

ForumIAS

F

Mains Marathon

2nd Week September, 2025

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
POLITY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

INDEX

Critically analyze how GST reforms can align fiscal policy with the aspirations of a young population, thereby acting as a tool for economic empowerment and inclusive growth in India.	2
To build climate-resilient cities, India needs institutional capacity and collaboration. Examine the strategies required to integrate government action, citizen participation, and sustainable infrastructure for urban climate adaptation.	3
Critically analyze how government policies, which often target the 'domestic sphere', can either address or reinforce the persistent gender discrimination faced by women in India.	4
Critically analyze how the proposed GST reforms, by prioritising long-term growth over short-term revenue, can serve as a model for fiscal policy and good governance in India.	6
The Supreme Court's order on using Aadhaar for voter verification is a significant step. Examine its implications for electoral integrity while balancing the fundamental right to privacy.	7
The EFTA trade pact reinforces India's image as a trusted partner. Examine how such agreements are crucial for promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India in the evolving global economic order." 8	
Despite a cautious thaw, old mistrust and new asymmetries persist in India-China ties. Critically analyze the challenges and prospects for a sustained revival of the 'Chindia' spirit.	10
The Katchatheevu and Palk Strait disputes can be symbols of cooperation. Examine the diplomatic and geopolitical challenges in resolving such historical issues to strengthen India-Sri Lanka relations."	11
The Great Nicobar project is a strategic necessity. Critically examine whether its development truly balances national security imperatives with the ecological and social sustainability of the island.....	12
Amid the political crisis in Nepal, India needs a policy reset. Examine the foreign policy challenges and strategic imperatives for India in engaging with the new leadership with tact and sensitivity.	13
India must urgently attract global talent in critical technologies. Examine the policy reforms and credible pathways needed to leverage this opportunity for technological leadership and economic self-reliance.....	15
"AI is a double-edged sword with transformative power and challenges. Critically analyze the socio-economic and security implications of Artificial Intelligence for a developing nation like India."	16
The PM's visit to Manipur is part of a process to heal a strife-torn state. Critically analyze the role of high-level political intervention in resolving civil unrest and addressing the root causes of conflict. .	17
The Online Gaming Bill 2025 seeks to promote certain types of gaming while prohibiting others. Critically analyze the challenges of this regulatory approach in balancing industry growth with social concerns like addiction and financial risk.	19

Critically analyze how GST reforms can align fiscal policy with the aspirations of a young population, thereby acting as a tool for economic empowerment and inclusive growth in India.

Introduction

With nearly 65% of India's **population below 35 (UNFPA, 2023)**, fiscal instruments like GST reforms become pivotal in aligning tax policy with **youth aspirations, ensuring empowerment, affordability, entrepreneurship and inclusive national growth.**

GST Reforms & Youth Aspirations – A Critical Analysis

1. **Consumption-Led Growth & Household Empowerment:** Private consumption forms **~60% of India's GDP (World Bank, 2023)**. GST 2.0's rate simplifications and exemptions on essentials (insurance, healthcare, education) increase **disposable income**, boosting demand for aspirational goods, services, housing and digital products. **Multiplier effect**, increased consumption → investment → jobs → further consumption, reinforcing the virtuous cycle.
- **Financial Security & Risk Mitigation:** Historically, India's **insurance penetration is just 4.2% of GDP (IRDAI, 2022)**. Exemptions on life and health premiums encourage financial planning, strengthening **household resilience against shocks**. Reduces the **"out-of-pocket expenditure" (currently 48% of health spending, WHO)**, securing long-term economic productivity of young families.
- **Entrepreneurship & MSME Formalization:** MSMEs employ **~110 million people** and contribute **~30% to GDP (MSME Annual Report, 2022)**. GST 2.0 simplifies compliance, reduces tax burden and expands formalization, improving **access to credit, supply chain participation, and digital footprints**. Young entrepreneurs benefit through **lower entry barriers** and transparent taxation, boosting **Ease of Doing Business**.
4. **Employment Generation & Start-up Ecosystem:** India has the **world's 3rd largest start-up ecosystem (Economic Survey 2023)**. GST reforms align with **youth-driven digital entrepreneurship** by reducing compliance frictions and encouraging innovation-led growth. Example: **E-invoicing system** under GST fosters transparency and trust in B2B transactions.
5. **Predictability & Trust in Governance:** A simplified **two-tier GST structure** ensures stability and policy predictability. Young professionals can plan finances better, mitigating uncertainty in **income-expenditure cycles**. Transparency strengthens **"tax morale"** (OECD concept), building confidence among taxpayers.

Critical Perspectives / Challenges

1. **Regressive concerns:** GST is an **indirect tax**—risk of disproportionately impacting lower-income youth despite exemptions.
2. **Revenue federalism issues:** States worry about reduced revenues from rate cuts, potentially affecting social expenditure (education, skill development critical for youth).
3. **Complexity persists:** Despite reforms, multiple slabs and frequent revisions create compliance burdens.
4. **Digital Divide:** Small youth-led businesses in rural/semi-urban India face challenges in digital GST filings.

Way Forward

1. **Youth-Centric Tax Policy:** Broaden exemptions on education loans, skill-training services, and affordable housing.
2. **Equity through Direct-Indirect Tax Balance:** Increase direct tax base alongside GST rationalization.
3. **Tech-Driven Compliance:** Use AI/ML for smoother compliance to support start-ups and gig workers.
4. **Center-State Fiscal Harmony:** Revise **GST Compensation Mechanism** to address state concerns.
5. **Inclusivity Lens:** Target GST reliefs towards **marginalised youth, women entrepreneurs, and rural MSMEs** for equitable growth.

Conclusion

“As Amartya Sen notes in **Development as Freedom**, true empowerment expands choices. GST reforms, if youth-aligned, can translate fiscal policy into a catalyst for inclusive, sustainable economic empowerment.”

To build climate-resilient cities, India needs institutional capacity and collaboration. Examine the strategies required to integrate government action, citizen participation, and sustainable infrastructure for urban climate adaptation.

