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BRIEF ISSUE 174

PSIR & GS-2
DAILY BRIEF

ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE

Briefs, scans the best academic platforms, national newspapers & leading think tanks to pick the most relevant articles & research. It converts them into crisp, high-impact points you can directly use in your mains answers.



PSIR OPTIONAL BY
Amit Pratap Singh
| ForumIAS |

SOURCES SCANNED TODAY



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Daily Brief · Source Plan (Monday to Saturday)

Common Daily

The Hindu · The Indian Express · Deccan Herald · The Statesman

read every day, alongside the day's sources below

Day-wise Sources

Monday	**ORF** (Observer Research Foundation) · **Foreign Affairs** · **The Diplomat**
Tuesday	**MP-IDSA** · **EPW** (Economic & Political Weekly) · **Gateway House**
Wednesday	**Firstpost** · **South Asia Monitor** · **ICWA** (Indian Council of World Affairs)
Thursday	**ORF** · **Frontline** · **Bar & Bench** · **World Focus**
Friday	**MP-IDSA** · **Carnegie Endowment** · **VIF** (Vivekananda International Foundation)
Saturday	**Firstpost** · **Project Syndicate** · **The Economist**

As per relevance, articles from other relevant sources such as NatStrat, ThePrint and The Telegraph (India) will also be included.

Courting Controversy: Privacy Law, Press Blind Spot

Columns

Courting Controversy: Privacy Law, Press Blind Spot

India's new data protection law, while vital for privacy, should include a carefully limited journalism exemption so investigative reporting is not crippled by consent and erasure rules.



Context

The piece opens at Watergate. Two reporters at The Washington Post, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, traced a 1972 break-in back to President Richard Nixon's re-election campaign and eventually to the White House itself, and the author asks what that reporting would have looked like had the two first had to seek each of Nixon's men's consent to process his personal data.

On 27 October 2026 the Supreme Court issued notice in a petition by the Digital News Publishers Association challenging provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025. The Act puts consent at the centre of every use of digital personal data; journalism appears neither among its legitimate uses nor among its exemptions.

The author is a Senior Advocate and King's Counsel. He sets the Indian statute against the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, shows where the absence of a journalism exemption actually bites, and proposes a calibrated middle path rather than a wide carve-out.

Courting Controversy: Privacy Law, Press Blind Spot

Facts

- **What is before the Court :** On 27 October 2026 the Supreme Court issued notice in a petition by the Digital News Publishers Association challenging provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025. The DNPA's 21 members include The Indian Express, The Hindu, the Times group, HT Digital, NDTV and Network18.

- **Where journalism sits in the Act :** Under Section 4, those who decide why and how digital personal data is processed may do so only with the individual's free, specific, informed and unambiguous consent under Section 6, or for a legitimate use such as State functions, legal obligations, court orders or medical emergencies under Section 7. Section 17 further exempts courts, law enforcement, research, archiving and statistics from seeking consent. Journalism appears in neither list.

- **How the GDPR handles it :** Article 85 of the General Data Protection Regulation requires every member state to pass laws that reconcile the right to data protection with the right to freedom of expression and information, including processing for journalistic purposes. Article 14(5)(b) relieves data controllers of the duty to inform individuals of data processing where doing so would be impossible, involve disproportionate effort, or seriously impair the purpose of the processing.

Analytical Crux

1. The DPDP Act does not expressly provide an exemption for journalistic expression, but it places data that individuals have themselves made publicly available entirely outside its ambit; a politician's speech, a celebrity's social media post or a company's public filing can be reported freely.

Analytical Crux (contd.)

2. The investigative and time-sensitive stories that matter most often rely on information that people have not made public, which is precisely where a journalism exemption under the DPDP Act may be needed; data principals may also withdraw consent and seek erasure of their personal data, which could leave a newspaper's archive punched with holes.

3. The aim of the publishers is not to dilute the DPDP Act, and an exemption that is too wide would undermine its protections, becoming a licence for anyone with a camera phone to claim press privileges; the answer probably lies in a calibrated middle path, a public-interest exemption tied to recognised reporting standards such as the Press Council norms, with publishers remaining accountable for inaccurate reporting.

Verbatim Quotes

"But a privacy law that requires the subject of an investigation to sign off on it risks turning the press into a stenographer."

– Nakul Dewan

Transparency on trial: Mapping courts' compliance with the RTI Act

Transparency on trial: Mapping courts' compliance with the RTI Act

Columns

At a time when the RTI system is facing multiple challenges, the judiciary must set an example by staying true to the essence of the legislation.



