

ForumIAS

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HISTORY
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POLITY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

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Examine the factors causing gender imbalance in the higher judiciary. Critically analyze the potential of a national-level judicial competition to ensure gender equity.

Introduction

According to the **India Justice Report 2025**, women constitute only **14% of High Court judges** and **3.1% of Supreme Court judges**, exposing deep structural barriers to gender equity in India's higher judiciary.

Understanding the Gender Imbalance in Higher Judiciary

- Despite constitutional guarantees of equality under **Articles 14, 15, and 16**, women remain underrepresented in judicial leadership roles.
 - Current scenario is that** out of 34 Supreme Court judges, only **one is a woman**, and only **one High Court** has a woman Chief Justice.
 - Trends**, since 1950, only **11 women** have ever been appointed to the Supreme Court.
- This imbalance reflects **structural, procedural, and cultural barriers** within India's judicial ecosystem.

Key Factors Behind Gender Imbalance

- Collegium System and Networked Selection:** The Collegium System — an opaque, informal and male-dominated structure — favours judges and lawyers within elite circles. Lack of diversity in the judicial pipeline reduces the chances of women being nominated.
- Limited Representation at Bar and Bench:** Women constitute less than **15% of practising advocates** in the Supreme Court (Bar Council of India, 2024). The absence of women in senior advocacy limits their visibility for elevation.
- Infrastructural and Institutional Barriers:** A Supreme Court Centre for Research and Planning (2023) study found that **20% of district court complexes lack separate toilets for women**, discouraging their participation. Long work hours, lack of childcare facilities, and gender bias deter women from higher judicial careers.
- Socio-Cultural Constraints:** Persistent stereotypes about women's emotional nature or unsuitability for high-pressure decision-making reinforce gendered bias in appointments. **Justice Indu Malhotra noted** that unconscious bias, not competence, keeps women away from higher benches.

Potential of a National-Level Judicial Competition (AIJS)

- Ensuring Meritocracy and Transparency:** Establishing an **All-India Judicial Service (AIJS)**, as proposed under Article 312, can create a **merit-based, transparent and gender-neutral selection mechanism**. The **UPSC model** demonstrates the success of competitive recruitment in ensuring inclusion. For instance, **11 of the top 25 UPSC candidates in 2024 were women**.
- Promoting Diversity and Equal Access:** AIJS can bridge the gap between privileged law networks and talented candidates from underrepresented backgrounds, including women, OBC, SC, and ST aspirants. **President Droupadi Murmu (2023)** emphasized AIJS as an instrument to ensure representation of less-represented social groups.

3. **Institutional Parallels and Evidence:** In the lower judiciary, where recruitment occurs via **State Judicial Service Examinations**, women constitute **38% of judges** — a stark contrast to higher courts. This indicates that **open competition correlates with gender inclusivity**.

4. **Addressing Concerns of Judicial Independence:** Critics argue that AIJS may cause executive interference, but evidence from UPSC and lower judiciary recruitment disproves this fear. Judicial independence can be safeguarded if the Supreme Court and High Courts supervise recruitment and training post-selection.

The Way Forward

1. **Institutionalize AIJS** under Supreme Court oversight with UPSC-conducted exams.
2. **Gender-sensitive training modules** and mentorship for women judges.
3. **Infrastructure upgrades** (childcare, restrooms, flexible work policies).
4. **Reservation or representation targets** for women in higher judiciary appointments.
5. **Transparency mechanisms** in Collegium recommendations.

Conclusion

Real change endures when it begins in the hearts of people. Gender-equitable judiciary strengthens both justice and democracy.

Examine the necessity of Global South collaboration in navigating the global economic transformation. Justify the construction of a New Economic Deal for equitable development.

Introduction

As per the **World Bank's Global Economic Prospects (2024)**, developing economies face a decadal low growth of 4%, underscoring the urgent need for South-South collaboration amid global economic fragmentation and inequality.

The Global Economic Transformation

The 21st-century economy is witnessing a geo-economic realignment driven by:

1. **US-China great power rivalry**, reshaping supply chains and trade flows.
2. **Technological disruptions** through AI, Big Tech dominance, and digital colonialism.
3. **De-dollarisation efforts** and the emergence of new monetary blocs (e.g., BRICS Pay, Petro-yuan).
4. **Decline of multilateralism**, with WTO paralysis and weaponisation of sanctions.

This environment challenges the **traditional neoliberal order and exposes structural asymmetries** faced by the Global South — home to 85% of the world's population but controlling less than 40% of global GDP (IMF, 2023).

Necessity of Global South Collaboration

1. **Economic Sovereignty and Debt Sustainability:** Over 60% of low-income countries are in or at risk of debt distress (IMF, 2024). Collective bargaining via platforms like **G-77, BRICS, and New Development Bank**

(NDB) can ensure fairer debt restructuring and escape the debt trap diplomacy of both Bretton Woods institutions and regional hegemons.

2. **Trade and Supply Chain Diversification:** The pandemic and Ukraine crisis exposed supply chain fragility. Initiatives like **Indias SAGAR**, **Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**, and **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement** showcase South-led resilience through diversification and localised production.

3. **Technology and Digital Autonomy:** Digital colonialism by Big Tech demands **South-South cooperation in AI governance, data localisation, and cyber norms**. The **India Stack**, adopted by countries such as the Philippines and Morocco, exemplifies scalable South-origin technological models.

4. **Climate and Energy Justice:** The Global South bears 90% of climate-induced losses but receives only 25% of green finance. Platforms like the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and **Global Biofuel Alliance (2023)** highlight Indias leadership in equitable energy transition.

The Case for a New Economic Deal

A new economic architecture must reorient globalisation towards equity, sustainability, and human welfare.

