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India's procurement reforms can unlock innovation. Examine how blending these changes with global best practices in market-shaping and hybrid governance can transform the national R&D ecosystem.

Introduction

India spends only **0.65% of GDP on R&D (UNESCO, 2023)**, far below global peers. Recent **procurement reforms in GFR 2025** can shift procurement from cost-control to innovation-catalyst, driving India's R&D transformation.

Procurement as a Lever for Innovation

1. Public procurement forms **20-30% of GDP in many economies (World Bank)** and can stimulate **private R&D investment** through stable demand.
2. India's earlier procurement rules, mandating **GeM purchases up to ₹200 crore**, often hindered innovation due to delays, poor vendor quality, and rigid compliance.

India's Recent Procurement Reforms

1. **Flexibility for Research Needs:** Exemption from **GeM portal** for specialised R&D equipment. Direct purchase threshold raised from **₹1 lakh to ₹2 lakh**.
2. **Decentralised Authority:** Institutional heads empowered to approve **global tenders up to ₹200 crore**, reducing bureaucratic lag.
3. **Balance of Autonomy and Accountability:** While discretion increases, safeguards like **purchase committees** remain to check misuse.

Impact: These changes align with the concept of "**catalytic procurement**", where **procurement acts as an early adopter and stimulant of advanced technologies**.

Global Best Practices to Blend With

1. **Mission-Oriented Procurement (Germany):** Through its **High-Tech Strategy**, Germany uses procurement to drive innovation. Supported by **KOINNO**, advising procurers and connecting suppliers. India could adopt **dedicated procurement innovation cells** in CSIR and IITs.
2. **SBIR Model (United States):** **3% of federal R&D funds reserved for startups** under **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)**. Provides **phased contracts** to derisk technologies. India could earmark **procurement-linked innovation funding** for startups in biotech, AI, and clean tech.
3. **Pre-Commercial Procurement (South Korea & EU):** Pays premium prices for **prototype technologies** meeting moonshot goals. EU's **Joint Procurement Agreement** enables pooling demand for costly research equipment. India's labs could adopt **co-procurement alliances** for cryogenic coolers, quantum devices, etc.
4. **Hybrid Governance (USA's Sandia Labs Model):** U.S. **Department of Energy** privatised Sandia's management but retained mission control through **performance-based contracts**. Resulted in increased patents and SME linkages. India's **CSIR** could experiment with **public-private management models** in select labs.

The Way Forward for India

1. **Outcome-Weighted Tenders** – Evaluate bids on **innovation, scalability, and R&D investment**, not just cost.
2. **Sandbox Exemptions** – Allow top labs to bypass GFR for part of their procurement with **third-party audits**.
3. **Cognitive Procurement** – Deploy **AI-driven tools** for predictive sourcing and risk assessment under INDIAai.
4. **Innovation Scorecards** – Integrate procurement with **National R&D Roadmaps**, ensuring alignment with strategic sectors like quantum, semiconductors, and green hydrogen.

Conclusion

A purposeful state action can shape markets. India's procurement reforms, blended with global best practices, can transform procurement into the **engine of national innovation**.

India's economic ambitions need better gender data. Examine how an index on women's economic empowerment can be a policy tool for promoting inclusive growth and addressing gender disparities.

Introduction

According to the **World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024**, India ranks **129/146**, with women contributing only **18% to GDP**. Robust gender-disaggregated data is critical for bridging disparities and driving inclusive growth.

Need for Gender Data in India's Growth Ambitions

1. **Economic Imperative:** Women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) stands at **41.7%**, but only **18% in formal jobs**. **McKinsey Global Institute (2015)** estimated India could add **\$700 billion to GDP by 2025** through gender parity.
2. **Policy Blind Spots:** Existing indices (Human Development Index, Ease of Doing Business, NITI Aayog's SDG Index) often lack gender disaggregation. Without granular gender data, systemic inequalities remain invisible, perpetuating exclusion.

The Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Index: A Policy Tool

1. **Design and Dimensions:** Piloted in **Uttar Pradesh**, the **WEE Index** tracks five levers: **employment, education/skilling, entrepreneurship, livelihood/mobility, and safety/inclusive infrastructure**. Moves beyond surface participation rates to identify **structural drop-offs (e.g., skilling → entrepreneurship → credit)**.
2. **Catalytic Example:** Data in UP's transport sector revealed negligible women bus drivers and conductors. This led to redesigned recruitment and **gender-sensitive infrastructure** (e.g., restrooms in bus stations). Demonstrates how **visibility triggers reform**.
3. **Systemic Insights:** Despite women forming **>50% of skilling programme enrolments**, their entrepreneurship and credit access remain disproportionately low. Identifies **finance and mobility barriers**, enabling targeted interventions.

Broader Policy Applications of Gender Indices

1. **Mainstreaming Gender in Governance:** Embedding gender data into **departmental MIS** (transport, MSMEs, housing, etc.) ensures every rupee is tracked for its impact on women. Facilitates **evidence-based policymaking** rather than assumption-driven schemes.
2. **Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB):** India introduced GRB in **2005-06**, but it remains siloed. A **WEE Index** can link **budget allocations** to measurable gender outcomes, making expenditure more accountable.
3. **Replication Potential Across States:** States like **Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh** with trillion-dollar growth goals can adapt the **UP model**. District-wise gender scorecards can feed into **State Action Plans for Women's Economic Empowerment**.
4. **Global Parallels: Gender Equality Index (EU)** measures domains like work, money, knowledge, time, and health to guide funding priorities. **African Gender Index (UNECA)** integrates gender data into economic reforms. India's WEE Index can mirror these best practices with localised focus.

Challenges and Way Forward

1. **Data Gaps:** Quality, frequency, and comparability of gender data remain weak.
2. **Capacity Constraints:** Local governments require training for data collection and use.
3. **Intersectionality:** Must track caste, region, and age-based disparities within gender.
4. **Digital Tools:** Use of **AI and big data analytics** can strengthen predictive insights into female workforce trends.