Context

The Right to Information regime has been weakening on several fronts at once: delays in appointing information commissioners and other officials, rising backlogs, and arbitrary rejections of requests by public authorities. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 then amended Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act so that a public authority may refuse information that qualifies as personal information without weighing it against public interest.

The piece turns that lens on the courts themselves. The 2024-25 Annual Report of the Central Information Commission shows that among all public authorities in the country, the Delhi High Court has the highest rate of rejection of RTI applications, followed by the Supreme Court.

The author is a Research Fellow at the JALDI Initiative, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. Drawing on the Judicial Transparency Index report published by that team, he maps three failures: statutory exemptions read selectively, High Court RTI Rules that exceed the parent Act, and proactive disclosures that are missing or outdated.

Transparency on trial: Mapping courts' compliance with the RTI Act

Facts

- **What the CIC report shows :** The 2024-25 Annual Report of the Central Information Commission reveals that among all public authorities in the country, the Delhi High Court has the highest rate of rejection of RTI applications, followed by the Supreme Court. The same report records that the majority of High Courts are not taking part in the third party transparency audit of proactive disclosures recommended by the Commission, and that of the few which did conduct such audits, four got Grade D or Grade E, the lowest grades.

- **Rules that exceed the Act :** As many as 15 High Courts have included additional restrictions in their RTI Rules. The Bombay High Court exempts all "information which is not in the public domain"; the Punjab and Haryana and Bombay High Courts bar disclosure of information "relating to the Court's judicial functions and matters incidental thereto", while the High Courts of Gujarat and Gauhati bar information unrelated to such judicial functions.

- **Portals and disclosures :** The Supreme Court in 2023 took note of the fact that many High Courts had not yet set up online portals for filing and processing of RTI applications, and the Judicial Transparency Index report finds that five High Courts have not made available a functional link to their RTI portals on their websites even as of February 2026. Only about 15 High Courts have published the names, designations and contact information of their public information officers updated to reflect the latest information.

Analytical Crux

1. Courts have been thwarting RTI queries seeking clarity on judicial examinations, disciplinary conduct of judges and internal administrative affairs, by taking the cover of the exemptions laid out under Section 8 of the Act, even where the information demanded lies beyond the ambit of the exemptions.

2. Section 8(1)(j) is often invoked by High Courts, lending credence to the apprehensions being expressed over the DPDP amendment; this year the Chhattisgarh High Court cited the provision to overrule a direction issued by the State Information Commission, refusing to disclose details of the complaints and inquiries against three judicial officers.

Analytical Crux (contd.)

3. It was the Supreme Court that had taken the first step towards recognising the right to information by reading it into the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a), and yet courts today are contravening the RTI regime through selective readings of statutory exemptions, by failing to put in place functional RTI portals and by not adequately furnishing proactive disclosures.

Verbatim Quotes

"While the High Courts and the Supreme Court often find themselves adjudicating upon the failure of government ministries and departments to comply with the RTI Act, the courts themselves are guilty of not adhering to the principles of the Act."

- Abhishek Rath

John Keane: The worldwide outbursts of the powerless pose new political questions

Premium

John Keane: The worldwide outbursts of the powerless pose new political questions

We can't know the future of these stop-start, tortoise-and-hare refusals of top-down, arbitrary power. Just one thing seems certain: Thanks to these rebellions of the powerless, our world has been reminded that the downtrodden can spring surprises on the powerful

Written by:
John Keane

6 min read
Oct 31, 2026 10:03 AM IST

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Context

The piece surveys street protests happening at the same time in countries with little else in common: huge crowds in France, organised Jantar Mantar-style public protests in India, and comparable uprisings in Chile, Belgium, Tunisia, Spain, Portugal, Serbia, Albania, Indonesia and Italy.

It then rejects three standing readings of them. The first treats the protests as frenzy, hooliganism and arson; the second calls them Gen Z revolts of the young; the third reads them as working class opposition to the greed and corruption of neo-liberalism. Each holds a grain of truth, the author writes, and each misses that these are revolts of the powerless.

The author is Professor of Politics at the University of Sydney, and his latest book is Demagogues and Despots: Democracies on the Brink (2026). He argues that the powerful always depend on the cooperation of the downtrodden, and reads the protests as symptoms of slow-motion, long-term democratic revolutions rather than of the classical kind.

John Keane: The worldwide outbursts of the powerless pose new political questions

Facts

- **Where the outbursts are :** The piece counts huge crowds of angry citizens on the streets and towns of France, organised Jantar Mantar-style public protests in India, and the same in countries otherwise as different as Chile, Belgium, Tunisia, Spain, Portugal, Serbia, Albania, Indonesia and Italy. Chileans use the phrase estallidos sociales for these social outbursts.