Introduction

By 2070, India's urban population will reach nearly 1 billion (UN-Habitat, 2022), demanding 144 million new homes. Climate-resilient urbanisation is critical to avert \$30 billion losses annually and safeguard sustainable growth.

Climate Vulnerability of Indian Cities

1. **Flood Risks:** Two-thirds of urban dwellers face pluvial flooding; losses projected at \$5 billion by 2030 (World Bank).
2. **Heat Waves:** Ahmedabad Heat Action Plan shows extreme heat kills hundreds annually; urban heat island effect increases night temperatures by 3–5°C.
3. **Infrastructure Stress:** 25% of urban roads exposed to floods; transport paralysis occurs when only 10–20% of roads are inundated.

Institutional Capacity & Governance

1. **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs):** Weak fiscal and administrative capacity undermines climate planning. 74th Constitutional Amendment mandates decentralisation, yet ULBs depend on higher tiers for finance.
2. **Integrated Planning:** Need for city-level climate risk mapping, as seen in Kolkata's flood forecasting system and Chennai's stormwater management initiative.
3. **Finance Mechanisms:** World Bank estimates \$10.95 trillion for resilient infrastructure till 2050—requires leveraging green bonds, municipal bonds, and climate funds (e.g., Green Climate Fund).

Citizen Participation & Community Engagement

1. **Behavioural Adaptation:** Participation in segregated waste collection, rooftop rainwater harvesting, and tree plantation fosters resilience.
2. **Social Equity:** Slum dwellers and informal workers are disproportionately vulnerable—citizen-led initiatives like Mumbai's community-based flood mapping show participatory models of resilience.
3. **Digital Platforms:** Smart Cities Mission's citizen feedback portals can be expanded for climate-risk reporting and participatory planning.

Sustainable Infrastructure & Nature-Based Solutions

1. **Housing:** Compact city design, cool roofs, and cyclone-resilient housing ensure adaptive capacity. Over half of 2070 housing stock yet to be built—a huge opportunity.
2. **Green-Blue Infrastructure:** Wetlands, mangrove belts, and urban forests as natural buffers. Example: East Kolkata Wetlands absorb excess rainwater, acting as ecological infrastructure.
3. **Transport & Mobility:** Flood-resilient metro corridors, alternate routes, and electrified public transport to reduce both disruption and emissions.
4. **Municipal Services:** Waste-to-energy and circular economy approaches improve air-water-soil quality while reducing GHG emissions.

International & Comparative Lessons

1. **Brazil:** Shift from structural flood control to integrated ecosystem-based flood management.
2. **Netherlands:** “Room for the River” policy demonstrates balancing urban growth with water resilience.
3. **India's Lessons:** Scaling Ahmedabad's Heat Action Plan, integrating NITI Aayog's National Urban Policy Framework (2018), and linking AMRUT 2.0 with climate adaptation.

Way Forward

1. **Capacity Building:** Train ULBs with climate data tools and urban planners with climate science.
2. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Mobilise private capital for green infrastructure while ensuring accountability.
3. **Institutional Integration:** Align Smart Cities Mission, Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework, and National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change.
4. **Citizen Co-Creation:** Foster collaborative governance through ward-level climate action committees.

Conclusion

Climate-resilient Indian cities demand institutional strength, citizen collaboration, and sustainable infrastructure to transform vulnerability into opportunity.

Critically analyze how government policies, which often target the 'domestic sphere', can either address or reinforce the persistent gender discrimination faced by women in India.

Introduction

“With women contributing nearly 49% of India's population (Census 2011) yet only 18% to GDP (World Bank, 2022), policies shaping the ‘domestic sphere’ profoundly influence gender equity, labour recognition, and empowerment.”

Government Policies & The Domestic Sphere: Two Contrasting Pathways

Reinforcing Gender Discrimination

1. **Dowry Deaths & Domestic Violence:** NFHS-5 shows 30% women face intimate partner violence, but state responses remain muted; laws against dowry deaths (over 7,000 annually) lack strong enforcement.

2. **Marital Rape Exception:** The government's stance opposing criminalisation of marital rape on cultural grounds reflects **patriarchal institutional bias**.
3. **Unpaid Domestic Work:** According to **Time Use Survey (TUS) 2024**, women spend **7 hours daily** on unpaid domestic work vs **men's 26 minutes**, yet policies glorify this as **"Indian social fabric."**
4. **Undervaluation of Care Work:** ASHA, Anganwadi and Mid-Day Meal workers are treated as "volunteers," receiving **honorarium instead of minimum wage**, reinforcing systemic undervaluation of feminised labour.
5. **Policy Narratives:** Political appeals such as calls for women to produce **"at least three children"** objectify women as reproducers, ignoring their agency in family planning.

Addressing Gender Discrimination

1. **Legislative Reforms:** The **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005)**, **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017)**, and **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013)** represent progressive interventions.
2. **Financial Inclusion:** **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (2014)** ensured over **23 crore accounts for women**, enhancing household bargaining power.
3. **Skill & Employment Policies:** **Stand Up India** and **Skill India Mission** have enabled women's entrepreneurship, though participation remains low (LFPR for women at 25.4% in 2022-23, PLFS).
4. **Child & Elder Care:** Expanding **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** and maternity entitlements under **PMMVY** attempt to reduce unpaid care burdens, albeit inadequately.

Critical Analysis

1. **Policy Black Holes:** By failing to recognise unpaid domestic and care work in GDP or minimum wage calculations, policies perpetuate the **"invisible subsidy"** women provide to capitalist economies (**SBI report, 2023: ₹22.5 lakh crore**).
2. **Cultural Reinforcement:** State glorification of women's sacrifices in caregiving roles (e.g., PIB's 2025 framing of TUS results) strengthens patriarchal norms rather than challenging them.
3. **Caste-Class Intersections:** Labouring-class women (SC/ST) face double burdens—longer hours of unpaid work and precarious wage labour, reflecting structural inequalities within domestic roles.
4. **Global Contrast:** Nordic countries treat child/elder care as state responsibility, integrating gender-sensitive budgets. India's **low social sector spending (~1.4% of GDP on health)** weakens similar outcomes.

