

ForumIAS

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*HISTORY
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Examine how structural dependence on foreign cloud infrastructure undermines digital sovereignty. Evaluate the policy measures required to ensure absolute strategic autonomy.

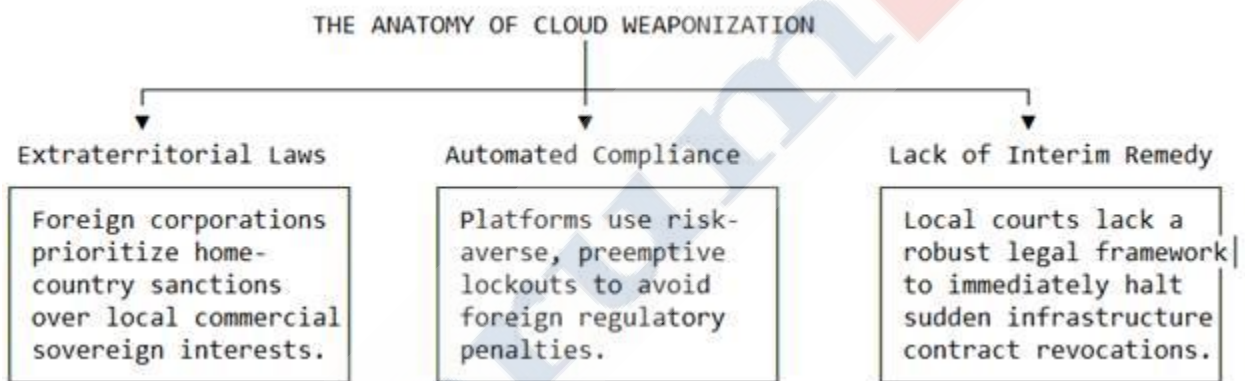
Introduction

Economic Survey 2025–26 identifies digital infrastructure as a strategic growth multiplier, while Budget 2026–27 deepens investments in AI, semiconductors, and data centres. Yet dependence on foreign clouds exposes India's digital sovereignty vulnerabilities.

Foreign Cloud Dependence and the Crisis of Digital Sovereignty

1. India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) architecture—comprising Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, ONDC, and Account Aggregators—has emerged as a global governance model.
2. However, while India controls the application layer, much of the foundational compute, cloud storage, AI infrastructure, and semiconductor ecosystem remains dependent on foreign hyperscalers such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure, and Google Cloud. This structural dependence creates significant challenges for strategic autonomy.

How Foreign Cloud Infrastructure Undermines Digital Sovereignty



1. **Extraterritorial Legal Control:** Foreign cloud providers remain bound by the laws of their home jurisdictions, irrespective of server location. The U.S. CLOUD Act permits access to data held by American companies even when stored abroad. Data localisation without ownership control becomes merely “data residency”, not sovereignty. Example: CLOUD Act exposure.
2. **Geopolitical Weaponisation of Digital Infrastructure:** The 2025 Nayara Energy–Microsoft episode demonstrated how geopolitical tensions can directly affect domestic operations. Foreign sanctions can influence service continuity within India. Critical sectors such as banking, energy, logistics, and defence become vulnerable. Example: Nayara Energy.
3. **Vendor Lock-In and Strategic Dependence:** Proprietary architectures create migration barriers. High switching costs reduce policy flexibility. Foreign corporations gain disproportionate influence over pricing and technological standards. Example: Proprietary cloud stack.
4. **National Security Risks:** Cloud infrastructure now supports critical information infrastructure. Disruption can affect defence communications, financial networks, and public services. Centralised foreign-controlled systems create systemic vulnerabilities. Example: Financial grid.
5. **AI Sovereignty Deficit:** Large Language Models (LLMs) are increasingly embedded in governance and enterprise workflows. Most foundational AI models are controlled by U.S. or Chinese firms. Embedded values, datasets, and moderation standards may not align with Indian priorities. Example: Foreign LLMs.

Broader Implications

1. **Constitution and Governance:** Digital sovereignty is increasingly linked to the constitutional obligation of protecting citizen data and ensuring accountable governance. DPDP Act seeks data protection. Operational dependence weakens effective state control. Example: Data governance.
2. **Economic:** India's digital economy is projected to become a major contributor to GDP. Foreign cloud concentration increases capital outflows. Domestic innovation remains dependent on external infrastructure. Example: Cloud expenditure.
3. **Geopolitical:** Technology is becoming a strategic instrument of power. Semiconductor controls and AI export restrictions illustrate emerging techno-nationalism. Digital dependence can constrain foreign policy autonomy. Example: Chip restrictions.
4. **Global South Implications:** Several developing nations face similar vulnerabilities. India's DPI partnerships in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America create opportunities for alternative digital ecosystems. Example: UPI diplomacy.

Policy Measures for Absolute Strategic Autonomy

1. **Develop Sovereign Cloud Infrastructure:** Expand MeghRaj into a hyperscale sovereign cloud ecosystem. Create mandatory sovereign backups for critical sectors. Example: Government cloud MeghRaj.
2. **Accelerate Semiconductor Self-Reliance:** Strengthen India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0. Promote indigenous chip design, fabrication, and AI accelerators. Budget 2026–27 significantly expanded semiconductor support.
3. **Enact a Digital Sovereignty Law:** Require cloud providers to operate through Indian-incorporated subsidiaries. Restrict unilateral service termination based on foreign sanctions. Example: Jurisdictional control.
4. **Promote Open Standards and Interoperability:** Mandate portability and multi-cloud architecture. Reduce vendor lock-in risks. Example: Open APIs.
5. **Build Sovereign AI Ecosystems:** Expand IndiaAI Mission and indigenous foundation models. Develop sector-specific AI for governance, agriculture, healthcare, and education. Budget 2026–27 places AI infrastructure and data centres at the centre of technological sovereignty.
6. **Strengthen Global South Coalitions:** Collaborate on sovereign cloud frameworks. Create alternatives to concentrated digital monopolies. Example: DPI partnerships.

Conclusion

As Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam wrote in Wings of Fire: A nation's strength ultimately consists in what it can do on its own. Building world-class apps on rented infrastructure is not sovereignty it is sophisticated dependency. India's digital future must be built on foundations it owns, not leases.

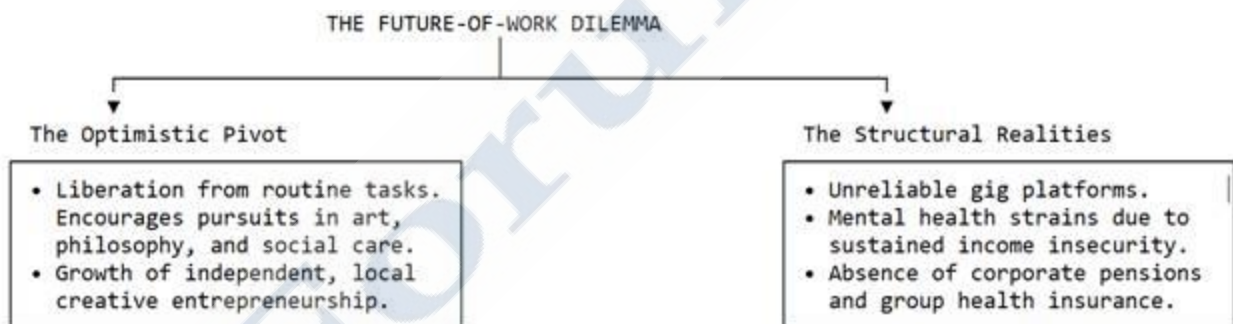
Examine the socio-economic implications of AI-driven automation on the future of employment. Evaluate the structural challenges of transitioning toward a passion-driven economy.

Introduction

The accelerating integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced automation across global industries is fundamentally altering the traditional nine-to-five employment paradigm. While optimization technologies promise to liberate human labor from repetitive, cognitive tasks, they simultaneously threaten to trigger widespread structural unemployment.

Socio-Economic Implications of AI-Driven Automation

- 1. Transformation of Labour Markets:** AI is increasingly automating routine cognitive and administrative functions. Entry-level jobs in coding, legal research, customer support, accounting, and content generation face disruption. Traditional apprenticeship pathways are weakening for young entrants. Example: Junior coding roles.
- 2. Labour Market Polarisation:** The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report highlights simultaneous job creation and displacement. High-skilled AI-enabled professionals gain disproportionate benefits. Middle-skill routine jobs experience contraction. Income inequality may widen significantly. Example: K-shaped employment.
- 3. Productivity and Economic Growth:** Automation can substantially enhance national productivity. Reduced operational costs improve competitiveness. New sectors emerge around AI development, cybersecurity, data governance, and human-machine collaboration. Example: AI startups.
- 4. Informalisation of Work:** Stable long-term employment may increasingly give way to project-based engagements. Gig work, freelancing, and platform-mediated labour expand. Employment becomes flexible but less secure. Example: Platform economy.
- 5. Social and Psychological Consequences:** Work provides identity, purpose, and social belonging. Job displacement may increase anxiety, loneliness, and uncertainty. Younger generations face career ambiguity and delayed financial independence. Example: Career insecurity.
- 6. Demographic Implications:** India adds millions to its workforce annually. Automation may constrain labour-intensive absorption. Demographic dividend risks becoming demographic stress. Example: Youth unemployment.



