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Mains Marathon

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HISTORY
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Examine the core tenet of Indian Secularism that emphasizes protection of all faiths. Critically analyze how this model ensures the supreme political identity remains "Indian".

Introduction

India, with over **1.3 billion people and 22 major religions (Pew, 2021),** adopted a unique secularism model ensuring equal respect for all faiths, safeguarding fraternity and national identity amidst deep cultural-religious diversity.

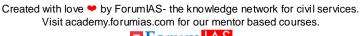**Core Tenet of Indian Secularism: Protection of All Faiths**

1. "Sarva Dharma Sambhava" – Equal Respect, Not Hostility: Unlike Western secularism's strict church–state separation, Indian secularism is **principled distance** (Rajeev Bhargava), enabling the state to engage with all religions without privileging or persecuting any. Examples: State management of diverse religious institutions, Protection of minorities under Articles 25–30, Government facilitation of religious events **(Kumbh Mela logistics, Haj committee until 2018).**

2. Constitutional Foundations Rooted in Equality and Liberty: Key provisions reflect protective secularism: **Article 25:** Freedom of conscience and free profession of religion, **Article 26:** Autonomy of religious denominations, **Article 27:** No compulsion to pay for another religion's promotion, **Article 28:** Secular education in state institutions. The Supreme Court in S.R. Bommai (1994) affirmed secularism as a **basic feature**.

3. Preventing Hierarchies and Majoritarian Domination: Indian secularism protects all groups from both state domination and intra-religious hierarchies. Examples from the article and beyond:

- **Ambedkar** advocating **state intervention against caste oppression.**
- **Periyar** campaigning for **temple-entry reforms.**
- **Hindu women's rights** expansion under reformist **Hindu Code Bill (1955).**
- **Muslim women's rights** upheld through **Shah Bano and Muslim Women Act** reforms

State neutrality prevents any group from acquiring **constitutional superiority.**

4. Religion Flourishing Publicly Without Controlling the State: India never restricted public religiosity—**Hindu festivals, Muslim Muharram processions, Sikh Nagar Kirtans and Christian** Christmas celebrations remain vibrant. This model encourages cultural pluralism while ensuring the **state itself remains non-religious**.

How This Ensures the Supreme Political Identity Remains "Indian"

1. Prevents Religious Identity from Becoming the Basis of Citizenship: By disconnecting political rights from religion, secularism ensures **citizenship ≠ faith**. Thus, Indian identity is civic, not theological.

2. Preserves National Fraternity in a Deeply Plural Society: According to the **Sachar Committee Report (2006)** and **Pew Global Attitudes (2021)**, Indians overwhelmingly support religious coexistence. A secular state reduces fears of exclusion, anchoring loyalty to the nation rather than a sect.

3. Enables Balanced State Intervention to Maintain Equality: The doctrine of **principled intervention** ensures the state can step in to: abolish untouchability (Article 17), outlaw triple talaq (2019), enforce anti-

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conversion laws where coercion exists. These interventions strengthen equal citizenship and protect minorities within majority and minority religions alike.

4. Prevents Religious Polarisation from Weakening the Republic: The Constitution-makers feared the divisive impact of religion-based politics seen during Partition. A secular state reduces polarisation, ensuring the citizen's primary allegiance is the **Constitution, not the community**.

Conclusion

As **Nehru wrote in The Discovery of India,** India's unity thrives on cultural multiplicity. Indian secularism safeguards all faiths, ensuring that constitutional citizenship—not religious identity—remains the nation's supreme unifying force.

Examine the reasons why mere laws are insufficient for women to access justice. Critically analyze the need to reform the gendered culture and court environment itself.

Introduction

Despite **India enacting 40+ women-protective laws since Independence (NCRB, 2023)**, only **7%** of **women report violence (NFHS-5),** showing that legal provisions alone cannot ensure meaningful access to justice for women.

Why Mere Laws Are Insufficient for Women to Access Justice

1. Procedural Barriers and Systemic Delays: Women face chronic delays—pendency of **over 4.7 crore cases** (NJDG, 2024). Example from article: A survivor waited **eight years** after leaving a decade-long abusive marriage. Delays create **justice fatigue**, financial burden, and dependency on the very families they escaped.

2. Patriarchal Attitudes Within Legal Institutions: Courts often reproduce social prejudices rather than neutral adjudication. Examples:

- Lawyer telling woman to **"untie her hair".**
- **Mediator trivialising suffering** through beauty stereotypes.
- **Advice to "compromise" in domestic** violence cases.

These align with the idea of **"institutional patriarchy"** highlighted by the **Justice Verma Committee (2013),** which argued that insensitive court culture often deters women more than perpetrators.

3. Power Asymmetries Between Lawyers and Women Litigants: Women—especially from poorer backgrounds—lack bargaining power. Fear of losing representation leads to silence even against harassment by their own lawyers. This mirrors the **"gendered client–counsel dependency"** highlighted in **FLT (Feminist Legal Theory).**

4. Economic and Social Vulnerabilities: Accessing courts involves: litigation costs, travel, lost wages, child-care burdens. Women often struggle financially after leaving abusive homes. UN Women (2021) notes that **economic vulnerability is the single biggest barrier to legal redress** for women across developing nations.

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5. Lack of Safe, Supportive Court Infrastructure: Many courts lack: gender-sensitive waiting areas, child-care rooms, counsellors, women-friendly police desks. Article shows women feeling unsafe inside the court itself—revealing how intimidation, surveillance, and male dominance shape the space.

6. Societal Norms Encouraging Compromise Over Justice: Women are repeatedly advised to "adjust," even in cases of sexual abuse. This culturally ingrained **valorisation of female endurance** is noted in **NFHS-5 findings** where **45% women justify some form of domestic violence.**

Why Reforming Gendered Court Culture Is Essential

1. Humanising the Justice System: Empathy training for judges, prosecutors, and police is necessary. **Justice Verma Committee** recommended mandatory **gender-sensitisation modules** and accountability mechanisms for insensitive conduct.

2. Building Trauma-Informed Courtrooms: Trauma-informed approaches reduce re-victimization through: confidential spaces, victim advocates, protection from aggressive cross-examination. This aligns with global best practices from the **UN Handbook for Women's Access to Justice (2016).**

3. Increasing Women's Representation in Judiciary: Only **13% of High Court judges and 36% of lower court judges** are women (2024). More women on benches improves trust, empathy, and interpretation of gender-sensitive laws.