- **The three readings rejected :** Some breaking news journalists short circuit discussion by pointing to the frenzy, hooliganism, arson and wanton damage to property; other observers employ the buzz phrase "Gen Z" to say these are uprisings of the young; still other interpreters categorise the protests as revolts against the greed and corruption of neo-liberalism. The author answers that anarchic disorder is not the main feature, and that although young people are often at the forefront, everywhere their social support base runs much wider.

- **The futures on offer :** The piece sets out three possibilities. The first is what the Belgian thinker Anton Jäger has sarcastically called "hyperpolitics", sporadic viral outrages that leave everything unchanged. The second is that elected governments are forced to craft radically new policies on housing unaffordability, climate change, systemic corruption, unregulated big-tech giants and mal-distributions of wealth. The third is old-fashioned revolution of the kind that gripped France (1789), Mexico (1910), Russia (1917) and Iran (1979).

Analytical Crux

1. These social outbursts are everywhere revolts of the powerless, in an age of powerlessness in which many millions of people living in many countries, democracies included, feel that they have zero control over the key institutions and policies that shape their lives.

Analytical Crux (contd.)

2. So long as rulers want to rule, the powerful require the cooperation of their victims, their willingness, however blind, to follow instructions; at the moment the powerless refuse to cooperate, the power of the powerful comes to be seen for what it is: contingent, refutable and defeatable.

3. Much more likely is that these rebellions are symptoms of another, less familiar type of revolution with a different rhythm: slow-motion, long-term democratic revolutions, in which periods of calm are punctuated by angry outbursts of indignant citizens reaching for the emergency brake because they are fed up with their powerlessness.

Verbatim Quotes

"The sweet secret is revealed when the powerless refuse to cooperate with the powerful."

- John Keane

Navigating the India-US-China Triangle Through Kautilyan Statecraft

Navigating the India-US-China Triangle Through Kautilyan Statecraft

AUTHOR : KAJARI KAMAL

Expert Speak Raisina Debates

Published on *Oct 31, 2026*

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India must navigate shifting US-China ties through Kautilyan statecraft while strengthening domestic capabilities to preserve its strategic autonomy

Context

Three movements reinforce one another, the piece argues: the steady deterioration in India-United States relations, the near-simultaneous warming of ties between India and China, and the emerging tactical rapprochement between Washington and Beijing. Each makes the others easier.

It reads that triangle through Kautilya's Rajamandala. India is modelled as the Vijigishu, the aspirant state; China as the Madhyama, the intermediate king on the immediate borders of both the Vijigishu and its Ari, Pakistan; and the United States as the Udasina, the neutral king outside the continental sphere and stronger than those inside it.

The author is an Associate Professor at the Takshashila Institution. She works through each leg of the triangle in turn, tests Kautilya's prescriptions against what the three states are actually doing, and ends on internal balancing.

Navigating the India-US-China Triangle Through Kautilyan Statecraft

Facts

- **The three roles :** India is modelled as the Vijigishu, the ambitious, aspirational state seeking to preserve its strategic autonomy and expand its influence. China fits the Madhyama, positioned along the immediate borders of both the Vijigishu and its Ari, Pakistan, with the raw power to assist or coerce either depending on whether the two act in unison or remain divided. The United States is the Udasina, situated outside the primary continental sphere, stronger than their constituents, and capable of suppressing them when they are disunited.

- **What hardened the China leg :** Following the 2020 Galwan Valley clash and the breakdown of 1990s border protocols, China solidified its position as India's primary security challenge. Much of China's hostility during this period was attributable to India's deepening ties with Washington, marked by India's Major Defence Partner status, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement, the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the India-US 2+2 dialogues.

- **Assistance read as an Upaya :** The multi-sectoral assistance India received from Washington over the years was never "dana", the virtue of selfless charity, but a political method among Kautilya's four Upayas of Sama, Dana, Bheda and Danda, designed to enlist India in service of Washington's strategic interests. The author reads Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau's 2026 statement that Washington will not repeat the "China mistake" with India as an echo of Kautilya's rule that a superior power keeps its partner strong enough to resist the primary enemy and no stronger.

Analytical Crux

1. Structural friction between India and China benefits the US; friction between India and the US benefits China; and competition between the US and China has historically strengthened India's position; as India's External Affairs Minister cautioned on Sino-Indian friction, third parties will take advantage.

Analytical Crux (contd.)

2. In an asymmetric alliance, the stronger partner supports the weaker one only so long as their strategic trajectories are aligned, and Kautilya prescribes that the superior power should not allow its partner to become either too weak or too powerful, keeping it strong enough to resist the primary enemy but not so strong as to assert its strategic upmanship.