1. **Institutional Reforms:** Democratisation of IMF, World Bank, and WTO voting structures to reflect present GDP shares.
2. **Fair Trade and Industrial Policies:** Preferential market access for developing economies; protection of infant industries akin to East Asian developmental states.
3. **Development Finance:** Expansion of the **BRICS Bank**, **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)**, and creation of a **South Sovereign Wealth Fund** to finance infrastructure, health, and education.
4. **Debt-Relief Framework:** Inspired by the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative but led by the Global South to prevent political conditionalities.
5. **Social Contract Renewal:** State-led investment in welfare, digital infrastructure, and education to reduce inequality and promote inclusive growth — resonating with **Amartya Sens capability approach** and **UNDPs Human Development Report (2023)**.

Indias Role as a Bridge

1. Indias presidency of **G20 (2023)** and **Voice of the Global South Summit** positioned it as a moral anchor, advocating One Earth, One Family, One Future.
2. Through its **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** and **Vaccine Maitri diplomacy**, India demonstrates South-driven global public goods delivery.

Conclusion

Echoing **Joseph Stiglitzs Globalization and Its Discontents**, a new economic deal rooted in South-South solidarity is essential to democratise globalisation, ensure inclusive prosperity, and restore faith in multilateralism.

Examine the challenges faced by public funding in heritage conservation in India. Justify the necessity of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for the sustainable preservation of national assets.

Introduction

As per UNESCO (2023), India hosts over **40 World Heritage Sites**, yet the ASI's annual budget allocation is **barely 0.08% of total expenditure**, revealing a chronic underfunding crisis in heritage conservation.

Heritage as a National Asset

1. India's cultural heritage, comprising **monuments, museums, crafts, and living traditions**—constitutes a crucial component of soft power and cultural economy.
2. The **World Bank (2022)** estimates that cultural tourism contributes nearly **\$250 billion** globally, yet India underutilises its vast heritage potential due to inadequate funding and fragmented governance.

Challenges Faced by Public Funding in Heritage Conservation

1. **Budgetary Constraints and Low Prioritisation:** Despite being a civilisational repository, the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** receives a meagre share of public funds. Between 2010–2023, allocations stagnated around ₹1,200–₹1,500 crore, insufficient to maintain over **3,600 protected monuments**.
2. **Bureaucratic Inefficiency and Lack of Flexibility:** Rigid procurement norms and delays in fund release hinder restoration work. The **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Report (2013)** noted that **70% of heritage structures under ASI were in a "neglected state"** due to bureaucratic delays.
3. **Fragmented Institutional Framework:** Multiplicity of agencies—ASI, State Archaeology Departments, Municipal bodies—leads to duplication, weak accountability, and lack of integrated Heritage Management Plans.
4. **Deficit of Expertise and Skilled Manpower:** Public departments lack multidisciplinary expertise in heritage engineering, conservation science, museology, and community engagement. UNESCO (2021) observed that India faces a **40% shortfall in trained conservation professionals**.
5. **Community Disconnection and Economic Unsustainability:** Absence of participatory management results in vandalism, encroachment, and local apathy. Sites like **Elephanta Caves** and **Hampi** exemplify how neglect leads to cultural and economic loss.

Necessity of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

1. **Mobilisation of Financial Resources and Expertise:** PPP models such as the **"Adopt a Heritage" scheme (2018)** encourage corporate sponsorship for conservation and tourist infrastructure. Corporate entities can invest **CSR funds (2% of profits)** for heritage development under Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013.

2. **Holistic Conservation Models:** Case studies like the **Elephanta Caves** and **Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum** demonstrate that PPPs ensure end-to-end site management—including restoration, documentation, tourism planning, and community benefit—beyond mere monument repair.
3. **Enhancing Visitor Experience through Technology:** Private sector innovation—AR/VR-based tours, smart signage, ticketing platforms—enhances accessibility and engagement. The **Qutub Minar e-guide project (ASI-TCS collaboration)** illustrates how technology can merge preservation with education.
4. **Job Creation and Local Empowerment:** Heritage PPPs can integrate skill development, craft revival, and eco-tourism, benefiting local communities. The **City of Jaipur Heritage Project (UNESCO-INTACH)** exemplifies community-inclusive urban heritage regeneration.
5. **Global Benchmarking:** Countries like **Italy (Fondo Ambiente Italiano)** and **UK's National Trust** have shown that non-state participation ensures sustainability, transparency, and tourism-led economic growth.

The Way Forward

1. Develop **National Heritage PPP Policy Framework** ensuring accountability and transparency.
2. Build **capacity and training programs** for heritage professionals.
3. Encourage **community-led micro-enterprises** around heritage zones.
4. Integrate heritage conservation into **urban and regional planning**, aligning with UN SDG 11.4 (Protect the world's cultural and natural heritage).

Conclusion

Echoing **Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom**, sustainable heritage conservation demands shared responsibility, where public trust, private innovation, and community participation coalesce to preserve India's living legacy for future generations.

Critically analyze the revisionist campaign to sideline B.R. Ambedkar by elevating B.N. Rau as the Constitution's architect. Justify Ambedkar's central contribution.

Introduction

India's Constitution, the world's lengthiest democratic charter with **448 Articles and 12 Schedules**, embodies social justice ideals shaped by **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's visionary leadership**, not mere technical expertise, as revisionist interpretations claim.

The Revisionist Narrative

1. Recent discourses attempt to reframe **Sir B.N. Rau**, the Constitutional Adviser (1946–47), as the “real architect” of the Indian Constitution, undermining **Ambedkar's moral, political, and representational role** as the Chairperson of the Drafting Committee.
2. This revisionism is not just academic; it carries **sociopolitical implications**, aiming to dilute **Dalit agency and Ambedkar's transformative constitutionalism**.