4. Strengthening Legal Aid and Community Support: Effective legal aid, paralegal volunteers, and trained counsellors can reduce dependence on exploitative lawyers. NLSIU's access to justice studies show women are more confident when accompanied by trained support workers.

5. Creating Accountability and Citizen Feedback Mechanisms: Complaint cells against insensitive court officers, public audits, and internal disciplinary action can transform court culture from within.

Conclusion

As **Amartya Sen argues in The Idea of Justice**, laws matter only when institutions embody fairness. Reforming court culture is essential to ensure women experience justice not as text, but as lived reality.

Examine the factors leading to the 'reengineering' of the India-Russia strategic relationship. Critically analyze the key takeaways and geopolitical implications of their recent summit.

Introduction

Despite Western sanctions reducing Russia's global partnerships and India diversifying foreign relations, bilateral trade touching **$65 billion (2023-24)** and 60% of India's defence platforms of Russian origin demonstrate a structural necessity reengineering their ties.

Factors Leading to the 'Reengineering' of India-Russia Strategic Relationship

1. Geopolitical Realignment after the Ukraine War: The Ukraine conflict placed India's key partners—the U.S., Europe, and Russia—at odds. India adopted **strategic autonomy**, maintaining neutrality while expanding imports of discounted Russian crude (over **40% of India's crude basket in 2023**, OPEC Data). With Russia's

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global isolation increasing, India emerged as one of its few stable major partners—creating space to reshape ties.

2. Energy Security Imperatives: India is the world's **second-largest fossil fuel importer**. Russia possesses the world's largest natural gas reserves and vast untapped Arctic & Siberian energy resources. Energy cooperation—oil, LNG, nuclear, and Arctic shipping—has become a **core reengineering driver** for India's long-term economic security.

3. Complementarity in Defence and Emerging Technologies: Despite diversification, **60–70% of India's military inventory** remains Russian-origin. Russia provided:

- BrahMos joint development
- S-400 Triumf (vital in Operation Sindoor, 2025)
- High localisation & technology transfer compared to Western suppliers

India's push for **Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence** requires continued Russian support during the transition, producing a recalibration rather than replacement.

4. Changing Demographics and Labour Dynamics in Russia: Russia faces a severe demographic decline, worsened by war-related casualties and declining migration from Central Asia. This enabled the new agreement to export **skilled Indian workforce to Russia**, particularly in the Far East—an important new pillar.

5. China Factor and Eurasian Balance: Both countries share unease over China's growing dominance. Russia fears overdependencea and India seeks to prevent a China-Russia axis from becoming unbalanced. Hence, they seek **strategic diversification to preserve manoeuvrability** in Eurasia.

Key Takeaways from the Recent Summit

1. Programme 2030: The adoption of the **Programme for Development of Strategic Areas of Economic Cooperation till 2030** aims for: $100 billion trade target, Diversification beyond hydrocarbon, Removal of non-tariff barriers and rupee-Ruble settlement mechanisms.

2. Strengthening Strategic Infrastructure Links: Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor, Northern Sea Route (Arctic) and expansion of shipbuilding cooperation. These reduce dependence on the Suez route and counterbalance China's BRI.

3. Energy and Critical Mineral Security: Russia offers access to fertilizers, critical minerals, rare earths—areas where India lags behind China and the U.S.

4. Defence Cooperation Recalibrated Towards Niche Technologies: Future collaborations may include cyber defence, AI-enabled systems, underwater platforms, and hypersonics.

5. Soft Power, Mobility and Tourism Cooperation: Visa easing, training of Indian seafarers, cultural exchanges, and skilled workforce mobility widen societal linkages beyond traditional security areas.

Geopolitical Implications

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1. India's Enhanced Role as a Global Balancer: New Delhi demonstrated it can engage the U.S. and Russia simultaneously—reflecting **multi-alignment**, not non-alignment.

2. Endorsement of Peace Efforts: India's support for peace negotiations (linked to the Trump-Witkoff initiative) signals its aspiration for **norm-shaping in conflict diplomacy**.

3. Europe's Unease and Strategic Hedging: While the U.S. may accept India's position, Europe remains wary. India must balance gains with Russia without eroding its deepening EU partnerships.

4. Preventing a China-Centric Eurasian Order: India-Russia cooperation helps moderate Beijing's overwhelming influence in the region.

Conclusion

India's foreign policy now blends autonomy with ambition. The summit shows that reengineered ties are pragmatic tools to navigate a transforming global order.

Examine the necessity of strengthening the 'roots' of STEM education in India for sustained progress. Justify prioritization of fundamental improvements over seeking merely glamorous scientific pursuits.

Introduction

India ranks **40th on the Global Innovation Index 2024**, yet persistent gaps in research funding, fellowships, basic infrastructure, and industry–academia linkages show that STEM advancement requires strengthening foundational systems rather than chasing glamorous technological breakthroughs.

Necessity of Strengthening the 'Roots' of STEM Education in India

1. Basic Research is the Foundation of Future Innovation: Scientific innovation typically arises from decades of foundational inquiry. The **2023 Nobel Prize in Physics** stemmed from work on quantum mechanics done in the 1980s—long before quantum computing existed. India's own success stories—**ISRO's cryogenic engine**, **Green Revolution technologies**, **CSIR drug discovery platforms**—originated from sustained basic research, not quick-fix missions. Thus, long-term national technological capacities require a strong base of curiosity-driven research.

2. Structural Weaknesses Undermine India's Research Ecosystem

　　a. Fellowship Delays and Poor Funding (Hygiene Factors – Herzberg's Theory): Government fellowships often arrive after **months of delay**, demotivating researchers. Non-NET fellowships remain at **₹8,000/month since 2012**, below minimum wage, forcing scholars into extra jobs and reducing time for research. Basic financial stability is a hygiene factor essential for meaningful scientific output.

　　b. Weak University Infrastructure: Over **70% of India's PhD students** are in state universities where lab infrastructure, libraries, and supervisory capacities are inadequate (AISHE, 2023). Strong roots require strengthening these institutions, not only elite IITs or IISERs.

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3. Over-politicisation and Narrow Topic Selection Hampers Scientific Temper: Restricting research topics to "national priorities" only addresses present needs, not future unknowns. Advanced scientific nations—from the U.S. (Bell Labs) to Japan—succeeded by allowing researchers freedom to explore non-applied questions. Innovation emerges from ecosystems, not command-and-control research agendas.