Conclusion

Expanding **women's capabilities** is **central to growth**; **robust indices like the WEE** can transform gender equity into **India's economic advantage**.

AI's efficiency is built on the invisible labour of low-paid workers. Critically analyze the various challenges of this model for ensuring inclusive and sustainable technological development.

Introduction

The **AI industry, valued at \$196 billion (2023, Statista)**, thrives on the invisible labour of low-paid workers in developing nations, raising profound **ethical, economic, and sustainability challenges** for inclusive technological development.

The Hidden Human Infrastructure of AI

1. **Data Annotation:** Workers label images, videos, and text for **machine learning (ML)** and **large language models (LLMs)** like ChatGPT and Gemini.
2. **Content Moderation:** AI platforms rely on humans to filter violent, pornographic, or extremist material.
3. **Synthetic Media:** Voice actors and even children provide training data for **Generative AI (GenAI)** tools.
4. **Outsourcing Chains:** Tasks outsourced to intermediaries in **Kenya, India, Philippines, Pakistan, and China** often lack transparency, fair pay, or legal protection.

Social Challenges

1. **Labour Exploitation & Informality:** Workers often earn **less than \$2/hour**, below ILO's **Decent Work Standards**. Lack of recognition leads to **"ghost work"** (Mary Gray & Siddharth Suri, Ghost Work).
2. **Mental Health & Well-being:** Exposure to explicit content leads to **PTSD, anxiety, depression (reports from Kenyan moderators, 2024)**. No safeguards or counseling mechanisms provided by tech giants.
3. **Global Inequalities:** Value is extracted in the Global South but profits accrue in **Silicon Valley**, reinforcing **digital colonialism**. AI becomes "inclusive" in rhetoric but **extractive in practice**.
4. **Opacity & Accountability:** Gig platforms use **fragmented, surveilled microtasks**, making it hard to regulate or unionize. Lack of transparency in AI supply chains undermines **responsible AI principles** (OECD AI Guidelines, 2019).

Economic Challenges

1. **Precarity of Employment:** Most workers are on **short-term, gig-based contracts**, denying social security and upskilling opportunities. Creates a **race to the bottom** in wages across developing economies.
2. **Skill Mismatch:** Non-experts are often assigned **technical annotation (e.g., medical scans)**, reducing **data reliability** and AI accuracy. Undermines the **sustainable scaling** of AI ecosystems.
3. **Value Appropriation:** The **labour-value gap** widens: annotations create billion-dollar AI products, but workers see negligible benefits. Absence of **redistributive frameworks** in AI-driven economies.
4. **Regulatory Vacuum:** No global convention governs AI supply chains. Current debates (EU AI Act, UNESCO Recommendation on AI Ethics) focus more on **content risks**, not **labour ethics**.

Pathways to Inclusive and Sustainable AI

1. **Fair Work Protocols:** Adopt **ILO's Decent Work Agenda** for digital labour markets.
2. **Supply Chain Transparency:** Mandatory disclosure of **AI labour networks**, similar to **Modern Slavery Acts**.
3. **Living Wages & Social Security:** Benchmarking against **national minimum wages**; provide health and mental well-being support.
4. **Upskilling Pathways:** Move workers from microtasks to higher-value **AI design, coding, and auditing roles**.
5. **Global Governance:** Build labour provisions into **AI treaties** under the UN or G20, ensuring **inclusive innovation**.

Conclusion

As book **The Age of Surveillance Capitalism** warns, unchecked digital economies deepen inequality. Sustainable AI demands **ethical labour practices** to align innovation with justice, inclusivity, and human dignity.

The Supreme Court's steps to prevent the misuse of Section 498A IPC are termed 'judicial experimentalism'. Critically analyze whether such measures undermine a victim's pursuit of justice.

Introduction

Section 498A IPC (now Section 85 BNS), introduced in 1983 to combat cruelty against women, is both a protective shield and a contested provision, raising concerns about misuse, liberty, and judicial experimentalism.

Understanding Section 498A and its Safeguards

1. Enacted to address **dowry-related cruelty, harassment, and domestic violence**.
2. Over time, courts flagged its **misuse in false complaints** and rampant arrests of husbands/relatives.
3. Institutional safeguards evolved:
 - **2008 CrPC amendment**: introduced the **principle of necessity** for arrest.
 - **Arnesh Kumar vs State of Bihar (2014)**: mandated a checklist, limited automatic arrests, required **notice for appearance**.
 - **Satender Kumar Antil (2022)**: reinforced bail provisions in cases of wrongful arrest.

These reforms balanced **victim rights** with **accused liberty**, ensuring the system was not weaponized.

Judicial Experimentalism: Cooling Period and FWCs

1. In *Mukesh Bansal vs State of U.P. (2022)*, the **Allahabad High Court** introduced: A **two-month cooling period** post-FIR/complaint and referral to **Family Welfare Committees (FWCs)** for mediation.
2. Endorsed by the Supreme Court in *Shivangi Bansal vs Sahib Bansal (2025)*.
3. Aims to curb misuse of Section 498A through **quasi-judicial mediation** before coercive action.