3. Kautilyan statecraft offers no substitute for internal balancing; in the long run, investments in India's Janapada, its territory, population and domestic capacity, will yield decisive results, while external alignments and triadic diplomacy remain tactical buffers.

Verbatim Quotes

"Historically, bilateral dynamics within this triad have cast long shadows over the broader triangle, with each power viewing the other two through the prism of its relations with the third."

- Kajari Kamal

Can India Adapt to the New Africa?

AUTHORS : SAMIR BHATTACHARYA | ANJALI KUMARI

Expert Speak India with Africa

Published on *Oct 30, 2026*

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India must recalibrate its Africa strategy to prioritise local value creation, economic sovereignty and African agency over extractive investment models.

Context

In late July 2026 Kenya's Ministry of Mining suspended the mining operations of Tata Chemicals Magadi Limited over regulatory and statutory concerns, and the Kenyan government went on to ask Tata Chemicals to stop its operations and leave the country. A century-old soda ash mining and production operation ended abruptly.

The piece reads the Lake Magadi dispute as a signal rather than a one-off. Across Africa, governments are moving away from a model in which resources are extracted locally but processed elsewhere, and are asking what foreign investment leaves behind in local processing, employment, industrialisation and tax and royalty revenues.

Samir Bhattacharya is a Fellow at Observer Research Foundation, and Anjali Kumari is a Research Intern with its Strategic Studies Programme. They set out what the episode means for India's Africa strategy, and argue for co-creation in place of a provider-recipient relationship.

Can India Adapt to the New Africa?

Facts

- **What happened at Lake Magadi :** The spat between the company and the Kenyan government began in late July 2026, when Kenya's Ministry of Mining suspended the mining operations of Tata Chemicals Magadi Limited over regulatory and statutory concerns. The Kenyan government then asked Tata Chemicals, one of India's major chemical companies, to stop its operations and leave the country, ending a 100-year-old soda ash mining and production operation.

- **The continental shift behind it :** In 2022 Zimbabwe banned the export of raw lithium to encourage investors to set up local processing plants. In 2023 Namibia introduced similar restrictions on the export of unprocessed lithium and other critical minerals. Both countries sought to retain a greater share of the profits by processing more minerals within their national borders, and similar debates on restrictions are emerging in many other African countries.

- **What the authors ask of India :** First, corporate interests and diplomatic relations must remain distinct, so that individual commercial disputes do not define the wider bilateral relationship. Second, future investments should link capital to local employment, technology transfer, domestic suppliers, processing, skills development and community benefits. Third, India's Africa policy needs to move beyond a predominantly government-to-government framework towards an ecosystem-based approach involving Indian businesses, African governments, local authorities, communities, universities and civil society.

Analytical Crux

1. Across the continent, countries are moving away from an extractive model in which resources are extracted locally but processed elsewhere; increasingly, they seek to use their natural resources to contribute to local development through local processing, employment, industrialisation and economic diversification.

Analytical Crux (contd.)

2. African countries are not turning away from foreign investment; rather, they are exercising greater agency over how investment translates into economic benefits, and shared history does not eliminate economic asymmetries between Indian corporate capital and Kenyan workers, communities and local economies.

3. India must place African agency at the centre of its strategy, understand what individual African governments seek in terms of industrialisation, employment, technology and economic sovereignty, and respond to these differences through country-specific approaches rather than relying on a uniform continental strategy.

Verbatim Quotes

"South-South cooperation, therefore, may not be considered equitable simply because both partners belong to the Global South."

– Samir Bhattacharya, Anjali Kumari

UPSC LINK

- **PSIR Paper I, 2026:** Analyze Kautilya's Saptanga theory. How do you explain its significance in present-day politics?

- **PSIR Paper I, 2026:** "Representative democracy is not an absolute principle, rather a question of time, place and circumstances." Analyze the statement. Mention the major challenges to representative democracy.

- **PSIR Paper II, 2026:** Does power transition theory reflect the dynamics of US-China relations?

- **GS Paper II, 2026:** "Transparency and accountability in governance are not about controlling corruption but about creating the trust of stakeholders in the policy process by following the Rule of Law and Participatory Governance." Comment.

- **PSIR Paper II, 2025:** The world currently has been in the throes of a twin process of 'democratic backsliding' and 'democratic backlash'. How would you explain this paradox?

- **PSIR Paper II, 2025:** Of late, centrist and centre-left political parties have been facing setbacks while centre-right parties have been in ascendency the world over. Comment.

- **PSIR Paper II, 2024:** Discuss some of the key drivers of India's new interests in Africa which might help in developing long-term comparative advantage over China.

- **GS Paper III, 2024:** Describe the context and salient features of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.

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