Can a Passion-Driven Economy Emerge?

- 1. Human Creativity Becomes Central:** As machines perform repetitive tasks, human strengths gain value. Creativity, empathy, ethics, caregiving, design, and innovation become critical. Example: Creative industries.
- 2. Rise of Independent Entrepreneurship:** Digital platforms enable individuals to monetize niche skills. Content creation, online education, consulting, and cultural enterprises expand. Example: Creator economy.
- 3. Greater Work-Life Flexibility:** People may increasingly pursue meaningful vocations rather than purely survival-oriented jobs. Example: Social entrepreneurship.

Structural Challenges of Transitioning to a Passion-Driven Economy

- 1. Economic Challenge:** Passion alone cannot guarantee livelihood. Creative and freelance incomes remain volatile. Absence of predictable earnings creates financial insecurity. Example: Gig fluctuations.

2. **Social Security Deficit:** Most independent workers lack institutional protections. No employer-sponsored pensions, insurance, or paid leave. Example: Informal freelancers.
3. **Educational Mismatch:** Current education systems remain examination-oriented. Creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and adaptability remain underdeveloped. NITI Aayog's AI strategy emphasised future-ready skills. Example: Skill mismatch.
4. **Constitution and Equity:** The State's commitment to social justice requires inclusive transitions. Automation should not deepen inequalities across regions, gender, caste, or income groups. Example: Digital divide.
5. **Technological Concentration:** A small number of global firms control advanced AI infrastructure. Wealth concentration may intensify. Example: MANG dominance.
6. **Governance and Regulatory:** Labour laws remain designed for employer-employee relationships. Gig workers and creators often fall outside traditional protections.

Way Forward

1. **Build Human-Centric Education:** Emphasize creativity, ethics, problem-solving, communication, and interdisciplinary learning. Align with National Education Policy (NEP) objectives.
2. **Establish Portable Social Protection:** Universal health coverage, pension portability, and unemployment support. Protect workers across multiple careers and platforms.
3. **Promote Lifelong Reskilling:** Expand IndiaAI Mission, Skill India, and digital skilling ecosystems. Encourage continuous learning rather than one-time education.
4. **Strengthen Gig Worker Protections:** Ensure social security coverage, grievance redressal, and platform accountability. Example: Gig welfare framework.
5. **Explore Universal Basic Support Systems:** Pilot Universal Basic Income (UBI) or Universal Basic Services (UBS) in vulnerable sectors. Example: Income floor.
6. **Foster Inclusive AI Governance:** Encourage responsible innovation through transparent and ethical AI regulation. Example: Responsible AI.

Conclusion

Echoing Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's vision of empowering minds, the future of work must prioritize human creativity over mere productivity. Technological progress should expand human dignity, not economic insecurity.

Examine how China's dual-use counter-space capabilities threaten India's space assets. Evaluate the measures required to strengthen orbital deterrence and architectural resilience.

Introduction

China's dual-use space programme poses direct threats to India's orbital assets amid LAC tensions. With over 60 operational satellites underpinning communications, navigation, disaster management and military surveillance, India's expanding space economy faces unprecedented risks.

The Counter-Space Threat Profile

1. **Direct-Ascent Kinetic Kill Vehicles (DA-ASAT) Capabilities:** China's 2007 ASAT test and subsequent DN-series interceptors demonstrated the ability to physically destroy satellites in Low-Earth-Orbit (LEO). Potential targeting of critical Indian assets such as NavIC, GSAT and CARTOSAT satellites could disrupt military operations. Example: SC-19 missile & LAC surveillance

2. Co-Orbital and Rendezvous Technologies: Chinese satellites equipped with robotic arms and proximity-operation capabilities can inspect, capture or disable adversary satellites under the guise of servicing missions. Blurs distinction between civilian and military activities, complicating attribution under international law. Example: SJ-series satellites, Orbital dogfight 2024.

3. Directed-Energy and Electronic Warfare (Soft-Kill Options): Ground-based lasers can dazzle or blind optical sensors of Indian ISR satellites. Jamming and spoofing can disrupt satellite communication and navigation services. Example: CARTOSAT imaging, NavIC interference.

4. Cyber-Space Convergence: Cyber intrusions targeting satellite command-and-control systems can degrade operational effectiveness without physical destruction. Example: Satellite uplink attacks.

Strategic Vulnerabilities in India's Space Architecture

1. Technological: India possesses a comparatively smaller satellite constellation, creating a redundancy deficit. Kinetic ASAT like Mission Shakti creates Kessler Syndrome risks. Example: Debris proliferation.

2. Military-Security: Space-based ISR, missile warning, precision navigation and communications are critical for integrated theatre operations. Loss of even a handful of satellites could significantly degrade battlefield awareness. Example: Border crisis scenario

3. Economic: Satellites support banking, telecom, logistics, weather forecasting and digital governance. Disruptions could impose substantial economic costs and affect critical infrastructure. Example: Financial network disruption

4. Geopolitical: China seeks strategic dominance through integrated civil-military space development. Expanding Chinese satellite constellations and lunar ambitions strengthen its influence in future space governance frameworks. Example: Lunar base plans

5. Legal and Normative: Existing frameworks such as the United Nations-backed Outer Space Treaty (UN-OST) inadequately address grey-zone activities such as cyberattacks, jamming and co-orbital interference.

Measures to Strengthen Orbital Deterrence and Architectural Resilience

1. Build Deterrence-by-Resilience: Transition from few large satellites to distributed SmallSat constellations. Ensure mission continuity through network redundancy. Example: Starlink model.

2. Strengthen Space Situational Awareness (SSA): Expand Project NETRA and deploy advanced tracking radars and optical sensors. Monitor suspicious orbital manoeuvres in real time. Example: Close-approach alerts.

3. Develop Responsive Launch Capability: Create multiple launch facilities beyond Sriharikota. Enable rapid replacement of damaged satellites. Example: Launch-on-demand.

4. Enhance Non-Kinetic Deterrence: Invest in cyber defence, anti-jamming technologies and electronic countermeasures. Provide proportional response options below the threshold of war. Example: Signal denial capability.

5. Deepen Strategic Partnerships: Expand data-sharing arrangements through frameworks like the Quad. Leverage commercial and allied satellite networks during contingencies. Example: Intelligence sharing.

6. Accelerate Space Industrial Capacity: Budget 2026–27 increased Department of Space allocation to ₹13,705 crore, with higher capital expenditure for launch vehicles and satellite infrastructure. This should be leveraged to strengthen indigenous manufacturing and private-sector participation through IN-SPACe.

Conclusion

Echoing former President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's vision that strength respects strength, India must combine resilience, innovation and deterrence to secure its orbital future and strategic autonomy.

Examine how NFHS-VI data highlights India's double burden of malnutrition. Evaluate the structural shifts needed to transition from supply-side to household-centric interventions.

Introduction

NFHS-VI reveals a paradoxical nutrition transition: stunting has declined to 29.3%, yet obesity affects nearly 30% of adults and diabetes one-sixth of Indians, exposing limits of calorie-centric welfare approaches.

NFHS-VI and Anatomy of the Double Burden

India is experiencing a double burden of malnutrition, where undernutrition coexists with overnutrition and rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs), reflecting an advanced epidemiological transition.

- 1. The Infant Dietary Deficit:** A staggering 80%+ of infants aged 6 to 23 months do not receive a minimum acceptable diet. This points to severe deficiencies in early complementary feeding practices, nutritional diversity, and maternal awareness during crucial developmental windows.
- 2. Persistent Child Undernutrition:** Despite progress, around 31% of children remain underweight and stunting remains significant at 29.3%. More than 80% of children aged 6–23 months do not receive a Minimum Acceptable Diet (MAD). Exclusive breastfeeding declined from 63.7% (NFHS-5) to 55.8% (NFHS-6).
- 3. Rapid Rise of Overnutrition and NCDs:** Obesity increased to 30.7% among women and 27.3% among men. One in six Indians reports elevated blood sugar levels, indicating growing diabetes prevalence. Rising hypertension and cardiovascular risks are emerging across age groups.
- 4. Intergenerational Nutrition Trap:** Poor maternal nutrition leads to low-birth-weight babies and stunting. Simultaneously, excessive consumption of refined carbohydrates and ultra-processed foods creates obesity risks. The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey found nearly 35% of children showing adult-level triglycerides. Example: Hidden hunger & Future NCD burden.
- 5. Social and Gender Preference:** Women often face intra-household nutritional discrimination despite being primary caregivers. Maternal education strongly influences child feeding practices. Example: Gendered food allocation and Nutrition literacy.
- 6. Economic Implications:** Malnutrition reduces productivity and increases healthcare expenditure. NITI Aayog estimates nutrition improvements significantly enhance human capital formation. Example: Demographic dividend.

