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Mains Marathon

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HISTORY
ECONOMICS
POLITY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

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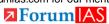Visit academy.forumias.com for our mentor based courses.
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Despite improved forecasting, floods take a worrying toll. Examine how the failure to use scientific knowledge exacerbates the socio-geographical vulnerabilities and policy gaps in effective disaster management.

Introduction

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

Science vs. Policy: The Persistent Disconnect

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

Socio-Geographical Vulnerabilities Aggravated by Non-Compliance

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

Climate Change Intensifies the Challenge

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

Failure to Use Science: Missed Opportunities

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

Pathways Forward: Science-Led Disaster Governance

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Historical Legacy and Core Dispute

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

Shaping Bilateral Security Framework

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

Impact on Foreign Policy

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

Critical Examination

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

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

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

Conclusion (30 words)

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

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

Introduction

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

Why Fragmented Carbon Pricing is Problematic

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

Designing a Coherent Carbon Tax Framework

Environmental Effectiveness

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

Economic Fairness

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

Global Coordination

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

Challenges in Building a Full Value Chain

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

Policy Imperatives

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Understanding Sickle Cell Disease and Disability Justice

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

Biomedical Scoring: The Narrow Lens

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

How This Undermines Disability Justice

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

Global & National Perspectives

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

Policy Imperatives

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Constitutional Provisions & Equality Framework

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

Judicial Position on the 50% Cap

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

Legal Justifications for Extending Reservations

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

Social Justifications for Extending Reservations

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

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

Challenges in Extending Beyond 50%

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

Way Forward

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

Conclusion

As **Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed in EWS case,** equality is **"contextual, not abstract."** Breaching 50% must ensure distributive justice, echoing **Amartya Sen's Idea of Justice on equity over uniformity.**

Theaterisation aims to integrate the three services under unified commands. Examine the potential benefits and challenges of this reform in enhancing India's military effectiveness and resource optimisation.

Introduction

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

Potential Benefits of Theaterisation

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

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

Challenges of Theaterisation

1. **Inter-Service Rivalry & Doctrinal Concerns**: IAF fears fragmentation of its limited 30 fighter squadrons across multiple theatres. **Former Air Chief R.K.S. Bhadauria:** "IAF is not a supporting arm, but a strategic force."
2. **Command and Control Dissonance**: Debate over whether **service chiefs retain operational roles or theatre commanders** get full autonomy. Risk of longer decision-making chains, weakening responsiveness.
3. **Institutional Resistance**: Dismantling legacy structures of **70+ years faces bureaucratic** inertia. It is being highlighted ongoing differences—Army favors speed, IAF prefers gradual integration, Navy is conditionally supportive.
4. **Resource & Technology Gaps**: Jointness demands integrated **C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance)** systems—currently inadequate. Without adequate indigenous platforms, reforms may remain structural rather than transformational.
5. **Risk of "One-Size-Fits-All" Approach**: Blind imitation of **U.S./China models may not fit** India's unique strategic geography and threat matrix. ACM A.P. Singh cautioned against "copy-paste" theatre structures.

Way Forward

1. Adopt a **phased approach**: start with Air Defence and Maritime Commands before adversary-specific land theatres.
2. Build **joint logistics nodes & training academies** before full integration.
3. Invest in **indigenous technologies (**AI, drones, cyber defence) to ensure functional rather than cosmetic jointness.
4. Conduct **Parliamentary oversight & civilian consultation** for legitimacy and transparency.

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Potential of GST Rate Cuts to Stimulate Growth

1. **Boost to Consumption Demand**: **Lower indirect tax burden → higher disposable income → potential multiplier effect** on aggregate demand. *Budget 2025 income-tax cuts + GST cuts* create a combined stimulus package. *Example*: FMCG, textiles, and white goods sectors expected to benefit, spurring rural and urban demand.
2. **Correcting Structural Anomalies:** Removal of **inverted duty structures** reduces cost distortions for manufacturers, especially in textiles, footwear, and electronics. Simplification enhances compliance and lowers litigation.

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

Challenges and Fiscal Implications

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

Way Forward

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Why the Tariff War is an Opportunity for the Global South

1. **Rebalancing Globalisation**: Tariffs expose fragility of neoliberal globalisation: rising inequality, wealth concentration, and dependency on G-7 economies. Global South can push for **multipolarity** in trade governance.

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2. **Erosion of U.S. Hegemony**: Despite controlling **26% of global GDP**, U.S. actions alienate partners. China's rise (**17% of global GDP**) and BRICS expansion create space for South-led alternatives.

3. **Precedent of Protectionism**: U.S. tariffs of **350% on tobacco, 200% on dairy, 120% on fruits** highlight Global North's double standards. India and peers can question WTO asymmetries and demand fairer market access.

Strategic Imperatives for India

1. **Champion Multipolarity**: Move from symbolic non-alignment to **multi-alignment**, engaging U.S., EU, BRICS, ASEAN, AU simultaneously. Lead Global South platforms (G-20, BRICS+) to advocate debt relief, trade equity, and fair climate finance.

2. **Recalibrate U.S. Ties**: Avoid over-reliance on the **India-U.S. strategic partnership**, given Washington's tilt towards Pakistan and conditionality on defence/tech transfer. Assert sovereignty by resisting unilateral diktats (e.g., oil bans on Iran, Venezuela).

3. **Strengthen Domestic Economic Base**: Manufacturing at a four-decade low; unemployment at **7–8% (CMIE 2025)**. Focus on **Atmanirbhar Bharat 2.0** with investment in R&D, MSMEs, and strategic PSU deployment like China's SOEs.

4. **Leverage Geo-economic Instruments**: Diversify trade with Global South (Africa, Latin America, ASEAN). Negotiate in rare earths, food security, pharma, and digital trade to increase bargaining power with U.S. and China.

5. **Forge South-South Solidarity**: Push for a **New Economic Deal** addressing sovereign debt, taxation justice, and development financing. Example: **International Solar Alliance** as a template for South-led collective institutions.

6. **Diplomatic Realignment**: Invest in bipartisan consensus at home and multiparty diplomacy abroad. Shed over-personalised diplomacy; strengthen institutional foreign policy for credibility.

Way Forward

1. Use BRICS+ and SCO to build financial alternatives to the dollar (de-dollarisation momentum).

2. Advocate at WTO for structural reforms ensuring equity in agricultural subsidies, technology access, and dispute settlement.

3. Build coalitions in the Global South against **neo-mercantilist tariffs** and champion climate justice as part of economic justice.

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Foreign Policy Imperatives in a Multipolar Order

Managing U.S. Partnership without Subservience

1. **Imperative:** Deepen ties while avoiding dependency.

2. **Context:** India-U.S. trade crossed **$200 billion (2023)**; defence pacts like **LEMOA, COMCASA, BECA** enhance interoperability.

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3. **Challenges:** Tariff disputes (Trump era), CAATSA sanctions threat, U.S. pressure on Russia ties and oil imports from Iran.
4. **Response:** Use platforms like **Quad, I2U2, IMEC** to advance Indo-Pacific strategy, but assert sovereignty — as in India's neutral stance on the Ukraine war.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction
Digital platforms today host **over 820 million Indian users (TRAI, 2024)**, where speech is **increasingly**

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monetised. Regulating such **"commercial speech"** through subjective notions like **"dignity" risks colliding** with **constitutional guarantees** of free expression.

1. Constitutional Position of Free Speech

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

2. Commercial Speech and Judicial Recognition

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

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

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

4. Balancing Dignity with Free Expression

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

5. Safeguards for Regulation

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

Way Forward

1. Shift focus from **broad dignity-based bans** to **targeted harm-based regulation**.
2. Encourage **self-regulation codes** with independent audits, as in the **Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI).**
3. Invest in **digital literacy and counterspeech** as democratic correctives instead of **heavy-handed censorship.**

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Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

GST Reforms & Youth Aspirations – A Critical Analysis

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

Critical Perspectives / Challenges

1. **Regressive concerns:** GST is an **indirect tax**—risk of disproportionately impacting lower-income youth despite exemptions.
2. **Revenue federalism issues:** States worry about reduced revenues from rate cuts, potentially affecting social expenditure (education, skill development critical for youth).
3. **Complexity persists:** Despite reforms, multiple slabs and frequent revisions create compliance burdens.