Critical Concerns

1. **Denial of Prompt Justice**: Victims face delays: FIRs lie dormant during the cooling period. Contravenes **Article 21 (Right to Life with Dignity)** and **prompt redressal principle** recognized in *Lalita Kumari vs Govt. of U.P. (2014)*.
2. **Erosion of Criminal Justice Autonomy**: FWCs, with **no statutory backing**, encroach on **police and magistrate powers**. Undermines the **functional autonomy** of law enforcement agencies.
3. **Repeating Judicial Overreach**: Similar experiment in *Rajesh Sharma vs State of U.P. (2017)* mandated FWCs, but was overturned in *Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar (2018)* as **regressive and beyond judicial competence**. Reviving such ideas risks **legitimizing extra-legal structures**.
4. **Statutory and Judicial Safeguards Already Exist**: Arrests under Section 498A dropped from **1.87 lakh (2015) to 1.45 lakh (2022)** despite rising complaints (NCRB 2022). Indicates safeguards like *Arnesh Kumar* are effective, making new experiments unnecessary.
5. **Victim's Vulnerability**: Delayed action prolongs exposure to **domestic violence** and coercion. Creates **secondary victimization**, where legal remedies turn into **procedural hurdles**.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen **existing safeguards** (checklists, arrest guidelines, bail provisions).
2. Promote **mediation and counselling** through **statutory family courts**, not ad-hoc committees.
3. Ensure **speedy FIR registration and investigation** in line with *Lalita Kumari*.
4. Adopt **victim-centric reforms**—legal aid, safe shelters, psychological counselling, and witness protection.
5. Training for police and judiciary to balance **false complaint risks** with **genuine victim protection**.

Conclusion

Unchecked judicial activism risks “**justice without law**”. Sustainable reforms must respect statutory frameworks, ensuring safeguards against misuse while prioritizing women’s prompt access to justice and constitutional dignity.

Critically analyze the governance challenges of using face recognition software for welfare delivery, ensuring that technology acts as a tool for inclusion rather than exclusion of the vulnerable.

Introduction

India, with **14 lakh anganwadis serving 100 million women and children**, increasingly relies on digital welfare tools like **Face Recognition Software (FRS)**. However, **technological determinism** risks undermining equity, dignity, and inclusive governance outcomes.

Challenges of FRS in Welfare

1. **Violation of Dignity and Presumption of Guilt:** FRS treats women and children as potential fraudsters rather than beneficiaries with rights. Contravenes **Article 21 (Right to Life with Dignity)** and natural justice principles of “innocent until proven guilty.”
2. **Exclusion Errors and Denial of Rights:** Network failures, device limitations, and mismatched biometrics result in denial of Take-Home Rations (THR). Similar exclusion seen in **Aadhaar-based PDS**, where the **State of Jharkhand (2017-18)** reported starvation deaths due to biometric authentication failures.
3. **Governance Deficit and Lack of Consultation:** FRS was introduced without dialogue with Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) or communities. Contravenes **Participatory Governance** principles emphasized by the **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)**.
4. **Technological Myopia:** Ignores real challenges: poor ration quality, irregular supply, stagnant budget (₹8 per child/day since 2018), and corruption in contracts. Risks substituting “**techno-solutionism**” for systemic reforms.
5. **Surveillance and Privacy Risks:** Mandatory face scans blur the line between welfare and policing, especially as **FRS is typically used in criminal investigations**. Lacks safeguards under the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023)**, raising fears of profiling and misuse.
6. **Global Standards and Concerns:** San Francisco and several EU states restrict or ban FRS for civil purposes due to accuracy and ethical concerns. UN’s **Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty (2019)** warned against digital welfare turning into “**digital welfare dystopia**.”

Way Forward: Towards Inclusive Technological Governance

1. **Principle of Proportionality** (Puttaswamy judgment, 2017): Tech use must be necessary, least intrusive, and rights-compatible.
2. **Community-Based Verification:** Empower SHGs, local panchayats, and women’s collectives for monitoring—upholding **decentralization under NFSA 2013** and SC orders (2004).
3. **Technology as Enabler, Not Gatekeeper:** Introduce **offline-first solutions**, grievance redressal, and override options for AWWs.
4. **Transparency and Accountability:** Publish fraud data, audit algorithms, and ensure **social audits** under MGNREGA-type mechanisms.

5. **Capacity Building:** Train AWWs in digital tools, upgrade infrastructure, and ensure adequate devices and connectivity.
6. **Ethical Tech Charter:** Adopt **UNESCO's AI Ethics Recommendation (2021)** to ensure fairness, accountability, and human rights compliance in welfare tech.

Conclusion

As **Development as Freedom** reminds us, **technology must expand capabilities, not restrict them**. Welfare delivery should prioritize dignity, equity, and inclusion, ensuring machines serve citizens not citizens machines.

The Supreme Court's move to fix a time limit for a Governor's assent is a judicial nudge. Critically analyze its constitutional implications for the separation of powers and legislative functioning.

Introduction

In **2023–25**, the **Supreme Court** mandated a three-month time limit for gubernatorial assent under Article 200, addressing delays in State legislation. This intervention foregrounds tensions between constitutional morality, federalism, and separation of powers.

Judicial Nudge: Context

1. **Article 200** provides four options to a Governor: assent, withhold, return, or reserve for President.
2. Yet, Governors have often delayed action indefinitely, stalling State legislatures (e.g., **Tamil Nadu Bills pending for years**).
3. Supreme Court, in *State of Punjab vs Governor* (2023) and *State of Tamil Nadu vs Governor* (2025), emphasized Governors are bound by **aid and advice of Council of Ministers** under Article 163.

Constitutional Implications

Constitutional Implications For Separation of Powers

1. **Judicial Overreach Debate:** Critics argue fixing a timeline amounts to judicial legislation, as **Articles 200–201** prescribe no time frame.
2. **Judicial Necessity:** Court drew upon the doctrine of **constitutional pragmatism**, similar to *Maneka Gandhi* (1978) expanding Article 21, to prevent constitutional paralysis.
3. **Comparative Perspective:** UK monarch and Canadian Governors General lack independent discretion; assent is a formal duty, not a discretionary veto.

Constitutional Implications For Federal Balance

1. Judicial push ensures Governors—appointed by the Union—cannot act as political speed-breakers in State legislative processes.
2. Aligns with **Sarkaria Commission (1988)** and **Punchhi Commission (2010)**, which cautioned against Governors misusing assent powers.
3. Prevents asymmetrical centralization, thus reinforcing **cooperative federalism** under the spirit of the Constitution's basic structure.

