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# THE HINDU & EXPRESS NOTES - JANUARY 2026

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WHAT LIES AHEAD • ONLY ~6% OF INDIANS TRAVEL BY AIR CURRENTLY • PLAN TO BUILD 50 NEW AIRPORTS IN 5 YEARS • CAPACITY EXPECTED TO REACH 550 MPPA BY FY2026 • NEEDS FINANCIALLY STRONG AIRLINES ALONGSIDE AIRPORTS WHAT WENT WRONG WITH A RABIES VACCINE BATCH?: TH FAQ ..... 72

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1st January 2026

## Before top court in 2026: Matters of religion, citizenship, liberty-The Indian Express Explained Page

Polity

### Easy Explanation

In 2026, attention shifts back to the courtroom as the **Supreme Court of India** takes up major cases affecting religion, free speech, citizenship, elections, privacy, and personal liberty. The year will test how the Court balances individual rights with state power amid heightened public scrutiny.

Judicial accountability will remain central, with possible impeachment proceedings involving **Justice Yashwant Varma**, raising questions about independence and parliamentary oversight. At the same time, live-streamed hearings have made judges more visible and more vulnerable to public criticism.

Under **Justice Surya Kant**, the Collegium will face a crucial year as several judges retire, making appointments that will shape the Court's future and revive debates on transparency in judicial selection.

Religion-related disputes, including challenges to the Waqf law, the Places of Worship Act, the hijab ban, and the Sabarimala review, will require the Court to reassess the "essential religious practices" doctrine.

Personal liberty and free speech will also be key themes. The prolonged bail case of **Umar Khalid** highlights concerns over delays and misuse of stringent laws, while the Court's recent stance suggests closer scrutiny of hate speech and online expression.

Electoral roll revisions, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, data protection, online gaming regulation, air pollution control, and the One Nation, One Election proposal ensure that 2026 will be a year of **high-stakes constitutional adjudication**.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Institutional & Judicial Accountability

Possible impeachment proceedings may redefine limits of judicial independence.  
Live-streaming has increased transparency but also public pressure on judges.

#### 2. Leadership & Collegium

CJI Surya Kant's tenure will shape the Court's approach to free speech and liberty.  
Multiple retirements make judicial appointments in 2026 especially significant.

#### 3. Religion & Constitution

Key cases on Waqf law, Places of Worship Act, hijab ban, and Sabarimala.  
Likely re-examination of the "essential religious practices" test.

#### 4. Liberty & Criminal Law

Bail delays and use of stringent laws highlight threats to personal liberty.  
Interpretation of anti-terror provisions will have wide civil liberty impact.



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## 5. Free Speech & Digital Space

Stricter scrutiny of hate speech and online content expected.  
Debates on social media regulation and user verification.

## 6. Citizenship, Elections & Policy

Electoral roll revisions may affect voter inclusion and federal balance.  
Pending challenges to CAA, DPDP Act, online gaming law, and ONOE proposal.

# Behind copper's record 2025 rally: Tariffs, supply hit, AI demand-The Indian Express Explained Page

Economy

### Easy Explanation

Copper prices surged to record highs in December 2025, crossing \$12,000 per tonne on the **London Metal Exchange**, marking their strongest annual rise since 2009. This rally is striking because it comes at a time when global economic growth is steady but not exceptionally strong, even though copper is usually seen as a barometer of economic health.

A major trigger has been tariff-related uncertainty in the US. Tariffs imposed under **Donald Trump** on semi-finished copper products led American buyers to aggressively stockpile copper in anticipation of higher costs. Fears that refined copper could also be brought under tariffs pushed prices up further. This has widened the price gap between US markets and London, creating arbitrage opportunities between the LME and **COMEX**.

Supply-side stress has added fuel to the rally. Disruptions at major copper mines in Chile, Indonesia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have tightened global supply just as demand is accelerating. The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence has sharply increased copper use, with large data centres consuming thousands of tonnes per facility.

Structural demand is also rising due to the energy transition. Electric vehicles use more than twice as much copper as conventional cars, while expansion of power grids and renewable energy infrastructure has further boosted demand.

Finally, a weakening US dollar has supported higher copper prices. Expectations of interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve have reduced the dollar's strength, and since copper is priced in dollars, this has pushed prices higher. While some banks expect the rally to continue, others warn that prices could cool in 2026 if supply improves.

### Key Takeaways

#### Price Surge

Copper crossed \$12,000 per tonne in December 2025.

Prices rose over 35% in 2025, the biggest jump since 2009.



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## Tariffs & Trade Disruptions

US tariffs triggered stockpiling and speculative buying.

Arbitrage widened between LME and US markets like COMEX.

## Supply Constraints

Mining disruptions in Chile, Indonesia, and DRC tightened supply.

Limited new capacity added pressure to prices.

## Demand Boom

AI-driven data centres consume massive amounts of copper.

EVs and renewable energy significantly increase copper intensity.

## Dollar Effect & Outlook

A weaker US dollar boosted dollar-denominated copper prices.

**Citigroup** and **JPMorgan** see further upside, while **Goldman Sachs** expects easing prices in 2026 if a supply surplus emerges.

## India's test in 2026 will be to remain, in a world of fissures, a bridge-The Indian Express The Ideas Page

### International relations

#### Easy Explanation

As 2026 begins, the global order is increasingly fragmented, marked by geopolitical tensions, tariff wars, AI-driven disruptions, and climate stress. In this low-trust but highly interdependent world, **India faces both risks and opportunities** to shape outcomes rather than merely react to them.

For New Delhi, 2025 was a stress test of its **multi-alignment strategy**—maintaining ties with competing power blocs without becoming dependent on any one of them. This approach was tested when China restricted exports of rare earth minerals, threatening India's green transition and EV sector, and when **Donald Trump** imposed steep tariffs on Indian exports, hurting labour-intensive industries. These episodes highlighted how economic interdependence is increasingly used as a geopolitical weapon.

India's response showed growing strategic confidence. It accelerated free trade agreement negotiations with partners across Europe, the UK, West Asia, and the Indo-Pacific, diversified export markets, and fast-tracked critical mineral strategies by working with global partners. This signalled a shift in India's understanding of strategic autonomy—from political distance to **supply-chain resilience**.



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Despite external shocks and pressure on the rupee, India's domestic fundamentals remained relatively strong. Structural reforms, labour codes, and steps to attract private investment in nuclear energy pointed to a more self-reliant and shock-resistant economy. Even as the **International Monetary Fund** pushed India's \$5-trillion economy timeline forward, India emerged as the world's fourth-largest economy, underlining long-term reform gains.

On the diplomatic front, India deepened engagement with the Global South while balancing relations with the US, Russia, and China. Its climate diplomacy, leadership in solar energy, and push for equitable climate finance reinforced India's image as a responsible global actor. At the same time, India began shaping a distinct **tech diplomacy**, exporting digital public infrastructure like UPI and India Stack as democratic alternatives in a splintering digital world.

Looking ahead to 2026, India's challenge is not to retreat inward, but to **remain a stable bridge across global fissures**—engaging widely, protecting national interests, and providing global public goods in a world defined by interdependence without trust.

## Key Takeaways

### Global Context

World marked by geopolitical rivalry, tariff wars, AI disruption, and climate urgency

High interdependence but declining trust among nations

### India's Strategic Approach

Multi-alignment tested but largely successful in 2025

Shift from political autonomy to economic and supply-chain resilience

### Economic & Trade Challenges

Tariffs and rare-earth disruptions exposed vulnerabilities

India responded by diversifying markets and accelerating FTAs

### Domestic Strengths

Structural reforms and labour codes improved resilience

India became the world's fourth-largest economy despite global shocks





## Diplomacy & Global Role

Balanced ties with major powers while championing the Global South

Strong push in climate leadership and clean energy cooperation

## Technology & Future Outlook

India emerging as a digital public goods provider

2026 test: stay open, inclusive, and credible as a bridge in a fractured world

# On property registration and title-The Hindu Text and Context

## Polity

### Easy Explanation

In **Supreme Court of India's** decision in **Samiullah vs State of Bihar**, the Court examined Bihar rules that allowed registration officials to **refuse property registration** if the seller could not show proof of mutation (such as Jamabandi records). The Court struck down these rules as **illegal and arbitrary**.

The Court held that these Bihar rules went beyond the powers given under the Registration Act. By demanding mutation proof, the State effectively required sellers to prove **title or ownership**, which is not the purpose of registration. Registration is meant only to officially record a transaction, not to decide who legally owns the property. Such questions fall within the jurisdiction of **civil courts**, not registration offices.

The Court also noted the practical impossibility of complying with the rules because mutation and survey processes in Bihar are incomplete. Making mutation mandatory therefore violated the **constitutional right to property** by restricting the freedom to transfer land.

This ruling reaffirmed earlier decisions, including **K. Gopi vs Sub-Registrar**, where the Court clarified that a Sub-Registrar has **no adjudicatory power** to decide ownership. Registration only creates a **rebuttable presumption** of ownership, not conclusive title.

The judgment highlights why property transactions are often "traumatic" in India. Land governance is fragmented across registration, revenue, and survey departments, none of which are fully synchronised. Buyers must rely on imperfect records and conduct extensive due diligence, often facing prolonged litigation.

Looking ahead, the Court emphasised the need for **systemic land reforms**. Digitisation, integration of land records, and technologies like **blockchain** could help create transparent, tamper-proof records. However, technology alone cannot solve the problem unless existing administrative inaccuracies are first addressed.

### Key Takeaways

#### Supreme Court Ruling

Struck down Bihar's mutation-linked registration rules as ultra vires.



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Reaffirmed that registration ≠ proof of ownership.

## Registration vs Title

Registration only records a transaction.

Title and ownership disputes can be decided **only by civil courts**.

## Why Bihar Rules Failed

Exceeded powers under the Registration Act.

Made mutation proof mandatory despite incomplete land surveys.

Violated the right to property by restricting transfers.

## Why Property Deals Are “Traumatic”

Fragmented land administration (registration, revenue, survey).

No conclusive title system, only presumptive ownership.

Heavy burden of due diligence and frequent litigation.

## Way Forward

Integrated and digitised land records.

Linking registration with updated revenue and survey data.

Careful use of technologies like blockchain, backed by accurate data.

## India's status as world's rice leader augurs a water crisis-The Hindu Science

### Economy

#### Easy Explanation

India recently became the world's largest producer and exporter of rice, overtaking China, with exports crossing 20 million tonnes. While this achievement is being celebrated politically, it masks a serious environmental cost. Rice



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cultivation is placing enormous pressure on India's groundwater, especially in the key rice-producing states of Punjab and Haryana.

In these states, farmers depend heavily on groundwater rather than surface irrigation. Over the past decade, water tables have fallen sharply, forcing farmers to dig borewells much deeper than before. What was once accessible at around 30 feet now often lies between 80 and 200 feet. This has increased farmers' costs for pumps, pipes, and electricity, pushing many into debt.

Government policies have played a major role in sustaining this pattern. Assured procurement through a rising minimum support price for rice and large power subsidies make rice a financially safer crop than less water-intensive alternatives. As a result, farmers have little incentive to diversify, even though rice production far exceeds domestic food requirements.

The consequence is severe groundwater over-extraction. Large parts of Punjab and Haryana are officially classified as "over-exploited" or "critical", with annual extraction far exceeding natural recharge. Rice is particularly water-intensive, consuming far more water per kilogram in India than the global average.

There are early signs of policy rethinking. Haryana has introduced incentives for farmers to switch to crops such as millets, which require less water. However, these measures remain limited in scope and duration, and may not be enough to reverse decades of groundwater depletion unless scaled up and sustained.

## Key Takeaways

### India's Rice Dominance

India is now the world's largest rice producer and exporter.

Rice exports have nearly doubled in the past decade.

### Groundwater Stress

Punjab and Haryana rely heavily on groundwater for rice.

Water tables have fallen sharply, forcing deeper borewells.

Both states extract far more groundwater than is replenished.

### Role of Government Policies

Rising MSP for rice and power subsidies encourage water-intensive farming.

Farmers are financially locked into rice cultivation.





## Water Footprint of Rice

Producing 1 kg of rice uses 3,000–4,000 litres of water.

This is significantly higher than the global average.

## Way Forward

Crop diversification towards millets and other less water-intensive crops.

Long-term, well-funded incentives rather than one-season subsidies.

Aligning food security goals with groundwater sustainability.

## India's space programme, a people's space journey-The Hindu Editorial

### Science and technology

#### Easy Explanation

India's space programme has evolved from a series of scientific missions into a **people-centric national movement**. Moments like Group Captain **Shubhanshu Shukla** unfurling the Tricolour aboard the **International Space Station** in 2025 or the successful landing of **Chandrayaan-3** near the Moon's south pole have resonated far beyond laboratories, inspiring citizens and reshaping national identity.

India's lunar journey has been especially transformative. **Chandrayaan-1** confirmed water molecules on the Moon, **Chandrayaan-2** mapped it in detail, and Chandrayaan-3 achieved a historic soft landing. Together, they positioned India as a leader in lunar science and exploration.

Globally, India has emerged as a **trusted space partner**. Through **Indian Space Research Organisation**, the country has launched hundreds of foreign satellites, reached Mars on its first attempt with **Mars Orbiter Mission**, and undertaken advanced science missions like **Aditya-L1**, **XPoSat**, and **SpaDeX**.

The vision ahead is ambitious and clearly articulated. India aims to complete its first human spaceflight under **Gaganyaan**, establish a **Bharatiya Antariksh Station** by 2035, and land an Indian astronaut on the Moon by 2040. Space technology is already deeply embedded in governance — supporting disaster management, agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure planning, and national security.

Equally important is the transformation of the space ecosystem. Policy reforms have opened the sector to private players, leading to a vibrant startup ecosystem, rapid budget expansion, and growing global collaborations with agencies such as **NASA**, **JAXA**, **CNES**, and **European Space Agency**. For India, space is no longer elite science — it is a democratic utility and a shared national aspiration.

#### Key Takeaways

##### Space as National Identity

Space missions have become moments of collective pride and inspiration.



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India's space success is closely linked with the idea of *Amrit Kaal*.

### Major Scientific Milestones

Chandrayaan missions established India as a lunar science leader.

Mars, solar, and astrophysics missions enhanced global credibility.

### Human Spaceflight Vision

Gaganyaan targets India's first indigenous human space mission.

Long-term goals include a space station and a Moon landing by 2040.

### Everyday Governance & Economy

Satellites support disaster management, agriculture, infrastructure, and security.

Space is now a public utility, not just a research endeavour.

### Private Sector & Youth

Over 350 startups now operate in India's space ecosystem.

Strong focus on STEM education, hackathons, and Olympiads to inspire youth.

### Global Leadership

India positions space as a global commons guided by *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

Growing international collaborations underline India's role as a reliable space partner.

**2nd January 2026**

[A shift in the climate narrative as Paris pact comes under scrutiny-The Indian Express Explained page](#)

Environment

### Easy Explanation



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The article examines **why the global climate framework led by the Paris Agreement is increasingly being questioned**, especially by developing countries, after completing 10 years.

Earlier, the **Kyoto Protocol** placed **binding emission cuts only on rich, developed countries**, because they were historically responsible for most pollution. But developed countries found this inconvenient and gradually replaced it with the Paris Agreement, where **everyone is responsible — but no one is legally bound**.

The Paris Agreement focuses mainly on **cutting emissions (mitigation)** to keep global warming below **2°C (preferably 1.5°C)**. It assumes that all countries will cooperate voluntarily. However, real-world experience shows that **countries act in self-interest**, not global idealism.

By 2025, **developing countries began openly pushing back**. At **COP30 in Belém, Brazil**, countries like India, China and Brazil:

Forced inclusion of their demands

Blocked language on fossil-fuel phase-out

Asserted development rights more strongly

The **US withdrawal** weakened leadership, allowing **China** to emerge as a decisive player.

A major grievance of developing countries is **climate hypocrisy**:

Rich nations demand emission cuts

But fail to deliver **finance and technology**

Impose trade barriers like the EU's **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**, which penalises exports from countries like India

India argues that **development, poverty reduction and resilience** matter as much as emission cuts. It says:

2°C warming is not “end of the world”

Adaptation must be prioritised alongside mitigation

Equal emission standards for unequal countries are unfair

China's path strengthens this argument. While still labelled “developing”, China:

Became the world's largest emitter



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Built massive renewable capacity

Now plans gradual emission cuts

This shows **alternative development-first climate pathways are possible.**

The article concludes that **countries should be free to choose climate strategies suited to their realities**, instead of being forced into one rigid global model.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Structural Weakness of Paris Agreement

Voluntary commitments (NDCs)

No enforcement mechanism

Depends unrealistically on global cooperation

### 2. Shift from Kyoto to Paris

Kyoto: Binding targets for developed countries

Paris: Everyone contributes → diluted responsibility

Result: "Everyone's responsibility = no one's responsibility"

### 3. Developing Countries' Pushback (Post-2025)

Assert right to development

Demand finance, technology, flexibility

Visible power shift at COP30

### 4. Mitigation vs Adaptation Debate

Paris overly mitigation-centric



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Developing countries want equal focus on:

Adaptation

Poverty reduction

Climate resilience

## 5. Climate Trade Barriers

EU's CBAM penalises carbon-intensive imports

Hits Indian MSMEs hardest

Raises equity and fairness concerns

## 6. India's Position

Low per-capita emissions

Large population and development needs

Argues against uniform emission standards

Calls for context-specific pathways

## 7. China Model

Development first, emissions later

Massive renewable build-up

Possible net-zero before developed nations

Challenges Paris-prescribed pathway



| Clear your doubts now.



## 8. Broader Lesson

Climate change is real and urgent

But **one-size-fits-all solutions do not work**

Flexibility, equity and realism are essential

[Ikkis: The story of 2nd Lt Arun Khetarpal & the Battle of Basantar - The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Science

### Easy Explanation

The film **Ikkis** tells the story of **2nd Lt Arun Khetarpal**, one of the bravest soldiers of the **Indian Army**, who was martyred at just **21 years of age** during the **Battle of Basantar**.

The **1971 India–Pakistan War** is often remembered for the liberation of Bangladesh in the East. But on the **Western Front**, the fighting was equally critical. Pakistan hoped that gains in western India would help it bargain even if it lost in the East.

One of the most dangerous areas was the **Shakargarh Bulge** — a wedge of Pakistani territory pushing into India near Pathankot. If Pakistan captured **Pathankot**, it could cut off Jammu & Kashmir from the rest of India.

Pakistan attacked through this bulge on **December 3, 1971**. India responded with its own offensive on **December 6**, leading to the Battle of Basantar.

Indian troops had to cross the **Basantar River**, heavily mined and defended by Pakistani tanks (Pattons). Over nearly **12 days**, Indian forces:

Crossed the mined river under fire

Repelled repeated armoured counterattacks

Captured about **500 sq km** of Pakistani territory

Destroyed around **50 Pakistani Patton tanks**

A decisive role was played by the **Poona Horse** regiment.

On **December 15–16**, Poona Horse was ordered to establish a bridgehead across the river. During fierce counterattacks, **2nd Lt Arun Khetarpal**, just six months into service, fought with extraordinary courage.

When Pakistani tanks attacked, Khetarpal:

Destroyed **four enemy tanks**



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Continued fighting even after his tank, *Famagusta*, caught fire

Refused orders to abandon his tank, saying his main gun still worked

Destroyed one more Patton tank before being fatally hit

His sacrifice ensured the bridgehead was held, allowing Indian forces to push deeper into Pakistani territory. Pakistan soon sought a **ceasefire on December 16, 1971**.

For this unmatched bravery, Arun Khetarpal became the **youngest recipient** of the **Param Vir Chakra**.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Strategic Importance of Battle of Basantar

Fought on Western Front of 1971 war

Prevented Pakistan from exploiting Shakargarh Bulge

Secured Pathankot–Jammu axis

#### 2. Nature of the Battle

Defensive-cum-offensive operation

River crossing under fire

Heavy tank warfare (Centurion vs Patton)

#### 3. Role of Poona Horse

Established crucial bridgehead

Repelled multiple armoured counterattacks

Enabled Indian territorial gains





#### 4. Heroism of 2nd Lt Arun Khetarpal

Six months into service

Destroyed multiple enemy tanks

Refused to abandon burning tank

Martyred at age 21

#### 5. Military Outcome

~500 sq km Pakistani territory captured

~50 Pakistani tanks destroyed

Contributed to Pakistan seeking ceasefire

#### 6. Legacy

Youngest Param Vir Chakra awardee

NDA parade ground named after him

IMA gates and auditorium bear his name

Symbol of supreme sacrifice and leadership

[As EU carbon tax kicks in, India's metal exports face price threat-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Environment

#### Easy Explanation

The **European Union** has started implementing the world's first **carbon tax on imports** through the **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**.

This means that goods entering the EU will now be charged based on **how much carbon was emitted during their production**.

The policy directly affects **developing countries like India**, which export carbon-intensive products such as **steel, aluminium and iron** to Europe. Similar rules are expected soon in the **UK**, while the **US has already imposed high tariffs** on metals — together creating **new trade barriers**.



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What CBAM does

CBAM currently applies to imports from:

Steel and aluminium

Cement, fertilisers, chemicals

Power and energy-intensive industries

If exporting countries have **weaker climate regulations** than the EU, their products face an **extra carbon levy**. The EU can also **expand the list of covered products** later.

Why India is worried

India's metal industry mostly uses **blast furnace–basic oxygen furnace (BF-BOF)** technology, which is **highly emission-intensive**.

In contrast, Europe and the US rely more on **electric arc furnaces (EAFs)**, which use steel scrap and emit much less carbon.

As a result:

Indian exporters may need to **cut prices by 15–22%** to remain competitive

**MSMEs will be hit the hardest** due to high compliance and data-verification costs

Lack of plant-level emissions data may force EU authorities to apply **default (highest) emission values**, inflating taxes unfairly

The global debate

Developed countries argue CBAM merely **extends EU domestic climate standards** to imports.

Developing countries counter that it **violates the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)** — a cornerstone of global environmental law that recognises unequal development levels and historical emissions.

Institutions like the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development** warn that CBAM could:

Hurt export-led development

Reduce growth opportunities for poorer nations

Deliver **very limited climate benefits** (only ~0.1% cut in global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions)



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Link to the Paris Agreement crisis

This trade-climate tension fits into a **broader shift in global climate politics**. As the **Paris Agreement** completed 10 years, many countries began questioning its fairness and effectiveness.

Key developments:

US exit from the Paris Agreement

Strong pushback from developing countries at **COP30**

Rejection of rigid fossil-fuel phase-out language

Demand for **flexibility, adaptation and development space**

India has argued that:

Development and poverty reduction increase climate resilience

Uniform emission standards are morally wrong

Adaptation deserves equal priority with mitigation

Even voices like **Bill Gates** have supported this view, stressing health, sanitation, early-warning systems and poverty reduction over narrow emission targets.

The China example

China followed a **development-first pathway**:

Became the world's largest emitter

Built massive renewable capacity

Now plans gradual emission cuts

This challenges the **one-size-fits-all Paris model** and strengthens India's argument for policy freedom.

## Key Takeaways

1. What is CBAM?

EU's carbon tax on imports



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Targets carbon-intensive goods

Aims to prevent “carbon leakage”

## 2. Impact on India

Steel, aluminium exports most affected

Price cuts of 15–22% likely

MSMEs face highest compliance burden

## 3. Technology Issue

Blast furnace (India): high emissions

Electric arc furnace (EU/US): low emissions

Scrap availability controlled by developed nations

## 4. Legal & Ethical Concerns

CBAM allegedly violates CBDR

Raises WTO compatibility questions

Seen as climate policy + trade protectionism

## 5. Climate Effectiveness

Only ~0.1% global emission reduction

High economic cost for developing countries



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## 6. Bigger Climate Shift

Growing distrust in Paris Agreement architecture

Developing countries asserting autonomy

Demand for alternative, flexible climate pathways

## 7. India's Position

Low per-capita emissions

Large development needs

Climate action must not restrict growth

[Let 2026 be about sober realism-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

This article argues that **India's biggest challenge in 2026 is not political competition or economic shocks, but the growing gap between fantasy and reality.**

On the surface, India looks stable:

A strong and consolidated government

An economy that has weathered global disruptions

Cultural vibrancy and creativity

But this surface calm hides deeper problems. The author warns that **apparent stability can make a country more vulnerable**, because it encourages denial of real weaknesses.

Fantasy vs Reality

Politics always uses hope, pride and imagination. That is normal. The danger begins when **fantasy becomes a deliberate escape from facts** — when emotionally satisfying stories replace hard diagnosis.

Here, *fantasy* means:

Believing slogans instead of evidence



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Celebrating symbols instead of solving problems

Preferring moral self-congratulation to institutional reform

*Reality*, by contrast, is not pessimism. It is the discipline of **seeing the world as it is**, accepting constraints, and acting intelligently within them.

Economy: optimism without foundations

India's growth numbers look impressive, but they hide serious issues:

Stagnant private investment

Weak education and skill outcomes

Low spending on research and innovation

Structural underemployment and low productivity

Grand visions like *Viksit Bharat* risk becoming **aspiration without strategy**, just as earlier national missions often struggled in implementation.

Everyday realities — polluted air and rivers, degraded cities, insecure work — clash sharply with narratives of economic renaissance.

Democracy: spectacle over substance

The fantasy–reality divide is also visible in democratic life:

Politics has become permanent mobilisation

Disagreement is framed as an existential battle

Citizens are turned into spectators rather than participants

Claims of being the “mother of democracy” conflict with:

Erosion of civil liberties

Weakened federalism



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Declining institutional credibility (media, Election Commission, judiciary)

This is not only a government problem. The Opposition, especially the Congress, is also criticised for being trapped in outdated assumptions and failing to renew itself.

Civilisational fantasy

Public life is increasingly shaped by **civilisational redemption narratives** — the idea that present problems can be solved by reframing politics as a historic Hindu–Muslim struggle.

This turns:

Victimhood into virtue

Politics into myth

The past into a substitute for the future

Such narratives offer emotional satisfaction but avoid the harder task of building a **shared civic future** that can manage diversity without permanent conflict.

Global power illusions

India's aspiration to be a *vishwaguru* is also questioned. International stature cannot be achieved through rhetoric or spectacle alone.

A reality check:

India accounts for only about **4% of global trade**

Great-power status requires deep integration into global production, technology leadership and material economic strength

Events like *Operation Sindoor* exposed the limits of India's global political leverage, regardless of military outcomes.

Drawing on the idea of **Bruno Maçães**, the author argues that India is attempting to make **imagination precede reality** — performing great-power status before building its material foundations. But reality eventually pushes back through:

Weak human capital

Ecological stress

Shallow institutions



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Limited technological presence

The choice for 2026

India faces difficult choices domestically, regionally and globally. The real question is whether:

**Sober realism** will guide policy

or

The country will continue to give “an appearance of solidity to pure wind” (echoing **George Orwell**)

The world itself is full of illusions, but that is no comfort. Living in delusion only raises the cost of correction later.

The closing warning, drawn from **Bhartrihari**, is stark:

*A mirage does not quench thirst — it only deepens suffering.*

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Central Theme

India's key challenge is **fantasy vs reality**, not instability vs stability

### 2. Political Fantasy

Emotion over evidence

Symbols over substance

Mobilisation over governance

### 3. Economic Reality

Growth masks weak private investment

Poor human capital and innovation

Structural underemployment and low productivity



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#### 4. Democratic Concerns

Spectator democracy replacing participatory democracy

Institutional erosion beneath democratic rhetoric

#### 5. Civilisational Narratives

Mythologising politics avoids real problem-solving

Deepens social divisions instead of building civic unity

#### 6. Global Ambitions

Great-power status needs material foundations

Rhetoric cannot substitute trade, technology and production capacity

#### 7. Strategic Warning

Performing power before building capacity is unsustainable

#### 8. Message for 2026

India needs **sober realism, institutional repair, and long-term capacity building**

Illusions delay reform and raise future costs

[Navigating a world without norms-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

International relations

#### Easy Explanation

The article argues that the “**rules-based international order**” (RBIO) — the idea that global politics is governed by shared rules, norms and respect for sovereignty — is **rapidly collapsing**.