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4. **Digital Divide:** Small youth-led businesses in rural/semi-urban India face challenges in digital GST filings.

Way Forward

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

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

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

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

Climate Vulnerability of Indian Cities

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

Institutional Capacity & Governance

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

Citizen Participation & Community Engagement

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

Sustainable Infrastructure & Nature-Based Solutions

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

International & Comparative Lessons

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

Way Forward

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

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

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

Introduction

"With women contributing nearly 4**9% of India's population (Census 2011) yet only 18% to GDP (World Bank, 2022),** policies shaping the 'domestic sphere' profoundly influence **gender equity, labour recognition, and empowerment.**"

Government Policies & The Domestic Sphere: Two Contrasting Pathways

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Reinforcing Gender Discrimination

1. **Dowry Deaths & Domestic Violence:** NFHS-5 shows **30% women face intimate partner violence**, but state responses remain muted; laws against dowry deaths (over 7,000 annually) lack strong enforcement.
2. **Marital Rape Exception:** The government's stance opposing criminalisation of marital rape on cultural grounds reflects **patriarchal institutional bias**.
3. **Unpaid Domestic Work:** According to **Time Use Survey (TUS) 2024**, women spend **7 hours daily** on unpaid domestic work vs **men's 26 minutes, yet policies glorify this as "Indian social fabric."**
4. **Undervaluation of Care Work:** ASHA, Anganwadi and Mid-Day Meal workers are treated as "volunteers," receiving **honorarium instead of minimum wage**, reinforcing systemic undervaluation of feminised labour.
5. **Policy Narratives:** Political appeals such as calls for women to produce **"at least three children"** objectify women as reproducers, ignoring their agency in family planning.

Addressing Gender Discrimination

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

Critical Analysis

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

Way Forward

1. **Recognition of Domestic Work:** Incorporate unpaid care into **national accounts** and ensure **wage parity**.
2. **Universal Care Infrastructure:** State-provided crèches, eldercare, and healthcare to redistribute unpaid work.
3. **Cultural Interventions:** Promote **shared domestic responsibility** through educational curricula and campaigns.

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4. **Strengthen Laws:** Criminalise marital rape; tighten enforcement against domestic violence and dowry deaths.
5. **Justice for Scheme Workers:** Recognise ASHA and Anganwadi workers as **government employees** with wages and social security.

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

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

Model for Fiscal Policy

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

Good Governance Dimensions

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

Challenges and Critical Perspectives

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1. **Short-term fiscal stress**: Anticipated fall in collections may widen fiscal deficit (currently ~5.6% of GDP).
2. **Implementation risks**: As seen in **Malaysia (2015–18 GST rollback)**, poor execution can undermine trust.
3. **Inverted duty structure** persists in some sectors, causing liquidity crunch for firms.
4. **State autonomy concerns**: Higher central control over taxation may revive debates on fiscal federalism.

Way Forward

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

Significance of the Supreme Court's Intervention

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

Implications for Electoral Integrity

1. **Accuracy of Electoral Rolls**: Aadhaar helps address anomalies like statistically improbable death rates or forced deletions.
2. **Inclusivity**: Prevents disenfranchisement of migrant workers, women (often changing addresses post-marriage), and poor households.
3. **Efficiency**: Aadhaar-enabled verification streamlines identification and reduces duplication, bolstering the credibility of electoral processes.

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4. **Precedent for Nationwide Roll Updates**: Strengthens uniformity and trust in upcoming revisions across states.

Balancing the Right to Privacy

Concerns:

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

Safeguards Required:

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

Comparative and Institutional Perspectives

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

Way Forward

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

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

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

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

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Strategic Significance of the India-EFTA Pact

1. **Unprecedented Investment Commitment**: $100 billion over 15 years and one million direct jobs—the largest such FTA-linked pledge.
2. **Enhanced Market Access**: Tariff elimination on 92.2% of tariff lines, covering 99.6% of India's exports by value.
3. **Services Boost**: Commitments in over 120 sub-sectors per partner nation support India's IT, skilled labour, and business services exports.

Linkages with Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India

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

Energy Security and Green Transition

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

Geoeconomic and Diplomatic Dimensions

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

Challenges and Caution

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

Way Forward

1. **Leverage FTA Template**: TEPA should serve as a model for future pacts with the UK, EU, and GCC.
2. **Boost R&D and Skill Development**: Linking foreign investment to domestic innovation ecosystems.

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3. **Inclusive Growth**: Ensure benefits reach MSMEs, which constitute 30% of GDP and 48% of exports.

Conclusion

As it has been well established **power lies in interdependence.** The EFTA pact exemplifies India's strategic economic diplomacy, aligning global partnerships with Atmanirbhar Bharat's vision of resilience, innovation, and inclusive development.

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

Introduction

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

Historical and Symbolic Foundations

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

Persistent Challenges and Mistrust

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

Prospects for Reviving 'Chindia'

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

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4. **Strategic Autonomy**: Both nations advocate multipolarity and resist Western hegemony, creating scope for issue-based alignment.

Critical Analysis: Can 'Chindia' Endure?

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Nature of the Disputes

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

Diplomatic and Geopolitical Challenges

1. **Legal Constraints**: **Pacta sunt servanda principle** in international law prohibits unilateral repudiation of boundary treaties. Precedents: **Minquiers and Ecrehos case (UK vs France, 1953)** and **Rann of Kutch arbitration (1968)** show administrative control outweighs historical rhetoric. Hence, Katchatheevu retrieval demands are politically emotive but legally untenable.

2. **Ecological Pressures**: Bottom trawling violates **FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995)**. Coral reef loss and shrimp habitat destruction impact both artisanal fishers and **Sri Lanka's Northern Tamil** communities.

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3.   **Livelihood Conflicts**: Tamil Nadu's artisanal **fishers vs trawler operators**—an intra-community conflict aggravated by resource depletion. Sri Lankan Tamil fishers, already victims of civil war restrictions, view incursions as renewed economic aggression.

4.   **Geopolitical Dimensions**: Sri Lanka's strategic positioning in the Indian Ocean makes it pivotal for India's **Neighbourhood First** and **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** doctrines. China's expanding presence via Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City intensifies New Delhi's sensitivity to maritime disputes.

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

Pathways to Cooperation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

Strategic Necessity

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1. **Geostrategic Location**: Proximity to the **Six Degree Channel** enhances maritime domain awareness. Strengthens India's counter to China's **String of Pearls** and **PLA Navy's presence in Hambantota & Gwadar**. Complements **Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC)**, India's only tri-service command.
2. **Economic & Connectivity Hub**: The **International Container Transshipment Terminal (14.2 million TEUs)** can rival Singapore and Colombo, reducing India's dependence on foreign hubs. A **Greenfield Airport** will boost logistics, tourism, and air-sea connectivity.
3. **Defence & National Security**: Enhances **logistics resilience** under SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). Reinforces **QUAD's Indo-Pacific vision**, providing India leverage in chokepoint control.

Ecological and Social Concerns

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

Attempts at Balancing

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

Critical Assessment

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Foreign Policy Challenges

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

Strategic Imperatives for India

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

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Way Forward

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

Why Global Talent Attraction is Urgent

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

Policy Reforms Announced Recently

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

Gaps in Current Approach

1. **Low Global Representation**: Only **2% of world's top 2% cited researchers** are Indian.
2. **Fragmentation**: Fellowship schemes are scattered, lack mission-driven focus.

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3. **Uncompetitive Compensation**: Salaries and research funding remain below global benchmarks.
4. **Brain Drain**: Indian-origin PhDs/postdocs stranded abroad often find better institutional pathways in Europe or China.