Way Forward

1. **Recognition of Domestic Work:** Incorporate unpaid care into **national accounts** and ensure **wage parity**.
2. **Universal Care Infrastructure:** State-provided crèches, eldercare, and healthcare to redistribute unpaid work.
3. **Cultural Interventions:** Promote **shared domestic responsibility** through educational curricula and campaigns.
4. **Strengthen Laws:** Criminalise marital rape; tighten enforcement against domestic violence and dowry deaths.
5. **Justice for Scheme Workers:** Recognise ASHA and Anganwadi workers as **government employees** with wages and social security.

Conclusion

“As Simone de Beauvoir noted in *The Second Sex*, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.’ Policies must dismantle structural hierarchies, ensuring equality begins within the domestic sphere.”

Critically analyze how the proposed GST reforms, by prioritising long-term growth over short-term revenue, can serve as a model for fiscal policy and good governance in India.

Introduction

India's GST, introduced in 2017, subsumed 17 taxes and 23 cesses into one indirect tax regime. GST 2.0's rationalised slabs and compliance reforms emphasise structural growth, embodying fiscal prudence and good governance principles.

1. **GST 2.0: A Long-Term Structural Reform:** Rationalisation of slabs **from four (5%, 12%, 18%, 28%) to two (5% and 18%)** with special rates for essentials and luxury items reduces tax inefficiencies and simplifies compliance. Institutional strengthening through the **Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)** provides legal certainty, reinforcing the **rule of law**.
2. **Prioritising Growth Over Immediate Revenue:** Revenue may dip initially (₹20.2 lakh crore to ₹19.7 lakh crore, FY24), but by **the Laffer Curve logic, lower rates incentivise compliance and expand the tax base**. OECD and IMF studies highlight that tax simplification initially reduces collections but later accelerates growth through higher compliance and consumption.

Model for Fiscal Policy

1. **Counter-cyclical:** Lower taxes in the short run act as a fiscal stimulus by boosting demand.
2. **Equity through progressive taxation:** Sin goods (soft drinks, tobacco, gaming) attract 40% tax, aligning with public health objectives while ensuring revenue buoyancy.
3. **Formalisation of economy:** Simplified registration for small businesses and streamlined refunds for exporters reduce entry barriers, enhancing India's tax effort beyond the historic 70% potential collection mark.

Good Governance Dimensions

1. **Transparency & Simplicity:** Rationalised slabs improve predictability for businesses, reducing tax litigation and enhancing the Ease of Doing Business.
2. **Inclusivity:** Exemption for 52 essential goods reduces regressive impact on low-income households, aligning taxation with social justice.
3. **Accountability:** Removal of cess on coal while raising rates enhances the fiscal health of DISCOMs, reflecting cooperative federalism through GST Council deliberations.
4. **Digital Governance:** GST 2.0's focus on faster refunds and compliance through technology deepens e-governance practices.

Challenges and Critical Perspectives

1. **Short-term fiscal stress:** Anticipated fall in collections may widen fiscal deficit (currently ~5.6% of GDP).
2. **Implementation risks:** As seen in **Malaysia (2015–18 GST rollback)**, poor execution can undermine trust.

3. **Inverted duty structure** persists in some sectors, causing liquidity crunch for firms.
4. **State autonomy concerns:** Higher central control over taxation may revive debates on fiscal federalism.

Way Forward

1. Ensure robust training for tax officials and communication with businesses to avoid transitional disruptions.
2. Incorporate periodic review mechanisms within GST Council for flexibility.
3. Link GST reform outcomes with broader fiscal targets under the FRBM Act to strengthen credibility.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen** notes in **Development as Freedom**, **inclusive governance requires structural reforms**. GST 2.0 exemplifies fiscal prudence—balancing efficiency, equity, and growth—making it a model of sustainable economic governance.

The Supreme Court's order on using Aadhaar for voter verification is a significant step. Examine its implications for electoral integrity while balancing the fundamental right to privacy.

Introduction

India's voter roll accuracy has been under scrutiny, with **65 lakh exclusions reported in Bihar's Special Intensive Revision**. The Supreme Court's directive to include **Aadhaar balances electoral integrity with citizens' democratic entitlements**.

Significance of the Supreme Court's Intervention

1. Directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) to include Aadhaar as one of 12 valid voter verification documents.
2. Corrected inconsistencies: If ration cards, PAN, and driving licences (which do not prove citizenship) were admissible, Aadhaar's exclusion was arbitrary.
3. Restored access for marginalized sections—90% of Bihar's population holds Aadhaar, compared to only 2% with passports.

Implications for Electoral Integrity

1. **Accuracy of Electoral Rolls:** Aadhaar helps address anomalies like statistically improbable death rates or forced deletions.
2. **Inclusivity:** Prevents disenfranchisement of migrant workers, women (often changing addresses post-marriage), and poor households.
3. **Efficiency:** Aadhaar-enabled verification streamlines identification and reduces duplication, bolstering the credibility of electoral processes.
4. **Precedent for Nationwide Roll Updates:** Strengthens uniformity and trust in upcoming revisions across states.

Balancing the Right to Privacy

Concerns:

1. Aadhaar is primarily a proof of identity, not citizenship. Linking voter rolls risks conflating **residency with nationality**.
2. Potential misuse and surveillance, as flagged in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017)** which upheld privacy as a fundamental right.
3. Risk of **data leakage and profiling**, especially without robust safeguards.

Safeguards Required:

1. Aadhaar use must be voluntary, with alternative documents accepted.
2. Strong data protection law, as recommended by the Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee.
3. Firewalls between Aadhaar databases and electoral rolls to prevent unauthorized cross-linking.

Comparative and Institutional Perspectives

1. **Global Practice:** Many democracies (e.g., Canada, UK) use multiple documents rather than a single centralized ID to prevent exclusion and protect privacy.
2. **Indian Context:** SC's order maintains Aadhaar as one among many documents, not the sole basis—striking a middle path.
3. **Institutional Responsibility:** ECI must ensure house-to-house verification and avoid algorithm-driven mass deletions.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen legal framework by aligning Aadhaar use with the **Personal Data Protection Bill (2023 draft)**.
2. Adopt privacy-by-design architecture for electoral databases.
3. Increase voter awareness on multiple verification options.
4. Periodic audits of electoral rolls by independent bodies to prevent misuse.