4. Disconnect Between Industry and Academia: India suffers from: Minimal industry-funded PhDs (almost none outside IITs), Weak R&D expenditure (**0.65% of GDP**, OECD 2023), Poor collaborative culture. Strengthening roots requires building **translational research ecosystems**, research parks, and industry-ready PhD training—not announcing glamorous "quantum missions" without foundational capacity.

5. Need to Strengthen Non-STEM Disciplines for High-Quality STEM: Humanities and social sciences enable ethical reasoning, social analysis, design thinking, and policy understanding essential for STEM leadership. Countries with strong STEM capabilities—Germany, South Korea—invest equally in critical thinking and liberal arts. Weakness in these disciplines narrows scientific imagination.

Why Fundamental Improvements Must Be Prioritised Over Glamorous Scientific Pursuits

1. Without Basics, Megaprojects Collapse: Ambitious missions in AI, quantum, space, semiconductors or biotech require: Stable scholarships, Strong university laboratories, High-quality supervisors and transparent funding mechanisms. Without these roots, high-tech missions become dependent on foreign technology.

2. Glamour Cannot Substitute Systemic Repair: Announcing new missions while researchers go unpaid for months is counterproductive. Sustained progress needs: Predictable funding cycles, Meritocratic selection of supervisors, Upgraded labs. Reliable procurement systems
These ensure scientific continuity.

3. Long-term National Competitiveness Relies on Foundational Quality: Countries like China built world-class technology by first investing massively in: PhD training, Faculty hiring, Research funding and university ecosystems. India must replicate this foundational model, not only aspire for high-end technological milestones.

Conclusion

As **K. VijayRaghavan notes in The Scientific Indian**, enduring innovation emerges from strong ecosystems, not sporadic breakthroughs. Strengthening India's STEM roots is indispensable for genuine scientific self-reliance and long-term technological leadership.

Examine the assertion that improving the productivity of smallest enterprises is key to India's job growth. Justify a policy shift from focusing solely on large industry to the MSME sector.

Introduction

With over **7.3 crore unincorporated enterprises employing 12 crore workers (ASUSE 2024)** and MSMEs contributing **30% to GDP (MSME Annual Report 2023)**, India's employment landscape highlights the centrality of productivity-driven small enterprise growth.

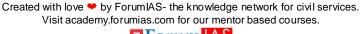**Why the Smallest Enterprises Matter for Job Growth**

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1. **Labour Absorption Capacity**: Nearly **80% of India's workforce** is engaged in informal or self-employed activities (Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2023). **Own Account Enterprises (OAEs)** constitute **87% of all non-agricultural enterprises**, yet operate with **low capital, low technology, and minimal hiring**.

2. **Productivity–Employment Link**: ASUSE data shows: **A 10% increase in GVA of small enterprises leads to 4.5% growth in hired workers.** Transitioning OAEs into **Hired Worker Enterprises (HWEs)** can dramatically expand employment.

3. **Large Industries Are Capital-Intensive, Not Labour-Intensive**: India's modern manufacturing (steel, autos, refineries) follows **capital deepening**, creating fewer jobs per crore of investment. RBI (2022) notes large firms increasingly automate to stay globally competitive, limiting labour absorption.

2. Why Productivity of Smallest Enterprises Remains Low

a) Constraints to Credit Access: Only **10–12%** of unincorporated enterprises have formal credit (ASUSE). **Credit gap of $530 billion** in MSME sector (IFC, 2018). Without credit → no capital deepening → firms remain trapped at subsistence level.

b) Technology Deficit: Only **6%** of micro-enterprises use basic digital tools (NASSCOM, 2023). ICT adoption increases operational efficiency, market access, and GVA significantly.

c) Informality & Non-Registration: UDYAM registration still covers only a minor share of micro enterprises. Perceived **high compliance burdens** and **lack of invoice recovery** deter formalisation (RBI MSME Report, 2019).

Why Policy Must Shift from Large Industry to MSMEs

1. **MSMEs Have Higher Employment Elasticity:** Employment elasticity in MSMEs is **0.75**, compared to **0.20** in large firms (ILO, 2021). Example: **Leather clusters in Kanpur** and **handloom in Tamil Nadu** demonstrate high labour intensity.

2. **Decentralised, Equitable Growth:** MSMEs promote **regional dispersal**, unlike large industries concentrated in coastal belts. Example: **ODOP in Uttar Pradesh** created local job ecosystems in districts.

3. **Role in Exports & Supply Chains:** MSMEs contribute **45% of India's exports**. Integration through **ONDC**, **Digital MSME**, and **GeM** can boost market linkages.

4. **Transitioning OAEs to Small & Small to Medium Firms:** Policy must enable **enterprise upgrading**, not just enterprise creation. Key reforms:

   · **Targeted credit** aligned to enterprise lifecycle (Shishu–Kishor–Tarun framework).

   · **Cluster-based skill development** (e.g., SFURTI, MSE-CDP).

   · **End-to-end digital onboarding** on UPI, ONDC, GSTN.

   · **Vocal for Local + global value chain integration**.

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Conclusion

As **Amar Singh's The Invisible Workforce and OECD's MSME Outlook** highlight, India's employment future lies in empowering micro-enterprises, where productivity enhancement can unlock inclusive, decentralised and sustainable job-led growth.

Examine the necessity for the State to reclaim its role in shaping digital markets. Justify how the zero-cost rail ethos of UPI reflects a commitment to open and accessible public digital infrastructure.

Introduction

As India's digital economy expands to **$1 trillion by 2030 (IAMAI, MeitY)**, concerns over monopolistic ecosystems, data concentration, and platform lock-ins highlight the imperative for the State to architect open, contestable, citizen-centric digital markets.

Why the State Must Reclaim Its Market-Shaping Role

1. **Platformisation and Private Ecosystem Dominance:** Digital markets are increasingly governed by **ecosystem orchestrators** — global tech giants controlling **operating systems, app stores, cloud layers, data flows**, and algorithmic governance. Their **bundling, self-preferencing, exclusionary access and interoperability restrictions** reduce competition. Studies by **OECD (2023)** and **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** show digital markets tend to become **"winner-takes-most"** due to **network effects**.