Credible Pathways for Talent Attraction

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

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

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

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

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

Way Forward

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

Conclusion

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

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

Introduction

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

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AI as a Driver of Socio-Economic Transformation

1. **Economic Growth & Productivity:** According to NASSCOM (2023), AI can add $500 billion to India's economy by 2025. In healthcare, predictive AI technologies could cut disease burden by 15%, enabling proactive care.
2. **Agriculture & Rural Resilience:** AI-powered pest detection reduces pesticide use by 50%, improving farm productivity. Case: Microsoft's AI-Sowing App increased cotton yields in Andhra Pradesh by 30%.
3. **Education & Human Capital:** Adaptive learning platforms like Byju's AI labs provide personalized education, bridging gaps for rural and underprivileged students. However, overreliance risks diminishing critical thinking and creativity.
4. **Inclusion & Service Delivery:** Aadhaar-enabled AI analytics optimize welfare delivery, ensuring targeted benefits to 1.3 billion citizens. AI chatbots in banking and food services (e.g., Domino's predictive delivery model) enhance consumer experience.

Challenges & Risks for a Developing Nation

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

Policy Measures for Balance

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

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

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

Answer:

Introduction

Civil unrest in India, from **Punjab militancy (1980s) to Manipur's ethnic violence (2023–25),** shows that high-level political intervention can catalyze reconciliation, peace-building, and institutional reforms when backed by inclusive dialogue and structural solutions.

Role of High-Level Political Intervention

1. **Symbolism and Healing Touch:** Prime Minister's visit to **Manipur (Sept 2025) signaled empathy and recognition, addressing both Kuki-Zo grievances** (development deficit, healthcare) and **Meitei aspirations** (valorization of heritage, contributions to national security). **Symbolism matters** in **divided societies, Nelson Mandela's** inclusive leadership helped dismantle apartheid-era mistrust in South Africa.

2. **Confidence Building and Legitimacy:** Governor **Ajay Bhalla's articulation of Churachandpur** as a space of **"rich cultural diversity" signaled inclusivity.** Similar confidence-building was evident in **Atal Bihari Vajpayee's "Insaaniyat, Jamhooriyat, Kashmiriyat" doctrine** during his 2003 Kashmir outreach.

3. **Policy Interventions and Developmental Push:** Launch of infrastructure projects, women's hostels, and healthcare centers align with the **"peace dividend" theory—economic development reduces incentives for conflict. Case: The Mizoram Accord (1986)** combined political autonomy with development, ending decades of insurgency.

4. **Security Stabilization:** Enhanced deployment, retrieval of looted weapons, and renewed **Suspension of Operations (SoO)** with armed groups reflect **the "securitization followed by reconciliation" approach. Example: President's Rule in Punjab (1990s)** paved way for normalcy before democratic restoration.

Limitations and Challenges

1. **Risk of Symbolic Overreach:** High-level visits may be perceived as optics without sustained follow-up, creating disillusionment. **Example: Visits to Kashmir often failed to translate into durable conflict resolution.**

2. **Deep-Rooted Ethnic Faultlines:** Meitei–Kuki-Zo conflict is rooted in **land rights, Scheduled Tribe status debates, and migration concern**s. Without **structural reforms (land regulation, Free Movement Regime management),** peace remains fragile.

3. **Over-Centralization vs Federal Sensitivity:** Excessive centralization risks undermining state institutions. **Durable peace requires empowering** local stakeholders, civil society, and traditional leaders. **Case: Bodo Accord (2020)** emphasized local councils and participatory governance.

Addressing Root Causes of Conflict

1. **Inclusive Dialogue Platforms:** Institutionalize peace committees involving both Meiteis and Kukis for long-term reconciliation.

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

Conclusion

As **John Paul Lederach's "Conflict Transformation" framework notes,** peace requires symbolic gestures, structural reforms, and inclusive participation. High-level interventions must move beyond optics, embedding reconciliation into institutions for lasting conflict resolution.

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

Introduction

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

Context

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

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

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

Positives

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

Critical Challenges

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1. **Industry & Job Losses**: India hosts **over 2,000 gaming startups**; the ban threatens **2–4 lakh jobs** (as highlighted by MPs Priyank Kharge and Karti Chidambaram). Risk of $6 billion FDI loss and collapse of **₹7,000 crore gaming ecosystem**.
2. **Revenue Loss & Informalisation**: Current 28% GST + 30% tax on winnings yields **₹20,000 crore annually**. Blanket bans risk revenue flight to offshore servers. Parallel with **Prohibition in Gujarat**, where bans fueled black markets instead of eliminating demand.
3. **Regulatory Overreach vs. Innovation**: Lack of stakeholder consultation raises concerns of a **knee-jerk policy response**. Over-regulation could stifle **AI-driven educational and AR/VR startups**, limiting India's creative economy potential.
4. **Migration to Offshore & Underground Markets**: Users may shift to Chinese or unregulated foreign servers, heightening risks of **data theft and digital colonialism**. Similar to how prohibition in **Andhra Pradesh liquor policy (1990s)** drove illicit trade.
5. **Balancing Morality with Economy**: Blanket bans assume gaming is inherently harmful, ignoring scope for **harm-reduction strategies** (age verification, spending caps, self-exclusion tools). The **Supreme Court (2017, K.R. Lakshmanan case)** recognised "games of skill" distinct from gambling—raising constitutional concerns.

Way Forward

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

Conclusion

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

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.

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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**.

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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

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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

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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.

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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.

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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

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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 smoothens 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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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. **Geoeconomic 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.

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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**.

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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.

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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**.

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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%.
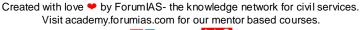2. **Digital Health Governance**: Integrate portals (**HMIS, IDSP, AB-PMJAY**) into a **single interoperable platform**. Move from duplication to **automation & AI-based data entry**.
3. **Mental Health & Occupational Safety**: Institutionalise **counselling and stress management units** at district 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**.

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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.
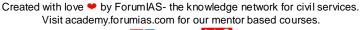
Introduction

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 **censor 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.

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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.

The success of GST 2.0 hinges on a bedrock of trust. Examine the governance measures required to build confidence among the government, industry, and consumers for a well-oiled tax system.

Introduction

India's "Goods and Services Tax (GST), hailed as **the biggest tax reform since Independence,** contributes **nearly 28% of total revenues (Economic Survey 2024),** yet its legitimacy depends fundamentally on stakeholder trust."

Trust Deficit in GST 1.0

1. **Multiplicity of slabs and disputes**: 4-rate structure caused "classification litigations" and inverted duty structures, disproportionately burdening MSMEs.
2. **Compliance overload**: Small businesses lacked capacity to handle frequent filings and refund delays.
3. **Consumer disconnect**: Savings from rate cuts were not always passed on; inflation persisted in essentials.

These issues eroded confidence in the tax architecture, demanding a governance reset in GST 2.0.

Governance Measures to Build Trust in GST 2.0

Institutional Credibility and Transparency

1. **Simplified rate structure** (5%, 18%, 40%) reduces ambiguity, curbing disputes and improving predictability.

2. GST Council functioning must be **federal, participatory, and data-driven**, preventing perceptions of central dominance.

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3.   OECD's "Best Practices for Consumption Taxes" stress **policy stability** as a trust-enhancing mechanism.

Consumer Confidence

1.   **Anti-profiteering enforcement**: Ensure firms pass on rate cuts, monitored via DGAP and consumer forums.

2.   **Price transparency**: Mandated disclosure on labels showing "pre- and post-GST price" during transition.

3.   **Inflation moderation**: RBI projects that simplified GST could lower CPI by ~0.3–0.4%, benefiting middle- and lower-income households.

Industry Confidence

1.   **Ease of compliance**: Faster refunds, "One Nation, One Return" system, and **GSTN digitisation** for automated reconciliation.

2.   **Litigation minimisation**: Pre-ruling authorities, real-time classification guidance, and risk-based audits.

3.   **Level playing field**: MSMEs given simplified quarterly filing, stock adjustment relief, and targeted capacity-building programs (via CII, FICCI).

Government Confidence & Fiscal Sustainability

1.   **Revenue neutrality**: Though short-term loss is projected at **"₹70,000–80,000 crore" (CRISIL 2025),** buoyancy will recover through higher compliance, consumption, and formalisation.