B.N. Rau's Role: The Constitutional Engineer

1. **Technical and Preparatory Role:** Rau prepared a “**rough draft**” of 243 Articles and 13 Schedules based on comparative constitutional research (U.S., U.K., Canada, Ireland, Weimar Republic).
2. **Absence of Political Mandate:** He was not a member of the **Constituent Assembly (CA)**; his role was advisory, not deliberative.
3. **Consultative Influence:** Rau's discussions with scholars like **Felix Frankfurter** and **Harold Laski** refined structural provisions (federalism, judiciary, rights framework), but he neither debated nor defended them publicly.
4. **Contribution Recognition:** Ambedkar himself acknowledged Rau's technical input in his **Concluding Address (Nov 25, 1949)** — describing it as foundational yet incomplete.

Ambedkar's Leadership: The Constitution's Moral and Political Soul

1. **Democratic Legitimacy and Leadership:** As **Chairman of the Drafting Committee**, Ambedkar transformed Rau's draft into a **living moral document**, integrating the **Objectives Resolution (1946)** into actionable constitutional principles.
2. **Navigating Crisis:** Ambedkar led deliberations amid **Partition violence**, **Gandhi's assassination**, and ideological divides — ensuring national unity through consensus building.
3. **Innovative Constitutionalism:** He embedded doctrines of
 - a. **Fundamental Rights and Social Justice (Articles 14–18)**
 - b. **Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV)**
 - c. **Affirmative Action (Articles 15(4), 16(4))**
 - d. **Constitutional Morality** — later echoed by the **Supreme Court (Navtej Singh Johar, 2018)** as Ambedkar's enduring legacy.
4. **Transformative Vision:** Through the “**Trinity of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity**”, Ambedkar converted India's Constitution from a legal framework to a **social revolution charter** (Madhav Khosla, *India's Founding Moment*, 2020).

The Politics Behind Revisionism

1. **Caste and Cultural Anxiety:** The attempt to elevate Rau arises from **elite discomfort** with a Dalit intellectual shaping modern India's moral order.
2. **Depoliticising the Founding:** Reducing constitutional authorship to technical drafting erases the **radical social contract** embedded in Ambedkar's vision — that political democracy is untenable without social and economic equality.
3. **Selective Historicism:** Primary records — Constituent Assembly Debates, speeches by **Nehru, Patel, Rajendra Prasad** — unanimously credit Ambedkar as the principal architect, not Rau.

Broader Implications

1. Revisionism risks **hollowing the Constitution's emancipatory ethos** and eroding its inclusive foundations.
2. Recognising Ambedkar sustains **constitutional morality**, pluralism, and the Republic's commitment to social justice — principles vital to India's democratic resilience.

Conclusion

As **Granville Austin** observed in **The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation**, Ambedkar fused law with social revolution — proving that moral imagination, not mere draftsmanship, builds enduring democracies.

Examine the dilemma between moral clarity and tactical ambiguity in India's foreign policy. Justify the need for India to articulate its stance on global issues.

Introduction

India's foreign policy today straddles **moral idealism and strategic pragmatism**—balancing **principled non-alignment** with realpolitik choices amid crises like **Ukraine, Gaza, and Indo-Pacific tensions** (MEA Annual Report, 2024).

India's evolving foreign policy landscape

- Since independence, India's external posture has been rooted in **"Panchsheel" and "Non-Alignment"**, reflecting Jawaharlal Nehru's moral diplomacy.
- However, global power flux—**Ukraine war, West Asia conflict, US-China rivalry**—has compelled New Delhi to recalibrate between **moral clarity** and **tactical ambiguity**.
- The dilemma lies in reconciling **ethical leadership** with **strategic autonomy**—a hallmark of India's **"multi-alignment doctrine"**.

The Nature of the Dilemma

Aspect	Moral Clarity	Tactical Ambiguity
Definition	Clear ethical positioning on global issues	Deliberate vagueness to preserve flexibility
Example	Opposing apartheid (1960s), supporting Palestine	Abstaining on UN votes over Ukraine (2022–23)
Advantage	Enhances moral authority and legitimacy	Preserves strategic space and avoids alienation
Challenge	Risks isolation or economic costs	May project indecision and erode credibility

Why the Dilemma Exists

- Complex Geopolitical Multipolarity:** In a fragmented order, alliances are transactional. India trades oil with Russia, partners with the U.S. in the Quad, and engages China in BRICS—reflecting **"issue-based alignment"**.

2. **Strategic Autonomy Imperative:** Rooted in the **Indira Doctrine (1980s)** and revived in the **Jaishankar Doctrine**, India aims to avoid bloc entrapment, maintaining **flexible diplomacy** amid power rivalries.
3. **Economic and Energy Dependencies:** Moral clarity on sanctions or wars may hurt economic interests—e.g., **Russian crude oil (over 40% of India's imports in 2024)** ensures energy security amid global volatility.
4. **Domestic Political Sensitivity:** Positions on Israel-Palestine or West Asia directly affect India's **8-million diaspora and energy corridors**, requiring nuanced articulation.

The Case for Moral Clarity

1. **Leadership of the Global South:** As **G20 President (2023)** and host of the **Voice of Global South Summit**, India positioned itself as a bridge between developed and developing worlds—moral clarity enhances its **normative leadership**.
2. **Upholding Democratic Values:** As the **world's largest democracy**, India's silence on human rights or aggressive wars contradicts its foundational values under **Article 51(c) of the Constitution**—promoting international peace and justice.
3. **Enhancing Credibility in Multilateral Forums:** A clear, consistent voice on issues like **climate finance, equitable trade, and global health governance** enhances India's reputation as a **responsible stakeholder**, not a passive participant.
4. **Shaping Global Norms:** Moral clarity strengthens India's influence in **UN reforms, WTO negotiations, and South-South Cooperation**, aligning with the **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam** ethos.