Constitutional Implications For Legislative Functioning

1. Fixing timelines smoothenes law-making, preventing indefinite dormancy of Bills.
2. Ensures **legislative supremacy within the State sphere** under the Seventh Schedule, shielding it from executive obstruction.
3. In practice, strengthens parliamentary accountability: laws must be tested on constitutionality by courts post-enactment, not stalled at the assent stage.

Risks and Limitations

1. **Blurring Lines:** Judicially prescribing timelines may set precedent for courts “filling gaps” in other constitutional silences, raising concerns of judicial activism.
2. **Union Responsibility under Article 355:** Instead of judicial directives, the Centre could ensure Governors discharge duties in line with constitutional norms.
3. **Discretion in Exceptional Cases:** Sarkaria Commission allowed rare gubernatorial discretion when Bills are “patently unconstitutional,” but judicial timelines may dilute this nuanced safeguard.

Way Forward

1. **Codification through Constitutional Amendment or Parliamentary Law:** Prescribe reasonable timelines while preserving judicial review.
2. **Strengthen Conventions:** As B.R. Ambedkar envisioned, Governors must act as constitutional heads, not political actors.
3. **Judicial Minimalism:** Courts should intervene only in exceptional situations, while Parliament evolves structural remedies.
4. **Promote Cooperative Federalism:** Through structured **inter-governmental councils** and dialogues, minimizing political stand-offs between Centre and States.

Conclusion

As **Granville Austin** termed India’s Constitution a “**seamless web of cooperative federalism**,” judicial nudges must ensure legislative vibrancy without judicial overreach, harmonizing separation of powers with constitutional morality and democratic governance.

To reach SDG 3, India needs more focus. Examine how making health education compulsory in schools can be a key policy tool for addressing public health issues and promoting well-being.

Introduction

India ranks **99 in the 2025 SDG Index**, yet lags on **SDG 3 targets—MMR, child mortality, and life expectancy**. Compulsory health education in schools can reshape preventive healthcare and long-term public well-being.

India’s SDG 3 Challenge

1. **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR):** 97 per 100,000 live births (target: 70).
2. **Under-five mortality:** 32 per 1,000 live births (target: 25).
3. **Life expectancy:** 70 years (short of target 73.6).
4. **Out-of-pocket expenditure:** 13% of consumption, nearly double the SDG target of 7.83%.
5. **Immunisation:** 93.23% vs. 100% target.

Persistent gaps reflect poor preventive care, limited awareness, and inadequate health-seeking behavior, particularly in rural and tribal populations.

Why Health Education in Schools Matters

Early Habit Formation

1. Health behaviours developed in school years influence adulthood.
2. **WHO (2022)**: 70% of non-communicable diseases are preventable with early lifestyle interventions.
3. Educated mothers contribute to improved child health, reducing intergenerational malnutrition and maternal deaths.

Prevention over Cure

1. Preventive health is more cost-effective than treatment.
2. **Lancet Public Health (2020)**: Every \$1 invested in preventive health saves \$7 in future treatment costs.
3. Lessons on hygiene, reproductive health, and nutrition can cut morbidity significantly.

International Case Studies

1. **Finland (1970s)**: School health curricula reduced cardiovascular deaths by embedding lifestyle awareness.
2. **Japan**: Compulsory health lessons improved hygiene and life expectancy (now 84 years, among the highest globally).
3. **Thailand**: Integrated health education linked to reduced adolescent pregnancies.

Public Health Issues Addressed

1. **Nutrition & Malnutrition**: Strengthens fight against India's 35.5% stunting prevalence (NFHS-5).
2. **Mental Health**: Awareness curbs stigma; relevant as 14% of youth experience depression (ICMR, 2022).
3. **Road Safety**: Lessons can reduce accidents, which currently kill **1.5 lakh annually** (MoRTH 2023).
4. **Reproductive Health**: Reduces teenage pregnancies and maternal risks.

Link to Broader Health Systems

1. School health education complements **Ayushman Bharat–School Health Programme**, which deploys trained teachers as “Health and Wellness Ambassadors.”
2. Aligns with **National Education Policy (2020)** that advocates experiential and holistic learning, including health literacy.
3. Can be synergized with **digital health tools** (telemedicine, e-health records) to bridge rural access gaps.

Way Forward

1. **Structured Curriculum**: Nutrition, hygiene, mental health, reproductive health, and first aid as graded modules.
2. **Teacher Training**: Invest in capacity building of educators as health mentors.

3. **Parent–Community Participation:** Encourage accountability through School Management Committees.
4. **Policy Convergence:** Integrate with **National Health Mission, Poshan Abhiyaan, and Fit India Movement.**
5. **Monitoring Outcomes:** Link to SDG dashboards with measurable indicators like reduced anaemia and improved adolescent BMI.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*** reminds us, **education expands capabilities**. Embedding health education in schools empowers youth, accelerates SDG 3 progress, and lays the foundation for a healthier, resilient India.

Amidst a troubled transition, Nepal's interim government faces illegitimate demands. Examine the challenges of democratic consolidation in India's neighborhood and the role of its foreign policy.

Introduction

Nepal, faced violent protests, unconstitutional dissolution of Parliament, and institutional erosion. Such troubled transitions highlight the fragility of democratic consolidation across India's neighborhood, demanding nuanced foreign policy engagement.

Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nepal

1. **Weak Constitutionalism:** Article 76 of Nepal's 2015 Constitution permits dissolution only after failed prime ministerial appointments. Recent dissolution bypassed this safeguard, undermining constitutional supremacy. Repeated political crises since 2008 show institutional fragility.
2. **Youth Protests and Populism:** Gen Z-led protests voiced genuine grievances: corruption, governance deficits, and digital censorship (ban of 23 social media websites). Yet violence — burning of Parliament and Supreme Court — threatens democratic legitimacy.
3. **Erosion of Institutions:** Destruction of legal and parliamentary documents cripples governance. Judiciary and legislature, pillars of the "Naya Nepal" order post-2006 peace process, are now delegitimised by both state actions and mob fury.
4. **Entrenched Political Elites:** Leadership monopoly by the K.P. Oli–Deuba–Dahal troika alienates youth and marginalized groups. Lack of intra-party democracy prevents fresh leadership from emerging, fuelling distrust in democratic institutions.