Conclusion

Democracy thrives on **participation and trust**. The Court's Aadhaar ruling, if coupled with privacy safeguards, can reconcile electoral integrity with individual freedoms.

The EFTA trade pact reinforces India's image as a trusted partner. Examine how such agreements are crucial for promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India in the evolving global economic order."

Introduction

India's first comprehensive trade agreement with developed European economies, the 2025 India-EFTA TEPA, pledging \$100 billion investment and one million jobs, exemplifies how strategic trade pacts complement Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India.

Strategic Significance of the India-EFTA Pact

1. **Unprecedented Investment Commitment:** \$100 billion over 15 years and one million direct jobs—the largest such FTA-linked pledge.

2. **Enhanced Market Access:** Tariff elimination on 92.2% of tariff lines, covering 99.6% of India's exports by value.
3. **Services Boost:** Commitments in over 120 sub-sectors per partner nation support India's IT, skilled labour, and business services exports.

Linkages with Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India

1. **Technology Transfer and Innovation:** Access to EFTA expertise in precision engineering, renewable energy, and frontier technologies aligns with self-reliance through capacity-building.
2. **Domestic Manufacturing Push:** Greater export competitiveness in textiles, pharmaceuticals, and gems and jewellery enhances Make in India's global value chain integration.
3. **Job Creation:** Supports India's demographic dividend by fueling manufacturing and services-led employment.

Energy Security and Green Transition

1. **Renewables Partnership:** Helps achieve 500 GW renewable energy target by 2030 and Net Zero by 2070.
2. **Nuclear Synergy:** India's thorium reserves (~25% of world total) can benefit from Norway's thorium research ecosystem and EU green finance taxonomy.
3. **Climate Diplomacy:** Aligns with India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, ensuring growth with sustainability.

Goeconomic and Diplomatic Dimensions

1. **Diversification of Trade Partners:** Reduces over-dependence on China and creates resilience against supply chain disruptions.
2. **Global South Leadership:** Positions India as a rule-shaper rather than a rule-taker in global trade governance.
3. **Confidence in Indian Reforms:** TEPA validates India's stable investment climate, echoing the IMF's 2024 recognition of India as the "world's fastest-growing large economy."

Challenges and Caution

1. **Domestic Industry Concerns:** Risk of import surges in sensitive sectors like dairy and pharmaceuticals.
2. **Implementation Bottlenecks:** Ensuring ease of doing business, quick dispute resolution, and infrastructure upgradation is critical.
3. **Global Trade Fragmentation:** Rise of protectionism and "friend-shoring" may test long-term sustainability of FTAs.

Way Forward

1. **Leverage FTA Template:** TEPA should serve as a model for future pacts with the UK, EU, and GCC.
2. **Boost R&D and Skill Development:** Linking foreign investment to domestic innovation ecosystems.
3. **Inclusive Growth:** Ensure benefits reach MSMEs, which constitute 30% of GDP and 48% of exports.

Conclusion

As it has been well established **power lies in interdependence**. The EFTA pact exemplifies India's strategic

economic diplomacy, aligning global partnerships with Atmanirbhar Bharat's vision of resilience, innovation, and inclusive development.

Despite a cautious thaw, old mistrust and new asymmetries persist in India-China ties. Critically analyze the challenges and prospects for a sustained revival of the 'Chindia' spirit.

Introduction

India-China relations, **marked by \$118.4 billion trade (2024) and lingering** border disputes post-Galwan, oscillate between cooperation and confrontation, making the revival of the 'Chindia' spirit both vital and precarious.

Historical and Symbolic Foundations

1. **Ancient Engagements:** Buddhism, Nalanda exchanges, and Silk Road trade cemented civilisational linkages.
2. **Modern Rekindling:** From Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai (1950s) to the "Chindia" vision (Jairam Ramesh, 2005), cooperation was framed as a pathway to Asian Century.
3. **Current Reset:** Modi-Xi meeting at the SCO, resumption of direct flights, pilgrim access to Tibet, and people-to-people ties mark cautious reconciliation.

Persistent Challenges and Mistrust

1. **Border Dispute:** No progress on restoring status quo ante April 2020 in Eastern Ladakh; Line of Actual Control remains volatile.
2. **Trade Asymmetry:** India's trade deficit with China crossed **\$101 billion in 2024** (DGFT data), worsened by **non-tariff barriers** against Indian pharma, IT, and agro products.
3. **Strategic Asymmetry:** China's **GDP (\$18 trillion)** is nearly 5x India's; military spending (\$224 billion in 2023, SIPRI) dwarfs India's \$81 billion.
4. **Geoeconomic Pressures:** US tariffs (50% on Indian exports, 30% on Chinese goods) push India-China together, but Beijing's dominance in **rare-earths (60% global supply)** undermines India's tech ambitions.
5. **Trust Deficit:** Foxconn's exodus of 300 Chinese engineers shows vulnerability in India's electronics supply chains.

Prospects for Reviving 'Chindia'

1. **Economic Interdependence:** China is India's largest trading partner; supply chain complementarities—Indian IT, pharma, services with Chinese hardware and manufacturing—can create synergies.
2. **Multilateral Platforms:** BRICS+, SCO, and G20 provide forums for constructive cooperation, reducing bilateral friction.
3. **Green and Energy Security:** Joint ventures in solar, EVs, rare-earth recycling, and thorium research could align with India's Net Zero 2070 pledge and China's 2060 carbon neutrality target.
4. **Strategic Autonomy:** Both nations advocate multipolarity and resist Western hegemony, creating scope for issue-based alignment.

Critical Analysis: Can 'Chindia' Endure?

1. **Structural Imbalances:** China's BRI projects in South Asia (CPEC in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka) constrain India's strategic space.
2. **Security Dilemmas:** QUAD and Indo-Pacific strategies heighten Beijing's suspicions; India views Chinese military infrastructure in Tibet as coercive.
3. **Mutual Leverage:** India's digital market (over 800 million internet users) and demographic dividend are assets, while China's capital and technology remain critical.
4. **Middle Path:** Sustained engagement requires confidence-building measures (CBMs), institutionalized border mechanisms, trade diversification, and gradual trust restoration.