2.   **Robust IT backbone**: Strengthening GSTN, plugging invoice mismatches with AI-driven analytics **(NITI Aayog 2025 report).**

3.   **Feedback loops**: A statutory **GST Dispute Redressal Authority** and periodic rate rationalisation review to resolve bottlenecks.

Citizen–State Compact

1.   **Trust through fairness**: Taxpayer charter ensuring respect, accountability, and grievance redress.

2.   **Awareness campaigns**: CII's ongoing awareness drives exemplify public-private trust-building.

3.   **Social contract logic**: As per Amartya Sen's idea of **"participatory development,"** legitimacy arises when citizens see tangible benefits in reduced costs and better services.

Way Forward

1.   GST 2.0 must integrate **technology-driven monitoring**, continuous dialogue with industry, and citizen-focused accountability.

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2. Success hinges on **predictability, transparency, and participatory governance**—ensuring trust is not merely promised but institutionally secured.

Conclusion

As it is being observed cooperative trust determines systemic success; GST 2.0 can deliver inclusive growth only if governance ensures fairness, transparency, and shared gains.

Criminal defamation is incompatible with democratic debate." Evaluate the growing use of criminal defamation proceedings and discuss how it undermines free speech and public discourse in a democracy.

Introduction

"India ranks **159/180 in the World Press Freedom Index (2025),** reflecting shrinking democratic space, where criminal defamation—validated in **Subramanian Swamy v. Union of India (2016)**—increasingly curtails constitutionally guaranteed free speech."

The Nature of Criminal Defamation

1. Defined under **Sections 499–500 of IPC**, prescribing imprisonment up to 2 years.
2. Intended to protect individual reputation as part of **Article 21 (right to life)**.
3. However, it clashes with **Article 19(1)(a) freedom of speech**, since restrictions under **Article 19(2)** must be "reasonable."

Growing Use & Judicial Concerns

1. Justice M.M. Sundresh (2025) expressed unease at rising misuse of criminal defamation to intimidate critics.
2. Cases:
    1. Rahul Gandhi (2023, Surat court conviction) leading to disqualification.
    2. Editors of The Hindu (Jayalalithaa govt.) facing multiple summons.
    3. Defamation cases by political leaders (Nitin Gadkari, Arun Jaitley vs. Arvind Kejriwal, 2012–14) delaying governance.
3. Trial courts often issue summons mechanically, without assessing the "threshold of defamatory speech."

Why It Undermines Democratic Debate

1. **Chilling Effect on Free Speech**: Threat of imprisonment fosters **self-censorship**, particularly among journalists, activists, and opposition leaders. Small-town journalists face harassment through distant court appearances.
2. **Tool of Political Retribution**: Weaponisation of defamation suits to silence rivals. Example: Criminal complaints used as **lawfare**—strategic litigation to exhaust opponents.
3. **Disproportionate Remedy**: Reputational harm is intangible and reparable via **civil remedies** (damages, injunctions, retractions). Criminal sanction with jail is **disproportionate under "principle of proportionality"** (Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, 2017).

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4. **Global Practice**: U.K. (2009), Ghana, and the U.S. have decriminalised defamation. UN Human Rights Committee (General Comment No. 34) urges states to abolish criminal defamation as inconsistent with **ICCPR Article 19**.

Way Forward

1. **Decriminalisation & Civil Remedies**: Shift to **civil defamation** ensuring compensation and apology as proportional remedies. Strengthen **fast-track civil courts** to address reputational harm.
2. **Judicial Safeguards**: Supreme Court guidelines for trial courts to apply **prima facie speech thresholds** before issuing summons. Adopt "actual malice" standard (New York Times v. Sullivan, U.S.) in political speech cases.
3. **Institutional Support for Free Press**: Strengthen **Press Council of India** and create independent ombudsman for media grievances. Support whistleblowers under **Whistleblower Protection Act, 2014**.
4. **Democratic Maturity**: Encourage tolerance for dissent as part of **"marketplace of ideas"** (Justice Holmes, U.S. SC). Political actors must use counter-speech, not criminal law, to address criticism.

Conclusion

As **John Stuart Mill argued in On Liberty**, **silencing opinion robs society of truth**; abolishing criminal defamation is essential to protect India's democratic discourse, constitutional morality, and informed citizenship.

The UN is facing a crisis of relevance. Critically evaluate whether the institution can move beyond ceremony to offer genuine service in humanitarian aid and conflict resolution in a multipolar world.

Introduction

Marking its **80th anniversary, the United Nations—founded in 1945** to ensure peace—faces a legitimacy crisis, with over **170 ongoing conflicts and record 362 million requiring humanitarian** aid **(UNOCHA, 2024).**

The UN's Crisis of Relevance

1. **Institutional Paralysis**: Veto politics: Russia's veto stalled Security Council resolutions on Ukraine; U.S. vetoes blocked ceasefire calls on **Gaza (2023–25).** Security Council remains **P5-dominated, unrepresentative of Global South**—no African or Latin American permanent members.
2. **Humanitarian Weakness:** Funding crisis, UN's humanitarian appeals are only **36% funded (UNOCHA 2024)**, the lowest in a decade. UNRWA in Gaza, crippled by U.S. and donor cuts, yet remains the only lifeline for **6 million Palestinians**.
3. **Peacekeeping Fatigue**: Troops sent without equipment, arrears in reimbursements (~$1.3 billion in 2023). Failures in Rwanda (1994), Srebrenica (1995), and more recently in Mali, South Sudan, Haiti raise doubts about credibility.
4. **Great Power Contestation**: Multipolar disorder, U.S. treats multilateralism à la carte, funding selective mandates; China emphasizes **"Global Development" rhetoric** with thin contributions; **Europe reduces commitments under domestic pressure**. **Regional coalitions (AU-led in Somalia, ASEAN diplomacy in Myanmar, Gulf-led aid in Yemen)** increasingly bypass **UN frameworks.**

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Yet, Why the UN Still Matters

1. **Normative Legitimacy**: **Charter of the United Nations** still embodies collective security principles; **150+ states still address the General Assembly annually**. Norms on human rights (UDHR, 1948), refugee protection (1951 Convention), and climate (Paris Agreement, 2015) retain moral weight.
2. **Essential Service Provider**: **World Food Programme**, fed **160 million people in 2023**. **WHO,** coordinated COVAX, delivering **over 1.9 billion vaccine doses** during COVID-19. **UNICEF,** vaccinated 45% of world's children annually.
3. **Conflict Mediation Role**: Ceasefire monitoring, UNDOF in Golan Heights, UNIFIL in Lebanon continue to stabilize volatile zones. Ukraine, despite paralysis, the UN brokered the **Black Sea Grain Initiative (2022–23)**, easing global food insecurity.

Can the UN Move Beyond Ceremony?

1. **Structural Reform**: Expansion of UNSC under the **Intergovernmental Negotiations framework;** India, Brazil, South Africa, and Nigeria push **G4 + Africa permanent seat** demand.
2. **Financial Renewal**: Calls for assessed contributions for humanitarian work, beyond current **70% voluntary model**.
3. **Digital & Climate Mandates**: **UN's Global Digital Compact (2024)** and **COP process** show scope for leadership in emerging global commons.
4. **Leadership Change**: Next Secretary-General selection (2026) could mark reform, with calls for first woman SG and Global South candidate.

Conclusion

The UN **"was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save it from hell."** Renewal—not ritual—alone can restore multilateral relevance.

Critically analyze the reliance on piecemeal judicial precedents for personality rights. Examine the need for legislative intervention to create a robust and uniform legal framework for their enforcement.

Introduction

With India witnessing a surge in AI-driven deepfakes and celebrity image misuse, **over 200 global cases highlight fragmented judicial enforcement** of personality rights, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive legislative codification.

What are Personality Rights?

1. Protect an individual's **name, image, voice, likeness, signature, catchphrases**, and other unique traits from **unauthorised commercial exploitation**.
2. Rooted in:
    ○ **Article 21** (right to privacy, autonomy, dignity).
    ○ **IPR laws**: Copyright Act (Sections 38A, 38B), Trade Marks Act (Section 14, 27).
    ○ **Common law tort of passing off**.