Democratic Consolidation Challenges in the Neighborhood

1. **Pakistan:** Frequent military interference, weak civilian authority, and constitutional manipulation.
2. **Sri Lanka:** Economic collapse (2022) led to mass protests questioning democratic resilience.
3. **Bangladesh:** Allegations of authoritarian drift under a dominant-party system.
4. **Myanmar:** 2021 coup reversed democratic transition, leading to civil war-like conditions.

Common threads: elite capture, weak rule of law, fragile institutions, and populist mobilization — all testing democratic consolidation.

India's Foreign Policy Role

1. **Neighbourhood First Policy:** India's priority is stability in the Himalayan belt. Instability in Nepal threatens **border security, trade routes, and migration flows** (6 million Nepalis in India).
2. **Democracy as Strategic Interest:** Stable democratic regimes align with India's **security and economic integration goals** (BBIN initiative, BIMSTEC connectivity). Authoritarian backsliding could open space for external actors, especially **China's BRI influence** in Nepal.
3. **Diplomatic Balancing:** India has traditionally followed **non-interference with constructive engagement**, supporting Nepal during the 2006 peace process. Presently, India must engage the interim government without legitimising unconstitutional practices or violent protestor demands.
4. **Leveraging Multilateral Platforms:** SAARC remains inactive, but BIMSTEC and BBIN offer cooperative mechanisms. India can champion **democratic resilience and disaster governance frameworks** regionally, projecting itself as a responsible stakeholder.
5. **Soft Power and Developmental Diplomacy:** Scholarships, cultural exchanges, digital connectivity, and infrastructure projects foster people-to-people bonds. **Lines of Credit, cross-border railways, hydropower projects** can stabilise Nepal's economy, reducing discontent.

Way Forward

1. Support **inclusive dialogue** in Nepal while affirming constitutionalism.
2. Encourage **intra-party reforms** through capacity-building and youth engagement.
3. Promote **One-South Asia democratic resilience framework** to address shared vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

Democracy without institutions risks chaos. India's foreign policy must anchor Nepal's democratic consolidation, balancing strategic stability with principled support for constitutional order.

Critically analyze the geopolitical implications of the Saudi-Pakistan pact, termed a 'dodgy insurance policy', for regional stability and India's strategic interests.

Introduction

The 2025 Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA), signed in Riyadh, signals tactical alignment but raises concerns. Amid volatile West Asia, it embodies a fragile hedge, impacting regional stability and India's strategic calculus.

Geopolitical Implications of the Saudi-Pakistan Pact

1. **Symbolism over Substance:** Historically, Saudi-Pakistani defence ties (1951 onwards) were marred by mistrust — from Shia troop exclusions to Pakistan's refusal to aid Riyadh during the 1990 Kuwait crisis or 2015 Yemen war. SMDA appears more **optical reassurance** than credible defence commitment.
2. **U.S. Factor and Strategic Hedging:** Washington's indirect role in shaping SMDA reflects declining U.S. credibility in Gulf security (e.g., muted response to Israel's 2025 strike on Qatar). Riyadh views SMDA as a **stop-gap insurance** while awaiting stronger U.S. guarantees.
3. **Nuclear Shadow:** Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability raises concerns of a potential "nuclear umbrella" for Riyadh if Iran advances its programme. While overt transfer is improbable due to Israeli red lines, **nuclear latency** via covert technology sharing echoes the A.Q. Khan precedent.

4. **China Variable:** Pakistan's "all-weather" partnership with China complicates Riyadh's military calculus. SMDA may indirectly expand Beijing's influence in West Asia through Pakistani channels, creating a triangular competition with U.S. and India.
5. **Impact on Regional Stability:** Risks of militarising Gulf rivalries: Iran may perceive SMDA as containment, escalating its strategic partnership with Russia and China. Could weaken fragile Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) unity, already strained by Qatar blockade (2017–21).

Implications for India's Strategic Interests

1. **Energy Security Concerns:** India is the **third-largest oil importer**; Saudi Arabia supplies ~18% of its crude. Any Riyadh–Islamabad defence tilt could complicate **energy diplomacy** amidst global volatility.
2. **Diaspora and Remittance Linkages:** 2.6 million Indians live in Saudi Arabia, sending over **\$10 billion in remittances annually** (RBI data, 2023). Ensuring diaspora security requires New Delhi to stay diplomatically relevant in Riyadh.
3. **Defence and Counter-Terrorism Cooperation:** Since 2014, India–Saudi ties have expanded into defence exercises (e.g., **Al-Mohed Al-Hindi Naval Exercise, 2021**) and intelligence sharing on counter-terrorism. SMDA may pressure Riyadh to balance, not tilt, given India's growing weight.
4. **Goeconomic Balancing:** Riyadh plans **\$100 billion investment in India**, though progress remains limited. Senior Saudi officials acknowledged India as a nuclear power, reassuring New Delhi of "parallel balancing" despite SMDA.
5. **Strategic Vigilance across Arabian Sea:** SMDA underscores need for India to deepen ties with GCC (especially UAE, Oman) and multilateral platforms like **IORA and BIMSTEC** to safeguard its West Asian interests.

Way Forward for India

1. Pursue **multi-vector diplomacy** with Riyadh while reinforcing energy and defence partnerships.
2. Enhance **maritime security footprint** in Arabian Sea and Western Indian Ocean.
3. Leverage **strategic autonomy** to balance U.S., Saudi, and Iranian sensitivities, avoiding zero-sum alignments.