Conclusion

Cooperation **between major powers hinges on managing differences.** For India and China, reviving 'Chindia' demands pragmatism, reciprocity, and calibrated strategic patience.

The Katchatheevu and Palk Strait disputes can be symbols of cooperation. Examine the diplomatic and geopolitical challenges in resolving such historical issues to strengthen India-Sri Lanka relations."

Introduction

India-Sri Lanka relations, marked by **\$7 billion bilateral trade (2024)** and centuries-old cultural linkages, face recurring strains over Katchatheevu sovereignty and Palk Strait fisheries, testing diplomacy, livelihood security, and ecological sustainability.

Nature of the Disputes

1. **Katchatheevu Issue:** 1974 India-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Treaty placed the uninhabited islet under Sri Lankan sovereignty; Indian fishers retain pilgrimage rights. Political rhetoric often conflates sovereignty with fishing rights.
2. **Palk Strait Fisheries Crisis:** Mechanised bottom trawling by Tamil Nadu vessels depletes marine resources, damaging Sri Lankan livelihoods. This has escalated into recurring arrests, boat seizures, and community-level tensions.

Diplomatic and Geopolitical Challenges

1. **Legal Constraints:** **Pacta sunt servanda principle** in international law prohibits unilateral repudiation of boundary treaties. Precedents: **Minquiers and Ecrehos case (UK vs France, 1953)** and **Rann of Kutch arbitration (1968)** show administrative control outweighs historical rhetoric. Hence, Katchatheevu retrieval demands are politically emotive but legally untenable.
2. **Ecological Pressures:** Bottom trawling violates **FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995)**. Coral reef loss and shrimp habitat destruction impact both artisanal fishers and **Sri Lanka's Northern Tamil communities**.
3. **Livelihood Conflicts:** Tamil Nadu's artisanal **fishers vs trawler operators**—an intra-community conflict aggravated by resource depletion. Sri Lankan Tamil fishers, already victims of civil war restrictions, view incursions as renewed economic aggression.
4. **Geopolitical Dimensions:** Sri Lanka's strategic positioning in the Indian Ocean makes it pivotal for India's **Neighbourhood First** and **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** doctrines. China's

expanding presence via Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City intensifies New Delhi's sensitivity to maritime disputes.

5. **Domestic Political Pressures:** Tamil Nadu politics periodically revives the “**retrieval of Katchatheevu**” demand, complicating bilateral diplomacy. Populist narratives overshadow technical solutions, risking bilateral trust.

Pathways to Cooperation

a) Joint Resource Management: UNCLOS Article 123 mandates cooperation in semi-enclosed seas. Models: Baltic Sea Fisheries Convention where states share quotas; similar mechanisms could regulate fishing days, quotas, and gear restrictions.

b) Deep-Sea Fishing Transition: India's **Blue Revolution scheme** and financial aid for deep-sea vessels can reduce pressure on Palk Bay. Joint training and technology transfer could enable sustainable alternatives.

c) Community Dialogue: Fishermen's cooperative talks between Tamil Nadu and Northern Province can build empathy. Highlighting shared hardships of Sri Lankan Tamils during the civil war can foster fraternity.

d) Institutional Mechanisms: A **Joint Fisheries Research Station on Katchatheevu** could monitor marine biodiversity. Regular Coast Guard–Navy coordination can prevent accidental escalations.

e) Multilevel Diplomacy: Government-to-government channels must respect treaty obligations. State–provincial engagements (Tamil Nadu and Northern Province councils) ensure local concerns are heard.

Conclusion

Maritime diplomacy defines regional stability. Converting Katchatheevu and Palk Strait into cooperation templates can anchor enduring India–Sri Lanka partnership.

The Great Nicobar project is a strategic necessity. Critically examine whether its development truly balances national security imperatives with the ecological and social sustainability of the island.

Introduction

Great Nicobar Island, located near the Malacca Strait through which **40% of global trade flows (UNCTAD, 2023)**, is central to India's **Act East Policy** and **Indo-Pacific Maritime Strategy**.

Strategic Necessity

1. **Geostrategic Location:** Proximity to the **Six Degree Channel** enhances maritime domain awareness. Strengthens India's counter to China's **String of Pearls** and **PLA Navy's presence in Hambantota & Gwadar**. Complements **Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC)**, India's only tri-service command.
2. **Economic & Connectivity Hub:** The **International Container Transshipment Terminal (14.2 million TEUs)** can rival Singapore and Colombo, reducing India's dependence on foreign hubs. A **Greenfield Airport** will boost logistics, tourism, and air-sea connectivity.

3. **Defence & National Security:** Enhances **logistics resilience** under SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). Reinforces **QUAD's Indo-Pacific vision**, providing India leverage in chokepoint control.

Ecological and Social Concerns

1. **Ecological Fragility:** 130.75 sq. km forest diversion risks felling **7.11 lakh trees**; island harbours **endemic species like Nicobar megapode, saltwater crocodile**. Located in **Seismic Zone V**, raising disaster vulnerability (2004 Tsunami impact). **IUCN and IPCC AR6 reports** highlight climate change threats to island ecosystems.
2. **Tribal Welfare Issues:** Home to **PVTGs – Shompens and Nicobarese**. Though authorities claim no displacement, concerns remain on cultural erosion and disease vulnerability, recalling **Jarawa isolation breaches (2004-12)**. **UNDRIP (2007)** stresses “**free, prior, and informed consent**” – implementation remains debated.
3. **Environmental Governance:** EIAs and EMPs exist, but past precedents (POSCO Odisha, Niyamgiri mining case – *SC 2013*) show gaps between legal safeguards and ground-level execution. Example, **Compensatory afforestation in Haryana** lacks ecological equivalence to tropical island forests – raises questions of **environmental justice**.