The immediate trigger discussed is **Israel’s recognition of Somaliland** as an independent state. This decision breaks a long-standing international consensus that treated Somaliland as part of **Somalia**, even though Somaliland has functioned as a de facto state for over 30 years.

This move is not an isolated event. It fits into a wider global pattern:



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**Russia** redrawing borders in Ukraine

**China** threatening force against Taiwan and altering facts in the South China Sea

**United States** itself dismissing the RBIO as a “liberal illusion” in its 2025 National Security Strategy

Together, these developments show that **power, not norms, now decides outcomes.**

Why Israel recognised Somaliland

Israel’s decision is driven by **strategic geography**, not moral principle. Somaliland sits at the mouth of the **Red Sea**, close to the **Suez Canal**, a vital global maritime chokepoint linking Europe to the Indian Ocean.

For Israel, ties with Somaliland offer:

Strategic depth

Maritime access

Greater influence in the Horn of Africa

Israel has calculated that these gains outweigh diplomatic criticism. This exposes a core illusion of the post–Cold War era: that the international community will always defend territorial integrity. In reality, **norms hold only until they clash with hard interests.**

Lessons for India

For **India**, the breakdown of the RBIO carries two hard lessons:

**Territorial integrity is not guaranteed by global norms**

**Sovereignty is not a gift from the international community** — it must be continuously defended

India itself applies norms selectively. New Delhi strongly supports sovereignty in Asia, yet avoided condemning Russia’s actions in Crimea (2014) and Ukraine (2022). Similarly, India is unlikely to oppose Israel on Somaliland due to close ties with Israel and Ethiopia, even while trying not to alienate the African Union or Arab partners.

Hence, India’s response will be **pragmatic balancing**, not moral posturing.

Why the Horn of Africa matters to India

The Horn of Africa lies firmly within India’s **Indian Ocean strategic sphere**. Developments there affect:

Energy supply routes



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Maritime trade

Naval deployments

Historically linked to India through trade and colonial networks, instability in this region directly impacts Indian interests.

Global South solidarity: a myth

The article dismisses the idea that the **Global South** can collectively protect weaker states:

**ASEAN** failed to protect the Philippines in the South China Sea

**Arab League** and **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation** have been ineffective on Gaza

**BRICS** is deeply divided, including over Somaliland

Even Africa is split: Ethiopia wants sea access via Somaliland, while other African states defend Somali sovereignty.

A deeper crisis of sovereignty

Modern threats to sovereignty are no longer only military. They include:

Economic coercion

Infrastructure dependence

Digital and informational subversion

For South Asia — already destabilised by Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar — this **post-RBIO world is especially dangerous**.

What India must do

The article outlines **three priorities** for India in a normless world:

**Internal political cohesion**

Divided societies are easier to destabilise from outside.

**Credible deterrence**

Norms matter only when backed by military strength and political will.

**Regional leadership**

If India cannot stabilise South Asia, external powers like the US and China will step in — as already seen in



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their attempts to mediate India-Pakistan tensions.

The core message is stark: **rules without enforcement are meaningless**, and illusions about global order are costly.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Central Argument

The rules-based international order has lost its restraining power

Power politics has replaced norm-based restraint

### 2. Somaliland as a Turning Point

Israel's recognition exposes the limits of sovereignty norms

Strategic interests override legal principles

### 3. Selective Use of Norms

Major powers invoke norms opportunistically

India also balances principles with interests

### 4. Limits of Global South Unity

ASEAN, Arab League, OIC, BRICS lack cohesion

No reliable collective shield for weaker states

### 5. New Forms of Threat

Economic coercion and digital influence rival military force

Sovereignty erosion is subtle and continuous





## 6. Implications for India

RBIO cannot be relied upon for security

Sovereignty must be internally consolidated and externally defended

## 7. Strategic Priorities for India

Social and political cohesion

Strong deterrence capability

Leadership in South Asia

## 8. Big Insight

**Norms survive only when backed by power**

Illusions about global order raise the cost of correction later

[Why does India need climate resilient agriculture?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

**Climate-resilient agriculture (CRA)** is about ensuring that Indian farming can **survive and perform well despite climate change** — erratic rainfall, heatwaves, droughts, floods, soil degradation and pollution.

India must adopt CRA because:

Climate change is already disrupting farming patterns

Food demand is rising due to population growth

Traditional farming alone cannot handle increasing climate stress

What is climate-resilient agriculture?

CRA combines **biotechnology, biological inputs, and digital tools** to make farming more adaptable and sustainable **without harming productivity**.

Key components include:



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**Biofertilizers and biopesticides** to reduce chemical dependence and improve soil health

**Soil microbiome analysis** to guide nutrient and crop decisions

**Genome-edited crops** that can tolerate drought, heat, salinity and pests

**AI-based tools** that analyse weather, soil, crop and water data to provide localised farm advisories

In short, CRA aims to **produce more with fewer resources under uncertain climate conditions.**

Why does India need CRA urgently?

About **51% of India's net sown area is rainfed**

This rainfed land produces **nearly 40% of India's food**

Rainfed regions are **highly vulnerable** to rainfall variability and extreme weather

Climate change increases the risk of:

Crop failures

Income instability for farmers

Threats to national food security

CRA offers a way to **stabilise yields**, protect the environment, and improve farmer resilience.

Where does India stand today?

India has already taken several steps:

In 2011, **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)** launched the **National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA)** project

Demonstrated climate-resilient practices in **448 villages**

Techniques include zero-till wheat, direct-seeded rice, climate-tolerant varieties, residue management



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The **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)** focuses on:

Rainfed farming

Water-use efficiency

Soil health and resource conservation

The **BioE3 Policy** recognises CRA as a priority area for **biotechnology-led climate solutions**

India already has:

Commercial bio-input companies

A fast-growing agritech ecosystem offering AI advisories, precision irrigation and crop monitoring

What are the challenges?

Despite progress, scaling CRA faces serious constraints:

**Low adoption** among small and marginal farmers due to cost and awareness gaps

**Quality inconsistency** in biofertilizers and biopesticides, reducing farmer trust

**Slow rollout of climate-resilient and genome-edited seeds**

**Digital divide**, limiting access to AI and precision tools

Ongoing **soil degradation, water scarcity and climate volatility**

**Fragmented policy coordination** across ministries and States

These risks may **outpace current adaptation efforts** if not addressed quickly.

What is the way forward?

India needs to move from pilots to **scale and integration**.

Key priorities:



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Accelerate development and approval of **climate-tolerant and genome-edited crops**

Strengthen **quality standards and supply chains** for biofertilizers and biopesticides

Expand **digital infrastructure and climate advisories**, especially for small farmers

Provide **financial incentives, climate insurance and affordable credit** to support transition

Most importantly, create a **coherent national CRA roadmap** under the BioE3 framework, aligning:

Biotechnology

Climate adaptation

Agricultural and farmer-support policies

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why CRA is critical for India

High climate vulnerability of rainfed agriculture

Rising food demand and farmer distress

Limits of conventional farming under climate stress

### 2. What CRA involves

Bio-inputs, genome-edited crops, AI and precision farming

Focus on resilience, sustainability and productivity

### 3. India's current efforts

NICRA (ICAR), NMSA, BioE3 policy

Growing agritech and bio-input sector



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#### 4. Major challenges

Low adoption, quality issues, digital divide

Slow seed innovation rollout

Fragmented governance

#### 5. Way forward

Scale climate-tolerant crops and bio-inputs

Support small farmers financially and digitally

Create a unified national CRA roadmap

#### 6. Core insight

**Climate-resilient agriculture is not optional for India — it is essential for food security, farmer livelihoods and long-term sustainability.**

[The Aravalli question faces the brunt of India's fondness for 'strategic exemptions' -The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Environment

#### Easy Explanation

This article explains **why the debate over mining in the Aravalli Hills has become a test case of India's habit of using "strategic exemptions" to bypass environmental safeguards**, instead of resolving conflicts through transparent rules.

At the heart of the issue is a **clash between three objectives**:

Climate and environmental protection

Industrial and strategic mineral demand

Weak, discretionary environmental governance

What is the Aravalli Hills issue?

The **Aravalli Hills** are one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world and are ecologically critical for:



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Groundwater recharge

Preventing desertification

Climate regulation and air quality

On **November 20**, the **Supreme Court of India**:

Adopted a **uniform definition** of “Aravalli Hills” and “Aravalli Range” for mining regulation

Froze **new mining leases** until a sustainable mining plan is prepared

Prohibited mining in **core/inviolable areas**, **except** for *critical, strategic and atomic minerals* — calling this a **“strategic exemption”**

Under the new definition:

Any landform rising **100 m above local relief** counts as an Aravalli Hill

Two or more such hills within **500 m** form an Aravalli Range

Environmental groups argue this creates **ecological “islands”** — hills protected on paper, while valleys, forests and scrublands that connect them remain vulnerable to mining and development.

Because of these concerns, the Supreme Court later **put the definition in abeyance** and decided to form a new expert committee.

What is the problem with “strategic exemptions”?

India **does not have clear rules** to resolve conflicts between:

Climate commitments

Environmental protection

Strategic and industrial needs

Instead, the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** often relies on:

Executive discretion



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Office memoranda

Project-specific exemptions

Ad hoc approvals

These frequently cite “**national defence**” or “**strategic considerations**” to bypass scrutiny.

The **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** framework itself allows exemptions from public consultation for projects deemed strategic by the Central Government, making the scope of “national interest” **opaque and arbitrary**.

What have the government and courts done recently?

Several decisions have widened the scope for exemptions:

### **Ex post facto clearances**

In May 2025, the Supreme Court held that post-facto environmental clearances were illegal and harmful

In November 2025, it **reopened the door** to post-facto regularisation, creating regulatory uncertainty

### **Critical minerals exemption (September 2025)**

The Environment Ministry exempted critical mineral mining projects from **public consultation** under the **EIA Notification 2006**

Justified on national security grounds

### **Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023**

Narrowed the definition of forest land requiring clearance

Expanded exemptions for land near borders, roads, railways, and “security infrastructure”

Made exploration and preliminary drilling easier before full clearances

Individually, these don’t legalise mining outright — but together they create “**scope creep**”, especially when combined with post-facto approvals and a pro-business regulatory stance.



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Why are the Aravalli Hills especially vulnerable?

The Aravallis:

Support groundwater recharge and prevent desert spread

Are vital for India's **Sustainable Development Goals** (water security, clean air, liveable cities)

At the same time, they contain or may contain:

Base metals

Strategic minerals like tungsten

Bulk minerals (stone, rock)

Potential green-transition minerals such as lithium and rare earths

This combination — **high ecological value + strategic mineral interest + weakened safeguards** — makes the Court's "strategic exemption" particularly risky.

What is the core concern?

By invoking "strategic need" without:

Clear criteria

Transparent assessments

Public disclosure of alternatives

India risks turning environmental law into a **shock absorber for political pressure**.

If exemptions continue to be negotiated case by case, climate goals and economic growth will **collide through ad hoc decisions**, rather than through principled governance.

What does the article demand?

If India must allow strategic exemptions, it needs:

A **binding test** defining when "strategic considerations" justify relaxed procedures



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**Landscape-level cumulative impact and groundwater assessments** before granting leases

**Public disclosure** of alternatives considered (imports, recycling, substitution, sourcing elsewhere)

Without this, claims of “sustainable mining” and “green transition” lack credibility.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Core Issue

India manages climate–industry conflicts through **discretion, not rules**

### 2. Aravalli Hills Significance

Critical for groundwater, climate regulation, desertification control

Ecologically connected landscape, not isolated hills

### 3. Strategic Exemptions

Allow bypassing scrutiny using “national security” claims

Lack clear criteria and transparency

### 4. Regulatory Dilution

Weakening of EIA process

Return of ex post facto clearances

Expanded forest and mining exemptions

### 5. Risk of Scope Creep

Exploration and infrastructure precede scrutiny

Post-facto regularisation normalised



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## 6. Climate vs Minerals Dilemma

Aravallis hold minerals vital for defence and green transition

But ecological loss undermines long-term climate resilience

## 7. What India Needs

Rule-based framework for strategic exemptions

Cumulative impact and groundwater studies

Disclosure of rejected alternatives

## 8. Big Insight

**Without transparent rules, “strategic exemptions” turn environmental law into an instrument of convenience, not protection.**

[What transgender men face when they access healthcare-The Hindu Science](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

The article explains **why accessing healthcare remains extremely difficult for transgender men and gender-diverse people (assigned female at birth)** in India, even in relatively progressive States like **Tamil Nadu**.

The experience of **Manohar**, a trans man, captures the problem: doctors **refused treatment** because his appearance did not match their rigid ideas of gender. Only after he obtained official recognition under the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019** did he receive care. This shows how **identity paperwork, prejudice, and poor medical understanding intersect to deny basic healthcare**.

Why trans men face distinct barriers

While trans women have been more visible in public discourse and policy, **trans men and AFAB gender-diverse persons remain poorly understood** within the healthcare system.

Key reasons:

Medical training still treats gender as **binary**

Limited research on transmasculine health

One-size-fits-all “transgender care” models



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Reliance on gynaecology-based care, which often comes with stigma

As a result, even routine care (for fever, infections, general illness) can involve:

Misgendering

Deadnaming

Ridicule or hostility

Denial of treatment

Many are forced to depend on **informal networks of “safe doctors”**, rather than the public health system.

Hormone therapy: risk without support

For many trans men, **hormone replacement therapy (HRT)** using testosterone is essential. But the system creates two dangerous outcomes:

#### **Inadequate medical guidance**

Doctors themselves often lack training on dosage, side effects, and monitoring

No clear, weight-linked or standardised dosage protocols

#### **Self-medication**

Due to hospital admission requirements or family pressure, many buy hormones privately

Hormones are easily available online and in pharmacies

Higher doses are sometimes used without supervision

Unmonitored testosterone use can cause:

Heart attack and stroke

Kidney and metabolic disorders



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Diabetes

Immunosuppressive effects

Yet these risks are **rarely explained or monitored**.

Gatekeeping and unethical practices

Healthcare for trans men is often controlled by **gatekeeping**:

Mandatory psychiatric diagnosis of “gender dysphoria”

Care tied to mental health labels rather than self-identified gender incongruence

Activists argue that **affirmative care should not depend on psychiatric approval**.

There are also **deeply unethical practices**, such as:

Refusal of hysterectomies unless the patient has had children

Forcing vaginal exams or chest exposure without medical necessity

Treating trans men primarily through a reproductive, patriarchal lens

These practices violate dignity, consent, and medical ethics.

Structural causes

Experts identify several root problems:

**Lack of India-specific research** on transmasculine healthcare

Overdependence on Western studies, which are not always context-appropriate

Poor training of doctors, nurses, and frontline health staff

Absence of standardised, evidence-based national protocols

Organisations like **Association for Transgender Health of India** and **SAATHII** stress that even well-meaning doctors often lack the tools to provide proper care.



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What needs to change

The article argues for **systemic reform**, not isolated goodwill.

Key reforms needed:

Evidence-based, peer-reviewed national protocols for gender-affirming care

Mandatory training of healthcare providers across specialties

Inclusion of people with lived transgender experiences in healthcare delivery

Removal of unnecessary gatekeeping and psychiatric barriers

Expansion of affordable, trans-affirming endocrinology services

There has been **slow progress**:

Dress-code related discrimination has reduced in some government gender clinics

Tamil Nadu conducts periodic sensitisation training with NGOs

In 2024, activists approached the **Madras High Court**, which is now considering improvements to government SOPs

But progress remains uneven and fragile.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Core Problem

Trans men face **systemic discrimination** in healthcare due to poor awareness and rigid gender norms

### 2. Distinct Vulnerability

AFAB transgender and non-binary persons face challenges different from trans women

Their needs remain under-researched and poorly addressed



| Clear your doubts now.



### 3. Hormone Therapy Risks

Lack of medical guidance → unsafe self-medication

Serious long-term health consequences possible

### 4. Gatekeeping & Ethics

Psychiatric approval used as a barrier to care

Unethical, non-consensual medical practices persist

### 5. Legal–Policy Gap

Progressive laws exist, but **implementation is weak**

Paper recognition often substitutes for dignity-based care

### 6. What is Needed

Standardised, evidence-based protocols

Trained and sensitised healthcare workforce

Community participation in healthcare delivery

### 7. Broader Insight

**Healthcare access is not just about infrastructure — it is about dignity, knowledge, and trust.**

**3rd January 2026**

[After splash in 2025, weight-loss drugs poised to take off this year-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Science and technology

#### Easy Explanation

In **2025**, a new category of medicines called **GLP-1 weight-loss drugs** entered India and quickly became a major talking point. These drugs were first known for diabetes treatment, but they are now widely used for **weight loss and metabolic diseases**.



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Two major global companies led this shift: **Eli Lilly**, which launched *Mounjaro*, and **Novo Nordisk**, which introduced *Wegovy*. Even though **very few Indians actually used these drugs**, they still became some of the **top-selling medicines by value**. This happened mainly because they are **very expensive** and are paid for **out of pocket**, not covered by insurance.

This shows a **big change in mindset**: many Indians are now willing to spend on long-term treatment for obesity, which was earlier seen more as a lifestyle issue than a medical condition.

However, doctors still don't have all the answers. A key concern is **what happens when patients stop taking these drugs**. Early global studies show that people often **regain weight**, though not always fully. Indian data is still limited. Questions like whether people must take these drugs for life, whether doses can be reduced, or whether breaks are safe will start getting clearer only in **2026**.

Where evidence is stronger is the **heart-health benefit**. Large international studies show that these drugs **reduce heart attacks, strokes and cardiovascular deaths**, especially in people who already have heart disease and obesity. Interestingly, these benefits seem to go **beyond just weight loss**, suggesting that the drugs may actually **modify the disease process**, like statins or aspirin do.

Looking ahead, the **big turning point** may not come from hospitals but from **drug factories and courts**. The main patent on semaglutide has already expired, and once the remaining patent barriers end in **March 2026**, Indian companies are expected to launch **much cheaper generic versions**. This could make these drugs accessible to far more people.

At the same time, even newer and more powerful drugs are being developed — including **oral pills** and **multi-hormone drugs** that may deliver greater weight loss and heart benefits.

Overall, what started as a weight-loss trend is now reshaping **metabolic medicine** in India, raising important questions about affordability, regulation and long-term public health impact.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Entry and Market Impact

GLP-1 weight-loss drugs entered the Indian market in 2025

Despite limited patient numbers, they ranked among the top drugs by value

Sales growth is driven by high prices rather than mass usage

### 2. Changing Patient Behaviour

Most GLP-1 drugs are paid for out of pocket

Reflects a shift in how obesity is viewed—from lifestyle issue to medical condition

Indicates rising willingness to spend on long-term metabolic treatment





### 3. Clinical Uncertainties

Long-term outcomes after stopping therapy remain unclear

Weight regain after discontinuation is common but not always complete

Key unresolved issues include duration of therapy, dose tapering, and safety of treatment breaks

### 4. Cardiovascular Benefits

Strong evidence shows reduction in heart attack, stroke, and cardiovascular death

Benefits seen even in non-diabetic patients with obesity

Effects are not fully explained by weight loss alone, suggesting disease-modifying action

### 5. Limits of Evidence

Existing cardiovascular evidence mainly applies to patients with central obesity

Insufficient data for lean individuals or low-risk populations

### 6. Patent Expiry and Generics

Primary semaglutide patent expired in September 2024

Secondary patent expires in March 2026

Entry of Indian generics is expected to sharply reduce prices and expand access

### 7. Indian Pharma Response

Several Indian pharmaceutical companies are preparing semaglutide products

Export of generics has begun, with domestic launches expected after 2026





## 8. Regulatory Scenario

In India, approvals are currently limited to diabetes and obesity

Globally, GLP-1 drugs are approved for broader indications like cardiovascular risk reduction

Indian regulators are expected to gradually widen approved uses

## 9. Next-Generation Metabolic Drugs

Focus shifting towards oral GLP-1 pills and multi-receptor drugs

Newer drugs promise greater weight loss and added cardiometabolic benefits

## 10. Broader Public Health Implications

GLP-1 drugs are transforming metabolic medicine beyond weight loss

Future impact in India will depend on affordability, patent outcomes, regulation, and long-term adherence

[How rice farmers can cut methane, and make money off it-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## Environment

### Easy Explanation

Rice farming is one of the **largest sources of methane**, a greenhouse gas that is far more powerful than carbon dioxide. This happens because rice fields are usually **kept flooded for long periods**, creating oxygen-free conditions where methane-producing microbes thrive.

Convincing farmers to reduce emissions is difficult, especially in India where **over 86% farmers are small or marginal**. Many climate-friendly practices need new machines or reduce yields, which farmers naturally resist.

This is where **Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD)** becomes important. AWD is a **low-effort, high-impact** method that does not require new machinery and **does not reduce yields**.

Under AWD, rice fields are **not kept continuously flooded**. After the first 20 days, the field is allowed to dry periodically before being flooded again. Drying introduces oxygen into the soil, which **suppresses methane-producing microbes**. As a result, methane emissions fall sharply, while water use also reduces.

Field studies in Telangana showed that AWD:

Reduced methane emissions significantly

Saved irrigation water





Maintained grain yields comparable to traditional flooding

The real breakthrough is money. Methane reductions are measured directly using scientific instruments and converted into **carbon credits**, which are sold to industries like data centres and airlines that want to offset their emissions. Farmers earn **additional income per hectare**, without changing crops or losing yield.

With global demand for carbon credits rising and India being the world's largest rice producer, AWD could become a **climate solution that pays farmers**, not burdens them.

## Key Takeaways

### Why Rice Farming Causes Methane

Continuous flooding creates oxygen-free soil

Anaerobic microbes decompose organic matter

Methane produced has 28× the warming impact of CO<sub>2</sub>

### Limits of Conventional Climate Solutions

Many green practices need costly machinery

Some lead to yield loss

Hard to adopt for small and marginal farmers

### What is Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD)

Rice fields are periodically dried and re-flooded

After first 20 days, fields are dried twice within a 45-day window

Water table allowed to fall 10–15 cm below soil surface

### Environmental Benefits of AWD

Breaks anaerobic conditions that produce methane



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Cuts methane emissions significantly

Saves irrigation water

Does not reduce crop yield

#### Scientific Evidence from India

Field trials conducted in Telangana

AWD compared with continuous flooding

Direct methane measurement using field chambers

Verified emission reductions

#### Carbon Credits and Farmer Income

Methane reductions converted into carbon credits

Credits sold to high-emission industries

Carbon credit price: \$15–25 per tonne CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent

Farmers can earn ₹3,000+ per hectare per crop

#### Scaling Up in India

Tens of thousands of farmers already enrolled

Adoption expanding across multiple states

Supported by climate-tech firms and global alliances



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## Broader Significance

Aligns climate action with farmer income

Suitable for small and marginal farmers

High potential due to India's large rice area

Shows how agriculture can fight climate change profitably

[Mamdani's 'big govt' bet may run into NYC budget deficit challenge-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## International relations

### Easy Explanation

**Zohran Mamdani** has taken charge as the **112th Mayor of New York City** after a surprise political rise. He defeated not just Republicans but also much of his own Democratic establishment by campaigning on a **“big government” agenda**—higher taxes on the rich and greater redistribution to the poor.

This is unusual because New York is seen as the **global capital of capitalism**, yet Mamdani openly argues that the city government must aggressively intervene to improve people's lives. He reaffirmed this stance in his inaugural speech, refusing to “reset expectations” downward.

Critics argue that such policies will **strain the city's finances**. Their concern is simple: if taxes on the wealthy rise too much, the rich may leave the city, slowing economic growth and shrinking the tax base. Over time, this could force the city into **higher debt and persistent budget deficits**.

To assess whether these fears are valid, it is important to see **where NYC's finances stood before Mamdani took office**. According to a December report by the **Office of the New York State Comptroller (OSC)**, the city is already headed towards **large budget deficits** in the coming years.

While the budget for FY2026 is technically balanced, the OSC warns that this masks deeper problems—rising welfare and safety-net spending, slowing economic growth, and uncertainty over federal funding. The city, the report says, has **not prepared adequately** for these pressures.

In short, Mamdani is beginning his term **not with fiscal comfort, but with looming deficits**, just as he plans to expand government spending. This sets up a difficult test—not only for him, but for the broader progressive wing of the Democratic Party.

### Key Takeaways

#### Mamdani's Political Rise

Zohran Mamdani won NYC mayoralty against both Republicans and Democratic establishment

Campaigned as a political outsider

Ran on a clear “big government” and redistribution-focused agenda



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## Core Policy Vision

Higher taxation of the wealthy

Expanded role of city government in welfare and redistribution

Explicit rejection of the idea that “big government is over”

## Critics' Main Concern

Higher taxes may drive wealthy residents and businesses out of NYC

Shrinking tax base could slow economic growth

Risk of rising public debt and long-term fiscal stress

## How NYC Budgeting Works

Fiscal year runs from July to June

June Plan: annual budget passed by Mayor and City Council

November Plan: mid-year budget update

## Current Fiscal Position

FY2026 budget is formally balanced

Medium-term outlook shows **growing deficits**

Budget gaps underestimated due to optimistic cost assumptions

## OSC Warnings

Rising spending on city-funded safety net programmes

Slowing economic growth



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Uncertain federal funding environment

Lack of serious fiscal preparation by the city

### Size of Expected Deficits

Deficits could reach about **\$10 billion by FY2027**

Could widen to **\$13.6 billion by FY2029**

### External Risks

Possible reduction in federal funds

Risk of economic downturn

Political uncertainty in Washington

### Political Implications

Mamdani's tenure will test viability of progressive "big government" model

Outcome may influence future Democratic leaders and national ambitions

NYC becomes a key laboratory for left-of-centre economic governance

[To resolve the street dogs issue,use reason and compassion,not fear and cruelty-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

### Governance

#### Easy Explanation

In India, **street dogs have become a legal and social flashpoint**, drawing the attention of the **Supreme Court of India** itself. While public fear over dog bites and rabies is real, the article argues that **panic-driven and cruel solutions will only worsen the problem**, not solve it.

India already has a clear legal and scientific framework to manage street dogs. The **Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules**, framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, mandate a **Capture–Sterilise–Vaccinate–Release (CSVR)** approach. This method is backed by global scientific consensus and has been shown to reduce both **dog populations and rabies** sustainably.

The problem is not the absence of law, but **poor implementation**. Calls to pick up and confine all street dogs into pounds are impractical, extremely expensive, and often inhumane. Past experience shows that dog pounds in India frequently become sites of neglect and mass death due to lack of food, staff, and medical care.



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Science shows that **killing or removing dogs creates “vacuum zones”**—new dogs move in, restarting the cycle of fear and aggression. In contrast, sterilised and vaccinated dogs are calmer, territorial (keeping new dogs out), and rarely aggressive.

International experience strengthens this argument. Countries like **France** and **the Netherlands** eliminated stray dog problems **without killing dogs**, using sterilisation, vaccination, strict action against abandonment, and public education. Importantly, these successes were led by **municipal authorities and health systems**, not courts.

The article stresses that most street dogs are not dangerous. Aggression usually arises from hunger, disturbance, or harassment. When fed and neutered, dogs are largely non-aggressive. A small minority of dangerous dogs can be handled separately without resorting to mass cruelty.

Ultimately, the issue must be approached with **reason, science, and compassion**, not fear, phobias, or unrealistic judicial orders.