Why Supply-Side Nutrition Interventions Are Inadequate

- 1. Calorie-Centric Policy Bias:** Programmes such as ICDS, PM-POSHAN and PDS have prioritized food quantity over dietary quality. Heavy dependence on rice and wheat addresses hunger but not micronutrient deficiencies. Example: Iron deficiency.
- 2. Neglect of Household Behaviour:** Food distribution ends at the household doorstep; actual consumption depends on family choices. Infant feeding practices, dietary diversity and meal frequency remain weak. Example: Poor weaning practices.
- 3. Limited Focus on Lifestyle Risks:** Existing schemes inadequately address obesity, diabetes and processed-food consumption. Example: HFSS food-consumption.
- 4. Fragmented Policy Architecture:** Nutrition, agriculture, education and health programmes often function in silos. Example: Convergence deficit.

Structural Shifts to Household-Centric Interventions

- 1. Behaviour-Change-Communication (BCC) Revolution:** Transform ASHA and Anganwadi workers into nutrition counsellors. Promote breastfeeding, complementary feeding and healthy cooking practices. Example: Poshan-Tracker outreach.
- 2. Diversified Food Basket Approach:** Expand beyond cereals to include millets, pulses, eggs, fruits and fortified foods. Align with International Year of Millets momentum. Example: Nutri-cereals.
- 3. Household-Based Nutrition Monitoring:** Track nutrition outcomes for entire families rather than only mothers and children. Integrate NCD screening with nutrition programmes. Example: Family health cards.
- 4. Regulatory and Fiscal Measures:** Front-of-pack warning labels for HFSS (High Fat, Sugar, Salt) foods. Higher taxation on sugary drinks and ultra-processed foods. Example: Sugar tax.
- 5. Technology-Enabled Precision Nutrition:** Use AI-driven Poshan Tracker and digital health records for targeted interventions. Real-time monitoring of vulnerable households. Example: Aspirational districts.
- 6. Agriculture-Nutrition Convergence:** Promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture and local food systems. Encourage kitchen gardens and bio-fortified crops. Example: Nutri-gardens.
- 7. Institutional Reforms:** Strengthen convergence among POSHAN Abhiyaan, NHM, PM-POSHAN and Jal Jeevan Mission. Move from food security to nutrition security. Example: Mission convergence.

Way Forward

1. Adopt “**Double-Duty Actions**” that simultaneously address undernutrition and obesity.
2. Institutionalize nutrition literacy in schools and maternal healthcare.
3. Scale community-led nutrition models through SHGs and Panchayats.
4. Establish universal NCD screening alongside nutrition surveillance.
5. Shift policy focus from calorie sufficiency to metabolic health outcomes.

Conclusion

Echoing Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's vision of a healthy and developed India, NFHS-VI underscores that nutrition security must evolve beyond calories toward holistic, household-centered human development.

Analyze how India's extreme semiconductor import reliance threatens its electronics ecosystem. Evaluate NITI Aayog's strategy of shifting from cutting-edge fabrication to collaborative co-creation.

Introduction

NITI Aayog's 2026 report reveals India imports 90–95% of its semiconductors despite demand projected to exceed \$200 billion by 2035, making semiconductor self-reliance central to economic resilience, technological sovereignty, and national security.

India's Extreme Semiconductor Dependence

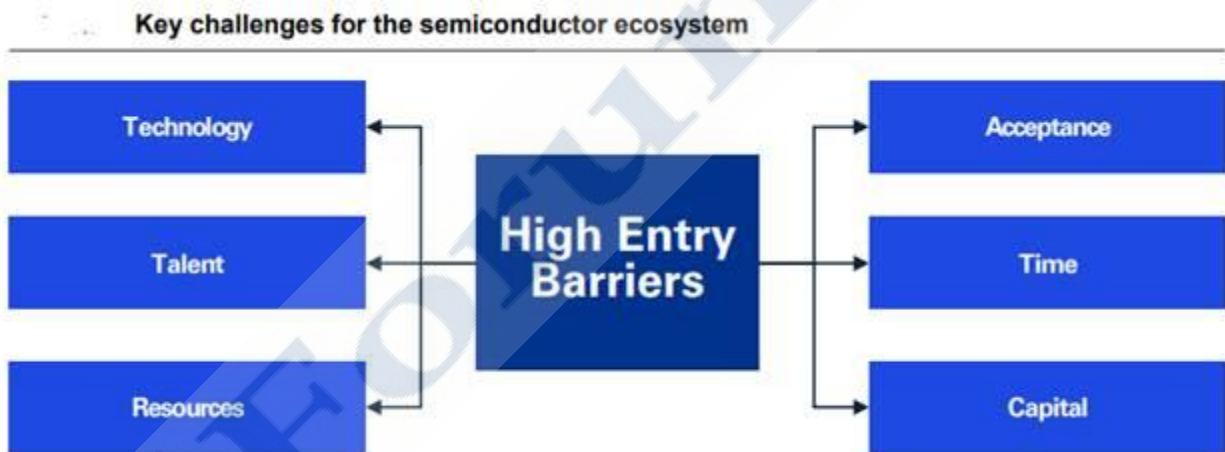
- 1. Massive Forex Outflow:** India spent roughly \$150 billion on chip imports between FY17 and FY25. Without localized intervention, annual chip import costs are projected to skyrocket to \$240 billion by 2035. Rising chip dependence threatens competitiveness of Electronics-Manufacturing-Services (EMS), smartphones and EV sectors. Example: Mobile manufacturing.
- 2. Exploding Internal Demand:** Driven by advancements in AI, electric vehicles, and telecom, domestic semiconductor demand is expected to reach \$100–110 billion by 2030 and cross \$200 billion by 2035.
- 3. Supply Chain Fragility:** Semiconductor production remains concentrated in Taiwan, South Korea and East Asia. Geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, or maritime disruptions can halt production across automobiles, telecom and healthcare sectors. Example: COVID chip shortage.
- 4. National Security Risks:** Defence systems, UAVs, aerospace platforms and critical infrastructure rely heavily on imported chips. Dependence on foreign "black-box" semiconductors creates risks of embedded vulnerabilities and strategic coercion. Example: Defence electronics.
- 5. Industrial and Employment Constraints:** Limited domestic semiconductor capabilities reduce value addition within India. High-end manufacturing jobs and intellectual property creation remain concentrated abroad. Example: Design migration.
- 6. Strategic-Geopolitical Dimension:** The ongoing US–China technology rivalry has transformed semiconductors into instruments of geopolitical leverage. Supply restrictions may affect India's strategic sectors. Example: Export controls.



Evaluating NITI Aayog's "Co-Creation" Strategy

The report advocates moving beyond the costly race for leading-edge sub-5nm fabrication and focusing on areas where India can become globally indispensable.

- 1. Strengthening Design Leadership (Pioneering):** India possesses nearly 20% of global semiconductor design talent. Focus on developing 100+ indigenous semiconductor IPs by 2035. High-value and less capital-intensive; leverages India's comparative advantage. Example: VLSI ecosystem.
- 2. Advanced Packaging and OSAT Leadership:** Targeting top-three global status in Advanced Packaging and OSAT. Packaging is increasingly strategic in the chiplet era. Realistic entry point with faster returns than advanced fabs. Example: ATMP facilities.
- 3. Focus on Mature Nodes and Compound Semiconductors:** Prioritizing 28–65 nm chips, Silicon Carbide (SiC) and Gallium Nitride (GaN). Aligns with domestic demand rather than prestige-driven technology races. These dominate automotive, industrial automation and power electronics. Example: Electric vehicles.
- 4. Talent and Institutional Development:** Proposal for National Fab Academy and semiconductor talent pyramid. Supports long-term ecosystem deepening. Example: Clean-room training.
- 5. Trusted Global Partnerships:** Strategic cooperation with the US, Japan, South Korea and EU. Facilitates technology transfer and supply-chain diversification. Example: Quad technology cooperation.