Attempts at Balancing

1. **Tribal Reserve Swap:** Net gain of 3.912 sq. km tribal reserve through denotification-compensation model.
2. **Wildlife Corridors & Viaducts:** To enable species movement between forest and shore.
3. **Budgetary Provision for Tribal Welfare:** Continuous funding for Shompens and Nicobarese welfare.
4. **Phased Development (2025–47):** Allows adaptive monitoring and mid-course correction.
5. **Global Best Practices:** Inspired by **Changi Airport's ecological design (Singapore)** and **Australia's Great Barrier Reef sustainable port regulations**.

Critical Assessment

1. **Strategic imperatives are undeniable**—India cannot remain passive while China expands naval footprints.
2. **However**, ecological compensation outside island ecosystems undermines sustainability.
3. Long-term impacts on **PVTGs' cultural survival** remain under-studied.
4. A **middle path of adaptive governance, stakeholder participation, and green infrastructure** is essential to prevent the project becoming another “development vs. environment” conflict.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen** notes in *Development as Freedom*, **true progress integrates security, equity, and ecology**. Great Nicobar's development must embody this synthesis to safeguard India's strategic and social futures.

Amid the political crisis in Nepal, India needs a policy reset. Examine the foreign policy challenges and strategic imperatives for India in engaging with the new leadership with tact and sensitivity.

Introduction

Nepal, India's closest neighbour with over **1,850 km shared border** and historic cultural ties, faces political churn—17 prime ministerships in two decades—demanding that India recalibrate policy balancing strategic imperatives with sensitive diplomacy.

Foreign Policy Challenges

1. **Political Instability and Leadership Transition:** Frequent government changes weaken continuity in bilateral relations. Resignation of K.P. Sharma Oli, who mobilised anti-India nationalism during the **2020 Kalapani border dispute**, highlights volatility. Challenge: engaging new leaders without appearing interventionist.
2. **Perception of Hegemony:** Since 1947, India often seen as a **"big brother."** **2015 unofficial blockade** left deep scars in Nepal's public memory, fueling anti-India rhetoric. Rising **"India Out" campaigns** demand tactful, perception-sensitive engagement.
3. **China Factor:** Nepal integral to China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** since 2017. Beijing's investments in **hydropower and infrastructure** compete with India's outreach. India must counterbalance without turning Nepal into another Sino-Indian contestation ground.
- **Federalism and Inclusivity:** Nepal's 2015 Constitution marginalised **Madhesis and Janajatis**, groups with cross-border kinship. India must cautiously engage provincial leadership beyond Kathmandu to strengthen **federal democratic processes**, avoiding perceptions of interference.
- **Economic Fragility:** Post-pandemic slowdown, unemployment, and remittance dependence (over **24% of GDP, World Bank 2022**) aggravate unrest. Political instability threatens bilateral projects like **hydropower cooperation** and border infrastructure.

Strategic Imperatives for India

1. **Geostrategic Importance:** Nepal forms a buffer between India and China. Control over mountain passes historically shaped India's **Himalayan frontier security doctrine**. Cooperation with Nepalese forces crucial under **India's neighbourhood first policy**.
2. **Economic Interdependence:** India accounts for **over 60% of Nepal's trade** and largest FDI source (Reserve Bank of India, 2023). Hydropower: Recent **India-Nepal-Bangladesh energy export framework** a game-changer. Opportunity to provide **budgetary and technical support** in crisis, enhancing trust.
3. **Connectivity and Integration:** **Rail projects (Jayanagar-Bijalpura-Kurtha)**, cross-border transmission lines, and integrated check posts deepen integration. Digital cooperation in fintech, e-governance, and education can empower Nepal's youth (median age **25 years**).
4. **Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:** Shared **civilizational ties (Ramayana circuit, Buddhism heritage)** remain underutilized. India's scholarships, healthcare aid (during COVID-19, vaccines under "Vaccine Maitri") highlight potential.
5. **Tactful Engagement:** Avoid personality-driven diplomacy; focus on institutions. Encourage inclusive democracy, learning from **Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis response**. Adopt **multi-vector diplomacy**—working with provinces, civil society, and youth leaders.

Way Forward

1. **Engage inclusively:** Strengthen ties beyond Kathmandu elites.
2. **Economic first approach:** Deliver infrastructure, trade facilitation, and hydropower investments.
3. **Strategic balance:** Counter China through cooperation, not confrontation.
4. **Perception management:** Promote "equal partnership" narrative to avoid hegemonic image.

Conclusion

As **Kautilya in Arthashastra emphasised**, neighbours are **natural partners and rivals**. India's Nepal policy must blend realism with **sensitivity, ensuring security, stability, and shared prosperity** in a transforming **Himalayan neighbourhood**.

India must urgently attract global talent in critical technologies. Examine the policy reforms and credible pathways needed to leverage this opportunity for technological leadership and economic self-reliance.

Introduction

India contributes only **2.5% of highly cited global research papers** (Stanford-Elsevier 2023) despite demographic advantages. In an era where critical technologies redefine power, attracting global scientific talent is essential for **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

Why Global Talent Attraction is Urgent

1. **Strategic Autonomy:** Critical technologies—semiconductors, quantum communication, synthetic biology, hypersonics—determine geopolitical leverage (ASPI, 2023). India risks dependence without sovereign capability.
2. **Opportunity Window:** Post-pandemic science funding cuts in the US (up to 50% in NSF, NASA under Trump era) and tightened visas create a glut of highly trained researchers seeking opportunities.
3. **China's Precedent:** The "Young Thousand Talents Program" recruited 3,500 scientists (2011–17), raising China's global Nature Index ranking dramatically. India lacks comparable talent-embedding mechanisms.

Policy Reforms Announced Recently

1. **Ease of Doing Research:** Government revised GFR rules (2025)—doubling direct purchase ceilings, empowering university VCs and directors to bypass GeM for specialized equipment, reducing delays.
2. **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (NRF):** With ₹1 lakh crore funding, mission-oriented large-scale R&D support is being institutionalized.
3. **R&D Innovation Fund:** Seeded to encourage private-sector collaboration in frontier domains.
4. **NEP 2020 Alignment:** Interdisciplinary flexibility promotes young innovators, but international integration remains weak.