Conclusion

Alliances without shared threat perceptions breed fragility. For India, strategic pragmatism, vigilant diplomacy, and deeper Gulf partnerships are essential amid Saudi–Pakistan's dodgy insurance pact.

Judicial prior restraint and government takedown orders both undermine a free press. Critically analyze the challenges of balancing the freedom of the press with the legal right to defamation.

Introduction

India ranks **159/180 in RSF World Press Freedom Index (2024)**, highlighting the fragility of free expression. Judicial prior restraint and executive takedown orders risk eroding Article 19(1)(a) while balancing legitimate defamation concerns.

Freedom of Press and Defamation – The Constitutional Tension

1. **Article 19(1)(a)** guarantees freedom of speech and expression, while **Article 19(2)** permits “reasonable restrictions” on grounds such as defamation, public order, and sovereignty.
2. **Defamation laws (IPC Sections 499–500)** criminalize reputational harm, but their broad interpretation often conflicts with press freedom.
3. The tension lies in distinguishing between **fair journalistic scrutiny** and **malicious falsehoods**.

Judicial Prior Restraint – Issues

Adani Defamation Case (2024–25):

1. A Delhi court’s **ex parte gag order** directed removal of articles and barred journalists from publishing “unverified” content.
2. Violated the **Bonnard Principle (1891)**, adopted by the Indian SC, which restricts pre-trial injunctions unless the defendant clearly cannot justify the content.
3. **SC’s Bloomberg vs Zee Ruling (2024)** reaffirmed that “pre-trial injunctions must be rare” to avoid chilling effects on democratic debate.

Risk of Democratic Erosion:

1. Blanket gag orders allow corporations to curate public narratives, undermining accountability.
2. Prior restraint was held **unconstitutional in Romesh Thappar (1950) and Brij Bhushan (1950)**, except under narrow grounds.

Government Takedown Orders – Problems

1. **Adani-linked takedowns (2024):** I&B Ministry ordered removal of 138 YouTube links and 83 Instagram posts, even satire, invoking IT Rules, 2021. Echoes **Section 66A misuse**, struck down in **Shreya Singhal (2015)**.
2. **Overreach and Chilling Effect:** Instead of letting courts settle disputes, executive actions create **executive censorship** bypassing due process. Affects public’s “**right to know**”, an essential democratic component.

Balancing Free Press and Defamation – Key Challenges

1. **Subjectivity of Defamation:** Thin line between **criticism** and **defamation**, often exploited by powerful entities.
2. **Corporate Control over Media:** Corporates with media stakes may use litigation to silence critical reporting (“Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation – SLAPPs”).
3. **Judicial Backlog:** Prolonged trials incentivize interim injunctions that suppress reporting for years.
4. **Digital Media Amplification:** Viral content increases risks of reputational damage, but also magnifies government overreach in takedowns.

Way Forward

1. **Adopt Bonnard Standard Strictly:** Injunctions only when falsity is prima facie evident.
2. **Independent Media Regulator:** To assess takedown requests instead of executive discretion.

3. **Decriminalize Defamation:** Shift to civil remedies, as recommended by **Law Commission of India (200th Report)**.
4. **Protect Whistleblowers and Investigative Journalism:** Implement anti-SLAPP legislation, following models from **Canada** and **California**.
5. **Judicial Training & Fast-Track Media Tribunals:** To adjudicate defamation swiftly while safeguarding press freedom.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen** in **The Argumentative Indian** reminds us, democracy thrives on open debate. Guarding press freedom while addressing genuine defamation demands **narrow restrictions, robust safeguards, and institutional maturity**.

Science is a collective endeavor. Critically analyze the governance challenges and policy imperatives for India to break the academic paywall and promote open access to research.

Introduction

India produces over **25,000 PhDs annually (OECD, 2023)**, yet access to global research remains restricted by paywalls. The **UNESCO Open Science Framework (2021)** highlights the urgency of dismantling knowledge barriers for inclusive innovation.

Why Science is a Collective Endeavor

1. **Publicly Funded Research:** Most research in India is taxpayer-funded through agencies like **CSIR, ICMR, and UGC**. Knowledge thus qualifies as a **“public good”**, not a private commodity.
2. **Knowledge Commons:** Research advances are cumulative, dependent on free exchange of ideas, as seen during **COVID-19 vaccine development**, where global collaboration was vital.
3. **Grassroots Knowledge:** Indigenous practices, biodiversity studies, and community innovations reflect **epistemic plurality**, reinforcing that science extends beyond elite labs.

Governance Challenges in Breaking Paywalls

1. **Copyright and IP Regimes:** International publishers dominate (Elsevier, Wiley, Springer cornering ~40% of the market). **TRIPS Agreement** limits flexibilities on knowledge sharing, similar to medicine patent challenges during COVID-19.
2. **Judicial Constraints:** **Delhi HC blocking SciHub & Libgen (2021)** curtailed access for researchers, despite India accounting for **8.7% of global downloads (Scientometric Research, 2021)**, mostly in health sciences.
3. **Inequity in Knowledge Production:** **Global South under-representation** in authorship; often relegated to fieldwork while intellectual credit accrues to Global North. Universities value publication in **impact factor journals** over **socially relevant research**, reinforcing elitism.
4. **Institutional Barriers:** Limited budgets of Indian universities impede journal subscriptions. **National Digital Library of India (NDLI)** remains under-utilized due to poor integration with global repositories.