Balancing Moral Clarity and Tactical Ambiguity

1. Adopt "**principled pragmatism**"—clear moral objectives guided by context-sensitive strategy.
2. Institutionalize **strategic communication** for clarity in global crises.
3. Anchor policies in **rules-based multilateralism**, not great-power competition.
4. Promote **human-centric diplomacy** through initiatives like **Vaccine Maitri** and **International Solar Alliance**.

Conclusion

As **Henry Kissinger** notes in **Diplomacy**, power without purpose breeds instability. India's moral clarity—tempered by **strategic prudence**—must define its global role as a principled yet pragmatic civilizational power.

Examine the potential and constraints of China-India cooperation in leading global governance reform. Critically analyze its impact on multilateralism and the Global South.

Introduction

Together representing **36% of the world's population and nearly 18% of global GDP (IMF, 2024)**, China and India hold pivotal potential to reshape global governance toward multipolarity, equity, and sustainable multilateralism.

Global Governance at a Crossroads

1. The post-1945 international order—anchored in the **UN, IMF, World Bank, and WTO**—is increasingly questioned for its Western dominance, inequitable representation, and policy conditionalities.
2. The **Global South**, often marginalized, demands a reformed, inclusive governance architecture responsive to new economic realities.
3. In this backdrop, **China-India cooperation** offers both opportunity and complexity.

Potential for Joint Leadership in Global Governance Reform

1. **Shared Platforms and Institutions:** BRICS, SCO, and the G20 enable Beijing and New Delhi to co-shape multilateral norms. Institutions like the **New Development Bank (NDB)** and the **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** reflect their joint effort to democratize financial governance, offering development finance without political strings.
2. **Global Governance Initiatives (GGI) and Voice of Global South:** China's **Global Governance Initiative (2025)** emphasizes sovereign equality, rule of law, and people-centric multilateralism. India's **Voice of Global South Summit (2023)** articulated "human-centric globalization." Together, they provide an alternative narrative to Western-centric globalism.
3. **Promoting Multipolarity:** Both nations emphasize "**reformed multilateralism**"—India's term at the **G20 Delhi Declaration (2023)**—and "**a community with shared future for mankind**"—China's guiding philosophy under Xi Jinping. Their convergence can strengthen the **UN Charter**, climate justice mechanisms, and technology-sharing regimes.
4. **Representation and Equity for the Global South:** Joint advocacy for **UN Security Council reform**, **WTO dispute settlement restoration**, and **climate financing** reflects a push for institutional equity. In forums like **COP28**, coordinated stances could amplify the Global South's collective voice on "Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)."

Constraints and Structural Challenges

1. **Strategic Mistrust:** Border tensions (Galwan 2020), India's participation in the **Quad**, and China's close ties with Pakistan create enduring security suspicions. Competing Indo-Pacific visions—India's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vs. China's "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)"—reflect divergent strategic outlooks.
2. **Economic Asymmetry:** China's GDP (~\$17.8 trillion) dwarfs India's (~\$3.9 trillion), leading to **power asymmetry** in multilateral forums. India's trade deficit with China (>\$100 billion, 2024) limits economic leverage.
3. **Governance and Ideological Divergence:** China's **state-capitalist authoritarianism** contrasts with India's **liberal democratic pluralism**—creating differing conceptions of rule-based international order. India's emphasis on "strategic autonomy" often diverges from China's bloc-based alignments.

4. **Global Perceptions and Trust Deficit:** Western powers view closer Sino-Indian cooperation as revisionist; developing nations fear potential “**duopoly of influence**” replacing Western hegemony.

Impact on Multilateralism and the Global South

Positive:

1. Joint development banks and vaccine diplomacy (e.g., **BRICS Vaccine R&D Center, 2022**) enhance South-South cooperation.
2. Promotes **inclusive globalization**, resilient supply chains, and equitable technology access.

Negative:

1. Lack of coherent policy coordination dilutes collective bargaining power in trade, climate, and digital governance.
2. Geopolitical competition risks fragmenting rather than strengthening the Global South’s unity.

Conclusion

As **Kishore Mahbubani** notes in **The Great Convergence**, a stable multipolar world demands Sino-Indian synergy—where cooperative leadership, not rivalry, ensures just, inclusive, and effective global governance.

Critically evaluate the efficacy and role of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) in securing the constitutional rights of minorities in India. Examine the need for its reform.

Introduction

India, home to over **20% religious minorities (Census 2011)**, established the **National Commission for Minorities (1992)** to safeguard their constitutional rights, yet persistent marginalization questions its **efficacy, autonomy, and institutional relevance**.

1. Constitutional and Institutional Mandate: The **National Commission for Minorities (NCM)** was constituted under the **NCM Act, 1992**, following Articles **29 and 30** of the Constitution, which protect **cultural and educational rights** of minorities.

Its functions include:

- Evaluating safeguards for minorities under the Constitution and laws.
- Monitoring the implementation of government schemes.
- Investigating complaints regarding deprivation of minority rights.
- Advising the Union and State governments on minority welfare.

The notified minority communities currently include **Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, and Jains (since 2014)**.