Judicial Recognition in India (Piecemeal Evolution)

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1. **R. Rajagopal v. State of Tamil Nadu (1994)** – Supreme Court upheld right to control one's identity under **right to privacy**.
2. **DM Entertainment v. Baby Gift House (2010)** – Delhi HC recognised publicity rights of singer Daler Mehndi.
3. **Rajinikanth case (2015)** – Madras HC upheld protection against unauthorised commercial exploitation, even without proof of deception.
4. **Anil Kapoor v. AI Entities (2023)** – Delhi HC restrained use of his persona, catchphrases ("jhakaas"), clarified limits between satire and exploitation.
5. **Jackie Shroff (2024), Arijit Singh (2024), Karan Johar (2025)** – Courts granted injunctions against AI-generated misuse.

Issue: These rulings, though progressive, are **case-specific, fragmented, inconsistent** and depend heavily on judicial creativity.

Concerns with Reliance on Judicial Precedents

1. **Fragmentation and Uncertainty**: Absence of codified law forces courts to "invent remedies," leading to **inconsistent standards** across jurisdictions.
2. **Overbreadth vs. Free Expression**: Expansive protection risks **chilling satire, parody, art, scholarship**. Courts **(Digital Collectibles v. Galactus, 2023)** warned against over-emphasis that may **curtail Article 19(1)(a)** rights.
3. **Technological Challenges**: AI deepfakes, voice cloning, revenge pornography create **scalable misuse**. Case-specific injunctions cannot keep pace with **rapid digital replication**.
4. **Accessibility Issues**: Ordinary citizens (especially women targeted by deepfakes, cyber harassment) lack similar legal recourse. Current protection perceived as **celebrity-centric**.

Global Practices

1. **U.S.**: Recognises "Right of Publicity" under state laws (California Civil Code §3344).
2. **EU**: GDPR ensures control over personal data and likeness.
3. **U.K.**: Protects personality rights under privacy + passing off doctrines, supplemented by statutory safeguards.

Need for Legislative Intervention

1. **Codification of Personality Rights**: A **dedicated statute** defining scope, duration, and exceptions. Inspired by **EU's GDPR** and **U.S. publicity rights**.
2. **Clear Exceptions**: Safeguards for satire, parody, criticism, academic use to preserve **free speech balance**.
3. **Special Protection for Vulnerable Groups**: Extend beyond celebrities to address **revenge porn, non-consensual deepfakes**.
4. **Institutional Mechanisms**: Creation of a **Digital Personality Rights Authority (DPRA)** for monitoring and redressal. Fast-track takedown procedures for AI misuse.
5. **Harmonisation with IPR and Data Protection Laws**: Integrate with **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**. Align with **Copyright and Trademark Acts** to avoid overlap.

Conclusion

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The **law must be stable yet it cannot stand still;** codifying personality rights will ensure certainty, protect dignity, and balance free expression in India's digital democracy.

India's border states contribute negligibly to exports. Critically analyze how integrating key geographies like the Northeast into India's global trade strategy can foster a cohesive economy and regional stability.

Introduction

Despite sharing **over 15,000 km of international borders**, India's border states account for barely **2% of exports**; the Northeast alone contributes just **0.13%**, reflecting structural exclusion from national trade strategy (DGFT, 2024).

Current Export Imbalances

1. **Export centralisation**: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka together account for **70%+ of India's exports** (EXIM Bank, 2023).
2. **Border state marginalisation**: UP, Bihar, and MP contribute under 5%; the Northeast remains outside policy design, with no operational global trade corridor.
3. **Institutional exclusion**: No representation of Northeast voices in the Board of Trade or **PM's Economic Advisory Council**, limiting policy responsiveness.
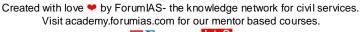
Why the Northeast Matters

1. **Strategic Geography**: Shares **5,400 km border with five countries** (China, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar). Key to **Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific vision**.
2. **Resource & Sectoral Potential**: Assam contributes **50%+ of India's tea output** but lacks value addition/branding. Rich in oil, natural gas, hydropower, horticulture, and handicrafts. Bamboo, organic spices, and medicinal plants could boost exports under **APEDA's Agri-Export Policy.**
3. **Regional Security Linkage**: Neglect fuels **economic alienation, insurgencies, and cross-border smuggling**. Integrating trade builds "**economic interdependence," a proven stabiliser in border regions (ASEAN experience).**

Challenges Blocking Integration

1. **Infrastructure Deficits**: Poor roads, missing cold-chain facilities, underdeveloped logistics. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway remains incomplete; borders like Moreh and Zokhawthar reduced to "securitised bottlenecks."
2. **Policy Myopia**: Export incentives like RoDTEP and PLI largely cater to western and southern clusters.
3. **Geopolitical Disruptions**: Myanmar coup (2021) disrupted border trade; scrapping of the Free Movement Regime (2024) hurt cross-border kinship and micro-trade.
4. **Comparative Gap**: China invests heavily in northern Myanmar infrastructure, creating supply chain routes India has failed to match.

Why Integration is Crucial

1. **Economic Cohesion**: Diversifies export geography, reducing dependence on a few coastal hubs. Enhances resilience against shocks like natural disasters or geopolitical sanctions.

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2. **Regional Stability**: **Border trade corridors** encourage people-to-people ties, reducing insurgency incentives. Trade-led development can transform borderlands from **"securitised zones" to "growth corridors."**
3. **Geostrategic Leverage**: Builds India's credibility as a connectivity provider in the Indo-Pacific. Counters China's Belt and Road Initiative influence in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Way Forward

1. **Infrastructure Push**: Complete IMT Highway, Kaladan Multi-Modal Project, and integrate Northeast with Bharatmala/Sagarmala corridors.
2. **Policy Representation**: Ensure Northeast presence in DGFT, BoT, and EAC.
3. **Export Hubs**: Develop Guwahati, Agartala, and Silchar as "border logistics parks" under PM Gati Shakti.
4. **Sectoral Strategies**: Tea branding, bamboo processing, organic agri-clusters, and handicrafts export promotion.
5. **Cross-border Frameworks**: Revive Free Movement Regime with safeguards, enhance BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) trade, and leverage ASEAN FTAs.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen argues in Development as Freedom**, true progress needs inclusive participation. Integrating the Northeast into trade policy ensures resilience, fosters regional stability, and anchors India's equitable economic rise.
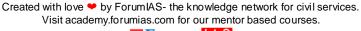
India is a key partner in the ITER fusion project. Examine the strategic and technological challenges and opportunities in the recently proposed roadmap for achieving indigenous fusion power."

Introduction

India, contributing nearly **10% of ITER's procurement packages** and advanced components, stands at a critical juncture—balancing its net-zero by 2070 commitment with the ambitious **SST-Bharat roadmap** for indigenous nuclear fusion power.

Opportunities in India's Fusion Roadmap

1. **Strategic Autonomy in Energy Security**: Fusion offers virtually limitless, low-carbon energy using isotopes like **deuterium and tritium**, abundant in seawater and lithium reserves. Reduces dependence on coal and imported uranium, aligning with **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.
2. **Technological Upgradation and Spin-offs**: Development of **superconducting magnets, plasma diagnostics, cryogenics, and radiation-resistant materials** can upgrade India's industrial ecosystem. R&D spin-offs aid defence, aerospace, semiconductor, and high-temperature engineering sectors.
3. **Global Standing in Scientific Collaboration**: India's contribution to ITER components (cryostat, in-wall shielding) enhances its credibility in "big science" projects. A successful **SST-Bharat** prototype (Q=5, 130 MW) could elevate India's leadership in **South-South cooperation** for sustainable energy.

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4. **One Health and Climate Linkages**: Fusion aligns with **IPCC AR6 recommendations** on decarbonisation pathways. Supports India's **net-zero 2070 trajectory**, while reducing air pollution-related health burdens.

5. **Digital Twin and AI Integration**: Use of **digital twinning, machine learning-assisted plasma confinement, and predictive simulations** offers India a leapfrog opportunity to reduce trial-and-error costs in experimental tokamaks.