Gaps in Current Approach

1. **Low Global Representation:** Only **2% of world's top 2% cited researchers** are Indian.
2. **Fragmentation:** Fellowship schemes are scattered, lack mission-driven focus.
3. **Uncompetitive Compensation:** Salaries and research funding remain below global benchmarks.
4. **Brain Drain:** Indian-origin PhDs/postdocs stranded abroad often find better institutional pathways in Europe or China.

Credible Pathways for Talent Attraction

1. Focused Research Organisations (FROs): Permanent Section 8 entities embedded in IITs/IISc/INIs, co-funded by industry ($\geq 51\%$) and state. Provide internationally competitive salaries, infrastructure, and translational focus. Example: IIT Delhi's success in **quantum secure communication** makes it a natural anchor for a National FRO on Quantum Technologies.

2. Public-Private-Academia Partnerships: Pool state, industry, and philanthropic resources. Lessons from **DARPA (US)** and **Horizon Europe** show mission-driven R&D accelerates sovereign capabilities.

3. Talent Absorption Pathways: Long-term joint appointments, rotational leadership, and competitive project entry for both global recruits and Indian academics. A pipeline of early-career scientists (postdocs, incoming faculty) ensures continuity.

4. Strategic Policy Incentives: Globally benchmarked compensation and guaranteed research grants. Fast-track visas, tax breaks, and housing benefits for returning diaspora scientists. Embed recruitment in **mission-oriented technology roadmaps** (semiconductors, AI, biotech, hypersonics).

5. Strengthening Translational Ecosystem: Align with **Make in India 2.0** and **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes**. Create innovation clusters around FROs to commercialize breakthroughs. Encourage **One Health, Digital India, and Net-Zero** missions to anchor talent.

Way Forward

1. Learn from **China's Young Thousand Talents** but adapt democratically with accountability.
2. Expand NRF into a **talent magnet platform**, targeting at least 500 world-class researchers within 5 years.
3. Use India's democratic openness, rising innovation ecosystem (\$150 bn startup valuation), and global goodwill to position itself as a **trusted hub for critical technologies**.

Conclusion

As it is being said that **innovation drives long-term growth**. By embedding global talent in mission-oriented FROs, India can secure **sovereign capability, technological leadership, and resilient self-reliance**.

"AI is a double-edged sword with transformative power and challenges. Critically analyze the socio-economic and security implications of Artificial Intelligence for a developing nation like India."

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI), projected to **add \$15.7 trillion to global GDP by 2030 (PwC Report)**, holds immense promise for India's socio-economic transformation but simultaneously raises profound ethical, security, and employment concerns.

AI as a Driver of Socio-Economic Transformation

1. **Economic Growth & Productivity:** According to NASSCOM (2023), AI can add \$500 billion to India's economy by 2025. In healthcare, predictive AI technologies could cut disease burden by 15%, enabling proactive care.

2. **Agriculture & Rural Resilience:** AI-powered pest detection reduces pesticide use by 50%, improving farm productivity. Case: Microsoft's AI-Sowing App increased cotton yields in Andhra Pradesh by 30%.
3. **Education & Human Capital:** Adaptive learning platforms like Byju's AI labs provide personalized education, bridging gaps for rural and underprivileged students. However, overreliance risks diminishing critical thinking and creativity.
4. **Inclusion & Service Delivery:** Aadhaar-enabled AI analytics optimize welfare delivery, ensuring targeted benefits to 1.3 billion citizens. AI chatbots in banking and food services (e.g., Domino's predictive delivery model) enhance consumer experience.

Challenges & Risks for a Developing Nation

1. **Employment Displacement:** World Economic Forum (2023) warns that AI may displace 85 million jobs globally by 2025, disproportionately affecting India's low-skilled and informal sector workforce. Potential risk of widening socio-economic inequality.
2. **Data Privacy & Ethical Concerns:** India lacks a robust framework for data governance despite the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. AI's dependence on vast datasets heightens risks of surveillance, bias, and privacy breaches.
3. **Security Implications: Cybersecurity:** AI enhances defense against evolving cyber threats, but also fuels sophisticated AI-driven cyberattacks and deepfakes, threatening democratic integrity.
4. **Military Use:** Autonomous weapons and AI-driven drones raise ethical dilemmas. The UN debates Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), with binding rules expected by 2026.
5. **Digital Divide & Access:** With only 43% internet penetration (World Bank, 2022), benefits risk being urban-centric, leaving rural and marginalized communities excluded. Women constitute only 26% of India's AI workforce (NASSCOM), reinforcing gender gaps.

Policy Measures for Balance

1. **Skilling Initiatives:** Skill India AI program must expand to retrain displaced workers.
2. **Regulatory Safeguards:** India's proposed National AI Mission should integrate ethical frameworks (fairness, accountability, transparency).
3. **Global Partnerships:** India's leadership in the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI) must be leveraged to shape equitable rules.
4. **One Health & Security Lens:** Integrating AI into healthcare, disaster management, and cyber defense under a One Health-style holistic framework.

Conclusion

As Yuval Noah Harari in "Homo Deus" cautions, unchecked technology can widen inequality. For India, AI's promise rests on balancing innovation with ethics, inclusivity, and security for sustainable development.

The PM's visit to Manipur is part of a process to heal a strife-torn state. Critically analyze the role of high-level political intervention in resolving civil unrest and addressing the root causes of conflict.

Answer:

Introduction

Civil unrest in India, from **Punjab militancy (1980s) to Manipur's ethnic violence (2023–25)**, shows that

high-level political intervention can catalyze reconciliation, peace-building, and institutional reforms when backed by inclusive dialogue and structural solutions.