2. The Efficacy Question: Achievements vs Limitations

Areas	Achievements	Limitations / Challenges
Educational & Cultural Rights	Promoted awareness of Articles 29–30 ; coordinated with NCMEI (2004) for minority education	Weak enforcement power; NCM's recommendations are advisory, not binding
Grievance Redressal	Investigated hate speech and communal violence cases	Lacks suo motu powers like NHRC; limited to civil court powers (Section 9, NCM Act)
Representation & Autonomy	Symbolic inclusion at national level	Recurrent vacancies , absence of Chairperson (2024), political appointments dilute credibility
Policy Influence	Involved in Ranganath Misra Commission (2005) , Sachar Committee (2006) indirectly guided	Low implementation rate of its recommendations; no monitoring mechanism
Budgetary Role	Annual outlay (~₹35–40 crore) supports awareness & welfare	Outputs disproportionately low; CAG reports flagged poor performance metrics

Structural and Functional Weaknesses

1. **Non-Constitutional Status:** Unlike the **National Commission for SCs (Article 338)** or **STs (338A)**, NCM lacks **constitutional backing**, limiting independence.
2. **Absence of Enforceable Powers:** It cannot penalize violations or ensure compliance—rendering it a “toothless tiger.”
3. **Politicization and Bureaucratic Dependence:** Appointments often lack transparency and reflect **political patronage**, undermining impartiality.
4. **Overlapping Jurisdiction:** With **NHRC, NCW, NCMEI**, and state minority commissions, mandates overlap without coordination.
5. **Underutilization:** The **Sachar Committee (2006)** and **Post-Sachar Evaluation Committee (2014)** found little evidence that NCM's work tangibly improved socio-economic indicators among minorities.

The Case for Reform

1. **Grant Constitutional Status:** Inclusion of NCM through an amendment (similar to Article 338B for OBCs) can ensure **autonomy and enforceability**.
2. **Institutional Restructuring:** Introduce **fixed tenure**, transparent appointments via **collegium model**, and strengthen **financial independence** through parliamentary oversight.

3. **Enhanced Powers:** Empower NCM with **suo motu jurisdiction**, **contempt powers**, and integration with **National Data Analytics Portal** for real-time minority welfare tracking.
4. **Coordination with State Commissions:** Create a **federal network** for synchronized grievance redressal and monitoring, ensuring horizontal accountability.
5. **Periodic Reporting to Parliament:** Mandate annual reports for **legislative scrutiny**, aligning with the **Paris Principles (1993)** for effective national human rights institutions.

Way Forward: Beyond Symbolism

1. Reform should transform NCM from a **reactive advisory body** to a **proactive rights enforcement institution**.
2. Incorporate **data-driven policy monitoring**, like **Minority Development Index (NITI Aayog proposal)**.
3. Promote inclusivity by expanding scope to **intra-minority backward groups** (as proposed by **Justice Ranganath Misra Commission, 2007**).

Conclusion

As **Granville Austin** observed in *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, institutions ensure justice only when empowered. A reformed, autonomous NCM is vital to secure **India's plural constitutional promise**.

Examine the new global realities contributing to a 'friendless world' for India. Critically analyze the adaptations necessary for India's foreign policy to secure its strategic interests.

Introduction

In an era of **multipolar volatility**, India faces a “friendless world” driven by **shifting global power equations**, **transactional diplomacy**, and **diminishing multilateralism**, demanding recalibration of its foreign policy to sustain strategic autonomy and global relevance.

The Emerging Global Realities: Causes of a 'Friendless World'

1. **Erosion of Multilateralism:** Post-2020 geopolitics has witnessed **declining faith in multilateral institutions** (UN, WTO, WHO). The **Russia-Ukraine war** and **U.S.-China strategic competition** have fragmented global consensus. India's voice in the **UNSC reform** and **WTO agricultural subsidies** debate has faced stiff resistance, reflecting weakening collective diplomacy.
2. **Transactionalism in Global Politics:** The “America First” legacy, visible under **Donald Trump** and continued as “**strategic pragmatism**” under Joe Biden, prioritizes **short-term national gains** over alliances. India's exclusion from the **Gaza peace process (2025)** and limited role in **Afghanistan's reconstruction** post-U.S. withdrawal underline this shift.
3. **China's Expanding Influence:** China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** and **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** have consolidated its leadership across Asia and Africa. Through **debt diplomacy** and **digital Silk Road expansion**, China has eroded India's regional sphere of influence. Even traditional partners like **Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka** engage Beijing for economic leverage.

4. **Regional Volatility and Strategic Isolation:** The **Gen Z revolution in Nepal**, **Bangladesh's democratic crisis**, and **Afghanistan-Pakistan instability** expose India's limited leverage in South Asia. The **Saudi-Pakistan Defence Pact (2025)** further dilutes India's strategic depth in West Asia.

India's Diplomatic Dilemmas

1. **From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment:** India's strategic culture, rooted in **Nehruvian Non-Alignment**, struggles to adapt to a **competitive multipolar system**. Balancing ties among **Quad**, **BRICS**, **SCO**, and **Global South** forums reflects an **identity dilemma**—between strategic autonomy and coalition-building.
2. **Moral Clarity vs Tactical Ambiguity:** India's cautious neutrality on issues like **Ukraine** and **Gaza** preserves autonomy but limits moral leadership. As an aspiring "**Vishwaguru**", India must balance ethical posturing with pragmatic interest-based diplomacy.
3. **Erosion of Soft Power:** Despite initiatives like **International Solar Alliance** and **Vaccine Maitri**, global perceptions of India as a **bridge-builder** have diminished. Rising domestic polarization occasionally undermines India's image as a **plural democracy**.