Policy Imperatives for India

1. **Strengthen Open Access Mandates:** Adopt **Plan S-like framework** (European initiative mandating publicly funded research to be open access). Make all **DST/ICMR/CSIR-funded research available** under **Creative Commons licensing**.
2. **National Knowledge Commons Framework:** Expand **National Institutional Open Access Policy (2014)** to cover all higher education institutions. Integrate NDLI with **international repositories** (arXiv, PubMed Central).
3. **Leverage Global South Alliances:** Build South-South collaborations (e.g., **BRICS Open Access Platform**) to reduce dependency on Western publishers. Advocate in **WTO & WIPO** for knowledge equity, similar to India's leadership on **TRIPS waiver for COVID-19 vaccines**.
4. **Support Community and Indigenous Knowledge Systems:** Recognize **grassroots innovations** (Honey Bee Network, People's Biodiversity Registers) as part of open science. Ensure **inclusive authorship norms** to correct epistemic injustice.
5. **Public-Private-Academic Collaboration:** Incentivize Indian publishers to build **low-cost open-access journals**. Promote **preprint culture** (like bioRxiv, SocArXiv) to accelerate dissemination.

Case Studies

1. **WHO's HINARI Program:** Offers low-cost access to medical journals in LMICs, but India's exclusion since 2012 shows the urgency of national alternatives.
2. **Latin America's SciELO Initiative:** Regional open-access publishing platform that bypasses corporate monopolies, a model for India.
3. **COVID-19 Vaccine Race:** Demonstrated that restrictive IP delayed equitable access; open scientific collaboration (Oxford-AstraZeneca partnership) showed opposite outcomes.

Conclusion

As Yuval Noah Harari in *Sapiens* notes, collective learning defines humanity's progress. For India, dismantling academic paywalls through robust **open science governance is vital for equity**, innovation, and global leadership.

The lack of a fixed timeline for a Governor's assent to a Bill challenges India's federal structure. Critically analyze the constitutional and political implications of this issue for Centre-State relations.

Introduction

India's **federal structure**, recognized as a **basic feature (Kesavananda Bharati, 1973)**, faces strain as Governors delay assent to Bills. The **April 2025 Supreme Court judgment** prescribing timelines reflects judicial intervention to preserve federal balance.

Constitutional Position

1. **Article 200:** Governor may assent, withhold assent, return for reconsideration, or reserve for President's consideration.
2. **Article 201:** President **may assent or withhold assent**; no timeline prescribed.
3. **Article 163(1):** Governor acts on **aid and advice of the Council of Ministers**, except in rare discretionary matters.

The Constitution only requires that a Bill returned be done “as soon as possible,” creating scope for **indefinite delays**.

Judicial Interpretation

1. **Shamsher Singh (1974)**: Governor bound by ministerial advice.
2. **Nabam Rebia (2016)**: Governor cannot act against the aid and advice of elected government.
3. **K.M. Singh (2020)**: SC fixed a three-month timeline for Speakers in disqualification matters.
4. **State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu (2025)**: SC held that “**Governor shall**” implies mandatory duty; prescribed **three-month timeline** for assent or reservation.

Commission Recommendations

1. **Sarkaria Commission (1987)**: Discretion to reserve Bills should be exercised only in “rare cases of patent unconstitutionality.”
2. **Punchhi Commission (2010)**: Governors should decide within six months.
3. **MHA OM (2016)**: Advised Governors to act “without undue delay.”

Constitutional & Political Implications

1. **Erosion of Federalism**: Delays undermine the **popular mandate** of elected State legislatures. Contravenes **cooperative federalism**, emphasized in **SR Bommai (1994)** as essential for Centre-State harmony.
2. **Politicisation of the Governor’s Office**: Governors often act as **agents of the Centre**, selectively delaying Bills in opposition-ruled States (e.g., Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab). Fuels demand for **abolition of gubernatorial post** (raised by C.N. Annadurai, Nitish Kumar).
3. **Judicial Overreach vs. Necessity**: Centre argues SC cannot impose timelines absent in Constitution. However, judiciary has previously stepped in to ensure **constitutional morality** when institutions delay decisions (e.g., **Election Commission, Speakers**).
4. **Impact on Governance**: Key reforms on **education, health, reservation, agriculture** face paralysis. Example: **Kerala University Laws Amendment Bill (2022)** delayed, hampering academic reforms.
5. **Centre-State Tensions**: Opposition-ruled States argue deliberate delays disrespect democratic mandate. Raises **questions of legitimacy** of the Governor in a parliamentary democracy.

Way Forward

1. Codify timelines via **constitutional amendment or legislation**.
2. Institutionalize **inter-governmental platforms** (like Inter-State Council) for resolving disputes.
3. Follow **Punchhi Commission’s** six-month guideline as convention.
4. Ensure appointment of Governors with **non-partisan stature**, respecting **Bommai principles**.

Conclusion

As **Granville Austin noted**, India’s Constitution rests on “**cooperative federalism**.” Fixing timelines for Governors’ assent is imperative to uphold democracy, strengthen State autonomy, and prevent Centre-State relations from degenerating into political battles.

Fatigued PHC doctors are a case where caregivers need care. Examine the policy and governance reforms needed to strengthen the public health system by supporting its frontline workers.

Introduction

India's **primary health centres (PHCs)** form the backbone of rural healthcare, yet physician burnout threatens this foundation. The **Lancet (2019)** termed doctor fatigue a "global public health crisis," undermining India's **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** goals.

PHC Doctors: The Unsung Backbone

1. Each **PHC serves ~30,000 people** (20,000 in tribal/hilly areas; 50,000 in urban).
2. Responsibilities extend beyond clinical care: **immunisation, disease surveillance, maternal care, epidemic response, community health promotion.**
3. They mentor **ASHA, ANMs, Anganwadi workers** and ensure last-mile delivery of schemes like **RBSK, IDSP, Ayushman Bharat.**

Yet, this critical workforce faces **structural neglect** in policy design.