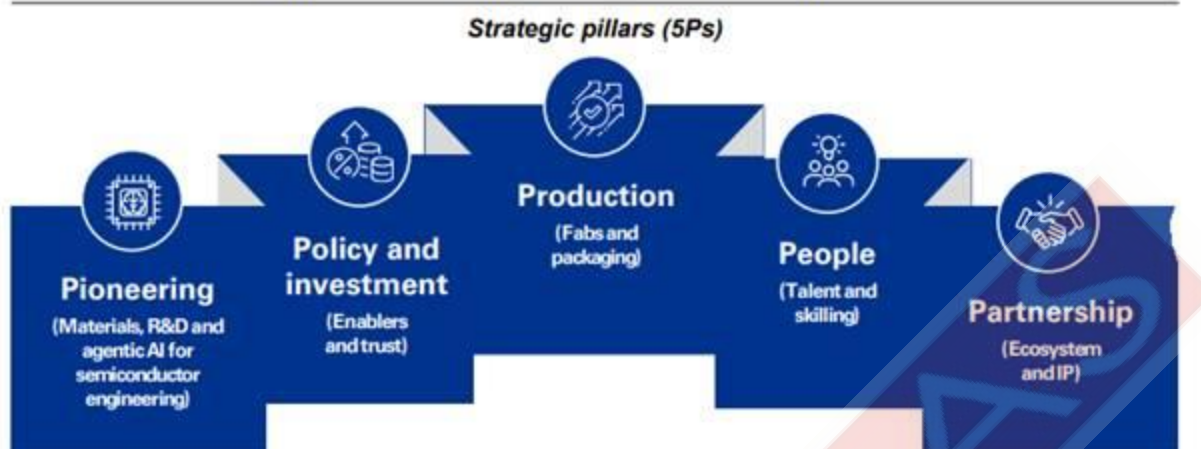


Challenges in the Co-Creation Model

1. Capital requirement of \$135–180 billion over a decade.
2. Dependence on imported equipment, wafers and specialty chemicals.
3. Infrastructure deficits: ultra-pure water, uninterrupted power and logistics.
4. Risk of remaining confined to lower-value segments if indigenous R&D remains weak.

Way Forward

Strategic pillars required to build a competitive ecosystem



1. **Adopt a “Fab + Design + Packaging” Triad:** Balance mature-node fabrication with design IP and advanced packaging.
2. **Institutionalize ISM 2.0:** Create a statutory Semiconductor Development Authority with long-term policy certainty.
3. **Build Semiconductor Clusters:** Fab-ready industrial corridors with dedicated utilities. Example: Dholera.
4. **Strengthen Research Ecosystem:** Industry-academia collaboration through IITs, IISc and Semiconductor Research Centres.
5. **Secure Critical Mineral Supply Chains:** Strategic partnerships for gallium, germanium and rare-earth access.
6. **Promote Demand-Side Procurement:** Preference for trusted domestic chips in defence, telecom and public infrastructure.

Conclusion

Echoing Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam’s vision of technological self-reliance in India 2020, semiconductor sovereignty demands not imitation but strategic co-creation, transforming India from consumer market to indispensable global innovator.

Examine how land pooling minimizes displacement and acquisition delays in urban development. Evaluate its efficacy as an alternative to traditional land acquisition.

Introduction

With India projected to be over 50% urban by 2050, land assembly has emerged as a major bottleneck. Land- Pooling-Schemes (LPS) offer participatory urban expansion, reducing displacement, litigation, and fiscal burdens.

Land Pooling As Transformative Alternative in Urban Development

1. Rapid urbanisation has intensified demand for land for roads, housing, industrial corridors, and public utilities.

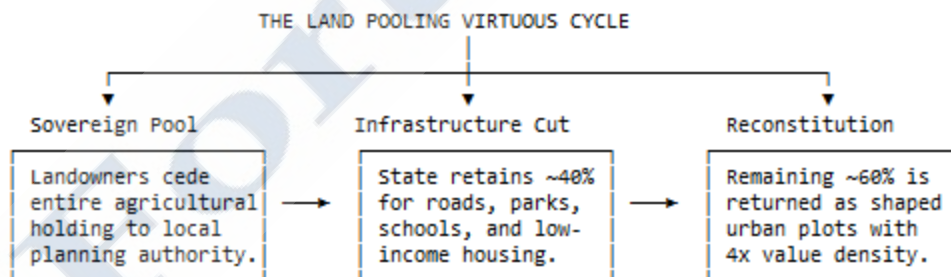
2. However, acquisition under the RFCTLARR Act, 2013, often faces prolonged litigation, escalating compensation costs, and social resistance.
3. Against this backdrop, Land Pooling Schemes (LPS), particularly Gujarat's Town Planning (TP) model, provide a collaborative framework that aligns urban growth with stakeholder interests.

How Land Pooling Minimizes Displacement and Acquisition Delays

1. **Participatory Rather than Coercive Approach:** Landowners voluntarily contribute land to a common pool. Eliminates adversarial State-citizen relationships associated with eminent domain. Enhances social acceptance and trust. Example: Gujarat TP Schemes.
2. **Near-Zero Physical Displacement:** Owners receive reconstituted serviced plots after development. Preserves social networks, livelihoods, and community identity. Avoids rehabilitation and resettlement challenges. Example: Ahmedabad Expansion.
3. **Reduction in Litigation:** Since landowners become beneficiaries rather than victims of development, disputes decline significantly. Accelerates project execution timelines. Example: Surat TP Projects.
4. **Faster Infrastructure Creation:** Entire urban layouts are planned simultaneously instead of parcel-wise acquisition. Enables seamless development of roads, drainage, utilities, and public spaces. Example: Ring-road networks.
5. **Fiscal Sustainability:** Governments avoid massive upfront compensation obligations. Infrastructure costs recovered through betterment charges and sale of reserved commercial land. Example: Self-financing model.

Efficacy of the Land Pooling Model the Lessons from Gujarat

The long-term execution of TP schemes under the Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act, 1976, provides a proven blueprint for managing urban sprawl:



1. **Ensuring Equitable Benefit-Sharing:** By transforming irregular agricultural fields into geometric, fully serviced urban plots, the model guarantees that the unearned increment (the surge in property value due to public infrastructure) goes directly to the original agrarian family rather than speculative middlemen.
2. **Accelerating Ring-Road and Network Logistics:** Cities like Ahmedabad and Surat successfully built massive outer ring roads and micro-utilities seamlessly across 1,000 sq. km because the layout was cleared globally via TP schemes, entirely bypassing individual plot-by-plot acquisition litigations.

Systemic Challenges and Implementation Roadblocks

Despite its conceptual elegance, scaling land pooling nationwide involves distinct operational bottlenecks:

1. **Extremely Protracted Approval Timelines:** While faster than standard litigation, the bureaucratic finalization of a TP scheme spanning draft, preliminary, and final stages under a Town-Planning-Officer frequently takes 3 to 5 years, delaying immediate infrastructure deployment.
2. **The Fragmented Land Titling Crisis:** Land pooling relies entirely on clear, undisputed local property registries. In states lacking updated, digitized mutation records or facing complex pending family disputes, determining the exact ownership of the pooled fragments creates immediate legal gridlock.
3. **Resistance from Small and Marginal Farmers:** Landowners with tiny holdings often resist pooling. Receiving a reconstituted plot that is 40% smaller may leave them with a piece of land too small to be economically viable for housing or small-scale commercial use, driving localized inequality.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Digital Land Governance:** Integrate LPS with DILRMP, GIS mapping, and blockchain-enabled land records. Ensure title certainty and transparency.
2. **Establish Dedicated Urban Planning Authorities:** Create autonomous statutory planning bodies with single-window approvals. Reduce bureaucratic fragmentation.
3. **Protect Marginal Landowners:** Guarantee minimum reconstituted plot sizes. Offer equity participation, annuity models, or transferable development rights (TDRs).
4. **Promote Flexible State-Specific Models:** Adapt contribution ratios according to local realities. Learn from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Delhi experiences.
5. **Link with National Urban Missions:** Converge LPS with PM Gati Shakti, Smart Cities 2.0, AMRUT, and Transit-Oriented Development policies.

Conclusion

By ensuring that rural communities become financial stakeholders in urban expansion rather than its casualties, India can build resilient, world-class cities without triggering rural distress or systemic economic delays.

Examine whether global and national university rankings genuinely improve higher education or distort its public purpose. Evaluate the need for socially relevant evaluation metrics.

Introduction

With India targeting a knowledge-driven economy under NEP 2020 and Budget 2026–27, global rankings like QS and THE, alongside NIRF, drive policy but often distort priorities. The real question is whether rankings measure excellence or merely institutional visibility.

Role of University Rankings in Improving Higher Education

1. **Enhancing Accountability and Transparency:** Rankings provide measurable benchmarks for institutional performance. NIRF evaluates institutions through teaching, research, graduation outcomes, inclusivity and perception. Example: NIRF-based institutional reforms.
2. **Promoting Healthy Competition:** Encourages universities to improve faculty quality, research output and infrastructure. Help governments identify best-performing institutions. Example: Institutions of Eminence Scheme.
3. **Facilitating Student Choice:** Offers comparative information for students and employers. Enhances international academic mobility. Example: Global student recruitment.
4. **Driving Research Ecosystems:** Incentivises publications, patents and collaborations. Contributes to India's emergence as a major scientific publication hub. Example: Research visibility.