## Key Takeaways

### Street Dogs as a Legal Issue

Indian Supreme Court has intervened directly in street-dog matters

Raises concerns about judicial overreach and separation of powers

Executive authority lies with the Animal Welfare Board, not courts

### Existing Legal Framework

Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules already in force

Mandates Capture–Sterilise–Vaccinate–Release (CSV)R

Law is evidence-based and nationally applicable

### Scientific Consensus

CSV)R endorsed by **World Health Organization** and **World Organisation for Animal Health**

Sterilisation and vaccination are the only sustainable solutions

Culling or removal leads to ecological “vacuum zones”



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## Problems with Dog Pounds

Extremely costly and logistically unviable

Past experience shows neglect, starvation, and deaths

Often become death traps rather than shelters

## International Best Practices

France reduced stray dogs via registration, sterilisation incentives, and waste management

Netherlands became the first country with zero stray dogs without killing

Success driven by municipalities, funding, and public education

## Indian Ground Reality

Many Indian cities have stabilised or reduced dog populations using ABC programmes

Failure lies in implementation, not in policy design

## Behavioural Reality of Street Dogs

Most bites linked to hunger, harassment, or mating disturbance

Sterilised and fed dogs are largely non-aggressive

Only a tiny minority of dogs are genuinely dangerous

## Social and Human Dimension

Street dogs act as guards in many localities

Widely fed and protected by poorer communities

Help inculcate compassion in children and aid in therapy



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## Core Message

Street-dog management must be rational, scientific, and humane

Fear-based and cruel solutions are impractical and counterproductive

Compassion and reason are not emotional choices, but evidence-based ones

[Energy transition will need more than chasing the sun or the wind-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

## Economy

### Easy Explanation

India has already built a large amount of **solar and wind power**—over **180 GW**—and renewables are now cheap. The real problem is no longer **producing green electricity**, but **using it efficiently**.

The main bottleneck is the **electricity distribution system (discoms)**. Discoms lose money, have high fixed costs, and depend heavily on industrial consumers who pay high tariffs. When these consumers adopt rooftop solar or energy efficiency, discom revenues fall but costs remain.

As renewables grow, electricity becomes more variable. Managing peaks, forecasting demand, and balancing supply become critical, but current incentives do not reward discoms for doing this well.

India has started reforms like **time-of-day tariffs** and **smart meters**, but price signals alone are not enough. Households cannot manually shift electricity use. **Automation through smart appliances and EV charging** is essential.

On the wholesale side, power markets remain fragmented. Much electricity is locked into long-term contracts, limiting the use of the cheapest renewable power. **Market-based economic dispatch** and integrating captive power plants can lower costs and improve renewable integration.

In short, India's energy transition now depends more on **reforming markets and incentives** than on adding new solar and wind capacity.

### Key Takeaways

#### Nature of the Challenge

Renewable capacity is sufficient; utilisation is the problem

Distribution and market design are the new bottlenecks

#### Role of Discoms

Central to clean energy transition

Financial stress and high losses persist



| Clear your doubts now.



Incentives focus on sales, not efficiency

## Tariff and Revenue Issues

Industrial users cross-subsidise others

Rooftop solar and efficiency reduce discom revenues

Fixed costs remain despite lower sales

## Rooftop Solar Impact

Discoms provide backup power without full compensation

Problem lies in tariff design, not solar adoption

## Smart Metering and Tariffs

~49 million smart meters installed

Time-of-day tariffs mandated

Foundation for flexible electricity use

## Need for Automation

Manual demand shifting is unrealistic

Smart appliances and EV charging are essential

Demand response can be cheaper than new infrastructure

## Wholesale Market Reforms

Power markets remain fragmented



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Cheap renewables not always dispatched first

Market-based economic dispatch can cut costs

## Overall Message

Energy transition is now a **systems reform challenge**

Better pricing, incentives, and markets are critical

More sun and wind alone will not deliver success

[Transforming a waste-ridden urban India-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Environment

### Easy Explanation

At **COP30**, Brazil highlighted waste as a major climate problem because untreated waste releases **methane**, a powerful greenhouse gas. The message was clear: **waste must be treated as a resource**, not as garbage. This aligns with India's **Mission LiFE**, which promotes mindful consumption and circular use of resources.

Urban India faces a serious waste crisis. Cities already struggle with pollution, landfills, and poor waste handling. By 2030, Indian cities may generate **165 million tonnes of waste annually**, rising sharply by 2050. Without action, this will worsen health problems, emissions, and urban living conditions.

The solution lies in a **circular economy**—reducing waste generation, segregating waste at source, recycling materials, and recovering energy. Organic waste can be composted or converted into biogas, plastics need strong recycling systems, and construction waste must be reused instead of dumped.

Government programmes like **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban 2.0)** aim to create **Garbage Free Cities** by 2026. However, weak enforcement, poor segregation, lack of markets for recycled products, and limited municipal resources slow progress.

Ultimately, clean cities are not about appearance but about **public health, climate safety, and economic sustainability**. Circularity, supported by policy, technology, markets, and citizen participation, is the only viable path forward.

### Key Takeaways

#### Waste and Climate Link

Waste is a major source of methane emissions

Circularity recognised globally as a climate solution

Treating waste as a resource is essential



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## Scale of India's Urban Waste Problem

165 million tonnes of waste annually by 2030

Could rise to 436 million tonnes by 2050

Direct impact on health, economy, and climate

## Circular Economy Approach

Shift from “use and dump” to reuse and recovery

Focus on reducing waste and extracting value

Essential for Garbage Free Cities

## Organic Waste Potential

Over half of municipal waste is organic

Can be composted or used for biogas and energy

Helps cut emissions and produce green fuel

## Plastic and Dry Waste Challenges

Plastic is the most difficult waste stream

Requires strict segregation at source

Recycling depends on strong market linkages

## Construction and Demolition Waste

About 12 million tonnes generated annually

Major source of urban pollution



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Reuse and recycling possible but poorly enforced

## Wastewater and Circularity

Recycling wastewater is key to urban water security

Reuse needed for agriculture, industry, and horticulture

Linked to missions like AMRUT and SBM

## Implementation Gaps

Poor segregation, logistics, and monitoring

Weak enforcement of EPR and C&D waste rules

Limited municipal capacity and funding

## Role of Citizens and Markets

Citizen participation is crucial for segregation

Recycling can become the strongest pillar of circularity

Private sector and technology must drive scale

## Core Message

Clean cities are a necessity, not a cosmetic goal

Circular economy is the only sustainable urban solution

Waste management is central to India's climate and urban future

[Recasting sanitation with urban-rural partnerships-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Sociology

## Easy Explanation



| Clear your doubts now.



India's **Swachh Bharat Mission** succeeded in giving toilets to almost every rural household and ending open defecation. But toilets are only the first step. The next challenge is **what happens to the waste** once septic tanks and pits fill up.

If faecal sludge is not safely collected, transported, and treated, it can undo the health and dignity gains of sanitation. This is why **SBM–Gramen Phase II (ODF Plus)** focuses on waste management and safe sanitation services.

Maharashtra shows how this can work through **urban–rural partnerships**. Villages near cities are being linked to underused urban faecal sludge treatment plants, making sanitation services affordable and safe. Where this is not possible, rural clusters are building their own treatment facilities.

These models prove that **collaboration between cities, villages, local governments, and private operators** can make rural sanitation sustainable. The real success of Swachh Bharat will be measured not just by toilets built, but by systems that manage waste safely over time.

## Key Takeaways

### From Toilets to Systems

Swachh Bharat achieved near-universal toilet coverage

New challenge is managing faecal waste safely

Poor waste handling can reverse health gains

### ODF Plus Focus

SBM-G Phase II targets solid and liquid waste management

Emphasises sustainability, behaviour change, and service chains

Nearly 97% villages declared ODF Plus

### Faecal Sludge Management Gap

Septic tanks and pits need periodic desludging

Informal and unsafe practices are common in rural areas

FSM is the weakest link in sanitation



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## Urban–Rural Partnerships

Cities often have underutilised treatment plants

Nearby villages can share this infrastructure

Reduces costs and improves safety

## Maharashtra's Satara Model

Villages linked to Satara city's treatment plant

Scheduled desludging every 5 years

Costs recovered through small sanitation tax

## Standalone Rural Solutions

Some villages need independent treatment systems

Cluster-level plants can serve multiple villages

Pooling resources improves viability

## Governance and Financing

Role of gram panchayats is central

Public–private participation improves service delivery

Formal agreements ensure accountability

## Why This Matters

Protects public health and environment

Preserves dignity achieved through Swachh Bharat



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Makes sanitation gains durable and scalable

## Core Message

Sanitation success is about systems, not just toilets

Urban–rural cooperation is key to sustainability

These models can be scaled across India

**4th January 2026**

[Which are the airports being privatised?: TH FAQ](#)

## Economy

### **Easy Explanation**

India is moving ahead with the third round of airport privatisation. This time, 11 medium-sized airports will be offered to private companies in five bundled groups, each combining bigger and smaller airports. The Civil Aviation Ministry has sent the proposal to the Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC), which will examine it before final approval by the Union Cabinet. If cleared, bidding by private operators is expected to begin by March 2026.

These 11 airports were chosen from Airports Authority of India (AAI) facilities that currently handle between 0.1 and 1 million passengers a year. Based on future traffic growth and investment needs, the government shortlisted these airports as the best candidates for privatisation in this round. This plan is part of a larger government strategy called the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), which aims to lease public infrastructure to private players, raise money, and reinvest it elsewhere.

Airport privatisation in India began in 2003, starting with Delhi and Mumbai airports, followed by Bengaluru and Hyderabad. In 2019, six more airports were privatised, all of which went to the Adani Group. Over time, the privatisation model has changed — from revenue sharing with AAI to a per-passenger fee system. In this third round, the government is carefully re-examining which model works best.

However, the move has raised concerns. A major worry is growing monopoly power in the airport sector, especially since one corporate group already controls many airports. Critics fear that this concentration reduces competition, increases costs for airlines, and ultimately makes air travel more expensive for passengers. Examples like fare hikes and increased user charges at privatised airports have added to these fears.

To address passenger concerns, regulators are now focusing on service quality. Airports may face penalties if they fail to meet standards such as reasonable security wait times, smooth check-in, availability of assistance, and accessibility for elderly or disabled passengers. Despite the concerns, the government argues that privatisation is essential to expand airport capacity and meet rising demand, as air travel in India is still used by only a small fraction of the population.

### **Key Takeaways**

#### **Current privatisation plan**

- Third round covers 11 airports bundled into 5 groups
- Mix of metro and non-metro airports
- PPPAC review underway; bids likely by March 2026



| Clear your doubts now.



### Why these airports were chosen

- Handle 0.1–1 million passengers annually
- Strong growth potential
- High investment requirements

### Link with National Monetisation Pipeline

- Airports privatisation part of NMP
- Airport sector target: ₹20,782 crore
- Aviation has lagged compared to roads and railways

### History of airport privatisation

- Started in 2003 with Delhi and Mumbai
- Bengaluru and Hyderabad followed
- 2019 round gave 6 airports to Adani Group
- Shift from revenue share to per-passenger fee model

### Key issues under evaluation

- Revenue-sharing vs per-passenger fee
- Cross-subsidisation within airport bundles
- Cap on number of airports per private entity
- Non-aeronautical revenue (shops, parking, land use)

### Concerns raised

- Risk of monopoly in airport sector
- Higher charges for airlines and passengers
- Limited bargaining power for airlines
- Rising user development fees after privatisation

### Passenger impact

- Increased airfares due to higher airport charges
- Complaints on congestion, taxi costs, accessibility
- Regulator proposing penalties for poor service

### What lies ahead

- Only ~6% of Indians travel by air currently
  - Plan to build 50 new airports in 5 years
  - Capacity expected to reach 550 mppa by FY2026
- Needs financially strong airlines alongside airports [What went wrong with a rabies vaccine batch?: TH FAQ](#)

### Sociology

#### Easy Explanation

Health authorities in Australia and the United States issued a warning after discovering that a counterfeit version of the human anti-rabies vaccine Abhayrab had been circulating in India since November 1, 2023. The alert was triggered after rabies cases were detected in travellers who had received the vaccine in India. The concern was that the counterfeit vaccine might not only be ineffective but could also be harmful.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advised that people vaccinated with Abhayrab in India during this period should consider their shots invalid and seek revaccination. Australia issued similar guidance for its travellers. This raised serious concerns because rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms appear, but is fully preventable if correct vaccination is given on time.

Indian Immunologicals Limited (IIL), the manufacturer of Abhayrab, responded by stating that the counterfeit batch had been removed from circulation. The company clarified that all genuine Abhayrab vaccines produced in India are tested and released by the Central Drugs Laboratory, a WHO-prequalified national control laboratory, ensuring quality and safety.



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Doctors have stressed that revaccination is safe and necessary in cases where vaccine authenticity is doubtful. Since the rabies vaccine is an inactivated vaccine, it does not contain live virus and can be safely repeated. If someone is unsure whether they received a genuine vaccine, or if cold-chain maintenance or dosage records are unclear, a fresh vaccination course is recommended.

In India, rabies remains a major public health challenge. The country accounts for over a third of global rabies deaths, with children being disproportionately affected. While human rabies deaths are entirely preventable, gaps in awareness, access to timely treatment, and dog vaccination continue to pose risks. The counterfeit vaccine episode highlights the importance of strong drug regulation, surveillance, and public awareness in disease control.

### **Key Takeaways**

#### **What triggered the alert**

- Counterfeit Abhayrab vaccine detected in India
- Rabies cases reported in travellers vaccinated in India
- Alerts issued by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Australian authorities

#### **Official response**

- Australia advised revaccination for travellers vaccinated after Nov 1, 2023
- Manufacturer Indian Immunologicals Limited said fake batches are no longer in circulation
- Genuine vaccines are tested by WHO-prequalified national laboratories

#### **What patients should do**

- Consult a doctor if vaccine authenticity is doubtful
- Revaccination is safe and allowed
- Full post-exposure prophylaxis needed if considered unvaccinated

#### **Rabies revaccination protocol**

- Full course: days 0, 3, 7, 14, and 28
- Rabies immunoglobulin required in severe exposures
- Previously vaccinated persons need boosters if documentation is valid

#### **India and rabies burden**

- India accounts for about 36% of global rabies deaths
- 18,000–20,000 deaths annually
- 30–60% of deaths occur in children under 15

#### **Prevention and policy**

- Rabies is 100% preventable with timely treatment
- Mass dog vaccination is most cost-effective strategy
- National Rabies Control Programme aims to eliminate dog-mediated rabies by 2030
- World Health Organization promotes a One Health approach combining human, animal, and environmental health.

[Where does India stand on acid attacks?: TH FAQ](#)

Sociology

### **Easy Explanation**

In December 2025, a Delhi court acquitted the three main accused in a 2009 acid attack case, ending a 16-year legal battle for survivor and activist Shaheen Malik. She was attacked outside her workplace at the age of 26, lost vision in one eye, and underwent 25 reconstructive surgeries. The verdict has deeply shaken her faith in the justice system, and she believes it will discourage other acid attack survivors from pursuing legal action. She plans to challenge the acquittal in the Delhi High Court.

Her case reflects a wider and disturbing pattern. Acid attacks are violent assaults where corrosive chemicals are thrown on victims, mostly women, causing lifelong physical, psychological, and economic damage. Despite strict



| Clear your doubts now.



laws, conviction rates remain extremely low. Data shows that while hundreds of cases are reported each year, only a handful result in convictions, with many cases dragging on for years.

Although Indian law prescribes severe punishment for acid attacks and mandates free medical treatment for victims, implementation remains weak. Regulation of acid sales is poorly enforced, police investigations are often flawed, and survivors face insensitivity from investigators and courts. Many are pressured to accept out-of-court settlements rather than pursue justice.

Comparisons with Bangladesh show that strict enforcement of acid sale bans, swift legal action, and strong public awareness campaigns can significantly reduce such crimes. Survivors in India are demanding similar reforms, including better regulation, faster trials, judicial accountability, and comprehensive rehabilitation support to truly address this brutal crime.

## **Key Takeaways**

### **What are acid attacks**

- Assault using corrosive substances like sulphuric, nitric, or hydrochloric acid
- Causes severe burns, blindness, disfigurement, disability, and psychological trauma
- Victims are mostly women; perpetrators are overwhelmingly men

### **Scale of the problem in India**

- 207 acid attack cases reported in 2023; actual numbers likely much higher
- Estimated around 1,000 attacks annually due to underreporting
- Worst affected States: West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat
- Motives often linked to rejected advances, domestic abuse, dowry disputes

### **Conviction and justice gap**

- Extremely low conviction rates despite hundreds of cases
- Long delays, weak investigations, and judicial insensitivity common
- Survivors often pressured into settlements instead of trials

### **Legal provisions**

- Section 124 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita: minimum 10 years to life imprisonment
- Acid attack attempts punishable with 5–7 years in prison
- Free medical treatment for victims mandated
- Supreme Court ordered regulation of acid sales, but enforcement is weak

### **Survivors' lived reality**

- Delays of over a decade in trials
- Compensation often delayed for years
- Lack of convictions discourages others from seeking justice

### **What needs to be done**

- Stricter ban and monitoring of acid sales
- Accountability of local authorities for illegal acid sales
- Fast-track courts and judicial sensitisation
- Stronger legal aid, counselling, and rehabilitation support
- Implement Justice J.S. Verma Committee's recommendation for a national survivor fund

### **Lessons from Bangladesh**

- Strict acid sale laws and enforcement since 2002
- Rapid sealing of shops violating rules
- Large-scale awareness campaigns
- Acid attacks reduced from nearly 500 in 2002 to just 13 in 2024

### **Relevant institutions and organisations**

- National Crime Records Bureau



| Clear your doubts now.



- Supreme Court of India
- Acid Survivors Trust International

## [Monroe Doctrine reloaded: TH Profiles](#)

### International Relations

#### **Easy Explanation**

Donald Trump has made Venezuela a major foreign policy target after returning to power in 2025. His administration has accused Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro of running drug cartels and launched what it calls a “war on drugs” against the country. This has included bombing boats near Venezuela, deploying U.S. warships and troops to the Caribbean, imposing a naval quarantine on oil tankers, and authorising covert CIA operations inside Venezuela.

In early January, just days after Maduro suggested talks with Washington, the U.S. carried out large air strikes in Venezuela. The Venezuelan government called this an act of military aggression and declared a state of emergency. Trump later claimed that Maduro and his wife had been captured and removed from the country, signalling an open push for regime change. Venezuela’s right-wing opposition leader María Corina Machado has openly supported Trump’s actions.

The U.S. has not provided concrete evidence that Venezuela poses a drug threat or runs global cartels. Instead, the article explains that America’s actions are driven by three main reasons. First, Trump wants to reassert U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere, following the old Monroe Doctrine idea that the Americas should remain under U.S. influence. His new National Security Strategy treats Latin America as a strategic priority and seeks to block China’s growing presence there.

Second, the U.S. wants to counter China and Russia, both of which have strong economic ties with Venezuela. China buys most of Venezuela’s oil and has invested heavily in its energy sector. By removing Maduro, the U.S. could warn other Latin American countries against aligning with Beijing or Moscow.

Third, Venezuela’s massive oil reserves make it extremely attractive. The country holds some of the largest oil reserves in the world. Trump has repeatedly said that Venezuela “stole” American oil through nationalisation and wants U.S. companies to regain access. If the current government falls, Venezuela’s oil, mining, and energy sectors could be reopened to American corporations, reducing U.S. dependence on West Asian oil and weakening China’s energy security.

#### **Key Takeaways**

##### **What triggered the crisis**

- Trump’s return to power in 2025
- Accusations that Venezuela’s government runs drug networks
- Military action, naval blockade, and CIA involvement
- Clear push for regime change

##### **Regime change objective**

- Trump openly seeks removal of President Nicolás Maduro
- Support from Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado
- No solid evidence presented for drug trafficking claims

##### **Strategic motive 1: U.S. dominance**

- Revival of the Monroe Doctrine mindset
- Latin America declared a strategic priority in Trump’s National Security Strategy
- Aim to keep the Western Hemisphere under U.S. political and military influence

##### **Strategic motive 2: China and Russia factor**

- China has deep economic links with Venezuela
- Part of China’s Belt and Road outreach



| Clear your doubts now.



- Major oil buyer and investor in Venezuela
- Regime change would weaken China and Russia in the region

### **Strategic motive 3: Oil and resources**

- Venezuela holds about 17% of global oil reserves
- Oil sector nationalised since the 1970s
- Trump wants U.S. companies back in Venezuelan oil
- Reduces U.S. dependence on Persian Gulf oil
- Forces China out of Venezuela's energy sector

### **Oil geopolitics**

- China buys nearly 80% of Venezuela's oil
- China National Petroleum Corporation is a major investor
- PDVSA partnered with Chinese firms even in 2024

### **Broader implications**

- Signals tougher U.S. stance in Latin America
- Encourages right-wing governments aligned with Washington
- Risks regional instability and military escalation
- Marks a shift from diplomacy to coercive foreign policy under Donald Trump

[Green paradox: planting trees will cool a megacity unless it's dry: TH Science](#)

Science

### **Easy Explanation**

Cities are becoming hotter because of two main reasons: global climate change and the way cities are built. Concrete, asphalt, and buildings trap heat much more than natural landscapes. Because of this, planting trees and greenery is often promoted as a natural way to cool cities. But this study shows that greening does not always work the way people expect.

Researchers studied 761 megacities across 105 countries and compared temperatures over trees, grasslands, croplands, and built-up areas. They measured whether vegetation was cooler or hotter than nearby concrete areas. Overall, trees usually cooled cities, and grasslands often did too. But in dry regions, especially cities receiving less than 1,000 mm of rainfall a year, vegetation sometimes made cities hotter instead of cooler.

The reason lies in how plants cool surfaces. Vegetation cools mainly through evapotranspiration — water evaporating from soil and leaves, which removes heat. But when water is scarce, this cooling weakens. At the same time, plants can absorb more sunlight than some reflective built surfaces. In dry cities, reduced cooling plus increased heat absorption can result in net warming.

During extreme heatwaves, trees still helped in most cities by limiting temperature rise. However, grasslands and croplands often made heatwaves worse because grasses and crops reduce water loss under extreme stress, cutting down cooling even further. The study warns that poorly planned urban greening can actually worsen urban heat instead of reducing it.

### **Key Takeaways**

#### **Why cities are heating up**

- Global climate change
- Heat-trapping urban materials like concrete and asphalt

#### **What the study examined**

- 761 megacities in 105 countries
- Compared trees, grasslands, croplands, and built-up areas
- Measured how much vegetation cooled or warmed cities



| Clear your doubts now.



## Overall findings

- Trees cooled cities in 98% of cases
- Grasslands cooled cities in 78% of cases
- Vegetation caused warming in many dry cities

## Dry region paradox

- In cities with low rainfall, vegetation can be hotter than concrete
- Lack of water reduces cooling from evapotranspiration
- Heat absorption by plants can dominate

## Performance during heatwaves

- Trees reduced heat rise in about 75% of cities
- Grasslands worsened heat in ~71% of cities
- Croplands worsened heat in ~82% of cities

## Why grasses and crops fail in extreme heat

- High vapour pressure deficit during heatwaves
- Plants shut down water loss to survive
- Cooling effect drops sharply

## Key policy lesson

- Urban greening is not one-size-fits-all
- Trees are generally safer than grasslands
- Poorly planned greening can increase urban heat
- Climate, rainfall, and water availability must guide city planning

[Earth life is made of space stuff, studies of asteroid Bennu hint: TH Science](#)

Science

## Easy Explanation

In 2020, a spacecraft studying a small asteroid named Bennu collected samples from its surface and returned them safely to Earth in 2023. This was part of NASA's OSIRIS-REx mission. Since then, scientists around the world have been analysing these samples to understand how the solar system formed and how life may have begun on Earth.

The new studies show something remarkable: Bennu contains sugars like ribose and glucose, along with amino acids and all five nucleobases found in DNA and RNA. This means that every basic molecular building block required for life has now been found together on an asteroid. Ribose is especially important because it forms the backbone of RNA, strengthening the idea that early life may have relied on RNA before DNA evolved.

The research also shows that Bennu is unusually rich in "presolar grains" — tiny dust particles formed in ancient stars and supernovae before our Sun existed. These grains survived the formation of the solar system and were later altered by liquid water on Bennu's parent asteroid. Their unusually high abundance suggests that Bennu formed in a region of space especially rich in supernova material.

Together, these findings support the idea that asteroids like Bennu may have delivered key ingredients for life to early Earth, helping trigger biological chemistry more than 3.5 billion years ago.

## Key Takeaways

### Mission and samples

- Samples were collected from asteroid Bennu and returned to Earth in 2023
- Studied by scientists in the U.S. and Japan
- Part of NASA's OSIRIS-REx mission

### Why Bennu matters

- Bennu formed ~4.6 billion years ago, around the time the Sun formed



| Clear your doubts now.



- Its parent body originated beyond Saturn and later broke apart
- Bennu now orbits between Earth and Mars

#### Discovery of life-building molecules

- Ribose (RNA sugar) detected
- Glucose (metabolism-related sugar) detected
- Amino acids and all five DNA/RNA nucleobases already known
- Confirms a complete molecular toolkit for life on one asteroid

#### Implications for origin of life

- Strong support for the “RNA world” hypothesis
- Suggests early Earth received sugars and amino acids from asteroids
- Helps explain how life could begin without biology already present

#### Chemical processes on Bennu

- Evidence of liquid brine on the asteroid’s parent body
- Ices melted due to radioactive heating
- Chemical reactions formed complex polymers like carbamates

#### Presolar grains discovery

- Bennu has at least 6× more presolar grains than similar asteroids
- Many grains originated in supernova explosions
- Indicates Bennu formed in a supernova-rich region of space

#### Why this is important

- Links stellar explosions to planet formation and life chemistry
- Shows asteroids can preserve ancient cosmic material
- Raises new questions about whether Bennu is unique or just the first well-sampled example

5th January 2026

[America’s return to interventionism-Since last year,Trump has asserted force across the globe.The Venezuela operation,with an eye on oil,is his most alarming yet-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

#### Easy Explanation

The article argues that the United States under **Donald Trump** has clearly returned to **direct military intervention abroad**, abandoning his earlier promise of avoiding “forever wars”.

The most dramatic example is the US operation in **Venezuela**, where American forces captured President **Nicolás Maduro**. Trump justified this action by invoking the **Monroe Doctrine**, which treats the Western Hemisphere as America’s sphere of influence.

Although the Monroe Doctrine had faded from active use, Trump has **revived and openly embraced it**, even rebranding it, to legitimise intervention in Latin America. This fits a broader pattern: in the past year, the US has used or threatened force in Syria, Nigeria, Iran, Yemen, Somalia and Iraq.

The **central motive**, according to the article, is **oil**. Venezuela possesses the **largest proven crude oil reserves in the world** (over 300 billion barrels) but produces very little due to economic collapse and sanctions. Trump has explicitly said the US would take control of these reserves and allow American companies to invest heavily to “refurbish” the oil sector.

This marks a sharp departure from recent US policy and contradicts Trump’s own “America First” and anti-war rhetoric. Instead of disengagement, the US now appears ready for **long-term involvement**, possibly even administering Venezuela during a so-called political transition.



| Clear your doubts now.



The article highlights major uncertainties:

Will the US **occupy Venezuela** or install a **pliant leadership**?

Can the remaining Venezuelan state function without Maduro?

What role, if any, will opposition figures like **María Corina Machado** and **Edmundo González** play?

Overall, the piece warns that the intervention risks destabilising Venezuela further and pulling the US into another prolonged foreign entanglement.