2. **Illusion of Competition:** Multiple platforms (e.g., Android–iOS, Amazon–Flipkart) appear competitive but follow similar strategies: Data hoarding, Vertical integration, Lock-in through default settings. Thus, competition becomes **intra-ecosystem**, not market-wide.

3. **Public Interest Risks:** Unregulated digital architectures affect: **Consumer choice, SME access to markets, Data sovereignty, Algorithmic fairness.** They can shape everything from credit access to mobility patterns.

4. **Limitations of Ex-post Regulation:** Traditional regulation—antitrust investigations, penalties, data protection laws—comes **after harm**, often too late in fast-moving digital markets. Hence, a **proactive, architectural role** of the State is necessary.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as a Market-Shaping Tool

1. India pioneered **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**—digital identity (Aadhaar), payments (UPI), digital documents (DigiLocker), and data empowerment (DEPA).

2. These systems create **public rails**, enabling private innovation **without dependence on a dominant private orchestrator**.
3. The India Stack has enabled **over 2,000 fintechs**, while reducing transaction frictions.

State as Architect, Not Just Regulator

DPI demonstrates three foundational functions:

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1. **Catalytic Anchor Client** – Government adoption (e.g., Aadhaar authentication) seeded early network effects.
2. **Institutional Continuity** – Through entities like **NPCI**, a non-profit public utility.
3. **Design for Inclusion** – Low-cost, multilingual, mobile-first design ensures accessibility.

This shifts the paradigm from **"regulating after exclusion"** to **"designing out exclusion from the start"**.

UPI Zero-Cost Rail Ethos as Proof of Public Commitment

1. **Democratization of Payments:** UPI's **zero MDR (Merchant Discount Rate)** model ensures no user—consumer or merchant—pays for digital payments. Over **12 billion monthly transactions** (NPCI, 2024). **Small merchants** onboarded without cost barriers.

2. **Contestability and Level Playing Field:** By keeping the rails **open, interoperable, and free**, UPI prevents the formation of payment monopolies. Allowed entry of PhonePe, Google Pay, Paytm, banks, fintech startups. Prevented dominance of card networks' fee-driven model.

3. **Public Purpose Orientation:** Reaffirmation by **RBI in 2024** to keep UPI zero-cost signals a commitment to: **Financial inclusion, Digital equity, Market neutral design.**

4. **Global Recognition:** World Bank (2023) calls UPI **"the world's most inclusive real-time payment system"**; G20 recognises DPI as a replicable model.

Conclusion

States must shape markets, not merely regulate them. India's UPI-centred DPI exemplifies how openness, neutrality and public purpose can govern future digital architectures responsibly.

Examine the detailed pathways suggested for improving Delhi's air quality. Critically analyze the relevance of global case studies from cities with similar geographical challenges.

Introduction

Delhi's annual PM2.5 levels remain nearly **eight times the WHO limit**, with an average AQI of **235 (2015–2025)**. Addressing its complex pollution crisis requires integrated pathways combining science-based governance, regulatory reform, and global learning.

Pathways Suggested for Improving Delhi's Air Quality

1. Strengthening Governance and Institutional Capacity: The SFC report highlights that India's pollution management has long been **externally driven**—via PILs, Supreme Court directions and EPCA—rather than internally institutionalised. **Resource-poor regulators**: Only **5,941 of 12,016** sanctioned posts in SPCBs are filled; CPCB functions with **504 staff**. This weakens **ground-level compliance monitoring**, environmental audits, and industrial inspections.

Pathway:

1. Strengthen SPCBs through staffing, funding, and technological support (remote sensing, CEMS).

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2. Create **mission-mode governance**, similar to Beijing's centralised approach to pollution reduction (2013–2017).

2. Prioritising PM2.5 Over PM10: India's NCAP focuses on **PM10 reduction**, largely because PM2.5 monitoring infrastructure is limited. Yet PM2.5 is **more harmful**, penetrating lungs, bloodstream, vital organs. WHO (2021) identifies PM2.5 as responsible for **one-third of global pollution-linked deaths**.

   Pathway:

   1. Shift metrics to PM2.5 reduction.

   2. Expand monitoring stations and adopt **source apportionment** and **airshed-level planning**.

3. Tackling Key Emission Sources: Delhi's pollution arises from: Transport (38%), Industry and power plants, Biomass burning, Waste burning, Dust and Geographical trapping in the Indo-Gangetic airshed.
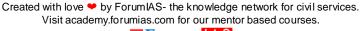
   Pathway:

   1. EV transition (like Mexico City's fleet).

   2. Strengthened **Clean Fuel Mandates**, **vehicle inspection systems**, and **industrial relocation** outside the airshed (as Beijing successfully did).

   3. **Agricultural mechanisation** and crop diversification to curb stubble burning.

4. Science-Based Standards and Transparency: Mexico City adopted **health-based standards**, catalytic converters, unleaded fuels, metro expansion, and **ProAire**—a long-term action plan.

   Pathway:

   1. Delhi needs predictable, time-bound, health-linked targets rather than ad-hoc seasonal actions.

   2. Public communication of health impacts to increase political salience.

Relevance of Global Case Studies with Similar Geography

1. Mexico City (Valley Basin, Mountain-locked): Similar to Delhi's position in the **Indo-Gangetic Basin**, Mexico City is surrounded by mountains that trap pollutants. **Relevance:** Demonstrates that even severe **topographic disadvantages** can be mitigated through: Coordinated multi-sector plan (ProAire), Fuel improvement, Mass transit expansion and Vehicle emissions standards. Delhi can adopt a similar **multi-decadal, science-led programme**.

B. Beijing (Mountain-locked with Winter Inversions): Beijing reduced PM2.5 by **35% in 5 years (2013–17)** through: Industrial relocation, Household coal bans, Heavy regulatory enforcement and Strict local and national targets. **Relevance:** shows that **political will + whole-of-government mobilisation** can overcome geographical constraints.

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C. Krakow, Poland (Civil Society-Led Reform): Despite EU standards, Poland lagged until civil society (PSA movement) pushed reforms. **Relevance:** Highlights the need for **citizen pressure**, decentralised accountability, and local action plans—critical for Delhi where political competition over pollution remains weak.

Critical Analysis

Global examples reveal that:

1. **Geography aggravates pollution but does not preclude success.**
2. **Institutional capacity**, **political will**, and **scientific standards** matter more than geography.
3. Delhi lacks consistent national-local coordination, long-term planning, and strong enforcement—gaps which cities like Beijing and Mexico City overcame.