5. **Global Recognition and Soft Power:** High-ranking universities strengthen a nation's knowledge diplomacy. Supports objectives of internationalisation under NEP 2020. Example: Study in India initiative.



How Metrics Shift the Public Purpose of Higher Education

1. **Excessive Research-Citation Bias:** QS, THE and similar systems heavily reward citations and research visibility. Teaching quality, mentoring and classroom learning receive limited attention. Example: Publish-or-perish culture.

- 2. Reputation-Driven Inequality:** Reputation surveys account for a significant share of ranking scores, reinforcing historical advantages. Older Western universities continue dominating rankings. Example: Matthew Effect.
- 3. Marginalisation of Social Inclusion:** Universities serving first-generation learners, tribal communities and regional populations receive inadequate recognition. Social transformation becomes secondary to branding. Example: Rural universities.
- 4. Linguistic and Knowledge Bias:** Dependence on Scopus/Web of Science favours English-language scholarship. Indigenous and vernacular knowledge systems remain underrepresented. Example: Regional language research.
- 5. Commercialisation of Higher Education:** Ranking agencies often sell consulting services alongside evaluations, creating potential conflicts of interest. Encourages marketing-oriented institutional behaviour. Example: Brand management expenditure.
- 6. Institutional Homogenisation:** Diverse institutions are judged through identical metrics. Agricultural, tribal and community-focused universities appear less successful despite high social impact. Example: Extension universities.

Need for Socially Relevant Evaluation Metrics

- 1. Social Inclusivity and Value-Added Mobility:** Measure admission, retention and graduation of SC/ST/OBC, women and economically weaker students. Assess value addition through employability, entrepreneurship and income mobility. Example: Social mobility index and Graduate outcome tracking.
- 2. Community Development:** Evaluate local problem-solving and extension activities. Example: Farmer outreach programmes.
- 3. Knowledge Diversity:** Reward contributions in Indian languages and indigenous knowledge systems. Example: Bhasha research outputs.
- 4. Governance:** Measure institutional autonomy, transparency and ethical practices. Example: NAAC governance indicators.
- 5. Institutional Culture Overhaul:** Adopt DORA (San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment) principles focusing on research quality over quantity.
- 6. Constitutional:** Align evaluation with equality, social justice and educational access under Articles 14, 15, 21A and DPSPs. Example: Inclusive education outcomes.

Way Forward

- 1. Adopt a Multi-Dimensional Assessment Framework:** Balance research excellence with teaching quality, inclusion and societal impact.
- 2. Create a Social Impact Index:** Measure contribution to local development, public policy and community welfare.
- 3. Strengthen Outcome-Based Evaluation:** Focus on learning outcomes, employability and innovation rather than institutional reputation.
- 4. Reward Inclusive Excellence:** Provide incentives for institutions serving disadvantaged populations.
- 5. Integrate NEP 2020 Objectives:** Align rankings with access, equity, affordability and multidisciplinary education.
- 6. Promote Responsible Research:** Prioritise quality and societal relevance over publication volume.

Conclusion

As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observed, universities must cultivate wisdom, not merely credentials. Evaluation systems should therefore reward social transformation, knowledge creation and inclusion not just prestige, citations and rankings.

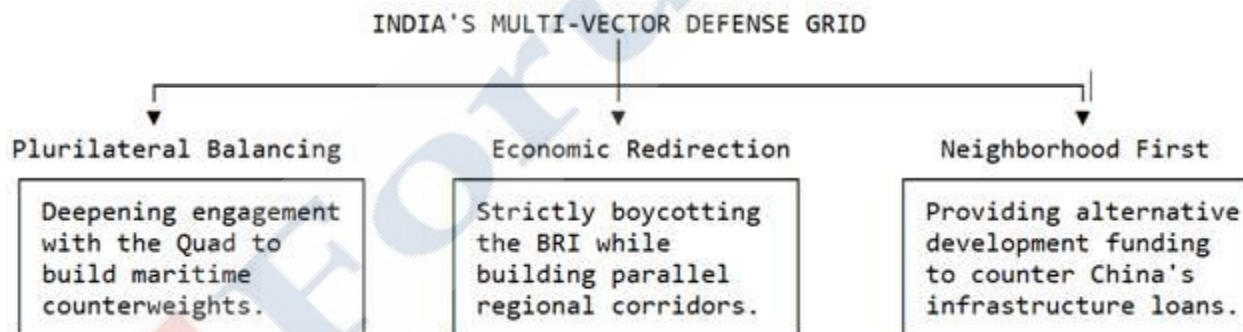
Critically analyze India's strategic response to the deepening China-Pakistan axis in South Asia. Evaluate its implications for regional stability and India's sovereignty.

Introduction

As India emerges as the world's fourth-largest economy and advances its Indo-Pacific vision, the deepening China-Pakistan strategic partnership—manifested through CPEC 2.0 and coordinated positions on Kashmir—poses complex sovereignty and security challenges.

China-Pakistan Axis and Strategic Synchronization and Sovereignty Challenges

- 1. Diplomatic Convergence on Kashmir:** China's recent endorsement of references to Jammu & Kashmir in its joint statement with Pakistan marks a departure from its earlier caution. Attempts to internationalize an issue India considers strictly internal and bilateral. Example: UNSC resolutions reference.
- 2. Sovereignty Concerns through CPEC:** The \$65-billion CPEC passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Infrastructure projects in disputed territory undermine India's territorial claims. Example: Gilgit-Baltistan corridor.
- 3. Two-Front Security Dilemma:** Growing military cooperation, intelligence sharing, and defence technology transfers increase pressure on both the LAC and LoC. Example: Joint military exercises.
- 4. Strategic Encirclement in the Indian Ocean:** Chinese investments in Gwadar, Hambantota, Ream and other dual-use facilities strengthen the "String of Pearls". Example: Gwadar Port.



India's Strategic Response and Multi-Vector Diplomacy

- 1. Geopolitical and Diplomatic Balancing:** Deepening engagement with the Quad comprising United States, Japan and Australia. Enhances maritime surveillance, critical minerals cooperation and rules-based order. Example: IPMSC initiative.
- 2. Strategic Partnerships:** Expanding ties with ASEAN, Europe, Gulf states and Africa. Reduces strategic isolation. Example: Comprehensive partnerships.
- 3. Connectivity and Economic Counterbalancing:** Development of Chabahar Port as a gateway to Central Asia. Promotion of India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and International North-South Transport Corridor. Example: Connectivity diversification.
- 4. Neighborhood First Policy:** Greater emphasis on energy grids, digital payments, disaster relief and trade integration. Example: UPI diplomacy.

5. **Military and Maritime Responses:** Strengthening the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a strategic outpost. Expansion of Maritime Domain Awareness networks. Example: Sea-lane monitoring.
6. **Defence Modernisation:** Theatre commands, indigenous defence manufacturing and ISR capabilities. Example: Aatmanirbhar defence

Implications for India's Sovereignty

1. **Stronger Deterrence:** Greater external balancing improves bargaining power against coercive diplomacy. Example: Quad deterrence.
2. **Protection of Territorial Claims:** Consistent rejection of CPEC and Kashmir references reinforces legal and diplomatic claims. Example: PoK assertion.
3. **Strategic Autonomy:** India avoids formal alliances while expanding partnerships. Example: Multi-alignment.

Limitations and Risks

1. **Resource Stretch:** Simultaneous management of continental and maritime theatres increases defence expenditure. Example: Two-front preparedness.
2. **Regional Polarisation:** Smaller South Asian states may become arenas of great-power competition. Example: Debt-influence politics.
3. **Grey-Zone Escalation:** Cyberattacks, information warfare and maritime coercion may intensify below conventional war thresholds. Example: Hybrid warfare.

Implications for Regional Stability

1. **Stabilising Effects:** Greater strategic balancing discourages unilateral dominance. Enhanced maritime cooperation supports secure sea lanes. Example: Collective security.
2. **Destabilising Effects:** Security dilemma may fuel military modernization and arms competition. Competing connectivity blocs could deepen regional fragmentation. Example: Strategic rivalry.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen Regional Economic Integration:** Accelerate BBIN, BIMSTEC and energy connectivity projects. Example: Cross-border grids.
2. **Build Credible Maritime Deterrence:** Expand naval presence from the Arabian Sea to the Western Pacific. Example: Blue-water navy.
3. **Enhance Technological Sovereignty:** Invest in AI, cyber defence, semiconductors and space capabilities. Example: Critical technologies.
4. **Maintain Firm Diplomatic Red Lines:** Continue linking normalization with border peace and respect for sovereignty. Example: Border stability.
5. **Lead Through Development Partnerships:** Deliver faster, transparent and sustainable infrastructure assistance in South Asia. Example: Capacity building.