Challenges in the Roadmap

1. **Technological Complexity**: Sustaining plasma at **100 million °C** for extended durations remains a hurdle—India's current SST-1 achieved only **650 milliseconds** versus China's EAST sustaining 22 minutes. Achieving a **Q ≥ 20** for commercial viability demands breakthroughs not yet proven.

2. **Financial and Policy Constraints**: Estimated **₹25,000 crore for SST-Bharat** poses fiscal strain amid competing energy priorities (solar, wind, nuclear fission). Unlike the US/UK, **India lacks private-sector participation**; fusion research remains public-sector dominated.

3. **Uncertain Timelines and Cost Competitiveness**: India's target of **2060** lags behind the UK's **STEP 2040** and US private firms' **2030s claims**. Economic viability remains untested; fusion electricity may be costlier than **RE100 (solar/wind+storage)**.

4. **Strategic Dependence on Global Partners**: ITER delays and cost overruns expose India to vulnerabilities. Dependence on foreign expertise could hinder full indigenous control over critical technologies like **tritium breeding modules (TBM)**.

5. **Geopolitical and Security Dimensions**: Fusion materials and technologies overlap with **dual-use domains** (nuclear weapons, space reactors), necessitating **strict IAEA safeguards**. Competition with China's aggressive fusion programme may pressure India's timelines.

Way Forward

1. **Policy Push:** Establish a **National Fusion Mission** with private-sector entry and PPP models.

2. **Investment in R&D:** Incentivise innovation in **superconductors, plasma-facing materials, and AI-driven plasma control.**

3. **International Collaboration:** Leverage **BRICS, QUAD, and ITER partnerships** for joint innovation hubs.

4. **Economic Viability:** Integrate fusion with **fission hybrids (SST-Bharat)** as transition models before pure fusion.

Conclusion

Transformative energy shifts require persistence and vision. India's fusion roadmap, though challenging, represents a strategic bet on **clean, resilient, autonomous power futures.**

Examine how offering long-term offtake possibilities can strengthen India's shipbuilding infrastructure and promote self-reliance in the defense and commercial sectors.

Introduction

India ranks **20th globally in shipbuilding capacity (UNCTAD, 2023)** despite a 7,500 km coastline. Strengthening shipyards through long-term offtake contracts is vital for **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, maritime security, and global competitiveness.

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Opportunities through Long-term Offtake Possibilities

1. **Financial Stability and Investor Confidence**: Long-term contracts ensure **assured demand visibility**, reducing risks of sunk capital from 2–3 year delivery timelines. Example: **China's COSCO and Japan's NYK Line** thrive on long-term charters.
2. **Commercial Shipbuilding Growth**: Merchant ship demand for coal, crude, LNG, and green hydrogen can be tied to Indian yards. Green fuel hubs like **Kakinada and Kochi** can integrate **green shipbuilding offtake contracts** for exports.
3. **Boost to Defence Indigenisation**: With **₹2.7 lakh crore defence budget (2024–25)**, linking naval contracts with long-term offtake enhances capacity utilisation. Aligns with **Make in India in Defence** policy, reducing import reliance (India imports 60% of warships' critical equipment).
4. **Cluster Development & Ancillaries**: Offtake certainty enables investment in **ancillary industries** (engines, propellers, electronics), reducing reliance on imports from Korea/Japan. Example: **China's Zhoushan cluster** reduced costs by integrated supply chains.
5. **Technology Upgradation**: Predictable demand justifies high-cost infrastructure like **1,000-tonne gantry cranes, modular construction yards, and digital shipbuilding (CAD/CAM, AI-based hull design).** Enables transition from 500 GT ships to **Panamax and VLCCs**.
6. **Employment & Skill Development**: Each **1,000 GT ship creates 30,000+ direct and indirect jobs (ASSOCHAM report)**. Offtake will spur **skill institutes**, akin to China's dedicated shipbuilding universities.

Challenges in Implementing Long-term Offtake

1. **Policy Bottlenecks**: Current classification of shipbuilding as infrastructure applies only to **large vessels**, limiting smaller yards. Lack of clarity on **tax incentives, ship financing norms, and GST rebates**.
2. **High Cost Overruns & Delays**: Indian shipyards average **2–3 years per ship** versus **12–18 months in Korea**. Offtake without productivity reforms risks eroding shipowners' trust.
3. **Global Competition**: China controls **47% of global shipbuilding (Clarksons, 2023)** with heavy subsidies. Without equivalent support, Indian yards may struggle despite long-term demand.
4. **Limited Private Sector Role**: Unlike defence PSUs (Mazagon Dock, Goa Shipyard), private yards (L&T Kattupalli, Pipavav) face inconsistent orders. Need for **PPP models and assured off-take pipelines**.

Way Forward

1. **Maritime Offtake Policy:** Link long-term time charters of **coal, crude, LNG, and green hydrogen transport** to Indian shipyards.
2. **Defence-Civil Convergence:** Synchronise naval procurement with commercial orders to build scale economies.
3. **Cluster Development:** Promote **shipbuilding SEZs** with ancillary manufacturing and **Green Corridor initiatives**.
4. **Financing Support:** Expand shipbuilding infrastructure status to **all vessel sizes**, enabling lower interest rates and export financing.
5. **Skill Development:** Launch **Maritime Skill Universities** under **Sagarmala 2.0**, focusing on welding, modular design, and digital shipbuilding.

Conclusion

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As **Alfred Thayer Mahan** observed, **"Whoever rules the waves rules the world."** Long-term offtake contracts can transform India's shipyards into global hubs, ensuring maritime self-reliance in commerce and defence.

The India-EU strategic agenda is based on five pillars. Critically analyze the potential of this multi-pillared framework to enhance India's economic growth and emerging technological interests.

Introduction

India–EU ties, covering **EUR 180 billion annual trade**, are guided by a five-pillar agenda (2025). With Europe as India's largest partner, this framework can catalyse growth, technology transfer, and strategic autonomy.

Economy & Trade: Expanding Growth Opportunities

1. The EU is India's **largest trading partner (EUR 120 billion in goods, EUR 60 billion in services, 2024)**; yet India accounts for just **2.5% of EU's total trade**.
2. **Potential**:
    o **FTA & IPA** can reduce tariff/non-tariff barriers and enhance India's access to **high-value supply chains** (aerospace, EVs, pharmaceuticals).
    o **Geographical Indications (GIs)** will protect Indian exports like **Darjeeling Tea and Basmati Rice**, boosting rural incomes.
    o EU FDI (EUR 140 billion in 2023) can support **greenfield infrastructure** and startups.
3. **Challenges**: India faces EU's **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**, which could penalize steel and cement exports unless aligned with green norms.
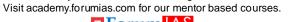
Global Connectivity: Strengthening Strategic Corridors

1. Initiatives like the **EU Global Gateway (EUR 300 billion)** and India's **MAHASAGAR policy** converge on sustainable infrastructure.
2. **IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor)** integrates **energy, digital, and clean hydrogen infrastructure**, diversifying routes away from chokepoints like the Suez Canal.
3. **Blue Raman submarine cable (11,700 km)** will ensure **data resilience and cybersecurity**.
4. **Critical analysis**: Competing with **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** demands faster implementation, as past EU connectivity projects often suffered from **bureaucratic inertia** and financing gaps.

Emerging Technologies: Catalysing Innovation Ecosystems

1. **EU's strength**: regulation, R&D, digital infrastructure; **India's strength**: workforce, startup ecosystem, frugal innovation.
2. **EU-India Innovation Hubs** and **Startup Partnership** can nurture joint R&D in **AI, semiconductors, and clean tech**.
3. Collaboration on **strategic AI domains** (multilingual NLP, LLMs, AI in agriculture and healthcare) aligns with India's **Digital India and IndiaAI Mission (2025, ₹10,300 crore outlay)**.
4. **Peaceful nuclear cooperation (Euratom-India)** extends to **fusion research, radioactive waste management**, and aligns with **India's net-zero 2070 pledge**.
5. **Challenge**: EU's stringent **data localisation and GDPR norms** could restrict India's data-driven AI ecosystem unless balanced with **data adequacy agreements**.