Conclusion

As **the Lancet Commission stresses**, air pollution control is a governance challenge, not a technological one. Learning from cities like Beijing and Mexico City can help Delhi institutionalise durable, science-driven, multisectoral reforms.

Examine the implications of Pakistan's internal dysfunction and the military's new role for India's national security. Justify a policy of firmness without agitation in future statecraft.

Introduction

With Pakistan's political volatility intensifying after Imran Khan's imprisonment and the military consolidation under General Asim Munir, India faces a nuclear-armed neighbour whose instability, as per SIPRI 2024, raises unpredictable cross-border security risks.

Implications of Pakistan's Internal Dysfunction for India's National Security

A. Civil–Military Disequilibrium Intensifying Strategic Ambiguity

1.   Pakistan's elevation of Asim Munir as the first **Chief of Defence Forces** formalises Rawalpindi's primacy over political institutions.

2.   Strategic decisions—including Kashmir policy, ceasefire violations, and terror sponsorship—are now shaped by a narrower, security-maximalist military calculus.

3.   A "military-first state" tends to employ **diversionary tactics**, historically seen after domestic crises (Kargil 1999, Operation Parakram 2001, Pathankot 2016).

B. Erosion of Civilian Legitimacy fuels Impulsive Behaviour

1.   A weakened Shehbaz Sharif government, lacking electoral credibility, reduces Pakistan's diplomatic bandwidth.

2.   Foreign policy becomes **reactive**, raising the possibility of **uncoordinated escalations**, particularly after incidents like the Pahalgam attack.

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3. Nuclear signalling may be used to compensate for internal fragility, increasing crisis instability in the Subcontinent.

Regional Security Spillovers from Pakistan's Domestic Crisis

1.   Rise of Non-State Actors and Unchecked Terror Ecosystems: Domestic dysfunction creates permissive environments for groups like: **TTP** (with safe havens in Afghanistan), **LeT/JeM** elements historically sheltered by Pakistan's deep state.
 With Pakistan accusing Kabul of hosting TTP, the risk of **two-front militancy** increases. For India, this heightens threats along the LoC and raises infiltration probabilities.

2.   Economic Distress and Strategic Adventurism: Pakistan's chronic economic crisis—debt, IMF conditionalities, 30% inflation—creates incentives for **externalisation of internal pressures**. According to World Bank 2024, states with declining economic resilience often resort to **risk-prone foreign policy**. India must anticipate sudden escalatory postures from a fiscally cornered neighbour.

3.   External Actors Recalibrating Policies: China remains invested through CPEC but is increasingly risk-averse after repeated attacks on Chinese workers. **Saudi Arabia's** growing warmth toward India limits Pakistan's financial leverage. **The U.S.** maintains tactical ties, especially for counter-terror cooperation. This multipolarity fragments Pakistan's external anchors, amplifying unpredictability for India.

Why India Requires a Policy of "Firmness Without Agitation"

1.   **Managing a Nuclear-Neighbour with Multiple Power Centres:** India cannot allow domestic turbulence in Pakistan to provoke **emotion-driven escalation**, especially when "command cohesion" is uncertain. Controlled firmness—calibrated military responses, robust border management, and counter-terror intelligence—ensures deterrence without spiralling crises.

2.   **Preserving Strategic Focus in the Indo-Pacific and West Asia:** A reactive Pakistan-centric posture could dilute India's capacity for: Indo-Pacific partnerships (Quad, IPEF), West Asian outreach (I2U2, oil-security ties), Central Asian engagement. Composure ensures India's **strategic bandwidth** is not hijacked by a weakened neighbour.

3.   **Behavioural Realism and Crisis Stability:** Successful statecraft requires **signals without provocation**: targeted retaliation (Balakot model), denial capabilities (counter-infiltration grid), diplomatic isolation of terror networks, maintaining backchannel communication for crisis de-escalation. This reflects the doctrine of **offensive defence + strategic restraint**.

Conclusion

Unstable neighbours demand calibrated diplomacy. India's future policy must blend quiet strength, crisis stability, and strategic patience to safeguard long-term national security.

Examine how the growing costs of education highlighted by the NSS 80th Round exacerbate inequalities in access to quality education in India. Critically analyze the policy response required.

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NSS 80th Round (2025) reveals steep rises in private schooling and coaching costs, contradicting Article 21A's mandate of free education. Coupled with MPCE disparities and ASER learning gaps, educational inequality intensifies across socio-economic groups.
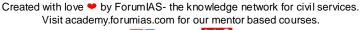
Rising Costs as a Driver of Inequality:

1.   **Present Observations:** The NSS 80th Round shows **only 55.9% of students remain in government schools**, while **31.9% are in private unaided schools** charging substantial fees. Annual private school fees range from **₹17,988 to ₹49,075**, often equaling or exceeding the **monthly expenditure of the poorest 5% households (HCES 2023–24)**.

2.   **Rural–Urban Divide: Private school enrolment**: 24.3% (rural) vs 51.4% (urban). Urban households spend **2–3× more** on schooling, deepening spatial inequalities. Similar patterns were documented by **UNESCO's 2023 South Asia Education Report**, which warned of **"creeping privatisation" and "structural exclusion."**

3.   **Private Coaching as an Inequality Multiplier: 25.5% rural** and **30.7% urban** students take private coaching. Expenditure: **₹7,066 (rural)** vs **₹13,026 (urban)** annually. Higher-income households disproportionately access coaching. The **World Bank's "Learning Poverty" (2022)** notes such parallel markets create "shadow education systems" benefitting the affluent.

4.   **Learning Outcomes Worsen Inequality**: ASER 2023 found: Only **43% of Class 5** students can read Class 2 text. Students from private schools + coaching consistently outperform poorer peers — reproducing the "**Matthew Effect**" (advantaged learners gain more advantage).

5.   **Feminisation of Educational Exclusion:** Even though gender gaps in enrolment are small, **girls disproportionately drop out** when schooling becomes costly. NSS data show **lower female enrolment in private schools**—indicating intra-household discrimination.

Why Government Schools Are Losing Ground

1. Declining trust due to **teacher absenteeism**, poor infrastructure, and limited digital access.
2. Underfunding: India spends **2.9% of GDP on education** (below NEP's recommended 6%).
3. Excessive reliance on private providers has shifted education from a right to a market good.