### Key Takeaways

Return to Interventionism

Clear shift from restraint to **direct military action abroad**

Breaks from post-Iraq caution in US foreign policy

Signals acceptance of force as a routine policy tool

Revival of the Monroe Doctrine

**Monroe Doctrine** used to justify US dominance in the Western Hemisphere

Latin America treated as a strategic backyard

Reversal of recent administrations' distancing from the doctrine

Oil as the Strategic Driver

Venezuela holds the **largest proven crude oil reserves globally**

Production remains low despite massive reserves

US aims to control resources and open sector to American companies



| Clear your doubts now.



## Contradiction with MAGA Narrative

Trump rose on promises to end “forever wars”

Current actions point toward **prolonged overseas entanglement**

Risk of alienating isolationist support base

## Risk of Long-Term Involvement

Talk of “running the country” suggests indirect rule or occupation

Political transition likely to require sustained US presence

High costs and legitimacy challenges

## Political Uncertainty in Venezuela

Removal of **Nicolás Maduro** creates a power vacuum

Divided opposition and weak institutions

Unclear role of leaders like **María Corina Machado** and **Edmundo González**

## Historical Continuity

Fits a long record of US regime-change interventions in Latin America

Mirrors earlier Cold War–era strategic behaviour

Reinforces perception of US unilateralism

## Wider Global Implications

Indicates a more aggressive US foreign policy posture

Raises concerns about international law and sovereignty





May encourage instability and counterbalancing by other powers

[America's return to interventionism-Trump's plans to revive Venezuela oil sector will take years, cost billions-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article explains **why oil lies at the heart of US intervention in Venezuela**, and why **reviving Venezuela's oil sector will be slow, costly, and uncertain**, despite bold political claims.

After the capture of Venezuelan President **Nicolás Maduro**, US President **Donald Trump** announced that Washington would **take control of Venezuela's oil sector** and invite American oil majors to invest billions of dollars to restore production.

However, experts caution that **this revival will take years**, not months. Venezuela's oil infrastructure is **severely degraded** after years of underinvestment, sanctions, economic collapse and mismanagement. Even though the country has the **largest proven oil reserves in the world** (over 300 billion barrels), it produces **less than 1% of global oil output**.

Because global oil markets are currently well supplied and demand is relatively subdued, **there is unlikely to be any immediate impact on global oil prices**. Only in the long term—if US control leads to sustained investment and higher output—could Venezuelan oil significantly affect prices.

For India, the short-term impact is minimal since **India does not currently import Venezuelan crude**. However, if US sanctions are eased in the future, Venezuela could again become an important supplier, and Indian companies like **ONGC Videsh** and **Reliance Industries** could benefit.

### Key Takeaways

Oil as the Core Motive

Venezuela holds **~20% of global proven oil reserves**

Oil is the primary strategic driver behind US intervention

Trump openly linked regime change with control of oil assets

Why Revival Will Take Years

Oil infrastructure is **old, damaged and poorly maintained**

Years of sanctions limited exports and investment

Billions of dollars needed before output can rise meaningfully



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US oil companies have **not yet committed publicly**

#### Limited Impact on Global Oil Prices

Venezuela produces only ~1 million bpd vs **100+ million bpd globally**

Global markets are currently well supplied

Any price impact would be **long-term and gradual**, not immediate

#### Sanctions and Investment Constraints

US sanctions were the single biggest constraint on production

Easing or suspension of sanctions is essential for revival

“Chevron model” allows limited foreign operations with US approval

#### What It Means for India

No immediate impact: India does not import Venezuelan oil currently

India imports **over 88%** of its crude needs from abroad

Sanctions relief could reopen Venezuelan oil to Indian refiners

#### Opportunities for Indian Companies

**ONGC Videsh** may recover **\$500+ million** in stuck dividends

Scope for fresh Indian investment if sanctions ease

**Reliance Industries** was once a major buyer of Venezuelan crude



| Clear your doubts now.



## Policy Uncertainty Going Forward

US tariff threats halted Venezuelan oil exports to India in 2025

Future trade depends on US–Venezuela political arrangements

Energy decisions now tightly linked to geopolitics, not markets

## Bigger Strategic Message

Confirms US shift back to **resource-driven interventionism**

Signals politicisation of global energy flows

Reinforces oil's role as a trigger for conflict, not just commerce

[Targeted cancer treatment could be insight.via nanobots-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

The article explains how **magnetic nanorobots** could overcome one of the biggest limitations of current cancer therapy: **delivering drugs deep inside tumours without damaging healthy tissue**.

Dr **Ambarish Ghosh**, a professor at the **Indian Institute of Science (IISc)**, is developing **microscopic, magnetically controlled nanobots** that can move through blood, dense tissue and even inside cells. His work won the **Tata Transformation Prize 2025**.

These nanobots are **helix-shaped**, inspired by how bacteria swim. When exposed to an external magnetic field, they rotate like a corkscrew, allowing them to **drill through dense tumour tissue**. Drugs can be coated on the tip or surface of the nanobot, effectively turning it into a **precision delivery vehicle**.

What makes them powerful is **control and precision**. Magnetic fields guide the nanobots exactly to the tumour site. Once there, they can:

Release drugs only at the target

Bind preferentially to cancer cells

Even act as the treatment themselves by generating **localised heat (magnetic hyperthermia)** to kill cancer cells above 42°C while sparing healthy tissue

Beyond cancer, the same technology shows promise in **dentistry**, especially for root canal infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria, where nanobots may offer a safer and pain-free alternative to existing chemical disinfectants.



| Clear your doubts now.



At present, the technology has been tested on **cell cultures and animal models**. Clinical use will require further trials, cost optimisation, and acceptance by doctors and patients.

## Key Takeaways

### The Core Problem in Cancer Therapy

Drugs struggle to penetrate **deep, dense tumour tissue**

Conventional chemotherapy damages healthy cells

Limits the promise of targeted and personalised medicine

### What Are Magnetic Nanobots?

Helix-shaped nanoscale devices inspired by bacterial movement

Made of **biocompatible silica** with magnetic iron components

Act as **nanoswimmers** guided by external magnetic fields

### How They Reach Tumours

Corkscrew-like motion helps them move through blood and tissue

Magnetic fields provide precise navigation

Can penetrate environments unreachable by standard drugs

### Why Delivery Is Highly Precise

Nanobots bind preferentially to cancer cells

Healthy tissue remains largely unaffected

Therapy can be tailored to tumour-specific properties



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## Nanobots as the Treatment

Enable **magnetic hyperthermia** to kill cancer cells

Can function as both **drug carrier and drug**

Can act as MRI-visible beacons to locate tumours accurately

## Cancers Tested So Far

Effective against **breast and ovarian cancer cells**

Especially promising for **deep-set and dense breast tumours**

Potential applicability to other cancers under testing

## Beyond Cancer: Dentistry Applications

Effective against antimicrobial-resistant bacteria (*E. faecalis*)

Safer alternative to sodium hypochlorite in root canal treatments

Potential to **rebuild and remineralise teeth**

Animal trials show **100% effectiveness**

## Stage of Development

Currently tested on cell cultures and animals

Clinical trials still needed

Cost likely manageable using existing nanotechnology methods

## Key Challenges Ahead

Scaling for clinical use



| Clear your doubts now.



Regulatory approvals

Acceptance by clinicians and patients

Market-friendly adaptation of the technology

### [The uncertainty after Maduro-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

International relations

#### Easy Explanation

The article analyses **what the arrest of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro by the U.S. really means**, and why **removing one leader is unlikely to bring stable regime change** in Venezuela.

The United States apprehended **Nicolás Maduro** in a military-led operation and flew him to the U.S. to face charges of **drug trafficking and narco-terrorism**. The move follows months of pressure by the administration of **Donald Trump**, which has long branded the Venezuelan leadership as criminal and hostile.

Inside the Trump administration, **two competing impulses** drove this action:

**Republican hawks**, including Secretary of State **Marco Rubio**, who want outright regime change in socialist-led Venezuela.

The **"America First" camp**, which argues that Venezuela's leadership is involved in drug trafficking and therefore poses a direct threat to U.S. security.

While Maduro's arrest is being projected as a decisive blow, the article stresses that **most of Venezuela's state and military apparatus remains intact**. Power is likely to shift to another figure within the same system, rather than triggering democratic transformation.

History suggests that **U.S. military interventions rarely produce stable political outcomes**. Examples like **Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan** show that removing a ruler often leads to chaos, prolonged instability, or the need for costly nation-building—something Trump has repeatedly rejected.

There is also a risk that instability in Venezuela could:

Increase refugee flows toward the U.S. border

Worsen drug trafficking rather than curb it

Trigger nationalist backlash, with citizens rallying around the regime

The article concludes that Trump may prefer to **declare a quick victory and disengage**, but pressure from hawks and domestic political groups could push the U.S. toward deeper involvement—despite the lack of a clear strategy for what comes next.

#### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## What Happened

U.S. forces apprehended Nicolás Maduro and flew him to the U.S.

He faces charges of drug trafficking and narco-terrorism

Marks the climax of months of U.S. pressure on Venezuela

## Why the U.S. Acted

Republican hawks seek regime change in socialist Venezuela

Trump administration frames Venezuelan leadership as criminal

Domestic political appeal to conservative Hispanic voters

## Limits of Leader Removal

Maduro's arrest does not dismantle the state or military

Regime structures built over decades remain intact

Power likely shifts within the same ruling system

## Lessons from Past U.S. Interventions

Libya: regime change followed by state collapse

Iraq & Afghanistan: short wars turned into long nation-building

Military force alone rarely reshapes political systems

## Nation-Building Dilemma

Durable regime change usually requires occupation and reconstruction

Trump opposes nation-building on ideological and political grounds



| Clear your doubts now.



Leaves no clear pathway to achieve U.S. objectives

### Risk of Instability

Potential refugee flows from Venezuela

Possible rise in drug trafficking amid weakened governance

Nationalist backlash against foreign intervention

### Conflicting Pressures on Trump

Hawks want sustained U.S. involvement to “finish the job”

“America First” base wants quick action, not prolonged wars

Trump may opt for a symbolic win rather than long-term commitment

### Big Picture Insight

Removing a leader is easier than transforming a political system

U.S. power has clear limits in shaping foreign societies

Venezuela’s future remains uncertain despite Maduro’s arrest

[Political instability, constitutional change, and the military’s hold over Pakistan-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

### International relations

#### Easy Explanation

The article explains **why Pakistan’s politics repeatedly tilts in favour of the military**, and why the recent elevation of **Asim Munir** represents **continuity rather than a break** from the past.

In December 2025, Pakistan appointed Asim Munir as its **first Chief of Defence Force (CDF)** while he continued as **Chief of Army Staff (COAS)**. Backed by recent constitutional amendments—especially the **27th Amendment**, which expanded military authority, limited judicial oversight, and granted legal immunity—this move was widely seen as a **“silent coup”**. There were no tanks on the streets, but real power shifted decisively toward the military.

This development fits a long historical pattern. Since independence, Pakistan’s civilian governments have struggled to assert authority due to **deep ethnic and linguistic divisions, weak political institutions, and repeated constitutional disruptions**. These weaknesses created space for the military to emerge as the most cohesive and powerful institution in the country.



| Clear your doubts now.



From **Ayub Khan** to **Yahya Khan**, **Zia-ul-Haq**, **Pervez Musharraf**, and now **Asim Munir**, the pattern has remained consistent:

Civilian leaders rise

They attempt to assert autonomy

The military intervenes directly or indirectly

Even popular leaders such as **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto**, **Benazir Bhutto**, **Nawaz Sharif**, and **Imran Khan** eventually fell out with the Army once they challenged its primacy.

The article argues that **constitutional changes are often used to legitimise military dominance**, rather than restrain it. **Asim Munir's** rise reflects this logic: formal authority has been legally centralised, while civilian leadership—currently under **Shehbaz Sharif**—appears marginal.

In short, Pakistan's instability is not accidental. It is the outcome of **structural imbalances** where the military remains the final arbiter of power, regardless of elections or popular support.

### Key Takeaways

Recent Trigger: Silent Consolidation of Power

Asim Munir appointed first Chief of Defence Force

Continues simultaneously as Army Chief

Constitutional amendments expanded military authority

Seen as a “silent coup” without overt military takeover

Role of Constitutional Changes

27th Amendment curtailed judicial oversight

Legal immunity granted to military leadership

Authority centralised in the security establishment

Constitution used to legitimise dominance, not limit it



| Clear your doubts now.



## Early Roots of Military Intervention

Frequent change of Prime Ministers after 1947

Deep linguistic and ethnic divisions (Urdu vs Bangla)

Weak civilian institutions enabled Army's entry into politics

1958 coup under Ayub Khan set the template

## Military Rule and National Crises

Ayub Khan's failed wars weakened civilian legitimacy

Yahya Khan's refusal to honour 1970 election results

1971 war led to Bangladesh's creation

Military miscalculations caused national trauma

## Zia Era: Ideology and Control

Zia-ul-Haq seized power in 1977

Islamisation, blasphemy laws, jihadist ideology expanded

Economic growth driven by foreign aid, not institutions

Deepened military and intelligence networks

## Managed Democracy after 1988

Elected governments repeatedly dismissed

Army remained behind-the-scenes power broker

Musharraf's 1999 coup reaffirmed military supremacy





“Reformist” image could not mask control

From Favourite to Foe: Imran Khan

Initially backed by the military in 2018

Removed once he tried to assert independence

Despite popularity, denied real power

Shows limits of electoral legitimacy in Pakistan

Why the Pattern Persists

Weak political parties and institutions

Enduring ethnic, regional, and ideological divides

Geopolitical insecurities and radicalisation

Military remains the most organised institution

Big Picture Insight

Asim Munir’s rise is not exceptional

Civilian rule in Pakistan remains conditional

Elections do not guarantee authority

Military continues as the ultimate arbiter of power

[Unusual genetic code in Antarctic microbes yields rare amino acid-The Hindu Science](#)

Science

### Easy Explanation

The article reports a **major discovery that challenges the long-held “universal” genetic code**, showing that some microbes use a **stop signal in DNA to insert a rare amino acid instead**.



| Clear your doubts now.



A study published in **Science** found that certain **Archaea** — microbes distinct from bacteria — have **rewired their genetic code**. In these organisms, the DNA codon **TAG**, which normally tells cells to **stop making a protein**, instead **always codes for a rare amino acid called pyrrolysine (Pyl)**.

This overturns the belief that such “recoding” happens only rarely and locally. Instead, researchers discovered a **genome-wide alternative genetic code**, which they named the “**Pyl code**”.

Scientists believe this finding could **transform bioengineering**, allowing researchers to design proteins with **new chemical properties** and create microbes that act as **biological factories**.

## Key Takeaways

What Is the Genetic Code?

DNA uses four bases: A, G, C, T

Groups of three bases (codons) code for amino acids

Standard genetic code:

64 codons in total

61 sense codons → 20 amino acids

3 stop codons (TAG, TAA, TGA)

What Is Unusual in These Archaea?

In some archaea, **TAG is not a stop signal**

TAG always codes for **pyrrolysine (Pyl)** instead

This creates a **new genetic code** with:

62 sense codons

21 amino acids

Only 2 stop codons



| Clear your doubts now.



What Is Pyrrolysine (Pyl)?

A **rare amino acid**

Previously thought to appear only occasionally

Now shown to be **systematically used across the genome**

Expands the chemical diversity of proteins

Which Organisms Were Studied?

**Methanococcoides burtonii**

Lives in cold Antarctic lakes

**Methanomethylophilus alvi**

Found in the human gut

Both use the **Pyl code consistently**

How Did Scientists Confirm This?

Used computational genome analysis

Verified results with **mass spectrometry**

Identified **54 proteins** newly shown to contain Pyl

These proteins perform essential functions like:

DNA replication

Energy metabolism



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## Why This Changes Protein Prediction

Standard protein-prediction methods assume TAG = stop

For these archaea, TAG = Pyl

Scientists must now **reinterpret genomes using the Pyl code**

Affects accuracy in genomics and evolutionary studies

## Breakthrough in Bioengineering

Researchers engineered **Escherichia coli**

Inserted archaeal machinery into E. coli

Successfully produced **Pyl-containing proteins**

Proves the Pyl code can be **transferred and controlled**

## Why This Matters for Biotechnology

Enables precise insertion of rare amino acids into proteins

Allows creation of proteins with **novel functions**

Potential applications:

New materials

Industrial enzymes

Advanced therapeutics

## Open Scientific Questions

Does Pyl give archaea an advantage in extreme environments?



| Clear your doubts now.



Can Pyl-based proteins improve stability or efficiency?

How many more “hidden” genetic codes exist in nature?

## Big Picture Insight

The genetic code is **less universal than once thought**

Evolution can rewire even the most fundamental biological rules

Nature continues to offer tools for next-generation biotechnology

## [Security camps, the game changer in the Maoist fight-The Hindu Editorial](#)

Internal security

### Easy Explanation

The article explains **why Maoism in India has sharply declined**, especially in the last decade, and highlights **security camps in remote areas as the decisive factor** behind this turnaround.

Government data show that **Maoist-related violence has fallen by nearly 90% between 2010 and 2025**. The number of **Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-affected districts** has steadily reduced, and today the insurgency is largely confined to **three districts in south Bastar — Bijapur, Narayanpur and Sukma in Chhattisgarh**.

Historically, Maoists shifted to the **Dandakaranya** region in the 1980s after facing pressure in Andhra Pradesh. The area's **dense forests, rugged terrain, remoteness, marginalised tribal population, and weak state presence** allowed Maoists to establish a parallel system of control.

The turning point came when the government **expanded governance and security presence deep into Maoist strongholds**, primarily through the **establishment of permanent security camps**. Initially resisted, these camps gradually gained acceptance as local people began to see tangible benefits.

Security camps did not function merely as military outposts. They became **anchors for governance, development, and confidence-building**, enabling roads, telecom connectivity, quicker emergency response, better intelligence gathering, and regular access to civil administration. As a result, Maoists lost both **territorial control and popular support**.

However, the article cautions that **military success alone is insufficient**. For long-term peace, the government must now **address rights-based and governance issues**, especially as tribal populations re-enter democratic politics.

### Key Takeaways

#### Scale of Maoist Decline

Maoist violence down by **~90% (2010–2025)**



| Clear your doubts now.



LWE-affected districts reduced from **126 (2018) to 11 (Oct 2025)**

Only **Bijapur, Narayanpur, Sukma** remain most affected

### Why Dandakaranya Became a Maoist Hub

Remote, forested, and difficult terrain

Poor administrative reach and governance deficit

Tribal marginalisation and alienation

Conflict around **jal-jungle-zameen**

Enabled Maoists to run a parallel administration

### Security Camps as the Turning Point

Permanent security presence in remote interiors

Dismantled Maoist territorial dominance

Converted “no-go areas” into governable spaces

Shifted balance of power decisively towards the state

### Operational Advantages for Security Forces

Improved police-to-population ratio

Faster response time to Maoist incidents

Greater confidence and morale among forces

Maoists pushed into defensive mode



| Clear your doubts now.



## Psychological and Intelligence Impact

Visible state dominance weakened Maoist narrative

Local population gained confidence in government

Sharp improvement in **human intelligence (HUMINT)**

Decline in Maoist recruitment and funding

## Development Spillover Effects

Road construction and mobile towers

Better connectivity transformed daily life

Security camps enabled civil works to proceed safely

## Return of Civil Administration

Officials like collectors, tehsildars, patwaris reaching villages

Governance replacing coercion as the main interface

Administration piggybacked on security infrastructure

## Impact on Maoist Organisation

Reduced recruitment and arms acquisition

Mass surrenders of cadres and leaders

Leadership neutralised or weakened

Maoism reduced to residual pockets





## Mid- and Long-Term Challenges

Emergence of rights-based demands

Former Maoists seeking democratic participation

Need for careful, transparent governance

## Way Forward for Sustainable Peace

Implement **Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act**

Enforce **Forest Rights Act**

Build governance institutions from scratch in former conflict zones

Create a long-term development roadmap aligned with **Viksit Bharat 2047**

## Big Picture Insight

Security camps broke Maoist control, but **governance must consolidate peace**

Military success creates opportunity, not permanence

Sustainable peace depends on **rights, development, and democratic inclusion**

[High and dry-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Economy

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that **India's new draft labour rules fail to meaningfully protect gig workers**, even as strikes by platform workers highlight deep insecurity in app-based work.

Soon after nearly **one lakh gig workers** went on strike across India on December 31, the **Ministry of Labour and Employment** released **draft Rules** to operationalise the new labour codes. While these Rules acknowledge gig workers, they **limit protections almost entirely to social security**, leaving out **wages, working conditions, and algorithmic control**—the very issues driving worker unrest.

Although the **Code on Wages** applies across sectors, it **does not treat gig work as an employment relationship for wage purposes**. Platforms are not required to guarantee minimum wages or fair pay structures. Their only obligation is to contribute a fixed amount to a **social security fund**.



| Clear your doubts now.



Similarly, the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code** (OSH&WC) relies on traditional employer compliance mechanisms like the **Shram Suvidha Portal**, which are ill-suited to algorithm-driven, app-mediated work.

The most concrete changes are under the **Code on Social Security**. Gig workers must register on a portal, and aggregators must upload worker details quarterly. However, eligibility depends on **minimum engagement thresholds** (90 days with one platform or 120 cumulative days across platforms), which may exclude workers facing illness, care responsibilities, or demand slumps.

The article concludes that unless these Rules are redesigned, **the insecurity that caused the strikes will persist**, merely wrapped in the language of social security.

## Key Takeaways

Context: Gig Workers' Strike

Nearly one lakh gig workers struck work nationwide

Protests over falling pay, algorithmic rate cuts, and opaque incentives

Strike coincided with release of draft labour Rules

What the Draft Rules Do

Recognise gig workers only for **social security**

Exclude them from protections on **wages and working conditions**

Treat gig work as distinct from standard employment

Exclusion from Wage Protection

Code on Wages applies broadly but not to gig work as "employment"

No obligation on platforms to ensure minimum wages

Core grievances on pay remain unresolved

Limits of OSH&WC Rules

Built around employer compliance via Shram Suvidha Portal



| Clear your doubts now.



Assumes conventional employer–employee relationships

Fails to address algorithmic control and app-based management

### Social Security Provisions

Mandatory worker registration on a central portal

Aggregators must update worker data every quarter

Eligibility requires:

90 days with one aggregator, or

120 cumulative days across platforms in a financial year

### Problems with Eligibility Thresholds

Workers penalised for illness, maternity, or care work

Demand slumps beyond workers' control not accounted for

Short-term inactivity may erase eligibility

### Missing Safeguards

No clarity on:

Nature and minimum level of benefits

Dispute resolution mechanisms

Time-bound claims and appeals process

Heavy reliance on platform-provided data



| Clear your doubts now.



## Need for Transparency

Platforms should provide periodic statements of:

Jobs performed

Hours logged

Earnings and deductions

Workers must have the right to contest incorrect data

## Core Critique

Social security is promised but not made accessible in practice

Structural insecurity of gig work remains untouched

The Rules risk formalising precarity instead of reducing it

## Big Picture Insight

Without wage rights, transparency, and enforceable protections, social security alone cannot address gig workers' vulnerability

# 7th January 2026

[UAPA's ever-widening definition of terrorism-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Internal security

## Easy Explanation

The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) is India's main anti-terror law. But when it was first made in 1967, it was not a terror law at all. It was meant only to stop activities that threatened India's sovereignty and territorial integrity, such as secessionist movements.

Terrorism was added to UAPA much later, in 2004, after the repeal of POTA. At that time, the law focused on acts involving weapons, explosives, and violence meant to threaten India's security or create fear among people.

The biggest change came after the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in 2008. Parliament added the words "by any other means" to the definition of a terrorist act. This made the law very broad and vague. Now, almost any act that authorities believe threatens public order or security can potentially be called terrorism, even if it does not involve bombs, guns, or mass killing.



| Clear your doubts now.



At the same time, the law was made much stricter procedurally. Police were given more time to keep people in custody, filing of charge sheets was delayed up to 180 days, and getting bail became extremely difficult. In some cases, the burden of proof was shifted towards the accused.

In 2012, UAPA was expanded further to include threats to economic and environmental security, and even counterfeit currency was treated as terrorism. In 2019, the government was given the power to label individuals, not just organisations, as terrorists, even before any conviction.

Because of these continuous expansions, UAPA today covers far more than classic terrorism. Its wide wording allows it to be used in cases involving protests, activists, and journalists. The recent Supreme Court refusal of bail in the Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam case shows how this broad legal definition is now being relied upon.

Overall, UAPA has gradually shifted from a limited sovereignty-protection law into a powerful national security statute, raising serious concerns about civil liberties, misuse, and long imprisonment without trial.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Origin and original purpose of UAPA

Enacted in 1967 to deal with unlawful activities threatening India's sovereignty and territorial integrity

Did not originally contain any provision on terrorism

Based on the 16th Constitutional Amendment and National Integration Council recommendations

### 2. Entry of terrorism into UAPA (2004)

Terrorism formally introduced after repeal of POTA

Chapter IV (Sections 15–23) added to punish terrorist activities

Focused on violence using weapons/explosives with intent to threaten India's security or strike terror

### 3. Major expansion after 26/11 attacks (2008)

Phrase "by any other means" added to Section 15, making the definition open-ended

Police and judicial custody periods extended

Time for filing charge sheet increased to 180 days

Bail made extremely difficult under the "prima facie true" standard





Presumption of guilt introduced in certain cases

#### 4. Expansion to economic and environmental security (2012)

Terrorism widened to include threats to economic, food, energy, livelihood, and environmental security

Counterfeit currency declared a terrorist activity

Companies, trusts, and societies brought under UAPA

Office bearers made criminally liable unless they prove lack of knowledge

#### 5. 2019 amendments and executive powers

Individuals, not just organisations, can be designated as terrorists

NIA empowered to seize property and investigate without state consent

Criticised for weakening presumption of innocence and federalism

#### 6. Impact on rights and criminal justice

Very broad and vague definition of terrorism

Long incarceration without trial has become common

Bail is the exception, jail is the norm under UAPA

Shifts burden of proof away from the prosecution

Raises concerns under Articles 14, 19, and 21

#### 7. Contemporary relevance

Applied to cases involving activists, journalists, and protest-related activities



| Clear your doubts now.



Supreme Court increasingly relying on the wide statutory definition

Rekindles debate on balance between national security and civil liberties

[Maduro's capture is blow to China's influence, and a signal on Taiwan - The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro by the United States has sent strong geopolitical signals across the world. While it directly affects Latin America, its biggest impact is likely on China, which had built Venezuela into one of its closest allies in the region.

For more than two decades, starting from the Hugo Chávez era, China steadily expanded its presence in Venezuela. Beijing became Venezuela's main economic partner, importing large quantities of oil and investing in gold, rare earths, minerals, and infrastructure. Much of this cooperation was based on "loans-for-oil" arrangements, through which China supplied money and goods in return for long-term oil supplies. Over time, the relationship moved beyond economics and became a political alliance, helping China expand its influence close to the United States' traditional sphere of influence.

Maduro's capture now puts this entire relationship at risk. China's investments, oil supplies, and debt repayments from Venezuela face serious uncertainty. Chinese companies operating in Latin America are reportedly anxious, as the U.S. move suggests Washington is reasserting its dominance in the Western Hemisphere and is willing to directly challenge China's footprint there.

This development is also being read as a wider strategic message. It shows that the U.S. is prepared to act unilaterally and forcefully, even against the leadership of a sovereign state, to protect what it sees as core interests. This has led to debate about the implications for Taiwan.

At first glance, some argue China might feel encouraged to act against Taiwan by pointing to U.S. behaviour. However, many experts believe the opposite is more likely in the short term. The operation demonstrates American military reach and strategic intent, which could act as a deterrent, making China more cautious about any move on Taiwan.