Challenges Contributing to Fatigue and Burnout

1. **Crushing Clinical Load:** ~100 patients/day; antenatal OPDs draw **80-100 women in one session.** They must deliver **multi-specialty care** from pediatrics to geriatrics without adequate support.
2. **Administrative Overburden:** PHCs maintain **100+ registers** (maternal health, NCDs, sanitation, drug inventory). Parallel digital entry in **HMIS, IHIP, PHR, UWIN** → duplication. Instead of healers, they become **clerical staff**, extending work into late hours.
3. **Burnout & Occupational Hazard:** Recognised by **ICD-11 (WHO)** as an occupational phenomenon. **WHO Bulletin meta-analysis:** one-third of LMIC primary care doctors report emotional exhaustion. **The Lancet:** physician burnout impairs clinical judgment, endangering patients.
4. **Skill Dilution:** Continuous updates in **clinical protocols, NCD guidelines, mental health**, with minimal training opportunities. Limited scope for **research or academic growth** despite being data generators.
5. **Inadequate Incentives & Recognition:** Poor career progression, low compensation, and lack of workplace safety. Even in progressive States like **Tamil Nadu (650 NQAS-certified PHCs)**, checklist-driven reforms ignore doctor well-being.

Policy and Governance Reforms Needed

1. **Workload Rationalisation:** Recruit more **Medical Officers and paramedics.** Introduce **task-shifting:** delegate non-clinical work to data-entry operators. Adopt **global best practices** like the U.S. **"25 by 5 campaign"** to reduce documentation burden by 75%.
2. **Digital Health Governance:** Integrate portals (**HMIS, IDSP, AB-PMJAY**) into a **single interoperable platform.** Move from duplication to **automation & AI-based data entry.**
3. **Mental Health & Occupational Safety:** Institutionalise **counselling and stress management units** at district hospitals. Include doctor burnout under **Occupational Health & Safety Standards.**
4. **Incentives and Career Progression:** Implement **rural hardship allowances** (on the lines of **Sixth Central Pay Commission**). Expand **National Programme for Quality Assurance in Public Health Facilities** to focus on well-being of staff, not just infrastructure.

5. **Training and Research Support:** Regular **CME (Continuing Medical Education)** and **telemedicine mentoring**. Encourage PHC doctors' participation in **research grants** through ICMR and State health missions.
6. **Community & Intersectoral Support:** Strengthen **Gram Sabhas & VHSNCs (Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees)** for community ownership. Enhance **intersectoral convergence** (sanitation, nutrition, education) to reduce disease burden on PHCs.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen** in **"Development as Freedom"** argued, real development empowers people. Strengthening PHCs by supporting frontline doctors ensures resilience, equity, and progress toward **SDG 3 – Health for All**.

Examine the institutional and policy reforms required to move from simply making promises for gender minorities to ensuring their active participation in politics and policymaking.

Introduction

According to the **2011 Census**, India has **4.9 lakh self-identified transgender persons**, yet their **political participation remains negligible**. Despite the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019**, implementation gaps exclude gender minorities from policymaking structures.

The Current Gaps: From Promises to Practice

1. **Symbolic Policies, Weak Implementation:** Quotas in welfare schemes exist on paper but are marred by **bureaucratic gatekeeping, corruption, and humiliation** in access. **Example:** Few transgender beneficiaries under **housing and livelihood schemes** despite announcements.
2. **Socio-Economic Marginalisation:** **75% of trans persons in India cannot access education beyond secondary level** (National Human Rights Commission, 2018). Barriers to housing, healthcare, and employment perpetuate exclusion.
3. **Absence in Political Representation:** While **Shabnam Mausi (2000)** became India's first transgender MLA in Madhya Pradesh, sustained representation is rare. No reserved seats for gender minorities in **Parliament, State Assemblies, or municipal bodies**.
4. **Cultural and Structural Barriers:** Persistent **stigma in public spaces:** housing, transport, workplaces. Lack of inclusive education perpetuates stereotypes. Policy remains **"for" trans persons, not "with" them**.

Institutional and Policy Reforms Needed

1. **Constitutional and Legal Safeguards:** Amend **Articles 330 & 332** (currently providing SC/ST political reservation) to consider **political reservation for gender minorities**. Strengthen enforcement of **Transgender Persons Act (2019)** through independent monitoring bodies.
2. **Inclusive Political Representation:** Introduce **mandatory party nominations** for transgender candidates (similar to gender quota debates). Create **Transgender Advisory Councils** within legislatures and ministries. Example: **Nepal's 2015 Constitution** guarantees political representation for "gender minorities."
3. **Education and Capacity Building:** Scholarships for transgender students, inclusion in **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** implementation. Sensitisation of bureaucrats, politicians, and judiciary

through **mandatory training modules**. Curriculum reforms to integrate **gender diversity education** at school level.

4. **Healthcare and Social Protection:** State-supported, affordable **gender transition and mental health services**. Expansion of **Ayushman Bharat** to include **gender-affirmative healthcare packages**. Mandatory **anti-discrimination protocols in hospitals and workplaces**.
5. **Housing and Employment Reforms:** Strict enforcement of **rental protection laws** and **workplace diversity mandates**. Expansion of **Skill India Mission** to include gender minorities. Employment-linked incentives for private sector companies ensuring inclusion.
6. **Representation in Policymaking Bodies:** Ensure inclusion in **sensor boards, commissions, and media councils**. Case Study: **Kerala (2015) State Transgender Policy**—one of the first to mainstream inclusion into governance, though implementation remains uneven.
7. **Strengthening Civil Society and Local Governance:** Empower **Self-Help Groups (SHGs)** for trans persons under **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)**. Encourage **community-based organisations** to collaborate in local policymaking.

Way Forward

1. Adopt a **One-Policy, Multi-Stakeholder Approach** integrating ministries (Health, Education, Housing, Social Justice).
2. Move beyond tokenism → ensure **structural inclusion**.
3. Learn from **global best practices**: Argentina's **Gender Identity Law (2012)** ensures state-funded medical support and rights-based recognition.

Conclusion

As **B.R. Ambedkar** warned in “**Annihilation of Caste**,” democracy is hollow without social inclusion. Empowering gender minorities in politics transforms rights into reality, ensuring justice, dignity, and genuine participatory governance.