Policy Response Required — A Critical Analysis

1.   **Strengthen Public Education Quality (Core Reform):** Expand **school infrastructure norms** under the RTE Act 2009. Implement **School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAF)** nationwide. States like **Delhi and Kerala** show improved learning outcomes after targeted investments.

2.   **Regulate the Private Sector:** Enforce **fee regulation laws**, transparency norms, and teacher qualification standards. Crack down on exploitative private coaching centres; integrate tutoring into school support systems. Introduce **Learning Outcome Guarantees** linked to school recognition.

3.   **Reduce Financial Barriers:** Targeted **education vouchers**, **DBT-based scholarships**, and **transport allowances** for poor households. Expand **Samagra Shiksha** to cover coaching support for disadvantaged groups.

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4.   **Address Shadow Education Inequality:** Strengthen **remedial teaching**, foundational literacy & numeracy under **NIPUN Bharat**. Leverage **AI-enabled personalised learning tools** for low-income children (as piloted in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh).

5.   **Enhance Governance and Teacher Quality:**   Recruit trained teachers; incentivise rural postings.Institute **performance-linked professional development** and **teacher mentoring systems**.

Conclusion

As **Nobel laureate Amartya Sen argues in Development as Freedom**, equitable education underpins capability expansion. NSS evidence underscores that only strong public systems can prevent unequal access and secure inclusive national development.

Examine the rationale behind exploring Space Data Centres like Project Suncatcher to meet the demands of the AI boom. Analyze the technological and security trade-offs of this approach.

Introduction

Goldman Sachs projects a 165% surge in global data-centre electricity demand by 2030, intensifying environmental and infrastructural stresses. Amid the AI boom, initiatives like Google's Project Suncatcher explore extraterrestrial data centres to overcome terrestrial constraints.

Rationale for Space Data Centres

1.   **Environmental Sustainability and Energy Security:** Traditional data centres consume enormous energy and water. A **2023 IEA report** estimated data centres may use **over 1,000 TWh electricity by 2026**, equal to Japan's annual demand. Space-based centres leverage **continuous solar radiation**, bypassing land-based ecological stress, water scarcity and fossil-fuel dependence. **Technical keywords:** energy redundancy, negative externalities, solar flux stability, environmental offloading.

2.   **Rising AI Computation Demands:** AI training requires high-volume, low-precision processors. Google's plan to place **TPU-enabled constellations linked by optical lasers** allows large-scale **distributed computing** in orbit. NVIDIA's 60-kg **Starcloud satellite** with an H100 GPU confirms feasibility of orbital AI inference.

3.   **Climate and Disaster Resilience:** Earth-based infrastructure faces risks from **hurricanes, heatwaves, undersea cable ruptures**, and grid failures. Space offers **predictable sunlight, lower environmental volatility**, and immunity from terrestrial hazards.

4.   **Data Sovereignty and Legal Loopholes:** The **Outer Space Treaty (1967)** prohibits national appropriation but leaves scope for private data hosting. Companies can bypass local data-residency restrictions, offering **multi-country hosting** in a non-sovereign domain — a major commercial incentive.

5.   **Falling Launch Costs and Advancing Space Tech:** SpaceX's reusable rockets have cut launch costs by **over 80% since 2010**. This makes experimental payloads like **Lonestar's lunar micro-datacentre** and Google's 2027 prototypes economically feasible.

Technological Trade-Offs

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1.   **Latency and Real-Time Constraints:** The **Earth–Moon latency (~1.3 seconds round-trip)** makes space data centres unsuitable for real-time banking, gaming, or critical defence networks. Highly delayed inference limits practical deployment for latency-sensitive AI applications.

2.   **Repair, Maintenance and Cost Escalation:** Orbital infrastructure requires expensive **on-site robotic maintenance**, specialized shielding, and radiation-resistant hardware. Failures may lead to **space debris**, amplifying the Kessler Syndrome risk.

3.   **Power and Thermal Regulation Challenges:** Cooling large processing clusters in vacuum is complex. Systems must manage **thermal dissipation without convection**, requiring sophisticated radiators that add weight and cost.

Security Trade-Offs

1.   **Cybersecurity in an Extra-Terrestrial Domain:** Space networks face risks of **satellite hacking, jamming, spoofing, and cyber-kinetic attacks**. The 2022 attack on **Viasat satellites** during the Ukraine war highlights vulnerabilities.

2.   **Militarisation and Geopolitical Risks:** Data-centre satellites may become targets in conflicts, challenging the **peaceful-use principle** of outer space. Rival nations could claim that dual-use computation threatens strategic stability.

3.   **Data Governance and Jurisdictional Ambiguity:** Ambiguous ownership under international space law complicates: liability norms, enforcement of data protection standards, cross-border disputes. This can undermine user trust and regulatory compliance.

Conclusion

Technological leaps reshape human systems. Space data centres offer promise but demand careful balancing of sustainability, security, and governance to ensure resilient and ethical AI-driven digital futures.
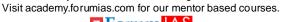
Examine the hits and misses of the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha Bill, 2025 in reforming the Indian insurance sector. Critically analyze its potential impact on policyholder protection and market competition.

Introduction

"India's insurance penetration remains **around 4.2% of GDP (IRDAI, 2023), far below global averages**. The Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha Bill, 2025 seeks structural reform, but reveals both ambition and constraint."

Hits: Strengthening Capital, Regulation and Policyholder Protection

1.   The Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha Bill, 2025 marks the most consequential reform of India's insurance architecture since the **IRDAI Act, 1999**. Its most transformative provision is the **enhancement of FDI limits to 100%**, aligning India with global insurance hubs such as Singapore and the UK.

2.   According to **Swiss Re's Sigma Report (2023)**, emerging markets require sustained foreign capital to expand insurance density, particularly in health and catastrophe coverage.

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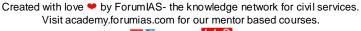Visit academy.forumias.com for our mentor based courses.
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3.   Full FDI is likely to strengthen insurers' balance sheets, introduce advanced actuarial models, and accelerate digital claims processing, thereby improving consumer experience.

4.   A second major reform lies in **strengthening the enforcement powers of Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India**. Granting IRDAI disgorgement powers, akin to those exercised by Securities and Exchange Board of India, enhances regulatory deterrence and protects policyholders from mis-selling, fraud, and unjust enrichment.