Overall, Maduro's capture weakens China's position in Latin America, threatens its economic interests, and sends a broader signal about the intensifying U.S.–China rivalry, extending from trade and technology into energy, regional influence, and great-power deterrence.

### Key Takeaways

Impact on China–Venezuela relations

China built Venezuela into its closest partner in Latin America since the Chávez era

Relationship covered oil, minerals, infrastructure, and political support

Maduro's capture puts Chinese investments, oil imports, and loan repayments at risk



| Clear your doubts now.



## Signal on U.S. strategy in Latin America

Indicates U.S. willingness to reassert dominance in the Western Hemisphere

Challenges China's expanding footprint near U.S. borders

Creates uncertainty for Chinese companies and projects across the region

## Economic implications for China

China is Venezuela's largest economic partner

Large unpaid debts under oil-for-loan deals now look difficult to recover

Energy security and resource access are affected

## Taiwan and global strategic messaging

Raises questions about whether China may act more aggressively on Taiwan

Many analysts believe it sends a deterrent message instead

Shows U.S. readiness for unilateral, high-risk strategic action

## Broader geopolitical meaning

Reflects deepening U.S.–China rivalry

Expands competition into Latin America and resource diplomacy

Highlights how regional events now carry global strategic consequences

[The Chinese are using ambiguity on the LAC and unsettled borders as a pressure point against us'-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## International relations

### Easy Explanation

China and India do not have a formally settled border. Instead, they are separated by what is called the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** — the line up to which each side actually controls territory. This is not a mutually agreed boundary, but a practical military line that emerged after the **1962 war**.



| Clear your doubts now.



In the **Eastern Sector (Arunachal Pradesh)**, the boundary is based on the **McMahon Line**, drawn in 1914 between British India and Tibet. China today rejects this line, even though Tibet at that time had the authority to negotiate. China only established full control over Tibet in 1950, much later. India maintains that the McMahon Line, based on the **watershed principle**, is the legitimate boundary.

The term **LAC** was first used by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1959. India rejected it then because it would have legitimised Chinese occupation of **Aksai Chin**. However, after repeated tensions and military stand-offs in the 1980s, India pragmatically accepted the concept of LAC in the **1993 Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement**, to prevent conflict while the final boundary remained unresolved.

India and China also agreed in 1996 to clarify the LAC by exchanging maps. While this worked in the Middle Sector, **China refused to exchange maps for the Western Sector**, and the process collapsed by 2004. Since then, the **ambiguity of the LAC** has remained.

According to the former ambassador, China is **deliberately using this ambiguity** as a pressure tactic. Through **“grey-zone” operations**, it tries to incrementally change the situation on the ground without triggering a full-scale war. This was clearly seen in **Eastern Ladakh after 2020** and is now a growing risk in **Arunachal Pradesh** as well.

China has also hardened its position on Arunachal Pradesh, calling it “South Tibet,” renaming places, and increasing political and military signalling. Earlier Chinese “package proposals,” which accepted the status quo in the East, have been abandoned. Today, China sees border pressure as a strategic tool and is **no longer interested in an early settlement**.

India’s response has been to **reject Chinese claims, reinforce deterrence, and treat the Eastern Sector as strategically sensitive**, especially areas like **Tawang**. The interview stresses that unresolved borders and LAC ambiguity are now central instruments in China’s India strategy.

## Key Takeaways

### History of the boundary and the LAC

McMahon Line (1914) defines the eastern boundary from India’s perspective

China rejects the McMahon Line despite Tibet’s role in negotiations

LAC term introduced by China in 1959, became a reality after the 1962 war

India formally accepted LAC concept in 1993 for peace management, not as a boundary

### Legal and diplomatic position

India bases the eastern boundary on the watershed principle

China’s objections were originally about Tibet, not the India–Tibet boundary

India rejects the “LAC of 1959” as it would legitimise Chinese territorial gains





## Confidence-building efforts and their failure

1993 and 1996 agreements created a framework to maintain peace

Both sides agreed to clarify the LAC through maps

Process collapsed by 2004 after China refused exchange in the Western Sector

Since then, ambiguity has remained deliberate

## China's current strategy

Using **ambiguity of LAC as a pressure tool**

Employing **grey-zone tactics** to change facts on the ground

Incremental advances without crossing the war threshold

Increased aggressiveness in both Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh

## Arunachal Pradesh and the Eastern Sector

China has hardened its claims, calling it "South Tibet"

Renaming places and administrative signalling increased

Earlier willingness to accept status quo in the East has been withdrawn

Tawang and populated areas have become core points of tension

## Strategic implications for India

China no longer prioritises early border settlement

Border pressure is now a long-term Chinese strategy

Risk of Eastern Ladakh-type operations spreading to the Eastern Sector





India must strengthen deterrence and border infrastructure

Core conclusion

Unsettled borders and LAC ambiguity are now **central instruments of Chinese coercive diplomacy against India**

The dispute is no longer only territorial, but strategic and political

[The Donroe Doctrine and a dangerous new world-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that what the U.S. is doing in Venezuela reflects a **new foreign policy doctrine**, called the **“Donroe Doctrine”** — a mix of the old **Monroe Doctrine (1823)** and **Donald Trump’s 21st-century worldview**.

The original Monroe Doctrine said that the **Western Hemisphere is a special U.S. sphere of influence**, where outside powers should not interfere. The “Donroe Doctrine” goes much further. It suggests that the U.S. is not only willing to intervene in Latin America, but also to **supervise political outcomes**, acting almost like a **guardian** of the region.

This doctrine has three key features.

First, the **reassertion of a sphere of influence**. Latin America is presented as America’s “neighbourhood,” where extra-regional powers like China are treated as intruders rather than normal partners.

Second, **securitisation**. Issues like migration, drugs, crime, and even energy are no longer seen mainly as social or economic problems. They are reframed as **national security threats**, which makes the use of coercive tools and intervention easier to justify.

Third, a **shift in values**. The older language of democracy promotion is fading. In its place come ideas of **stability, predictability, control, and resource security**. This aligns with recent U.S. thinking that prioritises great-power rivalry, control of strategic resources, and managing instability close to home.

The article warns that this approach is dangerous for the global order. It **normalises spheres of influence**, weakens the idea of **sovereign equality**, and sets a **precedent** that other powers may copy in their own neighbourhoods. It also raises concerns of **resource-driven intervention**, given Venezuela’s vast oil reserves.

For India, this creates dilemmas. India values its strategic partnership with the U.S., especially in the Indo-Pacific. But India has also consistently defended **sovereignty and non-intervention**, because as a post-colonial state, it is vulnerable to doctrines that justify external supervision. The article suggests India should remain restrained, avoid endorsing guardianship, quietly support diplomacy and humanitarian efforts, and continue defending international law in multilateral forums.

Overall, the “Donroe Doctrine” signals a more openly coercive American posture, with serious implications for international law, great-power politics, and countries like India that must balance partnerships with principles.

### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## Meaning of the “Donroe Doctrine”

Combines Monroe Doctrine’s sphere of influence with Trump-era unilateralism

Claims not just influence, but **guardianship** over Latin America

Signals readiness to intervene and supervise political outcomes

## Core features of the doctrine

**Sphere of influence:** Western Hemisphere treated as a privileged U.S. security space

**Securitisation:** Migration, drugs, crime, and energy reframed as national security threats

**Value shift:** Stability and control prioritised over democracy promotion

## Implications for the international order

Normalises spheres of influence

Weakens sovereign equality and non-intervention

Creates precedents other great powers may copy

Blurs line between intervention and administration

## Venezuela and resource politics

Venezuela’s large oil reserves raise fears of resource-driven intervention

External “guardianship” risks deepening internal polarisation

Force may change governments, but rarely creates legitimacy

## International law concerns

Strains UN Charter principles



| Clear your doubts now.



Challenges limits on use of force and respect for sovereignty

Risks eroding global legal norms

India's strategic dilemma

India values strong partnership with the U.S.

India also depends on sovereignty and non-intervention as safeguards

A world accepting supervised transitions may harm India's long-term interests

Suggested Indian approach

Maintain restraint and strategic autonomy

Avoid endorsing external guardianship

Quietly support diplomacy, humanitarian relief, and stabilisation

Reaffirm commitment to sovereign equality in multilateral forums

Core conclusion

The "Donroe Doctrine" reflects a more explicit, power-centric U.S. posture

It deepens great-power rivalry and increases risks to the international system based on rules and sovereignty

[Rethinking India's skilling outcomes-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

Over the last decade, India has created one of the world's largest skilling systems. Under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, about 1.4 crore people were trained and certified between 2015 and 2025. Yet, skilling has still not become a first-choice career path for most Indian youth. Formal vocational training covers only about 4.1% of the workforce, and wage benefits from such training remain limited, especially in the informal sector where most workers are employed.

The main reason skilling has failed to inspire aspiration is that it remains disconnected from mainstream education and real labour-market outcomes. Unlike many OECD countries where vocational education is a respected parallel



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pathway, India's skilling ecosystem largely operates outside schools, colleges, and universities. As a result, post-degree skilling is not common, and vocational routes are widely seen as inferior.

Industry participation is another major weakness. Even though companies face high attrition and productivity losses, most employers do not use public skilling certifications as hiring benchmarks. They rely on in-house training, referrals, or private platforms. Industry is neither sufficiently incentivised nor required to co-design curricula, certification standards, or assessments, keeping skilling misaligned with workplace needs.

The biggest structural failure lies with the Sector Skill Councils. They were meant to anchor standards, ensure relevance, and guarantee employability. Instead, responsibilities are fragmented across training, assessment, certification, and placement agencies. No single institution owns outcomes. As a result, SSC certificates carry little credibility, and certification remains symbolic rather than economically meaningful.

The article argues that India's skilling problem is not lack of intent or funding, but lack of accountability. Skilling must be embedded into higher education, industry must become a co-owner rather than a consumer, and SSCs must be held responsible for placement outcomes. Only then can skilling move from a fragmented welfare intervention to a driver of productivity, dignity of labour, and sustained economic growth.

## Key Takeaways

### Current state of skilling in India

PMKVY trained and certified about 1.4 crore candidates between 2015 and 2025

Only about 4.1% of the workforce has formal vocational training

Employability and wage gains remain modest and uneven

Skilling is not yet a first-choice pathway

### Why skilling fails to inspire aspiration

Weak integration with higher education pathways

Post-degree skilling is not mainstream

Vocational education is socially perceived as inferior

Informal employment offers little recognition for certified skills

### Industry participation gap

Employers rarely rely on public skilling certificates



| Clear your doubts now.



Preference for internal training and private platforms

Limited industry role in curriculum and assessment design

Skilling not co-owned by industry

#### Failure of Sector Skill Councils

SSCs lack accountability for employability

Responsibilities are fragmented across agencies

Certificates have weak signalling value

Standards exist, but outcomes are not owned

#### Core structural problem

Skilling crisis is about accountability, not funding

No reputational or performance-based responsibility

Certification remains symbolic

#### What needs to change

Embed skilling into formal degree programmes

Expand apprenticeships and workplace learning

Make industry a co-designer and co-owner

Hold SSCs answerable for placement outcomes





Link to economic growth

Better skilling improves productivity and job readiness

Reduces hiring and onboarding costs

Enhances dignity of labour

Converts demographic advantage into sustained growth

[What are biomaterials and how do they work?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

Biomaterials are materials made wholly or partly from biological sources such as plants, agricultural waste, or microorganisms, or produced using biological processes. They are developed to replace or work alongside conventional fossil-based materials like plastics, synthetic fibres, and chemicals. As the world shifts toward cleaner and more sustainable manufacturing, biomaterials are becoming an important frontier in materials science and industry.

Biomaterials fall into three broad categories. **Drop-in biomaterials** are chemically the same as petroleum-based materials and can be used in existing factories, for example bio-PET. **Drop-out biomaterials** are chemically different and require new processing or disposal systems, such as polylactic acid (PLA). **Novel biomaterials** go beyond replacement and offer new properties like self-healing materials, bioactive medical implants, and advanced bio-composites.

For India, biomaterials serve multiple purposes at once. They can reduce dependence on imported fossil-based plastics and chemicals, add value to agricultural produce and waste, create new income streams for farmers, support domestic manufacturing, and help meet climate and waste-reduction goals. As global markets move toward low-carbon and circular products, biomaterials can also strengthen India's export competitiveness.

India's biomaterials sector is emerging rapidly. The bioplastics market is already sizeable and growing, large investments such as proposed PLA plants are underway, and startups are converting agricultural and temple waste into biomaterials. However, India still depends partly on foreign technologies for converting raw biomass into high-value finished materials.

The way forward lies in scaling domestic biomanufacturing capacity, improving agricultural feedstock productivity, strengthening research and standards, and building clear regulatory and end-of-life systems. Without this, India risks new import dependence even in green industries.

### Key Takeaways

What are biomaterials

Materials derived from biological sources or biological processes

Designed to replace or interact with fossil-based materials



| Clear your doubts now.



Used in packaging, textiles, construction, healthcare, and more

### Types of biomaterials

**Drop-in:** chemically identical to petro-materials, usable in existing systems

**Drop-out:** chemically different, need new processing and disposal systems

**Novel:** offer new properties such as self-healing or bioactive functions

### Why biomaterials matter for India

Reduce dependence on fossil-based imports

Add value to agricultural crops and residues

Create new income opportunities for farmers

Support climate goals and plastic-waste reduction

Improve long-term export competitiveness

### Current position of India

Biomaterials and bioplastics sector is expanding

Large investments and startups are emerging

Agricultural base is strong, but some core technologies are imported

Biomanufacturing ecosystem is still at an early stage

### Challenges and risks

Possible competition between industrial feedstocks and food crops



| Clear your doubts now.



Risk of water stress and soil degradation

Weak waste-management and composting systems

Fragmented policy coordination

Danger of new import dependence if India moves slowly

Way forward

Scale domestic biomanufacturing and processing infrastructure

Improve feedstock productivity using new technologies

Invest in R&D, standards, and innovation

Create clear regulatory, labelling, and end-of-life frameworks

Use public procurement, incentives, and shared facilities to support early industry

[Privatisation and policy gaps threaten India's public health system-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

India's public health system is under serious strain due to chronic underfunding, rapid privatisation, weak regulation, and major policy failures. Alongside this, disease burdens are rising because of unhealthy food systems, pollution, climate change, and unsafe living conditions. Quality healthcare remains unaffordable for most people, and social factors such as class, caste, gender, and religion continue to shape who falls sick and who receives treatment.

Privatisation has deepened these problems. Public funds increasingly flow into private hospitals through insurance schemes and public-private partnerships, weakening the public system. In private healthcare, profit targets now influence medical decisions. Medical education has also become commercialised, with extremely high fees in private colleges pushing doctors towards high-earning specialisations rather than public service or preventive health.

The article argues that the core crisis is not only medical, but political. Diseases are being produced by policy failures in areas such as food regulation, pollution control, urban planning, road safety, and labour protection. Hospitals are left treating the consequences while the root causes remain unaddressed.

In this context, doctors are presented not just as clinicians, but as potential agents of social change. Because they witness suffering daily, they possess moral authority and social credibility. Drawing from historical examples such as Rudolf Virchow, anti-apartheid doctors in South Africa, global physician movements against nuclear weapons, and Indian reformers like Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, the article shows that physicians have long played political and social roles.



| Clear your doubts now.



The article concludes that doctors in India must move beyond treating disease alone and begin challenging the policies, industries, and power structures that create ill health. Silence, it argues, is not neutrality but a choice that allows injustice to persist.

## Key Takeaways

### State of India's public health system

- Chronic underfunding and weak public infrastructure

- Rising burden of non-communicable diseases and environmental illnesses

- Healthcare access determined by class, caste, gender, and wealth

- Quality healthcare remains unaffordable for most citizens

### Role of privatisation

- Expansion of private healthcare through public funds and PPPs

- Profit targets shaping clinical practice

- Public health system steadily eroding

- Healthcare becoming a market commodity rather than a social service

### Crisis in medical education

- Extremely high fees in private medical colleges

- Doctors driven towards revenue-oriented careers

- Overemphasis on exams and credentials rather than clinical skills

- Devaluation of general medicine and public health

### Policy failures driving disease

- Ultra-processed food consumption fuelling NCDs



| Clear your doubts now.



Weak pollution regulation increasing cancer and respiratory illness

Poor road safety driving trauma cases

Gaps in tobacco, alcohol, sanitation, and occupational health policies

Tuberculosis, anaemia, and kidney disease remain persistent

Doctors as agents of social change

Doctors witness direct link between policy and suffering

High public trust gives them moral and political credibility

Medical role historically includes social and political engagement

Physicians can translate clinical evidence into public advocacy

Historical and ethical foundation

Rudolf Virchow: medicine as a social science

Global physician movements against nuclear weapons

Doctors' role in anti-apartheid struggle

Indian tradition of physician-reformers like Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy

Structural metaphor and conclusion

Hospitals are “mopping the floor” while the “tap” of disease drivers remains open

Focus must shift from only treatment to prevention and policy accountability

Silence by doctors equals forfeiting influence

Ethical responsibility to challenge structures that produce disease



| Clear your doubts now.



Environment

## Easy Explanation

The United Nations has declared **2026 as the “International Year for Rangelands and Pastoralists”**, highlighting the growing recognition that **grasslands, savannahs, and rangelands are among the world’s most neglected but vital ecosystems**.

Global climate discussions under the UNFCCC have largely focused on forests, especially tropical rainforests like the Amazon. While forests are crucial, scientists argue that **grasslands and savannahs are equally important carbon sinks**, support immense biodiversity, regulate water systems, and sustain pastoral and indigenous livelihoods. Yet, they remain marginal in climate negotiations, funding, and policy frameworks.

Grasslands are also among the **most threatened ecosystems**. They are being rapidly converted for agriculture, plantations, mining, and infrastructure. Invasive species, climate-induced droughts and floods, and suppression of indigenous land-management practices such as controlled burning have worsened their vulnerability.

Examples from **Australia’s desert grasslands** and **Brazil’s cerrado savannahs** show how climate change, agribusiness expansion, and weak land rights are degrading these ecosystems. Indigenous communities are trying to protect them through traditional knowledge, monitoring, and restoration, but they face poor funding and limited political recognition.

The article argues that protecting grasslands is not only an environmental issue but also a **social justice issue**, since indigenous and pastoral communities depend on them. It calls for grasslands to be integrated into **national climate plans (NDCs)**, and for stronger coordination between the **three Rio Conventions** — on climate change, biodiversity, and desertification.

For India, the lesson is important. Indian grasslands are spread across many ministries with conflicting policies, often labelled as “wastelands” and diverted for plantations or development. Recognising grasslands as **valuable carbon sinks and living ecosystems** can strengthen India’s climate strategy, biodiversity protection, and rural livelihoods.

## Key Takeaways

Global recognition and context

UN declared 2026 as the International Year for Rangelands and Pastoralists

Scientists warn climate action is overly forest-centric

Grasslands and savannahs are major but neglected carbon sinks

Why grasslands matter

Store large amounts of carbon underground

Support rich biodiversity and water systems





Sustain indigenous, pastoral, and farming communities

Increase resilience to climate extremes

#### Threats to grasslands

Conversion to agriculture, plantations, and mining

Invasive species and fossil-fuel extraction

Climate-induced droughts, floods, and fires

Suppression of indigenous land-management practices

#### Case studies highlighting the crisis

Australia's desert grasslands facing invasive species and climate stress

Brazil's cerrado losing habitat faster than the Amazon

Cerrado crucial for Brazil's river systems and food security

#### Grasslands as a social justice issue

Dispossession of indigenous and traditional communities

Agribusiness policies prioritised over ecosystems

Need for land rights, community stewardship, and inclusive governance

#### Gaps in global governance

UNFCCC focuses mainly on carbon and forests

Grasslands better recognised under CBD and UNCCD



| Clear your doubts now.



Weak coordination among the three Rio Conventions

What needs to be done globally

Integrate grasslands into climate negotiations

Include grasslands in national NDCs

Adopt ecosystem-based approaches

Align climate, biodiversity, and land-degradation goals

Relevance for India

Indian grasslands spread across 18 ministries with conflicting mandates

Often misclassified as “wastelands”

India can include grasslands in its carbon-sink and climate targets

Requires policy convergence, scientific input, and community rights

Core message

Grasslands must be recognised as unique ecosystems, not empty lands

Protecting them supports climate action, biodiversity, and livelihoods

Multilateral cooperation and science-based policymaking are essential

[The right to disconnect in an 'always-on' economy-The Hindu Editorial](#)

Governance

### Easy Explanation

In today's digital economy, smartphones, laptops, and instant communication have erased the boundary between work and personal life. Many employees are now expected to be available 24x7, even outside official working hours. This “always-on” culture is driving widespread burnout, mental stress, and lifestyle diseases among Indian workers.



| Clear your doubts now.



India already has some legal limits on working hours under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, but these protections often apply only to traditional “workers” and not to all “employees,” especially contractual, freelance, and gig workers. This leaves a large section of India’s modern workforce vulnerable to excessive working hours and constant digital surveillance.

The article argues for legally recognising a “**right to disconnect**” — the right of employees to not engage with work-related communication beyond official working hours, without fear of punishment or discrimination. Such a right would protect mental health, restore work-life balance, and improve long-term productivity.

Globally, several countries including France, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Australia have already introduced laws requiring companies to limit after-hours work communication. Indian states like Kerala have begun moving in this direction, but the author argues that only a central law can ensure uniform protection across the country.

The article stresses that law alone is not enough. It must be accompanied by workplace culture change, mental health support systems, and awareness programmes to move away from toxic norms that glorify overwork.

Overall, the right to disconnect is presented not as an obstacle to growth, but as an investment in human capital, productivity, and social stability.

## Key Takeaways

The problem: an “always-on” work culture

- Digital tools have extended the workday into personal time

- High prevalence of long working hours and burnout in India

- Rising lifestyle diseases, anxiety, and depression linked to overwork

- Mental health crisis worsening among employees

Legal gaps in India

- OSH Code, 2020 limits working hours but not uniformly for all employees

- Contractual, freelance, and gig workers lack adequate protection

- Power imbalance prevents employees from refusing after-hours work

What is the “right to disconnect”

- Legal right to refuse work communication beyond working hours

- Protection from penalties, discrimination, or disciplinary action



| Clear your doubts now.



Mandatory grievance redress mechanisms

Part of occupational safety and mental health protection

### Global precedents

France pioneered the law in 2017

Similar protections exist in Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Australia

Recognised as necessary for sustainable productivity

### Why India needs it

Prevent burnout and protect mental health

Improve long-term productivity and creativity

Safeguard India's demographic dividend

Promote dignity of labour and work-life balance

### Role of the central government

Need for uniform nationwide protection

Amendment to OSH Code to include all categories of workers

Integration of mental health and well-being into labour law

### Beyond law: cultural change

Awareness and sensitisation of employers and employees

Shift focus from presenteeism to outcomes



| Clear your doubts now.



Organisational mental health support services

Redefining workplace commitment and productivity

Core conclusion

The right to disconnect is an investment, not a constraint

Essential for sustainable economic growth

Central to building a healthier, more productive workforce

**8th January 2026**

[Why silver prices surfed a 160% wave in 2025-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

Silver prices rose sharply in 2025 and continued rising in early 2026 due to a unique mix of industrial demand, supply constraints, geopolitics, and investor behaviour.

#### 1. Silver is not just a “safe-haven” like gold

Unlike gold, silver has heavy industrial use. It is a critical input for solar panels, batteries, electric vehicles, semiconductors, smart grids, and data centres. As renewable energy and AI-based technologies expand, silver demand has increased structurally.

#### 2. AI and clean energy boosted long-term demand

Rapid growth of artificial intelligence, automation, cloud computing, and renewable power systems increased silver consumption across electronics and energy networks. Analysts see AI-linked demand as a multi-year growth driver.

#### 3. Supply failed to keep pace

Silver is mostly a by-product of mining other metals such as copper, zinc, and lead. Even when prices rose, production could not quickly expand, leading to a persistent supply–demand gap.

#### 4. US and China policy shocks tightened markets

The US added silver to its critical minerals list, encouraging strategic stockpiling. China imposed new export restrictions on strategic and rare metals. These moves increased fears of shortages. US inventories surged, while London markets faced physical shortages, pushing global prices up.

#### 5. ETF buying created a self-reinforcing rally

Large inflows into silver ETFs, especially from India, forced funds to buy physical silver. This created shortages, raised premiums, triggered fear of missing out, and led to further buying. Some Indian mutual funds even paused fresh investments due to lack of physical silver.



| Clear your doubts now.



## 6. Broader “real assets” boom supported silver

Gold, copper, and even Bitcoin rose alongside silver due to US interest rate cuts, a weakening dollar, geopolitical risks, and declining trust in fiat currencies. Investors shifted towards real assets as protection against currency debasement.

### Key Takeaways

- Silver’s dual nature as both precious and industrial metal makes it highly sensitive to AI growth and the energy transition.
  - Renewable energy, EVs, semiconductors, and data infrastructure are long-term demand drivers.
- Silver supply is rigid because it is largely a by-product metal, leading to chronic shortages.
- US critical minerals policy and China’s export controls intensified scarcity fears.
- Heavy ETF inflows converted financial demand into physical stress in global markets.
- FOMO and speculative participation amplified the price surge.
- The weak dollar, easing monetary policy, fiscal stress, and geopolitics strengthened the real-assets trade.
- Silver has become strategically important at the intersection of critical minerals policy, energy security, and global finance.

[Contested history of TN hill where HC allowed lamp ceremony-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Polity

### Easy Explanation

This case relates to the long-standing dispute over **Thiruparankundram Hill near Madurai**, where the Madras High Court allowed the lighting of a **ceremonial lamp (Karthigai Deepam)** at a stone structure called the *Deepathoon*.

The hill has **multiple religious identities**. At its base is the Arulmigu Subramanian Swamy Cave Temple (Hindu). Over centuries, **Jain beds and caves** were carved there. At the top lies the **dargah of the Sufi saint Sikkandar Badhusha**. Because of this layered history, the hill has often been a **site of dispute and heavy policing during festivals**.

A **1923 court ruling** had divided control: most of the hill and the pilgrim path were temple property, while the **peak area around the mosque and steps** were recognised as Muslim property. This arrangement shaped later conflicts.

Authorities had earlier **stopped attempts to light lamps near the summit**, citing lack of established custom and law-and-order concerns. In 1996, the High Court permitted Karthigai Deepam only at a **lower temple**, not near the dargah.

In November 2025, devotees sought permission to light the lamp at the **Deepathoon near the top**. A single judge allowed it, calling it restoration of a religious practice. The State challenged this, citing security concerns and claiming the structure was just a survey marker.

The **Division Bench rejected the State’s claim**, holding that the structure was indeed a *Deepathoon* capable of holding oil and wick. The court said fears of unrest were **“imaginary”**, and that allowing a **small controlled ritual once a year** was not unmanageable.

However, the court **restricted public access**. Only a **limited team of temple officials**, under the District Collector’s coordination and subject to **ASI conditions**, can light the lamp to protect the monument and maintain order.

### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## Historical and Religious Significance

- Thiruparankundram Hill has **multiple religious layers** — Hindu (Murugan temple), Jain (rock beds and caves), and Islamic (Sufi dargah).
- The site reflects India's **shared and contested sacred landscapes** developed over centuries.

## Legal Background

- A **1923 court judgment** divided ownership and access: most of the hill with pilgrim paths to the temple, while the summit area near the dargah was recognised as Muslim property.
- This colonial-era ruling continues to influence present-day disputes.

## Core Dispute

- The issue concerned lighting **Karthigai Deepam** at a stone structure called *Deepathoon* near the hill's summit.
- The State argued the structure was a **survey marker** and raised law-and-order concerns.
- Devotees claimed it was a **traditional ceremonial lamp pillar**.