Conclusion

The synchronized statements from China and Pakistan regarding Jammu and Kashmir show that regional border disputes are increasingly linked to wider global power competitions. India must combine strategic deterrence, regional connectivity and sovereign resilience to ensure stability without compromising autonomy or territorial integrity.

**Evaluate the legal and institutional challenges in enforcing fire safety norms in India.
Examine the role of NDMA guidelines in transforming fire services.**

Introduction

As per NCRB with 7,435 deaths in over 7,500 fire incidents in 2022, fire safety has emerged as a critical governance challenge. Rapid urbanization, infrastructure expansion, and weak enforcement necessitate robust legal and institutional reforms.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

India's fire governance architecture is decentralized. Fire services fall under the State List, while municipalities are empowered under the 12th Schedule (Article 243W) to regulate urban safety. Consequently, enforcement standards vary significantly across states.

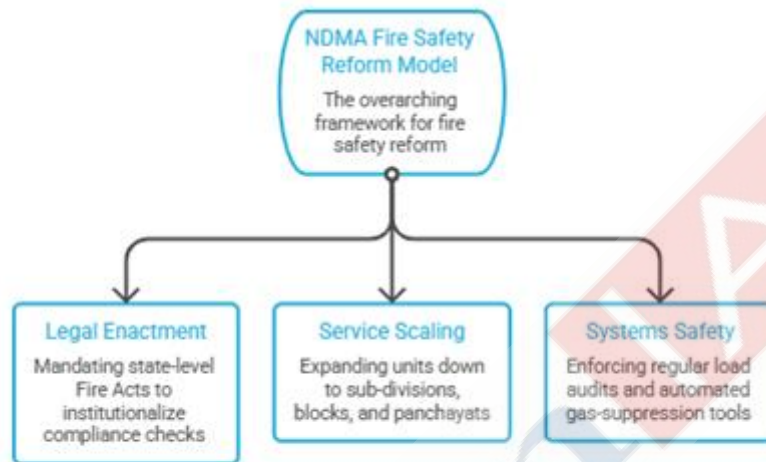
1. **National Building Code (NBC), 2016 (Part IV):** Comprehensive fire prevention and life-safety standards.
2. **Model Building Bye-Laws, 2016:** Framework for integrating fire norms into local regulations.
3. **Model Fire and Emergency Services Bill, 2019:** Recommended uniform legal architecture for states.
4. **Scheme for Expansion and Modernisation of Fire Services (2023-26):** Financial support for modernization of state fire services.

Legal and Institutional Challenges

1. **Fragmented Legislative Framework:** India lacks a uniform national fire law. Several states have either outdated legislation or incomplete adoption of the Model Fire Act, resulting in uneven compliance standards and penalties.
2. **Advisory Nature of NBC:** NBC standards become enforceable only after incorporation into local building bye-laws. This creates regulatory gaps and inconsistent implementation across urban jurisdictions. Example: Practical Difficulty Clause.
3. **Weak Enforcement and Regulatory Capture:** Periodic inspections, fire NOC renewals, and safety audits are often irregular due to corruption, understaffing, and poor monitoring. Example: Rajkot Game Zone fire.
4. **Capacity Deficits:** The Parliamentary and NDMA assessments have repeatedly highlighted shortages of fire stations, trained personnel, and specialized equipment. Shortage of over 5,000 fire stations, deficit exceeding 5 lakh personnel. These shortages reduce response effectiveness during emergencies.
5. **Urbanization-Induced Vulnerabilities:** Economic Survey 2025-26 identifies urban governance and infrastructure constraints as major developmental challenges. Congested settlements, mixed land use, and unauthorized constructions increase fire risks. Examples: Uphaar Cinema fire (Delhi).
6. **Technological and Infrastructure Gaps:** Many buildings lack: functional sprinklers, smoke detectors, automated suppression systems and fire-resistant materials. Electrical overloading remains a leading cause of urban fires.
7. **Social and Behavioral Challenges:** Public awareness regarding evacuation protocols and emergency response remains inadequate. Fire drills are often treated as procedural formalities. Example: Panic-induced casualties.

NDMA Guidelines for Transforming Fire Services

The NDMA FIRE SAFETY REFORM MODEL



Made with Napkin

1. **Legal Reforms:** NDMA recommends: State-specific Fire Acts, mandatory fire clearances, periodic safety certification, stronger penal provisions. This promotes accountability and uniformity.
2. **Institutional Modernization:** NDMA advocates: professional Fire Service Cadres, state-level Chief Fire Officers, dedicated training academies and scientific manpower planning. **Example:** Modern Fire Service Training Centres.
3. **Infrastructure Expansion:** NDMA proposes: fire stations up to block and Gram Panchayat levels, water reservoirs and hydrant networks and specialized rescue vehicles. This improves last-mile emergency response.
4. **Technology Integration:** Recommended interventions include: GIS mapping, IoT-based sensors, drone-assisted assessment and computerized command-and-control systems. **Example:** Smart city fire surveillance.
5. **Community-Based Preparedness:** NDMA emphasizes: school safety programs, community volunteers, periodic fire drills and public awareness campaigns. This aligns with the **Sendai Framework's "Build Back Better" approach.**

Systemic Gaps and Recurring Structural Vulnerabilities

Despite established guidelines, real-world execution frequently reveals critical vulnerabilities:

Vulnerability Vector	Operational Manifestation	Impact on Public Safety
Material Substandardization	Widespread use of non-ISI certified wiring and highly flammable composite building materials.	Accelerates fire spread and structural failure, bypassing basic containment systems.

Electrical Mismatches	Load	Rapid installation of heavy cooling units (ACs) without upgrading underlying wiring infrastructure.	Triggers catastrophic short-circuits and arc faults during high-demand summer peaks.
Evacuation Encroachment	Route	Internal stairwells and corridors are often blocked or used as makeshift storage areas.	Traps occupants during smoke propagation, making smoke inhalation and asphyxiation a primary cause of casualties.

Way Forward

1. Make NBC fire provisions legally mandatory nationwide.
 2. Establish independent third-party fire safety audits.
 3. Create a National Fire Safety Compliance Portal.
 4. Implement Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA) frameworks.
 5. Fully integrate NBC 2016 into all state municipal bylaws.
 6. Promote indigenous firefighting technologies and AI-enabled early-warning systems.
- Examples:** Singapore Fire Code; Tokyo Disaster Preparedness Model.
7. Integrate fire resilience into Smart Cities and PM Gati Shakti planning.

Conclusion

As Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam wrote in Ignited Minds: A nation's strength lies in its capacity to protect every citizen. Transforming fire safety from governance failure to institutional imperative is not a choice it is a constitutional obligation.

Critically analyze the impact of bureaucratic control on national educational bodies. Evaluate the need for academic leadership to restore institutional autonomy and credibility.

Introduction

As India implements NEP 2020 and expands digital education, recent crises involving NTA, NCERT, and CBSE reveal how excessive bureaucratic control can undermine institutional credibility, autonomy, innovation, and public trust.

Impact of Bureaucratic Control on National Educational Bodies

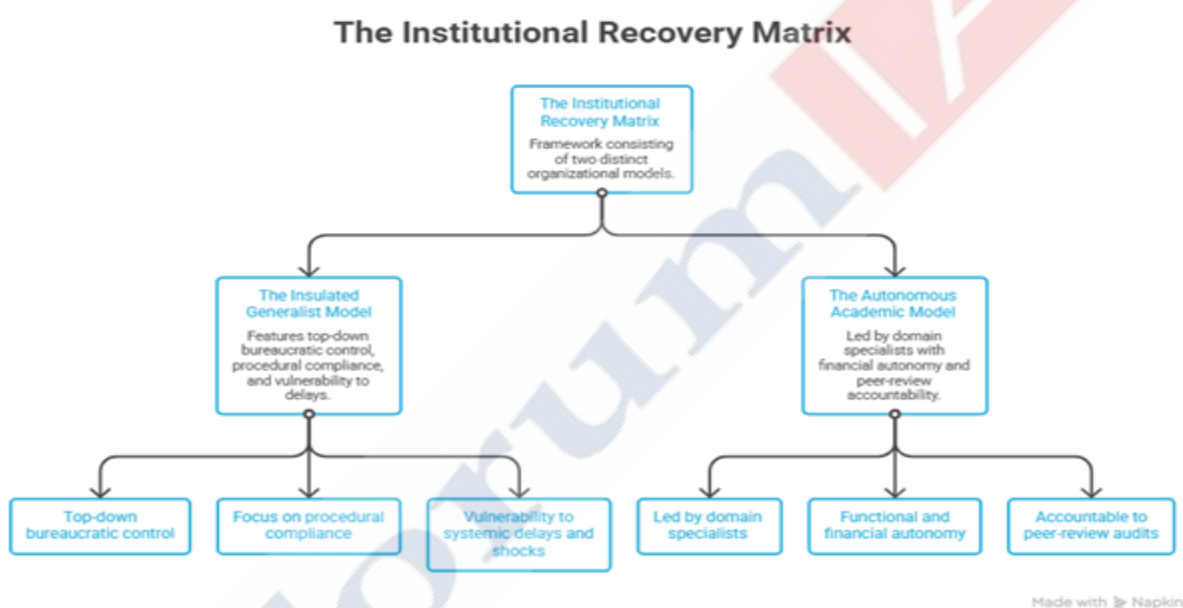
1. **Knowledge Attrition:** Educational governance increasingly requires expertise in pedagogy, psychometrics, curriculum development, AI-enabled assessment, and educational psychology. Generalist administrators often lack specialized understanding necessary for such complex functions. Example: NEET examination.
2. **Bottlenecking and Delayed Accountability:** Hierarchical decision-making often discourages institutional initiative. Operational failures escalate upward rather than being resolved internally through professional leadership. Example: NTA controversies.
3. **Performative accountability:** Bureaucratic systems prioritize file-based compliance, audits, and procedural correctness rather than learning outcomes, innovation, and academic excellence. Example: Compliance-Driven Culture in curriculum implementation.