Role of High-Level Political Intervention

1. **Symbolism and Healing Touch:** Prime Minister's visit to **Manipur (Sept 2025)** signaled **empathy and recognition, addressing both Kuki-Zo grievances** (development deficit, healthcare) and **Meitei aspirations** (valorization of heritage, contributions to national security). **Symbolism matters in divided societies, Nelson Mandela's** inclusive leadership helped dismantle apartheid-era mistrust in South Africa.
2. **Confidence Building and Legitimacy:** Governor **Ajay Bhalla's articulation of Churachandpur** as a space of **"rich cultural diversity"** signaled **inclusivity**. Similar confidence-building was evident in **Atal Bihari Vajpayee's "Insaaniyat, Jamhooriyat, Kashmiriyat" doctrine** during his 2003 Kashmir outreach.
3. **Policy Interventions and Developmental Push:** Launch of infrastructure projects, women's hostels, and healthcare centers align with the **"peace dividend" theory—economic development reduces incentives for conflict**. **Case: The Mizoram Accord (1986)** combined political autonomy with development, ending decades of insurgency.
4. **Security Stabilization:** Enhanced deployment, retrieval of looted weapons, and renewed **Suspension of Operations (SoO)** with armed groups reflect the **"securitization followed by reconciliation" approach**. **Example: President's Rule in Punjab (1990s)** paved way for normalcy before democratic restoration.

Limitations and Challenges

1. **Risk of Symbolic Overreach:** High-level visits may be perceived as optics without sustained follow-up, creating disillusionment. **Example: Visits to Kashmir often failed to translate into durable conflict resolution.**
2. **Deep-Rooted Ethnic Faultlines:** Meitei-Kuki-Zo conflict is rooted in **land rights, Scheduled Tribe status debates, and migration concerns**. Without **structural reforms (land regulation, Free Movement Regime management)**, peace remains fragile.
3. **Over-Centralization vs Federal Sensitivity:** Excessive centralization risks undermining state institutions. **Durable peace requires empowering** local stakeholders, civil society, and traditional leaders. **Case: Bodo Accord (2020)** emphasized local councils and participatory governance.

Addressing Root Causes of Conflict

1. **Inclusive Dialogue Platforms:** Institutionalize peace committees involving both Meiteis and Kukis for long-term reconciliation.
2. **Socio-Economic Integration:** Focused investments in border areas, education, and healthcare to reduce developmental asymmetry.
3. **Identity and Autonomy Accommodation:** Explore federal solutions—greater autonomy for hill districts while preserving state integrity.
4. **Regional Security Lens:** Fencing, biometric monitoring, and reviewing the Free Movement Regime with Myanmar to address illegal migration, without alienating border communities.

Conclusion

As **John Paul Lederach's "Conflict Transformation" framework notes**, peace requires symbolic gestures,

structural reforms, and inclusive participation. High-level interventions must move beyond optics, embedding reconciliation into institutions for lasting conflict resolution.

The Online Gaming Bill 2025 seeks to promote certain types of gaming while prohibiting others. Critically analyze the challenges of this regulatory approach in balancing industry growth with social concerns like addiction and financial risk.

Introduction

The Indian online gaming industry, valued at **₹23,100 crore in 2023 (EY Report)** and employing over **2 lakh professionals**, faces a regulatory crossroads as the **Online Gaming Bill 2025** attempts balancing growth with social safeguards.

Context

The **Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025** aims to:

- **Encourage** e-sports and social/educational games.
- **Prohibit** online betting and real-money gaming.
- **Protect** citizens from addiction, fraud, and money laundering.
- **Establish** an Online Gaming Authority for oversight.

This regulatory approach resonates with global trends—where countries like **China regulate screen time**, while **the UK and USA adopt taxation-based frameworks** for responsible gaming.

Positives

1. **Consumer Protection & Social Safeguards:** Addiction: **AIIMS (2023) study** showed that 16% of adolescents reported symptoms of gaming addiction. Financial distress: NIMHANS found that 12% of problem-gamers experienced debt-related stress. The bill curbs predatory platforms, protecting vulnerable sections.
2. **Promotion of E-sports & Skill Development:** Recognition of e-sports as legitimate sport aligns with **UNESCO's emphasis on digital skill-building**. Potential to make India a global hub for competitive gaming, similar to South Korea's e-sports ecosystem.
3. **Strengthening National Security & Cyber Safety:** Curtails risks of **money laundering, terror financing, and offshore betting networks**. Supports Digital India and Cybersecurity 2025 initiatives.

Critical Challenges

1. **Industry & Job Losses:** India hosts **over 2,000 gaming startups**; the ban threatens **2–4 lakh jobs** (as highlighted by MPs Priyank Kharge and Karti Chidambaram). Risk of **\$6 billion FDI loss** and collapse of **₹7,000 crore gaming ecosystem**.
2. **Revenue Loss & Informalisation:** Current 28% GST + 30% tax on winnings yields **₹20,000 crore annually**. Blanket bans risk revenue flight to offshore servers. Parallel with **Prohibition in Gujarat**, where bans fueled black markets instead of eliminating demand.
3. **Regulatory Overreach vs. Innovation:** Lack of stakeholder consultation raises concerns of a **knee-jerk policy response**. Over-regulation could stifle **AI-driven educational and AR/VR startups**, limiting India's creative economy potential.

4. **Migration to Offshore & Underground Markets:** Users may shift to Chinese or unregulated foreign servers, heightening risks of **data theft and digital colonialism**. Similar to how prohibition in **Andhra Pradesh liquor policy (1990s)** drove illicit trade.
5. **Balancing Morality with Economy:** Blanket bans assume gaming is inherently harmful, ignoring scope for **harm-reduction strategies** (age verification, spending caps, self-exclusion tools). The **Supreme Court (2017, K.R. Lakshmanan case)** recognised “games of skill” distinct from gambling—raising constitutional concerns.

Way Forward

1. **Balanced Regulation:** Adopt a **graded regulatory framework** distinguishing skill-based vs chance-based gaming.
2. **Responsible Gaming Tools:** Age-gating, algorithmic play-limits, and **AI-based addiction monitoring**.
3. **Taxation & Licensing:** Model on **UK Gambling Commission**—generate revenue while ensuring player protection.
4. **Stakeholder Consultations:** Include startups, civil society, and mental health experts in policymaking.
5. **Digital Literacy & Counselling:** National campaigns (like anti-tobacco drives) to build awareness about risks.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen’s Development as Freedom** reminds us, true progress harmonises individual choice with collective welfare; India’s gaming regulation must balance innovation-driven growth with protection against exploitation and addiction.