## High Court's Findings

- The Division Bench held that the structure is indeed a **Deepathoon**, capable of holding oil and wicks.
- The court rejected the State's law-and-order fears as **speculative and exaggerated**.

## Balancing Rights and Order

- The judgment balanced **religious freedom** with **public order and communal harmony**.
- Lighting of the lamp was allowed only by a **small, authorised team**, once a year.

## Administrative and Heritage Safeguards

- **Public access is prohibited** during the ritual to prevent tensions.
- The **District Collector** must coordinate the exercise.
- Activities are subject to **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** conditions to protect the monument.

## Broader Implications

- The case highlights the judiciary's role in **managing inter-faith sensitivities**.
- It shows how courts navigate **tradition, history, security, and heritage conservation** in contested religious spaces.

[In relaxing Gujarat liquor law,tight rope of foreign investment,local sentiment-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## Governance

### Easy Explanation

Gujarat has been a dry state since 1960, rooted in Gandhian ideals and social reform movements. Over decades, it enforced one of India's strictest prohibition laws, with severe punishments and intensive policing.

As Gujarat increasingly projected itself as a global investment destination through Vibrant Gujarat Summits and the development of GIFT City as an international financial hub, prohibition began to be seen as a deterrent for foreign professionals and investors.

In December 2023, the state made a major policy shift by allowing controlled liquor consumption in GIFT City through permits. In late 2025, this was further relaxed to allow liquor in all Food and Beverage areas, including hotel rooms and terraces, within GIFT City.



| Clear your doubts now.



The government is attempting to walk a tightrope between attracting global capital and talent on one side, and respecting local sentiment, Gandhian legacy, and public health concerns on the other.

Despite relaxations, alcohol remains socially taboo, access is tightly regulated, and prohibition continues across the rest of the state. The changes were introduced without serious Assembly debate, reflecting the political sensitivity surrounding alcohol policy.

## Key Takeaways

### Gujarat's Prohibition Legacy

- Gujarat inherited the 1949 prohibition law when it was formed in 1960.
- The law is rooted in Gandhian philosophy and women-led social movements.
- Historically, attempts at relaxation triggered strong social opposition.
- Gujarat continues to have one of India's strictest alcohol regimes.

### Evolution of the Law

- 2005: Non-residents allowed drinking permits in SEZs.
- After the hooch tragedy, the law introduced the death penalty for fatalities caused by toxic liquor.
- 2016: Minimum 2 to 10 years' imprisonment for drinking and possession.
- Despite prohibition, large-scale smuggling and seizures persist.

### GIFT City as the Turning Point

- GIFT City is envisioned as a global financial and services hub.
- Foreign investors and diplomats called it a "ghost town" after work hours.
- 2023: Liquor permitted in designated wine-and-dine zones.
- 2025: Expanded to all Food and Beverage areas within GIFT City.

### Role of Vibrant Gujarat Summits

- Almost every relaxation occurred just before investor summits.
- 2006: Group permits for foreign delegates were allowed.
- 2015: Health permit conditions were further eased.
- Prohibition policy has been repeatedly used as an investment facilitation tool.

### Implementation Reality

- The permit process was initially cumbersome and uptake was low.
- High prices and limited access reduced the policy's impact.
- Government simplified procedures and expanded guest permissions.
- Alcohol consumption remains socially sensitive and highly regulated.

### Political and Democratic Concerns

- Amendments have not seen detailed debate in the Gujarat Assembly.
- Leaders avoid discussion due to social, moral, and law-and-order sensitivities.
- Highlights tension between economic pragmatism and ideological politics.

### Broader Significance

- Shows the balancing act between foreign investment and social values.
- Highlights limits of blanket prohibition in a globalised economy.
- Reflects how economic competitiveness is reshaping state social policy.



| Clear your doubts now.



## History

### Easy Explanation

Turkman Gate is a **17th-century Mughal gateway** in Old Delhi, built during Shah Jahan's reign when Shahjahanabad was founded. The area around it is much older and was once an important **centre of Sufi activity**. The gate is named after the Sufi saint **Shah Turkman Bayabani**, whose shrine stands nearby. Close to it is also a grave traditionally believed to be that of **Razia Sultana**, the only woman ruler of the Delhi Sultanate.

Over time, even when large parts of Delhi's old walls were demolished by the British after 1857 and later for commercial expansion, **Turkman Gate survived**, remaining a historical landmark.

However, Turkman Gate also became the site of one of the **darkest episodes of the Emergency (1975–77)**. In April 1976, during Sanjay Gandhi's "beautification" drive, large-scale demolitions were launched in the Muslim-dominated old city. The drive was linked with **forced slum clearances and coercive family-planning campaigns**.

When residents protested, police used **tear gas, lathicharge, and firing**. Bulldozers were sent in even at night. Large numbers of people were **killed, injured, or buried under rubble**. Estimates suggest about **400 deaths and over 1,000 injured**. No one was ever held accountable.

Thus, Turkman Gate stands today both as a **Mughal heritage structure** and as a **symbol of state excess during the Emergency**.

### Key Takeaways

#### Historical and Cultural Significance

- Built in the **17th century** during Shah Jahan's reign.
- Part of the walled city of **Shahjahanabad**.
- Named after Sufi saint **Shah Turkman Bayabani**.
- Area reflects Delhi's deep **Sufi and Sultanate-era heritage**.
- Nearby grave associated with **Razia Sultana**.

#### Survival Through Urban Change

- After the **1857 revolt**, the British demolished large parts of Delhi's walls.
- Further demolitions occurred in the early 20th century for commercial expansion.
- **Turkman Gate remained standing**, retaining its historical identity.

#### Turkman Gate and the Emergency

- In **April 1976**, it became a major site of Sanjay Gandhi's "beautification" drive.
- The drive combined **slum demolition and forced sterilisation campaigns**.
- Area had a **predominantly Muslim population**, making it socially sensitive.

#### The 1976 Tragedy

- Bulldozer demolitions met with resistance from residents.
- Police action included **tear gas, lathi charge, and firing**.
- Night demolitions buried people under debris.
- Estimated **~400 deaths and 1,000+ injured**.
- **No official accountability** followed.





## Political and Constitutional Significance

- Illustrates **authoritarian excesses** during the Emergency.
- Shows how **urban policy became a tool of coercion**.
- Highlights the dangers of **suspension of civil liberties**.

## Contemporary Relevance

- Turkman Gate symbolizes both **Delhi's layered history** and **state violence**.
- Modern protests and demolition drives often **revive memories of the Emergency**.
- Serves as a reminder of the need for **due process, rehabilitation, and accountability** in urban governance.

[Let players play, let diplomats do the work of diplomacy-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

## International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that sports should not be used as a political weapon. It criticises reports that the BCCI asked IPL franchises to exclude Bangladeshi cricketer Mustafizur Rahman because of political instability and violence in Bangladesh.

The author says this is unfair to the player, damages the integrity of the IPL, and reflects poor diplomatic judgement. Once a player is vetted and auctioned, removing him only because of nationality undermines professional sport.

The backdrop is strained India–Bangladesh relations and serious concerns over violence against minorities. These issues must be addressed firmly through diplomacy. However, boycotting cricketers is seen as counterproductive, as it alienates ordinary people and strengthens extremist narratives.

The article stresses that Bangladesh is not Pakistan. India–Bangladesh relations are fundamentally different, based on shared history, culture, economic ties, and regional cooperation. Treating Bangladesh like a hostile state ignores geopolitical nuance.

Targeting sport while continuing trade, transit, and diplomatic engagement is morally inconsistent and driven more by social-media outrage than strategic thinking.

The conclusion is clear: let players play and let diplomats handle diplomacy. Politicising cricket weakens India's global image, damages sporting credibility, and risks setting a dangerous precedent for the future.

### Key Takeaways

#### Core Argument

- Sports should remain a merit-based, apolitical space.
- Excluding players based on nationality undermines the integrity of leagues like the IPL.
- Diplomacy must be conducted by the state, not sporting bodies.

#### Sports and Diplomacy

- While sports intersect with politics, blanket boycotts of athletes are counterproductive.
- Individual players should not pay for political developments beyond their control.
- Politicisation erodes sport as a neutral global platform.





## India–Bangladesh Context

- India has serious concerns about instability and minority safety in Bangladesh.
- These must be addressed through firm but sensitive diplomacy.
- Bangladesh is not comparable to Pakistan in strategic terms.
- The relationship is rooted in shared history, culture, and Bay of Bengal cooperation.

## Strategic and Moral Concerns

- Singling out sport while continuing trade and diplomacy is inconsistent.
- It risks alienating moderate voices in Bangladesh.
- It can create perceptions of religious or nationality-based discrimination.
- This weakens India's moral high ground and soft power.

## Role of Extremism and Public Outrage

- Blanket bans can strengthen extremist narratives.
- Decisions appear driven by social-media pressure rather than strategic assessment.
- Outrage-based policy undermines institutional diplomacy.

## Institutional and Governance Issues

- Raises concerns about the autonomy and credibility of sports bodies.
- Sets a risky precedent for international tournaments hosted by India.
- Opens the door to routine politicisation of sporting calendars.

## Broader Significance

- Highlights the tension between national sentiment and strategic restraint.
- Shows the importance of sports diplomacy and people-to-people ties.
- Reinforces the need to separate foreign policy tools from cultural platforms.
- Directly linked to India's global image, soft power, and civilisational values.

[Russia, China and the Trump template - The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

## International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that the recent US military action in Venezuela under President Donald Trump has created a **dangerous global precedent**. By launching a unilateral military operation, capturing President Nicolás Maduro, and openly talking about controlling Venezuela's oil infrastructure, the US acted in a way that closely resembles Russia's approach in Ukraine.

The author points out the hypocrisy: Russia and China condemned the US move, even though they themselves have used or threatened force against neighbours. The real danger is not the condemnation, but the **template** the US has now provided — that powerful states can remove unfriendly leaders by force and justify it as a security operation.

This shift weakens the **rules-based international order** and strengthens a world of “**spheres of influence**”, where big powers dominate their regions and ignore international law. Trump's revival of the Monroe Doctrine and emphasis on Western Hemisphere dominance signals that the US is comfortable with this model.

The article warns that China could now use similar logic against Taiwan, and Russia can further justify its territorial ambitions. By abandoning moral and legal restraint, the US has surrendered the ground it once used to rally the world against aggression.



| Clear your doubts now.



The conclusion is stark: the world is moving away from global rules toward **raw power politics**, where military force replaces diplomacy and international institutions.

## Key Takeaways

### Core Argument

- The US action in Venezuela mirrors Russia's Ukraine invasion tactics.
- It normalises **regime removal by force**.
- It weakens international law and moral restraint.

### The "Trump Template"

- Unilateral military action.
- Rapid attempt to decapitate leadership.
- Strategic focus on **natural resources**.
- Justified outside multilateral frameworks.

### Shift in Global Order

- From a **rules-based system** to **spheres of influence**.
- Great powers assert dominance in their "backyards."
- International institutions and norms are sidelined.

### Impact on Russia and China

- Russia gains moral cover for Ukraine-type actions.
- China gains a precedent for coercion against Taiwan.
- Both can now claim they are only doing what the US has done.

### Monroe Doctrine Revival

- The US signals dominance over the Western Hemisphere.
- Encourages other powers to define and enforce their own zones.

### Strategic Consequences

- Erosion of global trust and stability.
- Rise of great-power rivalry.
- Increased risk of regional wars.

### Long-term Danger

- Aggression becomes normalised.
- Diplomacy becomes secondary to force.
- Smaller states become vulnerable to coercion.

### Overall Assessment

- The world is moving toward a **power-driven international system**.
- The degeneration from law to force is accelerating.
- The precedent set today will shape conflicts tomorrow.



| Clear your doubts now.



# India's progress on its climate targets-The Hindu Text and Context

Environment

## Easy Explanation

India has made **visible progress on climate targets**, especially in cutting **emissions intensity** (emissions per unit of GDP) and rapidly expanding **non-fossil power capacity** like solar and wind. In fact, India achieved its original Paris target of 33–35% reduction in emissions intensity **much earlier than 2030**, and crossed **50% non-fossil installed power capacity by 2025**.

But this progress hides a major gap. **India's total (absolute) emissions are still high and rising**, mainly because coal continues to dominate electricity generation and the economy is expanding fast. This is called **partial decoupling** — the economy is becoming cleaner per unit of output, but overall pollution is not yet falling.

Renewable energy capacity has grown impressively, but **actual electricity generation remains coal-heavy** because solar and wind are intermittent and India lacks **large-scale storage and grid flexibility**. More than **70% of power still comes from coal**.

On forests, official data suggests India is close to meeting its **carbon sink target**, but much of this comes from **plantations and broad definitions of forest cover**, not necessarily from healthy natural forests. Governance gaps, under-utilisation of afforestation funds, and climate stress raise doubts about the real ecological benefit.

The article argues that the **next five years are critical**. India must now shift from headline achievements to **real structural change** — coal transition, energy storage, industrial decarbonisation, and genuine forest restoration — to move towards true emissions moderation.

## Key Takeaways

### India's Climate Commitments

- Reduce emissions intensity by 33–35% from 2005 levels
- Achieve around 50% non-fossil installed power capacity by 2030
- Expand renewables (now aiming at ~500 GW by 2030)
- Create an additional 2.5–3 billion tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> forest carbon sink

### Where India Has Succeeded

- Emissions intensity reduced by ~36% by 2020
- Non-fossil power capacity crossed 50% by mid-2025
- Massive growth in solar and steady rise in wind
- Efficiency schemes lowered electricity demand growth

### The Core Problem

- Absolute emissions remain high and continue to rise
- Cement, steel and transport emissions are increasing
- India shows partial, not full, decoupling of growth from emissions

### Renewable Energy Reality

- Renewables form ~50% of capacity but only ~22% of actual generation
- Coal still supplies over 70% of electricity
- Intermittency and lack of storage are the main constraints



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## Storage and Grid Gap

- By 2030, India may need ~336 GWh of storage
- Operational storage in 2025 is extremely low
- Grid upgrades and faster connectivity are essential

## Coal Dependence Challenge

- Coal remains the baseload of the economy
- No clear, transparent national coal phase-down roadmap
- Net-zero 2070 credibility depends on coal and industrial transition

## Forest and Carbon Sink Issues

- Carbon sink targets appear close on paper
- “Forest cover” includes plantations and monocultures
- Ecological quality and biodiversity restoration are weak
- CAMPA funds and Green India Mission face implementation gaps

## Governance and Implementation Gaps

- Delays in land acquisition and grid integration
- Weak coordination across ministries and States
- Focus on numbers over real ecological outcomes

## Road Ahead

- Rapid scaling of battery and pumped-storage systems
- Clear coal transition and industrial decarbonisation plans
- Stronger forest governance focused on natural regeneration
- Better data transparency and sector-wise emissions tracking
- Shift from intensity success to **absolute emissions moderation**

[Can private reserves restore wildlife and keep tourism gentle?-The Hindu Science](#)

## Environment

### Easy Explanation

The article examines whether private nature reserves can help restore wildlife in India while keeping tourism gentle and low-impact, using Jabarkhet Nature Reserve near Mussoorie as a case study.

In India, wildlife tourism is mostly confined to crowded national parks and tiger reserves, or to specialised birding trails. The article explores a third possibility — privately protected forests where people walk quietly, wildlife gets the first right of way, and conservation comes before commercial tourism.

Jabarkhet Nature Reserve, established in 2015 on a neglected private estate, shows this model can work. The land had been heavily overused, full of garbage, and invaded by weeds. The founders cleared waste, removed invasive plants, stopped extractive use, and allowed the forest to regenerate naturally.

Over time, wildlife returned — including leopards, deer, martens, bears, civets, and rich birdlife. Instead of mass tourism, JNR introduced limited, ticketed nature trails, trained local villagers as guides, and created livelihoods linked to conservation.



| Clear your doubts now.



The reserve has also become a biodiversity refuge, protecting orchids, fungi, insects, birds, and rare species. This shows how even small private forests can act as ecological stepping stones, especially when larger landscapes are under pressure from mining, road widening, and tourism infrastructure.

The article concludes that while private reserves are common in Africa, in India they are still more potential than reality. Jabarkhet, however, offers a working model of private land conservation based on restoration, community involvement, and low-impact tourism.

## Key Takeaways

### Core Question

- Can private reserves restore wildlife while keeping tourism ecological and low-pressure?
- Jabarkhet provides a tested example.

### Importance of Private Reserves

- Government protected areas are limited and overcrowded.
- Natural landscapes are increasingly fragmented.
- Private reserves can act as refuges, corridors, and biodiversity stepping stones.

### Jabarkhet Nature Reserve

- Uttarakhand's first privately owned and operated nature reserve.
- Created in 2015 on a degraded private estate.
- Primary goal is habitat restoration and wildlife conservation.

### Restoration Strategy

- Removal of garbage and invasive species.
- Stopping unregulated human use.
- Allowing natural forest regeneration.
- No artificial beautification or cosmetic landscaping.

### Wildlife Recovery

- Return of leopard, barking deer, goral, black bear, civet, fox, and marten.
- More than 150 bird species and very high plant and fungal diversity.
- Demonstrates how protection enables ecosystem revival.

### Tourism Model

- Low-volume, guided, ticketed walking trails.
- Wildlife always gets the right of way.
- No mass safaris or adventure tourism.
- Tourism supports conservation rather than driving it.

### Community Role

- Local villagers trained as guides and restoration workers.
- Combines traditional ecological knowledge with conservation science.
- Builds livelihoods and long-term local support.





## Scientific and Conservation Value

- Protects rare species and natural forest stands.
- Enables ecological research and monitoring.
- Highlights the value of small intact habitats.

## Broader Environmental Context

- Himalayas threatened by road expansion, landslides, and tourism pressure.
- Aravallis threatened by mining and regulatory dilution.
- Every remaining natural patch becomes strategically important.

## Broader Significance

- Shows that responsible private reserves are possible in India.
- They can complement government protected areas.
- They encourage a shift from extractive tourism to conservation-led stewardship.

[Youth leadership is key to Viksit Bharat-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Sociology

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that **India's youth will be the main drivers of a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047**. Young Indians across campuses, villages, start-ups, sports fields and communities are already thinking seriously about how India should grow, govern better and become a developed nation.

The key issue today is not whether youth have ideas, but whether they are given **credible platforms to influence national direction**. The **Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue (VBILD)** was created to provide such a platform.

India has the **largest youth population in the world**, making "yuva shakti" its greatest national asset. When young people are trusted, they don't just participate — they **lead, innovate, and solve problems locally**.

Launched in January 2025, inspired by the Prime Minister's call to bring young people without political backgrounds into public life, VBILD reimagined the National Youth Festival. Lakhs of youth engaged through essays, challenges and state-level dialogues, culminating in a national interaction where young leaders directly shared ideas with the Prime Minister.

The upcoming **VBILD 2026** expands this effort further — with initiatives like **Design for Bharat, Tech for Viksit Bharat**, and inclusion of the **global Indian youth diaspora**. The emphasis is shifting from dialogue alone to **direction, leadership and action**.

The article concludes that India's development journey will succeed only if the nation **walks with its youth**, giving them space, trust, and responsibility.

### Key Takeaways

#### Central Theme

- Youth leadership is essential for building a **Viksit Bharat by 2047**.
- India's future will be shaped not just by policies, but by the **ideas, energy and leadership of young citizens**.



| Clear your doubts now.



## Demographic Strength

- India has the **largest youth population globally**.
- Youth are not just a demographic dividend, but a **strategic national asset**.
- Yuva shakti can drive **innovation, inclusive growth and democratic strengthening**.

## From Participation to Leadership

- Young people already run **community initiatives, learning centres, start-ups and social projects**.
- When given trust and space, youth **lead rather than follow**.
- The focus is shifting from symbolic participation to **real decision-shaping roles**.

## Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue (VBYLD)

- Launched in **January 2025** to provide a national platform for youth ideas.
- Engaged **lakhs of youth** through essays, challenges and state dialogues.
- Culminated in **direct interaction with the Prime Minister**.
- Designed to capture **diversity of region, language, profession and background**.

## Shaping India@2047

- Encourages youth to **critically assess national challenges**.
- Promotes alignment of **personal ambition with national purpose**.
- Treats young people as **co-creators of policy vision**, not just beneficiaries.

## VBYLD 2026 Expansion

- Scheduled for **January 9–12, 2026**.
- Moves from national to **global engagement**, including Indian youth abroad.
- New focus areas: **Design for Bharat, Tech for Viksit Bharat**.
- One of the **largest youth engagement exercises** in the country.

## Dialogue to Direction

- Youth are not only invited to speak, but to **be heard and influence thinking**.
- National Youth Day (January 12) interaction symbolises **youth-led nation building**.
- Emphasises leadership, responsibility and service.

## Broader Significance

- Strengthens **participatory democracy**.
- Builds long-term **leadership pipelines**.
- Channels youth energy towards **development, governance and innovation**.
- Reinforces that **Viksit Bharat will be built by confident, committed young Indians**.

[Natgrid', the search engine of digital authoritarianism-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Internal security

## Easy Explanation

The article critically examines **NATGRID (National Intelligence Grid)**, a massive data-integration system created after the **26/11 Mumbai attacks** to help security agencies connect scattered information and prevent terrorism.



| Clear your doubts now.



The original idea was simple: if intelligence agencies could quickly link data from travel, banking, telecom, identity and other databases, they might detect threats before attacks happen. NATGRID was designed as a **central search platform** that allows authorised agencies to query multiple databases at once.

However, the article argues that NATGRID has quietly evolved into something far bigger and more dangerous.

Recent reports show that NATGRID is now handling **around 45,000 queries every month**, its access is being expanded to **state police officers**, and it is being **integrated with the National Population Register (NPR)**, which holds personal data of about **119 crore residents**.

This marks a shift from **targeted intelligence gathering** to **population-scale surveillance**. With new AI tools like “entity resolution” systems and facial recognition, NATGRID is no longer just retrieving data — it is **making inferences about people**, linking identities, movements, finances, families, and behaviour.

The author warns that this creates two major dangers. First, **algorithmic bias** — existing social and policing prejudices (religion, caste, geography) can be amplified and disguised as “objective” machine outputs. Second, the **tyranny of scale** — when surveillance becomes routine and massive, safeguards like logging and permissions become hollow without strong independent oversight.

The most serious concern is that NATGRID operates **without a clear law passed by Parliament and without independent oversight**. This, the author says, violates the spirit of the **Puttaswamy privacy judgment (2017)** and risks turning India toward **digital authoritarianism**, where fear normalises permanent mass surveillance.

The article concludes that real security comes not from endless data accumulation, but from **professional policing, accountability, training, and democratic oversight**. Without these, NATGRID becomes an “architecture of suspicion” rather than a genuine counter-terror tool.

## Key Takeaways

### Origin and Purpose

- NATGRID was conceived after **26/11** to fix “intelligence failure.”
- Intended to allow agencies to **connect scattered data quickly**.
- Designed as a **middleware search platform** across multiple databases.

### Institutional Design

- Allows specified agencies to access data across **21 categories** (travel, telecom, banking, identity, assets, etc.).
- Approved by **executive decision**, not a Parliamentary law.
- Lacks a **clear statutory framework and independent oversight body**.

### Recent Expansion

- Around **45,000 searches per month**.
- Access widened to **state police levels**.
- Reported **integration with NPR**, covering ~119 crore residents.

### Paradigm Shift

- From **targeted intelligence** → to **population-scale surveillance**.
- From simple searches → to **AI-driven inference systems**.
- Surveillance now focuses on **predicting and profiling**, not just investigating.



| Clear your doubts now.



## Technological Risks

- Use of **entity resolution, facial recognition, and large-scale analytics**.
- Algorithms may **reproduce social and institutional bias**.
- High risk of **false positives** with severe consequences.

## Democratic and Constitutional Concerns

- Weak compliance with **right to privacy (Puttaswamy, 2017)**.
- No meaningful **Parliamentary or judicial oversight**.
- Citizens subjected to surveillance **without transparency or remedy**.

## Scale and Accountability Problem

- Mass access turns safeguards into **bureaucratic rituals**.
- Logging systems meaningless without **external scrutiny**.
- Intelligence failures often stem from **institutional weakness, not lack of data**.

## Link with Citizenship Architecture

- NPR integration shifts focus from threats to **entire population mapping**.
- Raises fears of **citizenship filtering and political misuse**.

## Broader Implications

- Normalisation of **surveillance through fear**.
- Risk of drift toward **digital authoritarianism**.
- Weakens trust between **state and citizens**.

## Way Forward Suggested

- Enact a **clear surveillance law**.
- Establish **independent oversight (Parliamentary + judicial)**.
- Ensure **professional policing, transparency, and accountability**.
- Security must be rooted in **institutions, not omnipresent databases**.

9th January 2026

[Recalling Madhav Gadgil's seminal Western Ghats report and the opposition to it-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## Environment

### Easy Explanation

Eminent ecologist Madhav Gadgil, who recently passed away, is best remembered for chairing the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) set up in 2010. The panel was created because the Western Ghats are ecologically fragile, climatically sensitive, and under rising pressure from mining, dams, roads, urbanisation and plantations.

The Western Ghats are called the “water tower of peninsular India” because major rivers like the Godavari, Krishna, Cauvery, Periyar and Netravathi originate here. They are also a global biodiversity hotspot with very high endemism.

After wide consultations with local communities, the WGEEP in 2011 declared the entire Western Ghats (about 1.29 lakh sq km) as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) and divided it into three sensitivity zones (ESZ-1, ESZ-2, ESZ-3).



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The panel recommended strict restrictions: no new mining, phasing out existing mines, no new hill stations, SEZs, major roads or railway lines in highly sensitive zones, a ban on GM crops, and strong controls on large dams, thermal plants and polluting industries. To implement this, Gadgil proposed a statutory Western Ghats Ecology Authority.

However, the report faced strong political opposition, especially from Kerala and Maharashtra, which argued it would hurt plantations, farmers, hydropower projects and local economies. The UPA government did not implement it.

Instead, a new committee led by K. Kasturirangan in 2013 diluted the approach. It reduced the ESA area to about 56,825 sq km, relied more on satellite mapping, and focused restrictions mainly on natural landscapes rather than populated areas. Even this version has not been fully notified due to continued resistance from states.

Whenever landslides, floods, or ecological disasters hit the Western Ghats, the Gadgil report is recalled as an early scientific warning that was largely ignored.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why the Gadgil Committee was formed

Set up in **2010** under the **Ministry of Environment and Forests**

To assess **ecological sensitivity** of the Western Ghats

To **demarcate ecologically sensitive zones**

To recommend a **framework for conservation and sustainable development**

### 2. Core recommendations of the Gadgil Report (2011)

Declared the **entire Western Ghats (≈1.29 lakh sq km)** as an **Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA)**

Divided the region into **ESZ-1, ESZ-2 and ESZ-3** based on degree of fragility

Recommended **strict restrictions**, including:

No new **mining and quarrying**; phase-out of existing mines

No new **hill stations, SEZs, major roads and railway lines** in high-sensitivity zones

Strong curbs on **large dams, thermal plants and polluting industries**

**Ban on GM crops**



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Proposed a statutory **Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA)**

### 3. Why it was opposed

States feared impact on:

**Plantation economy** (tea, coffee, rubber, spices)

**Hydropower and mining projects**

**Livelihoods and state revenues**

Strong political opposition from **Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa**

### 4. Kasturirangan Committee (2013) – diluted approach

Reduced ESA to about **56,825 sq km**

Focused mainly on **natural landscapes**, excluding most populated areas

Allowed relatively more scope for **development activities**

Yet, **final notification still pending** despite multiple drafts

### 5. Contemporary relevance

Western Ghats increasingly affected by:

**Landslides**

**Flash floods**

**Forest and biodiversity loss**

Gadgil report is cited as an **early scientific warning** ignored in policy

Central to debates on **development vs ecological security**



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Environment

## Easy Explanation

The United States has announced that it is withdrawing from the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** and over **60 international treaties and organisations** which it claims no longer serve “American interests”. This includes major climate bodies such as the **IPCC, International Solar Alliance (ISA), and IRENA**. This move comes after the US had already withdrawn from the **Paris Agreement** under President Donald Trump’s second term.