Adapting India's Foreign Policy: The Way Forward

1. **Strategic Realignment and Minilateralism:** Deepen engagement through **issue-based coalitions**—Quad for maritime security, I2U2 for West Asian connectivity, and BIMSTEC for Indo-Pacific outreach. Promote "**multi-vector diplomacy**" akin to France and ASEAN models.
2. **Reimagining Neighbourhood Policy:** Rebuild trust through **economic interdependence**, cross-border **digital infrastructure**, and **disaster diplomacy**. Leverage **Project Mausam** and **Sagarmala** for cultural and maritime influence.
3. **Economic Diplomacy as Foreign Policy Anchor:** Implement "**Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)**" with Japan and Australia. Use **semiconductor**, **green hydrogen**, and **AI cooperation** as tools of geo-economic leverage.
4. **Strategic Communication and Global South Leadership:** India's **G20 Presidency (2023)** and **Voice of Global South Summit (2023)** showcased its potential as a **normative power**. Institutionalize this by leading climate finance reform and **UNGA democratization efforts**.
5. **Institutional Reform and Foresight:** Establish a **National Strategic Council** for integrated long-term foreign policy planning. Invest in **diplomatic human capital** and strategic think tanks for anticipatory governance.

Conclusion

As **Henry Kissinger** noted, **nations survive by adapting to shifting power equations**. India's future relevance depends on **flexible realism**, blending strategic autonomy with proactive global leadership amid systemic unpredictability.

Examine how lower global oil prices provide a short-term fiscal advantage to India. Critically analyze the structural factors that make this relief cyclical and unsustainable.

Introduction

With India importing over **85% of its crude oil**, every **\$1 fall in oil price improves its current account by \$1.6 billion** (RBI, 2024). Yet, this fiscal relief remains transient and cyclical.

Short-Term Fiscal Advantages of Lower Global Oil Prices

1. **Improved Fiscal Balance:** Lower crude prices reduce India's import bill (worth \$137 billion in 2024–25). This leads to improved **Current Account Deficit (CAD)**, reduced fiscal pressure, and higher **macroeconomic stability**. According to the **IMF (2024)**, a \$10/barrel decline in crude prices can improve India's CAD by **0.3% of GDP**.
2. **Reduced Inflationary Pressure:** Cheaper crude lowers **transportation and manufacturing costs**, curbing **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** inflation. For a consumption-driven economy, this raises **real disposable income**, boosting **aggregate demand**. As per **NCAER (2023)**, every 10% decline in oil price reduces inflation by nearly **0.5 percentage points**.
3. **Fiscal Space for Public Investment:** The government often retains part of the benefit by **not fully passing on price cuts** to consumers. This improves **revenue buoyancy** and enables higher **capital expenditure** in infrastructure, renewable energy, and welfare.
4. **Exchange Rate and Monetary Stability:** Lower oil imports reduce dollar demand, strengthening the **rupee** and aiding **RBI's external stability goals**. It also gives the central bank room for **monetary easing** to spur growth.
5. **Energy Security and Geopolitical Leverage:** With cheaper oil, India can diversify its suppliers beyond Russia or OPEC+ and enhance its **strategic petroleum reserves (SPR)**, increasing resilience to future price shocks.

Structural Factors Making Relief Cyclical and Unsustainable

1. **Cyclical Nature of Oil Market:** The global oil market is inherently **volatile**, driven by **OPEC+ production cuts**, **U.S. shale output**, and **geopolitical disruptions**. Historical cycles (e.g., 2014–16, 2020–21) show temporary dips followed by rebounds.
2. **Low Domestic Energy Self-Reliance:** India's **import dependency (85%)** exposes it to **external supply shocks**. Despite investments in renewables, domestic crude output has stagnated around **30 million tonnes annually** for a decade (Petroleum Ministry, 2024).
3. **Fiscal Myopia in Utilizing Windfall Gains:** Instead of building a **sovereign oil stabilization fund**, India often uses windfall savings for **consumption-based subsidies**, which are politically popular but fiscally unsustainable.
4. **Exchange Rate Pass-Through and Volatility:** A weakening rupee or strong dollar can **neutralize gains** from cheaper crude. The **rupee depreciated 3.5% in 2023–24**, offsetting part of the oil-price advantage.
5. **Energy Transition and Climate Constraints:** Global shifts toward **decarbonization** and **EV adoption** are transforming oil demand patterns. This “demand plateau” phase makes price movements unpredictable, complicating India's **energy planning and fiscal projections**.
6. **External Sector Vulnerabilities:** Lower oil prices depress **remittances** and **exports** to West Asia (India's largest labour market), offsetting gains in the trade balance. For instance, a 10% slowdown in Gulf economies cuts remittances by **\$2–3 billion**.

Way Forward

1. **Diversify the Energy Basket:** Accelerate investments in **solar, green hydrogen, and ethanol blending** to reduce import dependence.
2. **Institutionalize an Oil Stabilization Fund:** To absorb fiscal shocks from price fluctuations.
3. **Rationalize Fuel Taxes:** Introduce a **flexible tax mechanism** that smooths price volatility without hurting consumers.

4. **Enhance Strategic Petroleum Reserves:** Target 90 days of imports (currently ~30 days) for energy security.
5. **Promote Demand Efficiency:** Encourage EVs, public transport, and **BEE-led** industrial energy optimization.

Conclusion

Oil wealth is fleeting without reform. India's true resilience lies in fiscal prudence, energy diversification, and strategic foresight beyond transient price windfalls.

Critically analyze the proposition that the future of global cooperation depends on rebuilding the legitimacy of multilateral institutions. Justify the need for citizen-centric reform.