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Security & Defence: Balancing Strategic Autonomy

1. With EU's Indo-Pacific engagement, convergence on **maritime security, cyber defence, counterterrorism** is strengthening.
2. Proposed **EU-India Defence Industry Forum** can link India's '**Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence**' with EU's R&D capacity.
3. **EU Naval Force–Indian Navy cooperation** in the western Indian Ocean enhances **maritime domain awareness (MDA)**.
4. **Limits**: EU lacks hard power coherence compared to the **US or QUAD partners**. Its approach remains **civilian and regulatory**, raising doubts about real security guarantees for India.

People-to-People Ties: Talent & Education Linkages

1. **825,000 Indians live in EU (2023)**; nearly **1 million Schengen visas issued (2024)**.
2. Expanded **Erasmus+** and recognition of Indian qualifications can reduce overdependence on the US/UK for higher education.
3. **Talent mobility partnerships** align EU's demographic needs with India's **Skill India Mission**.
4. **Challenge**: Stringent visa regimes and rising **right-wing populism in Europe** could hinder smooth people-to-people flows.

Critical Synthesis

1. **Strengths**: Diversification of trade partners, advanced tech cooperation, alternative connectivity to BRI, and talent circulation.
2. **Risks**: **Regulatory asymmetry (GDPR, CBAM),** EU's limited strategic heft, and India's protectionist instincts.
3. For India, **strategic hedging between EU, US, and QUAD** will remain vital to avoid overdependence on any single partner.

Conclusion

As **Joseph Nye's concept of "smart power"** suggests, India–EU ties must blend economic and technological cooperation with strategic alignment, ensuring sustainable growth, innovation, and balanced multipolarity in a turbulent world.
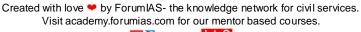
India needs strategic partnerships to secure its fertiliser supply. Examine the necessity of such global alliances for ensuring food security and the long-term sustainability of Indian agriculture.

Introduction

India's agriculture sustains **1.45 billion people**, yet depends on imports for **90% urea feedstock gas, 70% phosphate, and 100% potash**. Strategic global partnerships are essential to ensure food security and sustainable agricultural growth.

Fertiliser Dependence: The Critical Challenge

1. India is the **second-largest fertiliser consumer globally** (~61 million tonnes, 2023-24).

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2. Import reliance: **90% natural gas** for urea production. **70% phosphate** (Morocco, Saudi Arabia). **100% potash** (Belarus, Canada).
3. Subsidy burden: Fertiliser subsidy crossed **₹2.5 lakh crore in FY23** (Economic Survey 2023), making global price shocks highly destabilising.

Necessity of Strategic Partnerships

1. **Food Security Link**: Green Revolution gains were fertiliser-driven; sustaining yields requires assured supply chains. Any disruption risks **inflation, farmer distress, and political instability**.
2. **Global Alliances** mitigate risks from:
3. **Geopolitical shocks** (Russia-Ukraine war disrupted potash and ammonia supply). **Tariff wars** (US tariffs on India's pharma/H-1B linked indirectly to trade pressure). **Energy dependencies** (Middle Eastern LNG pricing affects urea).

Morocco: A Case for Phosphate Security

1. Morocco controls **~70% of global phosphate rock reserves** (USGS, 2024).
2. Strategic potential: **Joint ventures** with OCP Group for **DAP, TSP, SSP** production. Example: **Paradeep Phosphates Ltd.** – Indo-Moroccan collaboration. Tata Advanced Systems' defence plant in Morocco shows **trust-based industrial partnership**.
3. **Technical sustainability**: Switching from DAP to **TSP + Urea** balances soil nutrients, reducing nitrogen overuse and soil degradation.
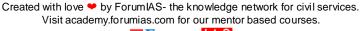
Diversifying Sources: Beyond Morocco

1. **Saudi Arabia**: Agreement for **3 million tonnes phosphate annually (2025)**. But security risks exist due to its defence ties with Pakistan.
2. **Russia & Belarus**: Major potash suppliers but sanctions pose uncertainty.
3. **Canada**: A stable partner for potash, though freight costs are higher.
4. **Qatar, UAE**: Reliable LNG suppliers for urea feedstock.
5. **Africa (Mozambique, Nigeria)**: Opportunities for joint ventures in natural gas and ammonia production.

Sustainability & Long-term Measures

1. **Nutrient-based Subsidy (NBS) reform**: Encourages balanced fertiliser use, preventing urea overuse.
2. **Alternative technologies**: Nano-urea (IFFCO claims 50% reduction in urea need), biofertilisers, and organic manures.
3. **Circular Economy**: Phosphorus recovery from sewage sludge and waste streams.
4. **Soil Health Management Scheme**: Promotes crop-specific nutrient application, reducing dependency on imports.
5. **Global examples**: **Brazil** invested in Morocco for phosphate security. **China** has locked-in long-term potash contracts with Canada, securing resilience.

Critical Analysis

1. **Pros of alliances**: Ensure steady supply, technology transfer, reduce volatility.
2. **Risks**: Overdependence on politically unstable regions (West Asia, North Africa).

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3. **Way Forward**: Balanced strategy **long-term contracts, joint ventures, domestic exploration, R&D in alternatives, diversification of partners**.

Conclusion

As **M.S. Swaminathan's National Commission on Farmers** stressed, **"sustainable food security requires assured inputs."** Global fertiliser alliances are thus indispensable to safeguard India's agriculture, economy, and long-term soil health.

An 'Engels' pause' due to AI may be shorter if policy aligns with innovation. Critically analyze the policy interventions needed to ensure the economic gains of Artificial Intelligence are broadly shared.

Introduction

AI could **add $15.7 trillion to global GDP by 2030 (PwC),** yet IMF (2024) warns **40% of jobs** are AI-exposed, raising fears of a **modern 'Engels' pause'.**
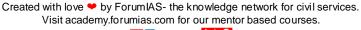
What is an Engels' Pause in AI context?

1. Coined by Robert Allen after Friedrich Engels, it refers to rising productivity without commensurate wage gains.
2. In AI era, **job displacement**, **inequality** and **high cost of complements (cloud, data, retraining)** mirror early industrial Britain.
3. Examples:
   o **Philippines' call centres**: AI copilots raised productivity 30–50% but wages stagnated.
   o **Indian IT sector**: 12,000 layoffs during AI pivot (2024).

Why AI poses risk of a modern Engels' pause?

1. **Productivity-wage disconnect**: Gains accrue to firms, not workers.
2. **Skills mismatch**: Younger, low/mid-skilled workers most vulnerable **(Stanford "Canaries in the Coal Mine", 2023).**
3. **Concentration of benefits**: AI rents captured by U.S., China, Big Tech **(PwC, IMF).**
4. **Cost of digital survival**: Continuous reskilling burdens workers (coding bootcamps, certifications).
5. **Inequality deepening:** Case of India: stronger IPR laws → widened wage inequality **(Journal of Development Economics, 2022).**

Policy Interventions Needed

1. **Skilling and Human Capital Development**: **Singapore's SkillsFuture**, lifelong learning credits for reskilling. **Abu Dhabi's MBZUAI**, world's first AI University. India's **Skill India Mission 2.0** must integrate AI-focused curricula, apprenticeship models, and NEP 2020 flexibility.

2. **Redistributive Mechanisms**: **Robot taxes**, proposed by Bill Gates to redistribute productivity rents. **Universal Basic Income (UBI)**, pilots in Finland, UK; ensures baseline security. India could experiment via **DBT-linked AI dividend schemes**.

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3.   **AI as a Public Good**: **Compute and Data Infrastructure** treated like electricity. UAE's **K2Think.ai** and Switzerland's **Apertus** – public open AI reasoning models ensuring access beyond monopolies. India's **IndiaAI Mission (₹10,300 crore)** aims for compute infrastructure, datasets, and AI innovation hubs.

4.   **Labour Market Institutions and Social Protection**: Strengthen **collective bargaining**, **gig worker protection**, and expand **social security nets**. OECD (2023) suggests portable benefits for gig/AI-displaced workers. India's **Code on Social Security, 2020** must be operationalised to cover AI-affected gig workforce.