This decision marks a **complete disengagement of the US from the global climate governance system**. Until now, even when the US was not serious about cutting emissions or providing climate finance, it remained engaged in negotiations, research, and clean technology development. That engagement allowed it to **shape climate discourse, science, and markets**.

Historically, the US has had a **contradictory climate record**. It helped create the UNFCCC, never joined the Kyoto Protocol, played a major role in shaping the Paris Agreement, but consistently failed to meet its commitments. Still, it invested heavily in **climate science, satellite monitoring, modelling, and clean energy innovation**, which benefited the whole world.

Under Trump, climate denial has become official policy. Funding cuts to climate research agencies weaken **global data systems, early warning, and climate modelling capacity**. While short-term impacts may be limited because the US was already underperforming, the **long-term fallout could be serious**.

By withdrawing, the US risks **ceding leadership to China**, which dominates renewable energy manufacturing and supply chains. Since most countries are moving towards renewables because they are now **cheap, secure and strategic**, the US may end up **hurting its own economic and geopolitical interests**.

For India, the decision may reduce diplomatic pressure to decarbonise quickly, but it also threatens **clean energy investments, technology partnerships, and climate cooperation**, including collaboration under the **International Solar Alliance**, which India co-founded.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. What has the US done?

Announced withdrawal from the **UNFCCC** and over **60 international bodies**

Exit includes **IPCC, ISA and IRENA**

Paris Agreement exit (already announced) becomes effective after the notice period

Marks **near-total disengagement** from global climate architecture

### 2. US climate record: inconsistent but influential

Played a key role in creating the **UNFCCC**





Never joined the **Kyoto Protocol**

Helped shape the **Paris Agreement**

Failed in:

Emissions reduction

Climate finance

Technology transfer

But invested heavily in:

**Climate science**

**Satellite and monitoring systems**

**Clean technology development**

### 3. Why this exit matters globally

Weakens the **multilateral climate process**

Cuts in US research funding hurt:

Climate data collection

Climate modelling

Early-warning systems

Signals retreat of a major power from **collective climate responsibility**



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#### 4. Long-term geopolitical and economic implications

US risks **ceding climate and clean-tech leadership to China**

China dominates:

Solar panels

Batteries

Renewable supply chains

Renewables are now:

Economically competitive

Strategically important

US exit could undermine its **future industries and global influence**

#### 5. Implications for India

Possible reduction in **external pressure** to decarbonise

Potential loss of:

Clean-tech investments

Technology partnerships

Research collaboration

Impact on **International Solar Alliance**, co-founded by India and France

India may need to **rework parts of its energy transition strategy**

[Inside Assam gov't's contentious ST status bid for six communities-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Sociology



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## Easy Explanation

The Assam government's proposal to grant **Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six communities** has triggered strong political and social opposition, especially from **existing ST groups**. The issue has become highly sensitive as Assam moves towards elections.

At present, Assam's ST communities are divided into **ST (Plains)** and **ST (Hills)**, with separate reservation quotas. These recognised tribes together form about **12.4% of Assam's population**. They already enjoy political reservations in the **Assembly and Lok Sabha**.

The six communities demanding ST status are: **Tai Ahom, Moran, Motok, Chutia, Koch Rajbongshi, and Tea Tribes/Adivasis**. Together, they make up **nearly one-third of Assam's population** and are currently classified as **Other Backward Classes (OBC)**, which has a **27% reservation quota**.

To address their long-standing demand, the Assam government set up a **Group of Ministers (GoM)**. The GoM recommended creating a new and complex structure by introducing a third category — **ST (Valley)** — while keeping existing ST quotas "fully protected".

However, **existing ST organisations have rejected the proposal**, arguing that these communities are historically advanced, politically dominant, and do not meet the constitutional criteria for ST status. They fear that any expansion of the ST list, even with sub-classification, will **weaken their political rights and access to opportunities**.

Thus, the controversy reflects a deeper tension between **identity, constitutional safeguards, political power, and distributive justice**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Present ST reservation framework in Assam

STs divided into:

**ST (Plains)** – 10% reservation

**ST (Hills)** – 5% reservation

ST (Hills) mainly from **Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao**

Political reservation:

**2 Lok Sabha seats**

**19 Assembly seats**

ST population (2011 Census):

**38.8 lakh (12.4%)**





Major tribes include:

Bodo, Mishing, Karbi, Rabha, Sonowal Kachari, Lalung, Garo, Dimasa

## 2. Six communities demanding ST status

**Tai Ahom**

**Moran**

**Motok**

**Chutia**

**Koch Rajbongshi**

**Tea Tribes / Adivasis**

Currently classified as **OBC**

Collectively around **one crore people**

Core demand: **ST status for political and educational reservations**

## 3. Assam government's proposal (Group of Ministers)

Found "**full justification**" for ST inclusion

Recommended **three-tier structure**:

ST (Hills)

ST (Plains)

New **ST (Valley)** category



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ST (Valley) to include:

Ahoms, Chutias, Tea Tribes/Adivasis, Koch Rajbongshis (outside undivided Goalpara)

ST (Valley) to have:

**Separate quotas**

**Separate rosters and vacancy registers**

Existing ST quotas to be **“fully protected”**

Part of **27% OBC quota** to be shifted to the new ST (Valley) category

Moran, Motok and some Koch Rajbongshis to be added to **ST (Plains)**

#### 4. Why existing ST groups oppose it

Argue these communities:

Were **historically dominant and advanced**

Do not satisfy **constitutional criteria of STs**

Were earlier examined and kept in **OBC list**

Fear:

**Dilution of political representation**

Loss of access to **jobs, education and local self-government seats**

Claim demand is mainly for:

**Political reservation** (Assembly, Panchayats, Autonomous Councils)



| Clear your doubts now.



## 5. Constitutional and political significance

ST inclusion affects:

**Reservation policy**

**Delimitation and political representation**

**Centre–State dynamics** (as final ST list is notified by Parliament)

Highlights tension between:

**Social justice vs political mobilisation**

**Identity claims vs constitutional safeguards**

[ISRO and the next big challenge-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

Over the last decade, ISRO has built an impressive and diverse record. It has made satellite launches almost routine through the **PSLV**, demonstrated advanced capability through **Chandrayaan-3's soft landing (2023)**, placed **Aditya-L1** at the Sun–Earth L1 point (2024), and partnered with NASA on the **NISAR climate-monitoring mission (2025)**. These achievements show that India is no longer an emerging space power, but a **mature and capable one**.

However, consistent success also **raises expectations**. The challenge before ISRO is no longer to prove it can do difficult missions once in a while, but to show that it can **deliver complex missions regularly, reliably, and at scale**.

As ISRO prepares simultaneously for **Gaganyaan (human spaceflight)**, **Chandrayaan-4**, and the **Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV)**, three structural challenges stand out.

First, ISRO faces a **capacity and prioritisation problem**. Launch frequency remains low, infrastructure is limited, and many missions depend on the same facilities and teams. Delays in one major mission can therefore affect many others. ISRO still acts as designer, integrator, tester, and operator, making it the system's biggest bottleneck.

Second, India's space sector has been **liberalised since 2020**, but there is still **no comprehensive national space law**. New bodies like **IN-SPACe** and **NSIL** exist on paper, yet their powers and responsibilities are not clearly anchored in legislation. This leaves ISRO being pulled into regulatory and commercial roles by default, distracting it from advanced research and frontier missions.

Third, global space activity is now driven by **high launch frequency, reusability, industrial depth, and private capital**. ISRO's future competitiveness depends less on single spectacular missions and more on whether India can build a **robust space ecosystem** involving industry, finance, regulation, and manufacturing. The NGLV reflects this shift, aiming for **heavy-lift capacity and partial reusability**, but this will require far greater industrial and financial support.

In short, ISRO's next phase is about **institution-building rather than hero missions**.



| Clear your doubts now.



## Key Takeaways

### Achievements and Current Status

- PSLV has enabled routine and reliable access to space.
- Chandrayaan-3 (2023) demonstrated India's lunar soft-landing capability.
- Aditya-L1 (2024) placed a solar observatory at the Sun–Earth L1 point.
- NISAR (2025) marked a major NASA–ISRO climate and hazard monitoring collaboration.
- India has emerged as a mature spacefaring nation.

### Nature of the New Challenge

- Focus is shifting from isolated successes to sustained, routine mission execution.
- Future credibility depends on institutional performance, not symbolic milestones.
- ISRO must deliver multiple complex programmes in parallel.

### Operational and Capacity Constraints

- Parallel work on Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan-4 and NGLV strains existing infrastructure.
- Low launch cadence and limited testing facilities create cascading delays.
- ISRO acting as designer, integrator and operator centralises risk and bottlenecks the system.

### Governance and Legal Gaps

- Space sector liberalised in 2020 with IN-SPACE and NSIL.
- Absence of a national space law leaves roles, liability and insurance unclear.
- ISRO is pulled into regulatory and commercial functions by default.
- Legal uncertainty weakens private sector confidence and burdens ISRO.

### Competitiveness and Ecosystem Challenge

- Global space sector now prioritises reusability, rapid launches and industrial depth.
- NGLV reflects India's push towards heavy-lift and reusable systems.
- Long-term success requires advanced manufacturing, deep supply chains and sustained finance.

### Core Institutional Shift Required

- ISRO must evolve from a mission-centric agency into an anchor of a space industry system.
- Engineering excellence must be matched by regulatory clarity and industrial capacity.
- The goal is to make ambitious missions routine, not exceptional.

### Way Forward Suggested

- Expand testing, integration and launch infrastructure.
- Enact a comprehensive national space law.
- Strengthen private participation and industrial base.
- Build a resilient ecosystem where governance, industry and science mature together.

[Why awareness about folic acid is the key to prevent Spina Bifida-The Hindu Science](#)

Science

## Easy Explanation



| Clear your doubts now.



Spina bifida is a **birth defect of the spinal cord** that leads to paralysis of the legs and multiple lifelong complications. In India, over **25,000 children are born each year** with this condition, making it one of the highest-burden countries globally. Yet, awareness remains extremely poor.

Children with spina bifida may suffer from **paralysis, bladder and bowel incontinence, hydrocephalus, and orthopaedic deformities**. Although many are physically disabled, **their intelligence is usually normal**, and with proper care they can lead productive lives. However, in India, **over 75% of affected children do not get access to specialised medical care**.

What makes this situation tragic is that **more than 70% of spina bifida cases can be prevented** if women take **folic acid before conception and in early pregnancy**. This has been scientifically established since 1991. Despite this, India has **not conducted any serious national awareness campaigns or mandatory food fortification**, unlike many other countries.

Globally, over **68 countries mandate folic acid fortification of food**, and have reduced spina bifida prevalence to **below 1 per 1,000 births**. India's rate remains around **4 per 1,000**, mainly due to the absence of prevention strategies.

The article argues that India urgently needs a **national awareness campaign and food fortification policy**, because prevention is far cheaper, more humane, and more effective than lifelong treatment and rehabilitation.

## Key Takeaways

### Understanding Spina Bifida

- Spina bifida is a birth defect of the spinal cord causing paralysis and lifelong disability.
- India sees over **25,000 cases annually**, among the highest in the world.
- Affected children may have paralysis, hydrocephalus, bladder and bowel incontinence, and orthopaedic deformities.
- Intelligence is usually normal, meaning affected children can live productive lives if treated properly.

### Public Health Burden in India

- More than **75% of children in India lack access to specialised treatment and rehabilitation**.
- Families face severe emotional, financial and social stress.
- The condition places a heavy long-term burden on the healthcare system.

### Prevention: Known but neglected

- Since 1991, research has shown that **pre-conception folic acid can prevent over 70% of cases**.
- Folic acid is **cheap, safe, and easily distributable**.
- India has made **no meaningful nationwide effort** to spread awareness or ensure supplementation.
- This failure is described as **gross public health negligence**.

### Global experience and contrast

- **68 countries** have legally mandated **folic acid food fortification**.
- These nations reduced prevalence to **below 1 per 1,000 births**.
- India's prevalence remains around **4 per 1,000 births** due to lack of policy action.
- Research in India is exploring fortification of **salt and tea** as widely consumed vehicles.





## Economic and social logic of prevention

- Every rupee spent on prevention can save **over 100 rupees** in treatment and rehabilitation.
- Prevention avoids childhood paralysis, stillbirths, under-five deaths, and lifelong disability.

## What India needs urgently

- A **national awareness campaign** on spina bifida and folic acid.
- **Mandatory food fortification** with folic acid and vitamin B12.
- Integration of prevention into **maternal and child health programmes**.
- Strengthening of medical systems to support affected families.

## Core message

- Spina bifida in India is **largely preventable**, yet continues due to policy inaction.
- India must shift from treatment-focused response to **primary prevention through nutrition and awareness**.
- Until every woman knows that folic acid can prevent spina bifida, the public health mission remains incomplete.

[Is the 10-minute delivery model necessary?-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Economy

### Easy Explanation

The 10–20 minute delivery model, popularised by quick-commerce platforms like Zepto, Blinkit and Swiggy Instamart, has triggered growing concern over **worker safety, job insecurity and labour rights**. In December, over a lakh gig workers went on strike, demanding that ultra-fast delivery models be withdrawn because they **increase pressure, risk and exploitation**.

Critics argue that 10-minute delivery is not a genuine consumer need, but a **business competition strategy**, where speed is extracted from human labour rather than created by technology. App-based platforms control pay, task allocation, ratings and deactivations through algorithms, leaving workers in a state of **constant insecurity**.

Supporters of the model point out that quick commerce has become a **major source of employment** in a country facing a serious job shortage. With millions entering the workforce every year and limited job creation, gig platforms provide **low-skill, fast-entry employment** and are rapidly expanding.

The debate, therefore, is not simply about delivery time, but about whether India should accept a model that creates jobs **without basic protections**, and whether existing labour reforms are sufficient.

While India's four Labour Codes have recognised gig workers and promised social security, critics say they are **weak, vague, and non-enforceable**, offering registration without real rights, income protection, or algorithmic accountability.

With AI expected to deepen algorithmic control, the article warns that unless clear regulations are built now, gig work could become even more **unstable, opaque and disposable**.

### Key Takeaways

#### Background and Trigger

- Over one lakh gig workers recently protested against 10–20 minute delivery systems, citing safety risks and exploitation.
- Workers demanded withdrawal of ultra-fast delivery models and stronger protections.
- Government views Labour Codes as the main solution for gig worker welfare.



| Clear your doubts now.



## Core Concern with 10-minute delivery

- The model is driven by corporate competition, not real consumer necessity.
- Speed is extracted from human labour, increasing pressure, risk and fatigue.
- Platforms treat technology and marketing costs as fixed, while labour is made adjustable.
- Workers face unstable pay, sudden ID blocks and algorithmic penalties.

## Economic and employment argument

- Quick commerce has grown rapidly and now employs lakhs of workers.
- India faces a major employment gap, especially for low-skill workers.
- Platforms are seen as filling this gap by offering fast, accessible jobs.
- Supporters argue some job is better than no job.

## Nature of gig work today

- Around 80% of gig workers depend on platform work as their primary livelihood.
- Platforms control pricing, work allocation, ratings and deactivations.
- Workers demand predictable income, safety cover, transparency and grievance mechanisms.
- If platforms control work, they must carry legal obligations.

## Labour Codes: why they are seen as inadequate

- Labour Codes recognise gig workers but do not grant employee status.
- Welfare schemes are vague, non-mandatory and weakly funded.
- No guaranteed minimum wage, working hours, paid leave or collective bargaining.
- No regulation of algorithmic management, transparency or appeal systems.

## Algorithmic and AI-related risks

- Algorithms already control work intensity, income and job access.
- Lack of transparency leads to stress, unfair penalties and income instability.
- AI is expected to deepen surveillance, automation and worker disposability.
- Future risk: workers becoming replaceable at scale without explanation or remedy.

## Broader implications

- Highlights tension between job creation and labour protection.
- Raises questions on platform accountability in a digital economy.
- Shows limits of welfare-only approaches without labour rights.
- Reflects how technology can concentrate power without regulation.

## Way forward suggested

- Regulate ultra-fast delivery models with worker safety standards.
- Enact enforceable social security and minimum protection guarantees.
- Introduce algorithmic transparency, accountability and appeal mechanisms.
- Strengthen labour-intensive manufacturing to reduce dependence on precarious gig work.
- Shift focus from platform convenience to sustainable employment systems.





## Core message

- The 10-minute delivery debate is actually about the **future of work in India**.
- Without strong legal frameworks, gig platforms risk creating mass insecure labour.
- India must balance innovation, employment and dignity of labour.

[GSDP share as criterion for central-State transfers-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Economy

# Central tax collections, transfers and GSDP GSDP, reflecting accrual of central taxes, strikes a balance between efficiency and equity in tax devolution

State-wise direct tax and gross GST collections, central transfers and GSDP from 2020-21 to 2024-25

States	Direct tax and GST collection		Central transfers		FC devolution	GSDP		Transfers using GSDP share	Loss or gain
	(₹ lakh crore)	% share	(₹ lakh crore)	% share	% share	(₹ lakh crore)	% share	(₹ lakh crore)	(₹ lakh crore)
Andhra Pradesh	3.32	2.97	3.23	4.30	4.07	64.35	4.97	3.74	0.51
Assam	0.75	0.67	2.93	3.90	3.13	24.48	1.89	1.42	-1.51
Bihar	0.76	0.68	6.5	8.65	10.06	38.48	2.97	2.23	-4.27
Chhattisgarh	1.68	1.50	2.36	3.14	3.41	23.03	1.78	1.34	-1.02
Gujarat	7.69	6.88	2.55	3.39	3.48	108.38	8.37	6.29	3.74
Haryana	6.02	5.39	0.83	1.10	1.09	48.82	3.77	2.83	2.00
Himachal Pradesh	0.48	0.43	1.19	1.58	0.83	9.58	0.74	0.56	-0.63
Jharkhand	1.58	1.41	2.22	2.96	3.31	20.69	1.60	1.20	-1.02
Karnataka	14.14	12.65	2.93	3.90	3.65	113.94	8.80	6.61	3.68
Kerala	1.81	1.62	2.03	2.70	1.93	51.19	3.96	2.97	0.94
Madhya Pradesh	2.17	1.94	5.56	7.40	7.85	61.26	4.73	3.56	-2.00
Maharashtra	40.3	36.06	4.99	6.64	6.32	179.83	13.90	10.44	5.45
Odisha	2.61	2.34	3.32	4.42	4.53	36.40	2.81	2.11	-1.21
Punjab	1.47	1.32	1.57	2.09	1.81	34.71	2.68	2.02	0.45
Rajasthan	2.83	2.53	4.57	6.08	6.03	67.96	5.25	3.94	-0.63
Tamil Nadu	8.5	7.61	3.5	4.66	4.08	120.41	9.30	6.99	3.49
Telangana	4.32	3.87	1.84	2.45	2.10	64.81	5.01	3.76	1.92
Uttar Pradesh	5.14	4.60	11.88	15.81	17.94	116.28	8.98	6.75	-5.13
Uttarakhand	0.9	0.81	1.24	1.65	1.12	14.84	1.15	0.86	-0.38
West Bengal	4.46	3.99	5.23	6.96	7.52	74.64	5.77	4.33	-0.90
8 small States	0.82	0.73	4.63	6.16	5.79	20.07	1.55	1.17	-3.46
<b>Total</b>	<b>111.75</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>75.12</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.02</b>	<b>1294.15</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>75.12</b>	<b>0.00</b>

credit-The Hindu

## Easy Explanation

The Centre shares a portion of its gross tax revenues with States based on the recommendations of the Finance Commission. Over time, this system has become controversial. States argue that after GST, their fiscal autonomy has weakened, while the Centre increasingly relies on cesses and surcharges that are not shared. High-performing States like Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu also complain that they contribute more to central taxes but receive a smaller share of transfers.

However, direct tax data based on the location of PAN registration does not accurately show where economic activity actually happens. Many large companies earn profits across India but pay taxes where their head offices are registered. Hence, current tax collection figures distort the true State-wise contribution.

The article argues that **Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)** is a better proxy for estimating where taxes actually accrue. GSDP reflects the size of a State's economy and underlying tax base. Empirical data shows a strong correlation between States' GSDP and both direct tax and GST collections, suggesting it is a meaningful indicator of tax contribution.



| Clear your doubts now.



Under the current Finance Commission formula, transfers correlate very strongly with devolution weights but weakly with tax contribution. GSDP, by contrast, shows a strong link with tax collections and a moderate link with transfers. This means GSDP can balance **efficiency (who generates income and taxes)** and **equity (redistribution needs)**.

If transfers were based more on GSDP share, productive States would receive somewhat higher allocations, poorer States somewhat less, but changes would be moderate. The article concludes that giving higher weight to GSDP would improve fairness, transparency, and trust in India's federal fiscal system.

## Key Takeaways

### Background: Centre–State transfers and the debate

- Central taxes are shared with States based on Finance Commission recommendations.
- Transfers occur through tax devolution, grants-in-aid and centrally sponsored schemes.
- States raise concerns about GST reducing fiscal autonomy, growing cesses, and rigid CSS.
- High-performing States argue they contribute more but receive less.

### Problem with current “tax contribution” claims

- Direct tax data reflects **place of collection**, not place of income generation.
- Multi-State firms, migrant labour and head-office-based taxation distort State figures.
- PAN-based attribution fails to capture true inter-State economic activity.
- Therefore, tax collection numbers are an unreliable measure of State contribution.

### Why GSDP is a better proxy

- GSDP represents the **actual economic base** of a State.
- If tax efficiency is broadly similar, GSDP approximates tax accrual.
- Strong correlations exist between GSDP and:
  - Direct taxes (0.75)
  - GST collections (0.91)
- GSDP aligns better with where income is actually produced.

### What current transfers reflect

- Actual transfers correlate very strongly with Finance Commission weights (0.99).
- But they correlate weakly with tax contribution shares (0.24).
- GSDP shows both strong correlation with tax collection (0.81) and moderate correlation with transfers (0.58).
- This suggests GSDP can bridge efficiency and equity.

### Who gains and who loses under GSDP-based sharing

- Likely gainers: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu.
- Likely losers: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh.
- Gains and losses would be moderate, not extreme.
- Reflects production contribution without dismantling redistribution.

### Federal and policy significance

- Higher GSDP weight would recognise States' role in national income generation.
- Could improve perceived fairness and trust in fiscal federalism.
- May reduce resentment among high-performing States.
- Supports a more transparent and economically grounded transfer formula.





## Core message

- GSDP is a more accurate indicator of where central taxes accrue.
- Incorporating it more strongly can balance equity with efficiency.
- Reforming devolution criteria is key to strengthening India's fiscal federal structure.

10th January 2026

[Beyond economy, Iran stir reflects rage against regime-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

## Easy Explanation

Iran is witnessing its **largest nationwide protests in three years**. They began in December with **traders protesting soaring prices**, collapsing currency, and inflation. Very quickly, these economic protests turned into **open anti-regime demonstrations** across all provinces. Security forces have responded with force, causing multiple deaths.

Iran's economy is in severe crisis:

Inflation crossed **50%** in 2025

Food prices rising around **7% every month**

The Iranian rial has **lost more than half its value**

US and UN sanctions and recent **US-Israel bombings** have worsened pressure

The government announced **subsidy cuts** and small **cash transfers**, while the Supreme Leader accused protesters of acting on behalf of the US and signalled repression.

Historically, protests in Iran arise from **different triggers**:

2009 – political (election dispute)

2022–23 – social (Mahsa Amini and hijab laws)

2025–26 – economic (inflation, currency collapse)

But all eventually turn into **anti-regime movements**, because economic pain is layered over **deep political dissatisfaction**.

This time, the regime has done something unusual: it has **acknowledged some “legitimate demands”** while still using force. President Masoud Pezeshkian's softer tone reflects both **internal vulnerability** and **external weakness**.

Despite the anger, **immediate regime change is unlikely** because:



| Clear your doubts now.



The powerful **Revolutionary Guards (IRGC)** still support the system.

Most Iranians do not want to **collapse the state machinery**, as that could worsen daily life.

Iran is also facing a **dangerous moment structurally and geopolitically**:

Loss of allies (Syria, Hezbollah weakened)

Israel's dominance and strong US backing

Upcoming **succession to Supreme Leader Khamenei**, which could destabilise the system

The protests may not overthrow the regime now, but they expose a **fragile, pressured, and uncertain future**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Nature of the current protests

Started as **economic protests**, quickly became **anti-regime**

Nationwide spread across all provinces

Reflect accumulated anger, not just inflation

### 2. Why economic issues are more explosive now

Chronic inflation + currency collapse

Sanctions pressure already high before Trump's return

Ordinary Iranians facing sustained erosion of living standards

### 3. How this round is different

Regime has **publicly acknowledged protesters' grievances**

Softer presidential tone, even while repression continues



| Clear your doubts now.



Comes after **direct US–Israel strikes**, denting regime image

#### 4. Why regime change is unlikely in the short term

**IRGC remains loyal** and economically invested in the system

No organised opposition leadership

Fear that revolution would **destroy welfare and administrative systems**

#### 5. Iran's deeper vulnerability

Geopolitically weaker than at any time since 1979

Regional allies weakened

Supreme Leader's succession approaching — a sensitive transition

#### 6. What this means for the Iranian government

Needs stability but faces rising public anger

Forced into limited concessions without real political reform

Protests could escalate into **unpredictable outcomes**, even if not immediate revolution

['US firms don't have much appetite for big Venezuela investment'-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

#### Easy Explanation

Despite Venezuela having the **world's largest proven oil reserves**, American oil companies are **not eager to invest** there. According to Ajay Singh, a senior global shipping and energy advisor, the **risks and uncertainties are far greater than the possible profits**.

Historically, oil has shaped the troubled US–Venezuela relationship. Venezuela was once a major US oil supplier, but ties broke down after it helped create **OPEC**, nationalised Western oil assets, and later under **Hugo Chávez** imposed harsh terms and seized US company properties. Since then, the US has imposed **sanctions**, and American firms have won **over \$10 billion in compensation claims** that are still unpaid. Meanwhile, **China's influence has expanded**, worrying Washington.



| Clear your doubts now.



Today, the irony is that the US **no longer needs Venezuelan oil**, because it has become **energy self-sufficient** and a major gas exporter. Trump's renewed interest is therefore less about energy needs and more about **geopolitics and influence in the Americas**, framed through a revival of the **Monroe Doctrine**.

However, from a business perspective, Venezuela is deeply unattractive:

hostile political environment

huge debt (about **twice its GDP**)

legal requirement to partner with state oil company **PDVSA**

poor record of honouring contracts

global trade uncertainty and unexciting oil prices

Even if Trump pressures Caracas to offer generous terms, companies fear that **future governments may reverse them**.

The suggested way forward is not quick foreign takeover, but a **structured economic reset**: foreign debt restructuring, gradual oil-led recovery, and a domestic stabilisation programme. Iraq after 2003 is cited as an example where oil output recovered only after **broad, competitive contracts and institutional rebuilding**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why Venezuela's oil is not attracting US firms

Extreme political risk and sanctions history

Past expropriations and unpaid arbitration awards

Mandatory PDVSA participation

Debt crisis and unstable economy

Lack of confidence in long-term contract security

### 2. Oil is now more geopolitical than economic for the US

US is no longer dependent on Venezuelan oil



| Clear your doubts now.