Introduction

As the United Nations marks its 80th year amid geopolitical flux, global trust in multilateralism is eroding. According to Pew Research (2023), **64% citizens perceive global institutions as elitist and ineffective.**

Erosion of Multilateral Legitimacy: The Emerging Crisis

1. **Institutional Stagnation and Structural Inequality:** The UN Security Council still mirrors **1945 power realities**, not today's multipolar world. The **P5 veto** undermines the principle of sovereign equality, limiting representativeness for emerging powers like India, Brazil, and Africa. Example: The UNSC's paralysis over Ukraine and Gaza has eroded its moral authority.
2. **Decline of Collective Leadership:** U.S. withdrawal from **UNESCO** and the **Human Rights Council**, alongside **China-U.S. rivalry**, reflects a shift from collective globalism to transactional diplomacy. As per Susan Rice, former U.S. Ambassador to the UN, "We are not playing on the fields we traditionally led."
3. **Rise of Minilateralism and Regional Blocs:** Countries are increasingly preferring **issue-based coalitions** like **Quad**, **BRICS**, and **IBSA**, bypassing large multilateral forums. While efficient, this **fragmentation dilutes universality**—the UN's moral backbone.
4. **Perception of Technocracy and Elitism:** Global institutions are seen as serving elites rather than people. As David Goodhart's "Somewheres vs Anywheres" thesis notes, globalization has alienated those rooted in traditional communities, fueling populist backlash against institutions. Examples: **Brexit**, **Trumpism**, and **Orbánism** embody skepticism toward global governance.

Why the Future of Global Cooperation Depends on Legitimacy

1. **Normative Authority over Enforcement Power:** Multilateral bodies like the UN, WHO, and WTO derive influence not from force but from **perceived fairness and credibility**. Legitimacy enhances compliance and collective action in areas like climate change and trade. Example: The **Paris Climate Accord** succeeded due to moral legitimacy and inclusive participation, not coercion.
2. **Global Interdependence and Transnational Challenges:** In the age of "**problems without passports**" (Kofi Annan), no nation can unilaterally address climate change, pandemics, or cyber threats. The **COVID-19 pandemic** exposed institutional weaknesses but also highlighted the necessity of global coordination through **COVAX** and WHO.

3. **Restoring Faith through Equity and Transparency:** According to the **UNDP 2022 Human Development Report**, trust deficits in governance have risen sharply. Without reform, citizens view multilateralism as distant from their everyday concerns—eroding the foundation of cooperative globalism.

The Case for Citizen-Centric Multilateral Reform

1. **Democratizing Global Governance:** Institutions must amplify the voices of the Global South and civil society. **India's G20 presidency (2023)** emphasized “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” — promoting inclusive human-centric globalization.
2. **Linking Global Policy to Local Impact:** A “**citizen-first**” approach can translate abstract diplomacy into tangible benefits — jobs, security, health, and dignity. The **SDGs** exemplify this bottom-up globalism, aligning global agendas with local aspirations.
3. **Digital Accountability and Participatory Multilateralism:** Platforms like the **UN75 People's Forum** and **Global Digital Compact** reflect a shift toward participatory policy design using **e-governance, open data, and AI ethics frameworks**.
4. **Institutional Reform for Legitimacy:**
 - **UNSC Expansion:** Inclusion of India, Africa, and Latin America.
 - **Financial Fairness:** Reforming IMF and World Bank voting shares.
 - **Global Health and Climate Governance:** Strengthening WHO's autonomy and ensuring equitable carbon financing.

Way Forward

1. Foster **polycentric governance**—empowering regional and local institutions while retaining a universal rules-based order.
2. Build **trust-based multilateralism** through transparency, accountability, and participatory mechanisms.
3. Promote **South-South cooperation** to balance structural inequities in decision-making.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen's “The Idea of Justice”** reminds us, legitimacy sustains cooperation. Rebuilding citizen trust—not bureaucracy—will decide whether multilateralism remains a relic or a renewed force for global equity.

Evaluate the requirement of labelling AI-generated content as a start to regulate synthetic media. Examine its efficacy in ensuring digital integrity and combating misinformation.

Introduction

According to the **World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2024**, AI-driven misinformation ranks among the top five global threats. Labelling synthetic media represents India's nascent yet crucial step toward ensuring digital transparency and trust.

The Rise of Synthetic Media and the Policy Context

1. **Explosion of Deepfakes and AI “Slop”:** With generative AI tools like **Midjourney, DALL·E 3, and Sora**, creating realistic deepfakes has become effortless. A 2024 **Deepttrace Report** estimated over

85% increase in AI-generated fake visuals online. Political misuse: Deepfake videos circulated during the **2024 Lok Sabha elections** and similar incidents in the **U.S. presidential primaries** show its potential to distort public discourse.

2. **Governmental Response — The Labelling Mandate:** The Union government's proposed **amendment to the IT Rules, 2021** mandates that AI-generated content be labelled. This aligns India with international trends, such as the **EU's AI Act (2024)** and the **U.S. AI Bill of Rights**, which emphasize content authenticity.
3. **Global Industry Support:** Leading firms like **Meta** and the **Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA)** have voluntarily adopted digital watermarking and metadata-based provenance tracking, signaling private sector readiness for compliance.

Efficacy of Labelling in Ensuring Digital Integrity

1. **Promoting Transparency and Authenticity:** Labelling synthetic content enhances **digital provenance**—the ability to trace origin and alteration. It strengthens **information integrity systems**, helping citizens distinguish between authentic and manipulated media.
2. **Enhancing Electoral and National Security:** During elections, deepfakes can alter voter perception. Proper labelling acts as a **soft deterrent**, preserving **information hygiene** and supporting **democratic resilience**. Case in point: Taiwan's **2024 AI Transparency Initiative** curbed electoral misinformation by mandating provenance labels on political content.
3. **Building Trust in Digital Ecosystems:** As India expands its **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**, trust becomes central. Labelling fosters **algorithmic accountability** and complements frameworks like the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**.

