression — safeguarding democracy's **"marketplace of ideas."**

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