5.   The introduction of structured **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** for regulation-making further improves transparency, predictability, and regulatory legitimacy.

6.   The Bill also rationalises compliance through **one-time registration for intermediaries** and raises the threshold for regulatory approval of equity transfers from 1% to 5%. These measures reduce transaction costs, encourage ease of doing business, and align with the **OECD's recommendations on proportional regulation**.

7.   Further, reducing the **Net Owned Funds requirement for foreign reinsurers** from ₹5,000 crore to ₹1,000 crore can deepen India's reinsurance market, currently dominated by General Insurance Corporation of India. Greater reinsurance capacity improves systemic resilience against climate-induced disasters, a growing concern flagged by the **IPCC Sixth Assessment Report**.

Misses: Structural Rigidities and Incomplete Market Deepening

1.   Despite these gains, the Bill stops short of addressing long-standing structural inefficiencies. The most significant omission is the absence of **composite licensing**, which continues the rigid separation between life and non-life insurance. Internationally, composite insurers dominate markets such as Australia and Germany, offering bundled products and benefiting from economies of scope.

2.   In India, this siloed structure limits innovation, restricts cross-risk pooling, and increases distribution costs for consumers.

3.   Another missed opportunity is the failure to **lower minimum capital requirements for new insurers**. The current ₹100–200 crore thresholds discourage niche, regional, and micro-insurance players.

4.   Evidence from **Kenya's micro-insurance reforms** shows that lighter capital norms for specialised insurers significantly expanded coverage among informal workers and rural households. India's insurance density — about **$91 compared to a global average of $890 (Swiss Re)** — suggests the need for such targeted entrants.

5.   The Bill is also silent on **captive insurance companies**, a globally accepted risk-management tool used by multinational corporations. Their exclusion limits India's ability to develop a sophisticated corporate risk ecosystem and retain premium outflows offshore.

6.   Additionally, restrictions on **multi-company agency distribution** and cross-selling of financial products remain, constraining competition and consumer choice, particularly in underpenetrated regions.

Impact on Policyholders and Competition

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1.	While enhanced regulatory powers and capital inflows strengthen **policyholder protection**, the limited structural reform may blunt competitive intensity.

2.	Market concentration risks persist, potentially favouring large incumbents over innovation-driven challengers.

3.	True consumer welfare requires not only stronger regulation but also **contestable markets**, product diversity, and last-mile outreach.

Conclusion

Regulation must enable markets, not entrench power. **IRDAI data and Swiss Re surveys** suggest deeper competition is essential for universal insurance access.

Examine the significance of the people-led climate intelligence movement in enhancing climate governance. Critically analyze how the community-driven MRV framework in Tamil Nadu facilitates real-time environmental data.
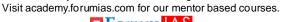
Introduction

Climate governance increasingly hinges on credible **Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV)**. As underscored by the **Paris Agreement and COP30 outcomes**, granular, inclusive data systems are vital for accountability, adaptation, and climate finance access.

Significance of People-Led Climate Intelligence

1. Bridging the Scale and Knowledge Gap: Climate impacts manifest first at **micro-ecological scales** — villages, forests, wetlands and coastal belts — while policymaking relies on aggregated datasets. People-led climate intelligence captures **hyper-local signals** such as rainfall variability, salinity ingress, biodiversity loss and livelihood stress that satellite or administrative data often miss.

2. Enhancing Democratic Legitimacy: Community-generated data transforms citizens from passive beneficiaries into **co-producers of governance knowledge**. This aligns with climate justice principles and the doctrine of **subsidiarity**, improving trust, compliance and policy legitimacy.

3. Strengthening Adaptation and Resilience: Unlike mitigation-focused emissions accounting, people-led intelligence improves **adaptation MRV**, which remains underdeveloped globally. IPCC AR6 notes that adaptation effectiveness depends on locally relevant indicators — something community systems provide naturally.

4. Unlocking Climate Finance: Robust, verifiable local data strengthens project pipelines for **results-based finance**, including adaptation funding, nature-based solutions and community-centred carbon markets. This responds to developing countries' demand for equity in climate finance access.

Community-Driven MRV (CbMRV) Framework in Tamil Nadu

1. Concept and Design: Tamil Nadu's Community-based MRV (CbMRV) initiative integrates **community-generated environmental data** into formal climate governance. Initiated under the UK PACT in partnership

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with Keystone Foundation, it operationalises bottom-up climate intelligence across diverse ecological landscapes.

2. Data Generation and Indicators: CbMRV combines **traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)** with scientific monitoring of: Rainfall and temperature patterns, Soil and water health, Biodiversity and fish catch, Cropping systems and livelihoods, Carbon stocks and emissions. This produces **real-time, longitudinal datasets**, enabling trend analysis rather than episodic assessments.

3. Community Climate Stewards: A core innovation is the training of **community climate stewards** — farmers, fishers, women, youth and tribal elders — who collect, interpret and communicate environmental data. This builds a **distributed green workforce** and institutional memory at the village level.

4. Governance Integration: CbMRV data feeds into: **Gram Panchayat Development Plans,** Climate-resilient village programmes, District-level watershed and disaster planning, State Action Plan on Climate Change and climate investment platforms. Digital dashboards ensure vertical integration from village to State, enhancing **evidence-based policymaking**.

Critical Evaluation

1.   While transformative, CbMRV faces challenges of **scalability, data standardisation, long-term financing and data governance**.

2.   Ensuring interoperability with national MRV systems, preventing elite capture, and maintaining data quality require strong institutional safeguards.

3.   Without sustained capacity-building, volunteer-based systems risk fatigue.

Conclusion

People-led climate intelligence redefines governance from control to collaboration. As Elinor Ostrom argued in **Governing the Commons**, durable institutions emerge from shared stewardship — a principle CbMRV brings alive in climate action.
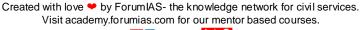
Examine the assertion that the shift from MGNREGA to RAM G transforms an employment guarantee into labour control. Critically analyze its implications for landless labourers and agricultural wages.

Introduction

India's **out-of-pocket health expenditure remains around 47% of total health spending (NHA 2021),** exposing limits of insurance-led UHC and underscoring the need for universal, publicly financed healthcare.