Limitations and Structural Challenges

1. **Technological Limitations:** AI models evolve faster than detection tools. Sophisticated **generative adversarial networks (GANs)** can bypass watermarking or labelling, creating a **cat-and-mouse dynamic** between regulators and developers.
2. **Implementation and Jurisdictional Gaps:** Subordinate legislation through IT Rules, rather than a **Parliamentary Act**, limits oversight and legitimacy. Moreover, India's vast linguistic diversity and low **digital literacy** complicate effective enforcement.
3. **Risk of Over-regulation:** Excessive or ambiguous rules could stifle **innovation in creative AI sectors**, particularly for startups and artists experimenting with generative design and virtual production.
4. **Global Interoperability Issues:** Without standardized global labelling norms, cross-border digital content flow may dilute the effect. **UNESCO's "Ethics of AI" Recommendation (2023)** calls for **harmonized governance frameworks**.

Way Forward

1. **Comprehensive AI Regulation:** Move from reactive labelling to a holistic **AI Governance Act**, incorporating ethical AI, transparency audits, and grievance redressal.
2. **AI Literacy and Citizen Awareness:** Public awareness campaigns akin to **"Fake News Buster"** can empower users to identify synthetic content.
3. **Technological Co-regulation:** Collaboration between government, tech firms, and academia for watermarking, digital forensics, and **AI provenance blockchain systems**.

4. **Periodic Review Mechanism:** Continuous adaptation of norms as AI models evolve, ensuring regulatory agility.

Conclusion

As **Yuval Noah Harari** cautions in **Homo Deus**, “Clarity is power.” Labelling synthetic media is the first step toward digital clarity—vital for safeguarding truth, trust, and democratic integrity online.

Examine the enduring relevance of the United Nations (UN) as a symbol of possibility in global affairs. Critically analyze the necessity of its reform at the 80-year mark.

Introduction

According to the **United Nations 2025 Annual Report**, over **70% of global humanitarian aid and peacekeeping efforts** are coordinated through UN agencies—proving that despite limitations, the UN remains humanity’s enduring instrument for cooperation.

The UN: A Symbol of Possibility in Global Governance

1. **Historical Foundation and Idealism:** Founded in **1945** after World War II, the UN embodied the ideals of collective security, sovereign equality, and human dignity. It was, as Dag Hammarskjöld said, “not to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.”
2. **Humanitarian and Developmental Impact:** The UN’s specialized agencies have played a transformative role—
 - **UNHCR** shelters over **36 million refugees** worldwide (UNHCR, 2024).
 - **WFP** and **FAO** provide critical food security interventions in crisis regions like Sudan and Gaza.
 - **UNICEF** safeguards child health, while the **WHO** led coordinated responses to COVID-19, Ebola, and now pandemic preparedness through the **Pandemic Accord 2024**.
 - The **SDGs (2015–2030)** represent a universal framework for inclusive, sustainable development.
3. **Peace and Security Role:** UN Peacekeeping Operations have been instrumental in stabilizing fragile regions such as **Namibia, East Timor, and Sierra Leone**, though they failed in **Rwanda (1994)** and **Srebrenica (1995)**—reflecting both promise and peril of collective action.
4. **Normative and Symbolic Relevance:** Beyond operations, the UN’s true power lies in **norm entrepreneurship**—institutionalizing principles of **human rights (UDHR, 1948)**, **gender equality (CEDAW)**, and **climate justice (Paris Agreement, 2015)**. It remains a forum of moral legitimacy and symbol of multilateral hope amid fractured geopolitics.

The Case for Reform: Addressing Institutional and Structural Stagnation

1. **Security Council Paralysis:** The **UNSC** still reflects the **power distribution of 1945**, dominated by the P5 (U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China). Emerging powers like **India, Brazil, Germany, and South Africa (G4)** remain excluded, undermining legitimacy and effectiveness. India, the **largest democracy** and a **major troop contributor to peacekeeping**, lacks permanent representation—an anomaly in the 21st century’s multipolar order.

2. **Erosion of Multilateralism:** Rising **nationalism**, **geopolitical rivalries**, and **selective multilateralism** have weakened global cooperation. The **Ukraine war**, **Gaza conflict**, and **climate deadlock** highlight how veto politics block moral consensus.
3. **Financial and Bureaucratic Challenges:** Chronic **funding deficits**—exacerbated by arrears from major donors like the U.S.—have forced hiring freezes and program cuts. Bureaucratic inertia and fragmented mandates hinder rapid crisis response.
4. **Technological and Thematic Lag:** The UN's governance mechanisms are ill-equipped for **cyber warfare**, **AI regulation**, and **digital misinformation**—21st-century challenges transcending state boundaries.

The Path Forward: Reform for Relevance

1. **Comprehensive UNSC Expansion:** Broaden permanent and non-permanent membership to include the **Global South**, reflecting contemporary geopolitical realities and enhancing **representative legitimacy**.
2. **Financial Autonomy:** Introduce assessed contributions for new domains (digital, climate) and streamline funding transparency.
3. **Institutional Agility:** Adopt **Mission-Based Governance** with real-time crisis response units leveraging AI and satellite data.
4. **Moral Renewal:** Restore UN credibility through consistent application of international law, equitable humanitarian intervention, and depoliticized peacekeeping.
5. **Global Digital Governance:** Champion norms for AI ethics, data sovereignty, and cyber stability, integrating the UN into future-oriented multilateralism.

Conclusion

As **Kofi Annan** wrote in **Interventions: A Life in War and Peace**, “**The UN is humanity’s imperfect instrument of hope.**” Reform, not rejection, will preserve its relevance in an uncertain world.