4. **Institutional Voids and Innovation Lag:** NEP 2020 advocates critical thinking, multidisciplinary learning, and institutional flexibility. However, risk-averse bureaucratic cultures often discourage experimentation and reform. Example: Slow adoption of assessment innovations.

5. **Institutional Distrust:** Repeated administrative failures directly affect millions of students and parents, reducing confidence in public institutions. Examples: NEET paper leak allegations, CBSE evaluation concerns, NCERT textbook controversies.

6. **Techno-Regulation:** Digital examinations, encrypted question banks, AI-assisted assessments, and cybersecurity require professional educational technologists rather than purely administrative supervision.

7. **Democratic and Constitutional Concerns:** Educational institutions are expected to function as professional public bodies insulated from day-to-day political or bureaucratic pressures. Excessive control may compromise academic freedom and intellectual neutrality.



Why Academic Leadership is Necessary

1. **Graded Autonomy:** Historically, institutions such as NCERT, CBSE, CSIR, TIFR, and ISRO gained credibility through professional leadership and operational autonomy. Academic leaders possess: subject expertise, research orientation, pedagogical understanding and long-term institutional vision. Example: Early NCERT leadership model.

2. **Strengthening Evidence-Based Decision Making:** Academic administrators rely on: learning assessments, educational research, comparative international practices, rather than merely procedural considerations. Example: Finland's autonomous education governance.

3. **Improving Examination Integrity:** Specialized leadership can modernize: psychometric testing, digital security architecture, question-bank development and evaluation systems. Example: Advanced testing agencies globally.

4. **Enhancing Global Competitiveness:** Institutions led by academic professionals are better positioned to achieve objectives envisioned under: NEP 2020, NCF and Internationalization of Higher Education. Example: Singapore education reforms.

Way Forward

Structural Reforms

1. Grant statutory autonomy to major educational bodies.
2. Prioritize academic qualifications for leadership positions.
3. Separate academic functions from routine administrative control.
4. Create National Educational Governance Standards under NEP 2020.
5. Establish independent examination security and cyber-audit units.
6. Institutionalize stakeholder consultation involving teachers, universities, students, and researchers.
7. Strengthen parliamentary and public accountability without operational interference.

Institutional Culture Reforms

1. Encourage innovation and evidence-based policymaking.
2. Promote academic freedom with responsibility.
3. Develop leadership pipelines from within educational institutions. Examples: RBI autonomy; ISRO professional governance.

Conclusion

Echoing Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's belief that education shapes national character, India's educational institutions require academic leadership, autonomy, and accountability to preserve trust, excellence, and democratic nation-building.

Examine the strategic dilemma in India's Myanmar policy amid its ongoing internal conflict. Evaluate the imperatives of balancing ties with state and non-state actors.

Introduction

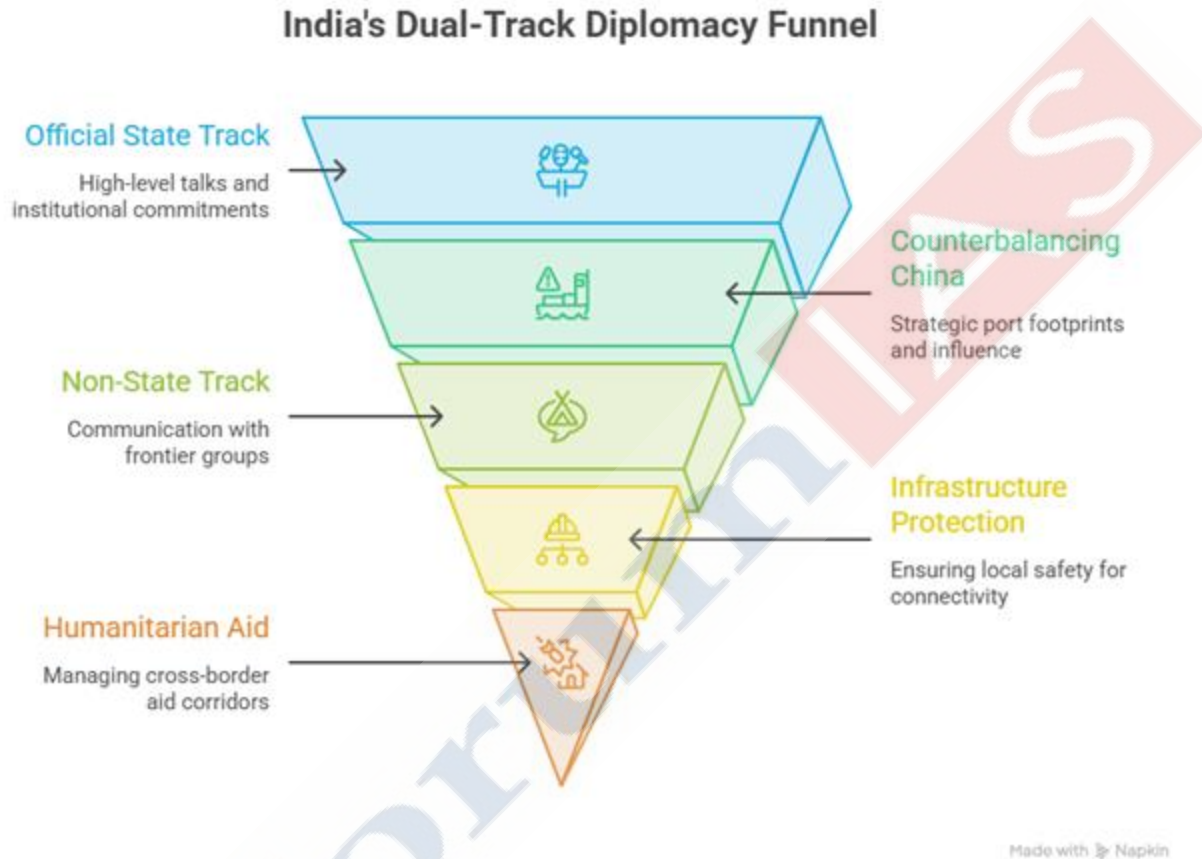
Sharing a 1,643-km border with Myanmar, India views it as the confluence of its Neighbourhood First, Act East and MAHASAGAR priorities. Myanmar's prolonged conflict has transformed a bilateral relationship into a complex strategic dilemma.

Myanmar Conflict and India's Strategic Dilemma

1. **Democratic Constitutionalism vs Pragmatic Realism:** India supports a return to the path of democratic transition while maintaining engagement with the military-led government exercising de facto control. Complete isolation of the junta could create a geopolitical vacuum, increasing Chinese leverage in Myanmar. Example: Post-2021 Chinese influence.
2. **Sovereignty vs Ground Realities:** India officially recognizes the Myanmar state and engages Naypyidaw on security and connectivity. However, several border regions are effectively controlled by ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and pro-democracy Peoples-Defence-Forces (PDFs), requiring informal engagement. Example: Arakan Army and Chin National Army.
3. **The Transnational Security Spillover:** Internal conflict has generated transnational spillovers into Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Refugee inflows, ethnic linkages and insurgent sanctuaries directly affect India's internal security. Example: Chin refugees.
4. **Countering the Nexus of Shadow Economies:** Weak state control has strengthened networks of: narcotics trafficking (Golden Triangle), arms smuggling, human trafficking and cyber-scam

syndicates. These undermine stability in India's Northeast. Example: Suspending the Free-Movement-Regime (FMR).