Conceptual Distinction: Universal Healthcare vs Universal Health Coverage

1. **Universal Healthcare (UHCare):** Goes beyond financial risk protection to ensure **equitable access to preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care**.
2. **Universal Health Coverage (UHC):** Focuses primarily on **insurance-based financial protection**, often hospital-centric and disease-package driven.

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Normative Foundation: Health as a Right

1. Health is a **human right**, reaffirmed by World Health Organization through the Alma-Ata Declaration.
2. Later global shifts, especially WHO (2010), prioritised **risk pooling and insurance**, diluting the primary healthcare vision.

Limitations of Insurance-Centric Approach in India

1. **Hospital Bias:** Schemes like Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY emphasise tertiary care, neglecting primary and secondary levels.
2. **Persistent Out-of-Pocket Expenditure:** NSS data show costs for diagnostics, medicines, and follow-ups remain uncovered.
3. **Supplier-Induced Demand:** Evidence of unnecessary procedures and inflated billing in private hospitals.
4. **Equity Concerns:** Informal workers, migrants and women face exclusion due to documentation and awareness gaps.

Importance of Primary and Secondary Care

1. **Gatekeeping Function:** Strong primary care reduces avoidable hospitalisation and costs.
2. **Cost-Effectiveness:** WHO estimates every $1 invested in primary care yields up to $9 in health and economic benefits.
3. **Epidemiological Transition:** Rising NCDs require **continuous, community-based care**, not episodic hospital treatment.

Asian Models: Insurance Embedded in Strong Public Systems

1. **China:** After near-universal insurance, high fiscal stress led to renewed investment in township hospitals and family doctors.
2. **South Korea:** Single-payer insurance supported by robust public provisioning and regulated private sector.
3. **Thailand:** Tax-funded Universal Coverage Scheme with strong district health systems drastically reduced catastrophic health spending.
4. **Key Lesson:** Insurance works best **within a publicly funded service-delivery backbone**.

Role of Public Spending

1. India spends about **2.1% of GDP on health**, below WHO's recommended 3–4%.
2. Higher public spending enables: Human resource expansion (doctors, nurses, ASHAs), Infrastructure at Health and Wellness Centres and Free drugs and diagnostics, reducing OOPE.
3. Strong public sector acts as a **price and quality regulator** for private healthcare.

Indian Context: Legacy and Missed Opportunity

1. **Bhore Committee:** Advocated comprehensive, state-funded healthcare before insurance.
2. **Chronic Underfinancing:** Weakened public provisioning pushed poor households towards costly private care.
3. **COVID-19 Lessons:** Highlighted limits of insurance when public hospitals and primary care are weak.

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Way Forward: From Coverage to Care

1. Increase public health expenditure to **at least 3% of GDP**.
2. Strengthen Health and Wellness Centres as first point of care.
3. Integrate insurance schemes with **referral-linked public systems**.
4. Invest in social determinants: nutrition, sanitation, housing.

Conclusion

As argued in **Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom** and WHO's Primary Health Care approach, health systems anchored in public provision are essential for equity, efficiency and genuine universal healthcare.

Examine the assertion that the shift from MGNREGA to RAM G transforms an employment guarantee into labour control. Critically analyze its implications for landless labourers and agricultural wages.

Introduction

MGNREGA provided legal wage security to nearly 26 crore workers annually; World Bank and ILO studies credit it with poverty reduction, wage stabilisation and counter-cyclical employment, making its dilution a serious socio-economic concern.

Rights-based Guarantee vs Scheme-based Control

1. **MGNREGA Framework:** A justiciable right to work, demand-driven, with time-bound wage payments and unemployment allowance.
2. **RAM G Shift:** Converts a statutory right into a conditional, allocation-driven scheme, weakening enforceability.
3. **Core Assertion:** From worker entitlement to state-managed labour supply.
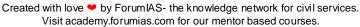
Fiscal Federalism and Cost Burden

1. **Earlier Model:** Centre bore 100% unskilled wage cost, ensuring uniform wage assurance.
2. **RAM G Cost Sharing:** 60:40 (general states), 90:10 (special states), shifting ₹50,000+ crore burden to states.
3. **Implication:** Poorer states may ration work → reduced bargaining power of labour.

Demand-driven Employment vs Budget Caps

1. **MGNREGA Principle:** Work followed demand; fiscal stress did not extinguish rights.
2. **RAM G Normative Allocation:** Pre-fixed ceilings decided by Centre; excess spending penalised.
3. **Outcome:** "When funds run out, rights run out."

Labour Control through Work Suspension

1. **Mandatory 60-day No-Work Period:** Coinciding with peak agricultural seasons.
2. **Economic Effect:** Forces landless workers into private farms.
3. **ILO Insight:** Public employment programmes raise rural wages by strengthening fallback options; withdrawal depresses wages.

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Impact on Landless Labourers

1. **Loss of Fallback Employment**: Landless households rely most on MGNREGA during lean seasons.
2. **Increased Vulnerability:** Greater dependence on landlords, advances, tied labour.
3. **Empirical Evidence:** Studies by Azim Premji University show MGNREGA increased women's participation and reduced distress migration.

Agricultural Wages and Labour Markets

1. **MGNREGA Effect:** Raised real agricultural wages (especially SC/ST and women workers).
2. **RAM G Risk:** Artificial labour oversupply during sowing/harvest → wage suppression.
3. **Case Study:** Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh showed wage convergence upwards due to MGNREGA floor wages.

Decentralisation vs Technocratic Centralisation

1. **Earlier System:** Gram Panchayat-led planning via Gram Sabhas.
2. **RAM G Tools:** GIS layers, PM Gati Shakti, biometrics, AI audits.
3. **Concern:** Tech failures → exclusion without grievance redressal; people reduced to datasets.

Social Inclusion and Representation

1. **MGNREGA Councils:** Mandated representation of women, SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities.
2. **RAM G Central Council:** Omission of reservation criteria signals elite capture.
3. **Normative Risk:** Weakening voice of the most affected workers.

Political Economy Perspective

1. **Employment Guarantee:** Strengthens labour's exit option (Amartya Sen).
2. **Labour Control Regime:** Aligns with landlord interests by disciplining labour supply.
3. **Governance Shift:** From welfare state logic to managerial state logic under Narendra Modi's development narrative.

Conclusion

Dismantling social protection re-commodifies labour; evidence from NSS, ILO and World Bank suggests RAM G risks reversing MGNREGA's hard-won gains in dignity and wages.

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