5.   **Ethical AI Governance**: National AI ethics frameworks aligned with UNESCO/OECD principles. Encourage **responsible AI** deployment in health, education, agriculture — sectors that directly impact inclusive growth.

Critical View

1. Unlike 19th century, today's **welfare systems and rapid diffusion** may shorten the pause.
2. AI can reduce costs in healthcare, education, and energy → immediate **welfare benefits** if governance accelerates.
3. However, risks of **techno-feudalism** (where few firms own AI models) could prolong inequality unless **policy aligns with innovation**.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen argued in Development as Freedom,** true progress lies in expanding human capabilities, AI's promise will shorten the Engels' pause only if policy ensures equity with efficiency."

India commands the largest area for Polymetallic Sulphides exploration. Evaluate the strategic and economic significance of deep-sea mineral exploration for India's resource security and technological self-reliance.
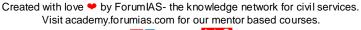
Introduction

India, with two ISA contracts covering 20,000 sq. km, now commands the largest PMS exploration area globally. This milestone underlines India's ambition for critical mineral security, Blue Economy growth, and strategic self-reliance.

What are Polymetallic Sulphides (PMS)?

1. PMS are hydrothermal deposits rich in **copper, zinc, lead, gold, silver** and trace amounts of **rare and critical elements**.
2. Found along mid-ocean ridges near hydrothermal vents at **2,000–5,000m depth**.

Economic Significance for India

1. **Resource Security**: India is import-dependent for **critical minerals** (copper, cobalt, nickel, REEs) essential for **EV batteries, semiconductors, green hydrogen, and renewable technologies**.
2. **Renewable Energy Transition**: As per **IEA's Critical Minerals Report 2023**, demand for copper and rare earths may rise **3–7 times by 2040**. Deep-sea PMS can supplement this surge.

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3. **Reducing Import Bill**: India spends billions on importing critical minerals. Domestic sourcing reduces vulnerability to supply shocks.
4. **Boosting Blue Economy**: Under India's **Blue Economy Policy (2021)**, deep-sea mining is a pillar for sustainable growth.
5. **Industrial Ecosystem Development**: Exploration spurs demand for indigenous AUVs, ROVs, seabed crawlers, and subsea robotics, fostering **technological self-reliance** under *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.

Strategic Significance

1. **Geostrategic Leverage**: Control over largest PMS blocks enhances India's influence in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**, aligning with **SAGAR doctrine (Security and Growth for All in the Region)**.
2. **Maritime Power Projection**: Enhances India's standing in **UNCLOS frameworks** and **ISA governance**, countering China's aggressive deep-sea exploration.
3. **Proximity Advantage**: Carlsberg Ridge (2°N latitude) lies closer to Indian shores compared to earlier ridges (26°S), enabling faster deployment and operational efficiency.
4. **Strategic Minerals for Defence**: PMS elements are crucial for **aerospace alloys, naval equipment, advanced electronics, and missile systems**—directly contributing to defence self-reliance.

Technological and Research Spin-offs

1. **Samudrayaan Mission (2021–26)**: Matsya-6000 submersible for 6,000m depth—indigenous development of high-pressure hulls, robotics, and deep-sea sensors.
2. **Deep Ocean Mission** investments—₹4,077 crore budget—build indigenous R&D ecosystems.
3. Collaboration with **NCPOR**, **NIOT**, and private industry accelerates multidisciplinary capacity in marine geology, biotechnology, and materials science.
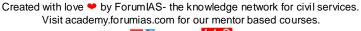
Challenges to Consider

1. **Environmental Concerns**: PMS extraction risks damage to fragile hydrothermal vent ecosystems—critics highlight potential biodiversity loss (CBD 2022 Report).
2. **Technological Barriers**: Deep-sea mining requires precision navigation, dynamic positioning, and advanced metallurgy, where India still trails behind China, Japan, and Korea.
3. **Economic Viability**: High capital and uncertain returns—commercial feasibility is untested.
4. **Global Regulations**: ISA is yet to finalize a comprehensive mining code—uncertainty persists over rules, royalties, and benefit-sharing.

Way Forward

1. **Sustainable Mining Protocols**: Align PMS exploration with **UNCLOS environmental guidelines**.
2. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**: Mobilize indigenous industries in subsea robotics and metallurgy.
3. **Strategic Alliances**: Collaborate with Japan, France, and Norway on green technologies and best practices.
4. **Integration with National Missions**: Link exploration with **National Critical Minerals Mission (2023)** and India's **Net-Zero 2070 commitments**.

Conclusion

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As **Amartya Sen observed, development lies in expanding capabilities**. Deep-sea PMS exploration, if guided by sustainable policy, can expand India's technological, economic, and strategic capacities, ensuring resilient resource security and self-reliance.

Justify South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) as a pathway to an equitable and sustainable future. Evaluate its efficacy in contrast to traditional North-South aid models.

Introduction

UNCTAD (2024) highlights widening inequalities despite trillions in North-South aid since the 1960s. Against this backdrop, South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) emerges as a demand-driven, frugal, and context-sensitive development model.

Why SSTC Matters Today

1. **2030 Agenda urgency**: With less than 6 years to achieve the SDGs, resource gaps exceed **$4 trillion annually** (OECD 2023). Traditional aid flows are declining.
2. **Principles**: Solidarity, mutual respect, horizontal learning (Buenos Aires Plan of Action, 1978).
3. **Comparative Advantage**: Replicability, cost-effectiveness, and contextual relevance compared to donor-driven North-South aid.
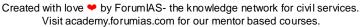
India as a Key Champion of SSTC

1. **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam philosophy** and role as Global South voice.
2. **Institutional mechanisms**: Development Partnership Administration (2012), Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme (capacity building in 160+ countries).
3. **India-UN Development Partnership Fund (2017)**: 75+ projects across 56 countries, particularly in LDCs and SIDS.
4. **Digital Public Goods**: Aadhaar, UPI, CoWIN shared globally as **Digital Public Infrastructure** (DPI).
5. **Food Security Partnership with WFP**: Innovations like Annapurti grain ATMs, fortified rice, and women-led Take-Home Ration programme, now replicated in Nepal and Lao PDR.

Triangular Cooperation (SSTC+ Model)

1. **Blending resources of North and South**: e.g., India-Japan-UNDP projects in Africa, India-USAID cooperation on vaccines and solar projects.
2. **Wider stakeholder base**: Civil society, private sector, grassroots communities → people-centric development.
3. **Efficacy**: In 2024, WFP mobilised **$10.9 million from Global South countries + private sector** for SSTC projects aligned with SDG-2 (Zero Hunger).

Efficacy vs Traditional North-South Aid Models

1. **Traditional North-South aid**: Often top-down, conditional, reinforcing donor-dependency. Criticised for "aid tied to procurement" and neo-colonial overtones. Limited sustainability once funding ends.
2. **SSTC Advantage**:
   - **Demand-driven**: Projects based on recipient country needs.
   - **Frugal and replicable**: e.g., India's solar microgrids in Africa.

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- o **Peer-to-peer trust**: Shared developmental challenges enable horizontal cooperation.
3. **Limitations of SSTC**: Funding scale still modest compared to OECD-DAC flows. Institutional frameworks for monitoring and accountability remain underdeveloped.

Global Relevance and Way Forward

1. **Climate Action**: IBSA Fund projects on renewable energy in Guinea-Bissau.
2. **Pandemic Response**: India's "Vaccine Maitri" supplied vaccines to 100+ countries, reflecting South-led solidarity.
3. **Blue Economy & Resilience**: India's projects in Pacific Islands.

Way Forward:

1. Expand **knowledge-sharing platforms**.

2. Strengthen **South-led financing institutions** (like New Development Bank, BRICS Bank).

3. Mainstream **Triangular cooperation** to mobilise larger resources.

4. Build **impact assessment mechanisms** for accountability.

Conclusion

As **Joseph Stiglitz notes, "globalisation must be reimagined to serve all."** SSTC, if scaled and institutionalised, can transform solidarity into sustainable outcomes, ensuring equitable progress in a multipolar world.

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