Why Balancing State and Non-State Actors is Essential



1. **Strategic Hard Infrastructure Protection:** India's flagship projects traverse conflict-prone regions: Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. Progress requires cooperation not only from Naypyidaw but also from local power centers controlling territory. Example: Rakhine corridor.
2. **Ensuring Trusted Connectivity to ASEAN:** Myanmar is India's only land bridge to Southeast Asia. Stability is necessary for creating resilient gateways connecting Northeast India to ASEAN markets. Example: Act East connectivity.
3. **Managing China's Expanding Footprint:** China backs projects under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and enjoys substantial influence over military and ethnic actors. India's engagement prevents Myanmar from becoming strategically dependent on Beijing. Example: CMEC projects.
4. **Humanitarian and Social Imperatives:** India's **Operation Brahma** after the 2025 Myanmar earthquake demonstrated its HADR capacity and strengthened people-centric goodwill beyond regime politics. Example: First responder diplomacy.

Challenges in the Balancing Strategy

1. **Geopolitical:** Engagement with the junta attracts criticism from pro-democracy groups and Western democracies. Example: Legitimacy concerns.
2. **Legal and Diplomatic:** Excessive outreach to non-state actors may be perceived as interference in Myanmar's sovereignty. Example: Diplomatic sensitivities.
3. **Security:** Fragmented authority complicates border management and counter-insurgency coordination. Example: Sagaing instability.
4. **Economic:** Delays in connectivity projects reduce India's competitiveness vis-à-vis China's faster infrastructure execution. Example: Kaladan delays.

India's Evolving Strategic Response

1. **Smart Border Management:** Integrated check-posts, fencing, surveillance drones and intelligence-sharing. Prevent safe havens for anti-India insurgent groups. Example: Northeast security.
2. **Myanmar-Led and Myanmar-Owned Peace Process:** Support inclusive reconciliation without external imposition. Encourage dialogue among military authorities, democratic forces and ethnic organizations. Example: ASEAN coordination.
3. **People-Centric and Demand-Driven Development:** Capacity building, education, healthcare and cultural projects. Build long-term goodwill beyond regime changes. Example: Sarsobeikman Literary Centre.
4. **Geo-Economic Diversification:** Expand cooperation in critical minerals, rare earths, trade and digital connectivity. Example: Rare-earth partnership and Rupee-Kyat Settlement Mechanism.

Way Forward

1. Institutionalize multi-channel engagement with both state authorities and legitimate local stakeholders.
2. Fast-track Kaladan and Trilateral Highway as strategic hard infrastructure.
3. Strengthen border-centric development in Northeast India.
4. Expand HADR diplomacy and developmental partnerships.
5. Coordinate with ASEAN while preserving India's strategic autonomy.

Conclusion

Echoing President Droupadi Murmu's description of Myanmar as India's "gateway to Southeast Asia", India must combine democratic values with pragmatic realism, ensuring stability, sovereignty, connectivity and regional balance simultaneously.

Critically analyze the impact of Western pressure on India-Russia ties on global stability. Evaluate India's multi-alignment strategy in balancing its competing strategic partnerships.

Introduction

As the world moves towards multipolarity, India's strategic autonomy faces renewed scrutiny amid Western pressure over Russia ties. With Russia becoming India's largest crude supplier post-Ukraine conflict, New Delhi's multi-alignment is increasingly consequential.

India-Russia Ties under Western Pressure and Impact on Global Stability

1. **Weaponization of Interdependence:** India's purchase of discounted Russian crude prevented a major supply shock following Western sanctions. According to the IEA, removing Russian oil entirely

from global markets could have triggered severe price volatility. Affordable energy imports moderated inflationary pressures across developing economies. Example: Oil market stabilization.

2. Reinforcement of Multipolarity: Attempts to isolate Russia accelerated the emergence of alternative power centres such as BRICS and SCO. India's independent stance demonstrated that major Global South powers can pursue issue-based partnerships rather than bloc alignment. Enhances strategic voice of developing nations. Example: BRICS expansion.

3. Preventing Excessive Russia-China Convergence: Sustained India-Russia engagement prevents Moscow's complete dependence on Beijing. Creates strategic space in Eurasia and avoids formation of a rigid China-Russia axis detrimental to Indian interests. Supports balance-of-power dynamics. Example: Eurasian equilibrium.

4. Diplomatic Bridge-Building Role: India maintains dialogue with both Western capitals and Moscow. Its position enabled constructive engagement on food security, fertilizer supplies and humanitarian concerns during the Ukraine crisis. Enhances India's role as a credible interlocutor. Example: Global South diplomacy.

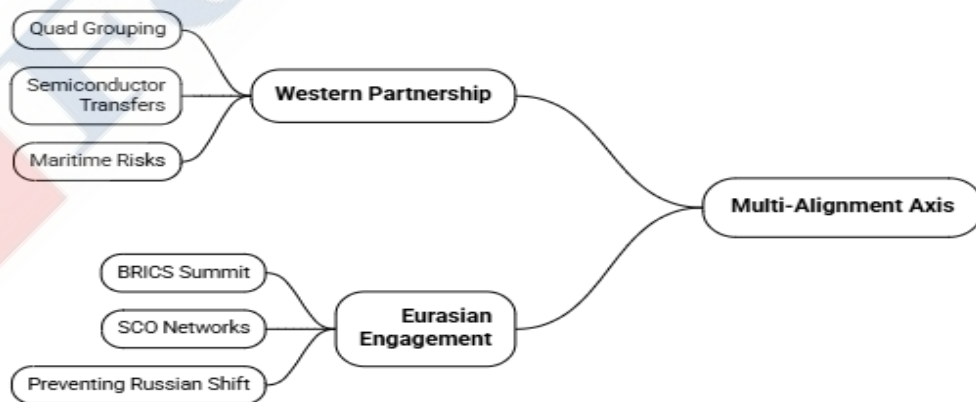
Critical Concerns Regarding India-Russia Engagement

1. Secondary Sanctions Risks: Western tariffs, sanctions threats and financial restrictions complicate trade settlements. Exposure to dollar-dominated financial systems remains a vulnerability. Example: Payment disruptions.

2. Technology and Investment Constraints: Excessive proximity to Russia may affect access to advanced Western technologies, semiconductors and critical supply chains. Particularly relevant under India's technology-led growth strategy. Example: Critical tech transfers.

3. Strategic Perception Challenges: Some Western partners view India's Russia engagement as weakening sanctions effectiveness. Creates diplomatic balancing costs despite growing convergence in the Indo-Pacific. Example: Ukraine divergence.

Multi-Alignment Axis: Strategic Partnerships and Engagement



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Evaluating India's Multi-Alignment Strategy

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India's foreign policy is neither non-alignment 2.0 nor alliance politics; it is **multi-alignment**—simultaneous engagement with competing power centres based on national interest.

- 1. Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership:** Deepening defence cooperation with the US, Japan and Australia through the Quad. Simultaneously retaining Russian military supplies, maintenance networks and strategic technologies. Nearly half of India's major military platforms retain Russian-origin components. Example: S-400 systems.
- 2. Geopolitical Anchor / Stabilizing Constant:** Participation in Quad for Indo-Pacific stability. Active engagement in BRICS, SCO and RIC formats. Avoids strategic overdependence on any single bloc. Example: Issue-based coalitions.
- 3. De-risking and Diversification:** Russian energy imports strengthen energy security. Western partnerships support investments, semiconductor ecosystems and manufacturing under Make in India. Balances affordability with modernization. Example: Energy-tech duality.
- 4. Preventing an Asymmetric Embrace:** Cooperation with Russia in nuclear energy, space and defence. Collaboration with Western partners in AI, quantum computing, semiconductors and emerging technologies. Diversifies technological dependencies. Example: Target 100 by 2030.
- 5. Multi-Vector Diplomacy / Dynamic Equilibrium:** India projects itself as a voice of developing countries. Its refusal to join sanctions regimes reflects an independent foreign policy rooted in sovereign decision-making. Enhances diplomatic credibility. Example: Global South Leadership, G20 Presidency.
- 6. Continental Eurasian Multi-Polarity:** Highlighting that true multipolarity cannot exist if Eurasia is dominated by a single power (China). A strong India-Russia axis preserves a multi-polar balance within the continent.

Way Forward

- 1. Strategic Indispensability:** Expand Rupee-Ruble settlement mechanisms. Promote alternative payment systems and local currency trade.
- 2. Accelerate Defence Indigenisation:** Utilize Russian and Western technology partnerships for domestic manufacturing. Strengthen Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence. Example: Joint production
- 3. Deepen Issue-Based Partnerships:** Continue Quad engagement for maritime security. Maintain BRICS and SCO participation for Eurasian connectivity.
- 4. Preserve Strategic Autonomy:** Avoid formal alliance commitments. Maintain flexibility amid intensifying great-power competition.
- 5. Strengthen Global Governance Role:** Use platforms such as G20, BRICS and the UN to advocate inclusive multipolarity and reform of global institutions.

Conclusion

Echoing External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in The India Way, India's multi-alignment reflects strategic autonomy in practice engaging all major powers while remaining aligned only to national interest and global stability.