Trump's approach reflects **power projection**, not energy need

Revival of **Monroe Doctrine thinking** (US dominance in the Americas)

### 3. International complications

China and Russia are major creditors and partners

Any US-driven oil restructuring will clash with their interests

Europe's position remains uncertain

### 4. Why large investments are unlikely soon

Oil prices not attractive enough to offset risks

Global trade disruptions reducing investor confidence

Long payback periods incompatible with Venezuela's instability

### 5. What Venezuela actually needs

#### **Foreign debt restructuring**

Oil exports used to stabilise the economy, not only repay elites

Institutional rebuilding and credible contracts

Iraq post-2003 cited as a precedent for recovery through diversified partnerships

### 6. Strategic meaning

Venezuela's crisis is as much about **state credibility and governance** as oil

Control over hydrocarbons alone is **not sufficient to attract investment**

Energy resources without institutional trust become a **liability, not leverage**



| Clear your doubts now.



International relations

### Easy Explanation

NATO is often seen as the **most powerful military alliance in the world**, but behind this collective strength lies a **huge imbalance** between the United States and the rest of its members.

The article uses a striking example: after events in Venezuela, some US officials even floated the idea that **Greenland should become US territory**. Greenland belongs to **Denmark, a NATO member**. If the US were ever to act forcibly against Denmark, it would **shatter NATO**, since the alliance is built on the idea that members will never attack each other.

NATO was formed in 1949 with three goals:

Contain the Soviet Union

Prevent the return of militarism in Europe

Encourage European integration

While NATO's combined power has helped prevent a third world war, its unity increasingly hides a reality: the **US now outweighs all other NATO countries combined**, economically and militarily.

In 2025, the **US economy alone is larger than the combined GDP of all other NATO members**. Just a decade ago, it was the opposite. Since 2014, the US added about **\$13 trillion** to its economy, while the rest of NATO together added only about **\$6 trillion**. This reflects **strong US growth** versus **stagnation in major European economies** like Germany and the UK.

Because the US is richer, its citizens pay more taxes and its government prioritises defence. As a result, the US:

spends far more on defence in absolute terms

spends a higher share of GDP on defence

spends much more per person on defence

The only area where the US does not exceed the rest combined is **troop numbers** — yet even here, it alone accounts for **about 40% of all NATO military personnel**.

This massive imbalance allows President Trump to **pressure allies and dominate NATO politics**, turning a collective alliance into something that increasingly depends on **one overwhelmingly powerful member**.

### Key Takeaways





## 1. NATO's image vs reality

Appears as a unified military bloc

In reality, hides **extreme economic and military disparities**

## 2. Original purpose of NATO (1949)

Contain Soviet expansion

Prevent European militarism

Anchor US presence and promote European integration

## 3. The core shift in the last decade

US GDP now **exceeds the combined GDP of the rest of NATO**

Growth gap: US surged, Europe stagnated

US citizens on average are **twice as prosperous** as those in other NATO countries

## 4. Military imbalance

US defence spending dwarfs all others

Higher share of GDP devoted to defence

Much higher per capita military spending

About **40% of NATO's total personnel** are American

## 5. Political consequences

US has disproportionate leverage inside NATO

Trump exploits this asymmetry to demand compliance





Raises questions about NATO's cohesion and internal stability

## 6. Strategic implication

NATO's strength increasingly rests on **one dominant power**

Any conflict of interest between US and European members could **threaten the alliance's survival**

The Greenland example shows how fragile the internal logic of NATO could become

[Somaliland is no longer a diplomatic endnote-The Hindu Editorial](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

In December 2025, **Israel formally recognised Somaliland as an independent country**. This is a major diplomatic break in the Horn of Africa. Until now, Somaliland — though stable and self-governing for over 30 years — was treated internationally as part of Somalia. Israel's move risks increasing **proxy rivalries, militarisation, and strategic competition** around the Red Sea.

The country most strategically troubled by this decision is **China**.

For Beijing, Somaliland touches three sensitive interests at once:

**The "One China" principle** (because Somaliland has official ties with Taiwan),  
**Security of the Red Sea–Bab el-Mandeb trade corridor**, and  
**Great-power competition in Africa**.

China has condemned Israel's move and repeated that Somaliland is an "inseparable part" of Somalia — mainly because it fears that recognising Somaliland would **legitimise separatism**, undermining China's stand on Taiwan.

But Somaliland creates a dilemma for China. Unlike most breakaway regions, it has been **peaceful, democratic, and institutionally functional** for decades. This exposes the weakness of China's argument that only existing states can determine legitimacy.

The Taiwan factor makes it sharper. Since 2020, Somaliland has had **official ties with Taipei**, hosting a Taiwanese office and cooperation programmes. Apart from Eswatini, Somaliland is Taiwan's only African partner — which directly challenges Beijing.

Beyond ideology, the **geography is crucial**. Somaliland sits near the **Bab el-Mandeb Strait**, one of the world's most important maritime choke points. China's first overseas military base (in Djibouti) was built to protect trade passing through this route. If Somaliland becomes internationally recognised and supported by **Israel, the UAE, and possibly the US**, it could emerge as an **alternative security and logistics hub**, weakening China's dominance around Djibouti.

China now faces a strategic trade-off:

If it pressures Somaliland too hard, it may push it closer to **Taiwan, Israel, and the West**.  
If it softens, it risks weakening the **One China principle**.

So Beijing is likely to use **indirect tools**: diplomatic blocking at the UN, economic pressure, political lobbying, and **information warfare** rather than overt intervention.



| Clear your doubts now.



China's recent **pro-Palestinian posture** also allows it to morally oppose Israel's decision, but this pulls Beijing deeper into West Asian politics, complicating its traditionally pragmatic approach.

Meanwhile, **Ethiopia's 2024 MoU for port access**, US congressional interest, and UAE support indicate that Israel's move may trigger **more recognitions**, further reducing China's room to manoeuvre.

Israel's decision has pushed Somaliland from obscurity into the **centre of great-power rivalry** in the Horn of Africa, revealing the limits of China's sovereignty doctrine and its security dominance in the Red Sea region.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why Israel's recognition matters

- Breaks long-standing international consensus
- Risks proxy conflicts and militarisation in the Red Sea
- Elevates Somaliland into global strategic competition

### 2. Why China is most affected

- Threatens the **One China principle**
- Endangers China's dominance near **Bab el-Mandeb**
- Challenges Beijing's Africa security architecture

### 3. Somaliland's uniqueness

- Stable, democratic, functioning institutions for 30+ years
- Stronger de facto legitimacy than most separatist regions
- Hosts a Taiwanese representative office since 2020

### 4. Strategic geography

- Near **Bab el-Mandeb Strait** — critical for Chinese trade and energy
- Close to China's **Djibouti military base**
- Potential rival hub backed by Israel-UAE-US axis

### 5. China's likely response

- Diplomatic blocking at UN
- Economic and political pressure
- Narrative shaping and media influence
- Avoidance of direct confrontation

### 6. Wider geopolitical ripple effects

- Ethiopia seeking port access via Somaliland
- Growing US interest in Somaliland
- UAE's tacit backing
- Intensifying great-power competition in Horn of Africa

### 7. Strategic significance

- Somaliland is no longer a marginal issue
- Becomes a test case for:
  - sovereignty vs legitimacy
  - China vs Taiwan diplomacy
  - Red Sea security architecture



| Clear your doubts now.



11th January 2026

[Is hiring lobby firms common in diplomacy?: TH Editorial](#)

International Relations

**Easy Explanation**

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has come under scrutiny after U.S. filings revealed that the Indian Embassy in Washington hired an American lobbying firm to do tasks that are usually handled directly by diplomats. These tasks included arranging high-level meetings for Indian ministers, contacting the White House during Operation Sindoor, and assisting during sensitive trade negotiations.

Hiring lobby firms in the U.S. is not unusual. Many embassies, companies, and organisations do this because the American political system relies heavily on professional lobbyists to access lawmakers and senior officials. India has been hiring such firms for decades. However, what raised eyebrows this time was the nature of the work done by one firm — SHW LLC — which appeared to go beyond routine advocacy.

According to filings under the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), SHW LLC, headed by a close associate of President Donald Trump, made multiple calls to top White House officials, the U.S. Trade Representative, and others at the request of the Indian Embassy. Some of these calls took place on the very day a ceasefire was announced in Operation Sindoor, despite India officially denying U.S. mediation claims. The firm also helped arrange meetings for senior Indian officials and flagged social media posts praising President Trump.

Many former diplomats have said this is unusual because setting up such meetings and conducting political outreach is normally the job of embassy officials, not foreign lobbyists. The MEA has defended the practice as standard but has not clearly explained why diplomatic duties were outsourced or whether the lobbying was effective, especially since India-U.S. ties remain strained on trade and strategic issues.

**Key Takeaways**

**Why this issue arose**

- U.S. Justice Department filings revealed details of India's lobbying activities
- An American firm performed tasks usually done by diplomats
- Raised questions about transparency and diplomatic norms

**India's use of lobby firms**

- India has hired U.S. lobby firms since 1949
- Lobbying is common in Washington due to its political system
- Firms hired usually represent different political groups

**What was unusual this time**

- SHW LLC arranged high-level meetings and made sensitive calls
- Contacts included the White House, U.S. Trade Representative, and security officials
- Calls were made during Operation Sindoor and tariff negotiations

**Operation Sindoor controversy**

- U.S. President Trump claimed he mediated a ceasefire
- India officially denied any U.S. mediation
- Lobby firm records show calls on the ceasefire day, raising questions

**Comparison with Pakistan**

- Pakistan also hires lobby firms in the U.S.
- Pakistan reportedly spends more than India on lobbying
- Firms promoted Pakistan's narrative on Kashmir and Operation Sindoor





### MEA's response

- MEA says hiring lobbyists is standard practice in the U.S.
- Did not explain why diplomatic duties were outsourced
- Effectiveness of lobbying remains unclear

### Broader implications

- Highlights growing reliance on lobbying in foreign policy
- Raises concerns about diplomatic accountability
- Comes amid strained India-U.S. trade and strategic relations

[How will the U.S. exit affect climate action?: TH Editorial](#)

Environment

### Easy Explanation

U.S. President Donald Trump has decided to withdraw the United States from 66 international organisations, including two key climate bodies: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This follows his long-held view that climate change is exaggerated or a hoax, and his move to pull the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement as well.

Leaving the FCCC is a major step because this treaty is the backbone of global climate talks. It is the system under which countries report their greenhouse gas emissions, set climate targets, and negotiate rules at annual climate summits called COPs. Once the U.S. exits, it will no longer be a decision-making member at these talks. It may still attend as an observer, but it will not be able to negotiate rules or influence outcomes from inside the room.

The exit also affects climate finance. The FCCC oversees funds like the Green Climate Fund, which helps poorer countries deal with climate change. By leaving, the U.S. loses influence over how these funds operate and makes it easier politically to stop contributing money. At the same time, U.S. companies may face more uncertainty because global climate rules will continue tightening without U.S. input, raising business risks and trade barriers.

Withdrawing from the IPCC weakens the U.S.'s role in global climate science. The IPCC does not make policy; it studies climate science and publishes reports used by governments worldwide. While American scientists can still participate in some ways, U.S. government backing for their involvement will reduce, shrinking U.S. influence over the scientific references that guide global climate action.

Globally, the move sends a negative signal. Climate cooperation depends on trust and shared responsibility. When a wealthy, high-emitting country steps away, poorer countries may become less willing to cooperate or contribute more money. This is especially damaging at a time when the world is trying to raise climate finance far beyond earlier targets to help vulnerable countries adapt to climate impacts.

### Key Takeaways

#### U.S. decision

- President Trump ordered withdrawal from 66 international bodies
- Includes FCCC and IPCC, central to global climate action
- Part of a broader rejection of climate agreements

#### Impact of leaving the FCCC

- U.S. exits the core framework of global climate negotiations
- No longer a negotiating party at COP climate summits
- Automatically exits related agreements, including the Paris Agreement

#### Effect on climate finance

- U.S. loses influence over funds like the Green Climate Fund
- Easier for the U.S. government to stop climate finance contributions
- Increases uncertainty and costs for U.S. businesses



| Clear your doubts now.



### Impact of leaving the IPCC

- Reduces U.S. role in global climate science assessments
- Limits government-backed participation of U.S. scientists
- Scientific reports will continue, but with less U.S. influence

### Global repercussions

- Weakens trust in shared climate commitments
- Encourages other countries to delay or dilute climate action
- Harms negotiations on large future climate finance targets

### Why this matters now

- World is moving from \$100 billion climate finance goals to much higher targets
- Poor countries already face a major funding gap for climate adaptation
- U.S. exit makes global climate cooperation harder and less credible

[Yemen's separatists: TH Profiles](#)

## International Relations

### Easy Explanation

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Yemen announced a new Constitution on January 3, declaring its intention to create a separate country called the "State of South Arabia." This move showed that the STC was closer than ever to its long-term goal of breaking away from northern Yemen. However, events that followed revealed how fragile its position actually was.

The STC grew out of a southern protest movement that existed even before the Arab Spring. Many people in southern Yemen felt politically and economically marginalised by the northern leadership under former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. One of the key leaders to emerge from this background was Aidarous al-Zubaidi, who gained prominence during the civil war after 2015, especially with military and political backing from the UAE.

With UAE support, al-Zubaidi helped push back Houthi forces in southern regions and was appointed Governor of Aden. But he soon clashed with Yemen's then-President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, especially over control of key institutions like Aden airport. After being removed from his post in 2017, al-Zubaidi formed the STC to formally pursue southern independence.

Over time, the STC unified several armed groups into a single force and managed to seize Aden in 2019. Saudi Arabia intervened diplomatically through the Riyadh Agreement, which brought the STC into Yemen's official government. But disagreements over power-sharing led the STC to declare self-rule again in 2020.

In 2022, after President Hadi stepped down, the STC joined the new Saudi-backed Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), with al-Zubaidi becoming a Vice-President. Even while cooperating internationally against the Houthis, especially during Red Sea tensions, the STC continued pushing for greater autonomy at home.

In late 2025, the STC took its boldest step yet by expanding militarily into oil-rich eastern regions like Hadramout. This gave it control over most of Yemen's oil reserves. However, Saudi Arabia reacted strongly, launching strikes against STC positions and backing forces that quickly reversed these gains. The conflict also exposed growing tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Soon after, the STC's position collapsed. Aden was lost, al-Zubaidi was removed from the Presidential Council, declared a traitor, and reportedly fled to the UAE. While the STC has kept the idea of a separate southern Yemen alive for years, its dependence on external powers and shifting regional politics have made independence increasingly difficult to achieve.

### Key Takeaways

#### Background of the STC

- Emerged from southern Yemeni protests demanding autonomy



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- Rooted in resentment against northern political dominance
- Led by Aidarous al-Zubaidi

### Role of regional powers

- UAE provided military and political support to the STC
- Saudi Arabia initially mediated but later opposed STC expansion
- Saudi-UAE rivalry directly affected STC's fortunes

### Path towards southern autonomy

- Formation of STC in 2017 after al-Zubaidi's dismissal
- Capture of Aden in 2019 strengthened its claim
- Participation in Yemen's unity government did not end separatist aims

### Recent escalation in 2025

- Issued decrees asserting southern authority
- Declared two-state solution as the only answer for Yemen
- Captured oil-rich Hadramout, gaining control of most oil reserves

### Collapse of momentum

- Saudi military intervention reversed STC's territorial gains
- STC leadership weakened and al-Zubaidi sidelined
- Internal authority and external backing both declined

### Overall significance

- Highlights fragmentation within Yemen beyond the Houthi conflict
- Shows limits of separatist movements dependent on foreign support
- Demonstrates how regional geopolitics shape outcomes in civil wars

[How a diamond defect is changing quantum physics: TH Science](#)

Science

### Easy Explanation

When most people think of a diamond, they imagine a perfect, shiny stone. But for physicists, a perfectly flawless diamond is not very interesting. The real excitement begins when the diamond has tiny imperfections.

One such imperfection is called a nitrogen-vacancy (NV) centre. This happens when one carbon atom in the diamond is replaced by a nitrogen atom and a nearby spot is left empty. This tiny defect gives the diamond very special properties.

An NV centre behaves like a single atom locked inside a solid structure. It has a property called "spin," which you can imagine as a tiny magnetic arrow. Because this magnetic arrow is protected by the diamond structure, it is not easily disturbed by external noise. This allows scientists to study it very precisely.

These spins react sensitively to changes in magnetic and electric fields. Because of this, NV centres are already being used as extremely precise sensors, for example to map brain activity or detect very small cracks in materials.

Unlike many quantum systems that need to be cooled to extremely low temperatures, NV centres can work at room temperature. This makes them much more useful for real-world applications like medical scanners or portable devices. Scientists can also read their quantum state using light: when a green laser shines on an NV centre, it emits red light, and the brightness tells researchers what state the spin is in.

Usually, problems arise when many NV centres are packed together. Their spins start interacting with each other in chaotic ways, destroying useful quantum behaviour. But a new study has shown that these interactions can actually be useful.

Researchers packed trillions of NV centres into a diamond and placed it inside a special microwave cavity that traps and amplifies microwaves. When they excited the NV centres, the diamond first released a strong burst of



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microwave radiation. Surprisingly, instead of stopping, the system kept emitting microwaves continuously for a short but significant time.

This continuous emission is called a maser, which is similar to a laser but works with microwaves instead of visible light. The interactions between nearby spins, usually seen as a problem, helped pass energy between NV centres and kept the emission going.

Although this is not yet ready for practical use, the experiment shows a new way to create stable microwave sources. Such systems could be important for future quantum technologies, precise sensors, and even time-keeping devices.

## **Key Takeaways**

### **What is an NV centre**

- A defect in diamond where nitrogen replaces carbon and a nearby atom is missing
- Acts like a single atom trapped inside a solid
- Has a stable quantum “spin”

### **Why NV centres are special**

- Extremely sensitive to weak magnetic and electric fields
- Can work at room temperature
- Quantum state can be read using light

### **Current and potential uses**

- Mapping brain magnetic activity
- Detecting tiny material defects
- Portable medical and sensing devices

### **New scientific breakthrough**

- Trillions of NV centres were packed into a diamond
- Placed inside a microwave cavity
- Produced continuous microwave emission

### **What is a maser**

- Similar to a laser, but emits microwaves
- Requires stable and coherent energy release
- Achieved here using spin-spin interactions

### **Why this matters**

- Turns a known problem (spin interference) into an advantage
- Opens new possibilities for quantum devices
- Useful for precision sensing, frequency standards, and time-keeping

[Aerosols aloft lift, thicken winter fog over North India: IIT-M study- TH Science](#)

Science

## **Easy Explanation**

Winter fog is a common problem in the Indo-Gangetic Plain and often disrupts daily life by reducing visibility for long hours. This fog usually forms close to the ground, especially in polluted air, and tends to last longer when pollution levels are high. Scientists have long wanted to understand how thick these fog layers are, because thicker fog usually means it will persist for more time.

A new study from IIT Madras used 15 years of satellite data to study this problem. The researchers focused on pollution present above the fog layer, not just near the ground. They found that when there is more dust and smoke floating above the fog, the fog layer becomes thicker.



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Interestingly, the bottom of the fog stays close to the ground, but the top of the fog rises higher on polluted days. This makes the overall fog layer thicker. The researchers also found that the tiny water droplets near the top of the fog become slightly larger when pollution above the fog is higher.

To understand why this happens, the team used a weather model to recreate a major fog event from January 2014. The model showed a self-reinforcing process. Pollution provides more tiny particles that act as “seeds” for water vapour to condense into fog droplets. As more droplets form, a small amount of heat is released, which helps the fog mix upwards and grow thicker.

At the same time, a dense fog layer can lose heat efficiently by sending out infrared radiation. This keeps the air near the top of the fog cool and moist, which encourages even more condensation. As a result, pollution and fog strengthen each other, creating a vicious cycle.

The researchers note that some pollutants like soot can also absorb sunlight and warm the air above the fog, which may further affect fog behaviour. However, this effect could not be studied in detail due to lack of enough observations.

### **Key Takeaways**

#### **Why winter fog is severe in North India**

- Forms in polluted air near the ground
- Lasts longer when pollution levels are high
- Reduces visibility and affects daily life and aviation

#### **What the study found**

- Pollution above the fog makes the fog layer thicker
- Fog thickens mainly because its top rises higher
- On polluted days, fog layers were about 17% thicker

#### **Role of pollution particles**

- Aerosols act as seeds for fog droplets
- More particles lead to more droplets forming
- Droplets near the fog top become slightly larger

#### **Self-reinforcing fog cycle**

- More pollution → more fog droplets
- Droplet formation releases heat and helps fog grow upward
- Fog cools efficiently, keeping conditions favourable for more fog

#### **Why this matters**

- Fog and pollution trap each other in a vicious cycle
- Improving air quality can reduce fog severity
- Better pollution control can improve health, transport, and economic activity

12th January 2026

[The weed threat to mustard, and need for new solutions-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### **Easy Explanation**

Mustard is **India's most important indigenous edible oil crop**, grown widely in Rajasthan, Haryana, UP, MP and West Bengal. But it is now facing a **serious underground threat** from a parasitic weed called **Orobanche aegyptiaca** (locally called *margoja*).



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This weed **does not grow like normal weeds**. It **attaches itself to mustard roots below the soil**, steals **water and nutrients**, and weakens the plant. By the time the weed is visible above ground, **most of the crop damage is already done**.

Earlier, Orobanche appeared late in the season and only in light sandy soils. Now, because its **seeds survive up to 20 years in soil** and spread easily, it is emerging **within 40 days** and even in **fertile fields**. Repeated mustard cultivation has created a **huge underground seed bank**, making infestation worse each year.

Normal herbicides like **glyphosate cannot be used**, because they kill **both crop and weed**. Farmers have started shifting away from mustard to wheat and pulses due to losses.

A new solution is **herbicide-resistant mustard hybrids**. These varieties can survive specific herbicides (like **imazapyr/imazapic**), which then kill only the weeds. Some companies claim these hybrids are **non-GM**, while Indian scientists have also developed **GM mustard lines** resistant to multiple herbicides.

This matters because India imports about **₹18 billion worth of edible oil annually**, and mustard is a key crop to reduce this dependence.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why this issue matters

Mustard contributes **over 4 million tonnes** to India's edible oil production.

India imports around **16 million tonnes of edible oil every year**.

Any major threat to mustard directly affects **food security, farmers' income, and import dependence**.

### 2. About Orobanche (Parasitic weed)

A **root parasite** – lives underground and attaches to host roots.

**Steals nutrients, carbon and water** → stunted growth, yellowing, low yields.

Each plant produces **1.5–2 lakh seeds**.

Seeds remain viable for **up to 20 years**.

Damage is **“hidden”** and detected too late.

### 3. Why the problem is worsening

Repeated mustard cropping → **strong seed bank in soil**.





First irrigation after sowing creates conditions ideal for **weed germination**.

Earlier appearance → **more severe yield losses**.

Chemical sprays at safe doses are **ineffective**.

#### 4. Limits of conventional herbicides

Herbicides like **glyphosate, glufosinate, paraquat** are **non-selective**.

They kill both crop and weed.

Hence **cannot be used safely** on normal mustard varieties.

#### 5. New solutions being tried

##### (a) Herbicide-resistant mustard hybrids (non-GM route)

Example: **Pioneer 45S42CL**

Resistant to **imidazolinone herbicides (imazapyr, imazapic)**

Allows farmers to spray herbicide without harming mustard.

##### (b) GM mustard under research

Developed at **Delhi University (Deepak Pental's team)**

Contains genes for resistance to:

**Glyphosate (cp4epsps gene)**

**ALS-inhibiting herbicides**

Aimed at long-term control of Orobanche.

#### 6. Broader implications



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Shows limits of **traditional weed management**.

Raises questions on:

Role of **biotechnology in Indian agriculture**

**GM crop regulation and acceptance**

Balancing **farmer distress, productivity, and ecological safety**.

[What Zehanpora stupas shed light on: Kashmir's rich Buddhist past-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Art and Culture

### Easy Explanation

For decades, villagers in **Zehanpora (Baramulla, North Kashmir)** thought the long stretches of mounds were just natural formations. Recent scientific mapping and archaeological work have now shown that these are **man-made structures**, spread over **about 10 acres**, and **more than 2,000 years old**.

Archaeologists believe the site dates back to the **Kushan period** and likely represents a **large Buddhist complex**, possibly including **three stupas and wooden superstructures**. The discovery gained attention after a **photograph preserved in a French museum archive** matched the layout of the site, confirming its historical significance.

This excavation is important because it:

Confirms that **Buddhism had a deep and widespread presence in Kashmir**, possibly even **before Ashoka**.

Indicates that Kashmir was connected to **ancient trade and cultural routes** linking Taxila, Central Asia and the Indian plains.

Adds strong archaeological backing to what was earlier known mainly from **texts and scattered ruins**.

Overall, Zehanpora sheds new light on **Kashmir's forgotten Buddhist heritage** and its role as a **cultural crossroads** in ancient times.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. About the Zehanpora site

Location: **Zehanpora village, Baramulla district, North Kashmir**

Area: **~10 acres**



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Age: **Over 2,000 years old**

Period: **Kushan era**

Features:

Large man-made mounds

Likely **stupas and monastery-type structures**

Evidence of **wooden superstructures**

Confirmed using:

**Drones, remote sensing, and surface mapping**

## 2. Why the discovery is significant

It is a **major, previously unexplored archaeological site**.

Shows Kashmir was an **important centre of Buddhism**, not a peripheral region.

Strengthens evidence of **Kashmir's role in trans-regional trade and cultural exchange**.

Provides material proof to support **ancient literary sources**.

## 3. Buddhism in Kashmir – historical context

Popular belief: Buddhism entered Kashmir under **Ashoka (Mauryan period)**.

Textual correction:

**Kalhana's Rajatarangini** suggests Buddhism existed in Kashmir **before Ashoka**.

**Mahavamsa** records that Ashoka invited scholars from Kashmir to the Buddhist council at Pataliputra.



| Clear your doubts now.



The Zehanpora site supports the idea of an **early and continuous Buddhist tradition**.

#### 4. Kashmir as a Buddhist landscape

Major Buddhist-linked sites mentioned:

North Kashmir

Kanispora

Ushkur

Zehanpora

Parihaspora

Central Kashmir

Harwan (major Buddhist complex near Srinagar)

South Kashmir

Semthan

Hutmur

Hoinar

Kutbal

This shows Buddhism was spread **across the entire Kashmir valley**.

#### 5. International archival link

A **photograph in a French museum archive** matched the site.

Indicates that **European travellers documented Kashmir's Buddhist remains** during the colonial period.



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Highlights the importance of **foreign archives in reconstructing Indian history**.

## 6. Broader implications

Strengthens Kashmir's identity as a **civilisational meeting point** (India, Central Asia, Silk Route networks).

Useful for:

Cultural heritage preservation

Buddhist studies

Tourism and soft power

Shows the role of **modern technology** (remote sensing, drones) in archaeology.

[Fogged out: How Railways and air lines tackle fog-induced disruptions in winter - The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

Every winter, especially in **north India**, dense **radiation fog** disrupts both **air and rail transport**. Radiation fog forms on clear winter nights when the ground cools rapidly, moisture condenses, and still air traps it near the surface. Increasing **air pollution and smog** have made the problem worse.

In aviation:

Airports shift to **Low Visibility Procedures (LVPs)**. This includes:

**Low Visibility Take-Off (LVTO)**

**ILS CAT IIIB landings**, which allow aircraft to land with visibility as low as **50 metres**.

But not all airports, aircraft, or pilots are certified for this. Even where they are, **safety spacing between flights increases**, reducing runway capacity. This creates **backlogs, delays, diversions, and cancellations**, especially at major hubs like **Delhi**, where disruption spreads across airline networks.

Fog also affects **crew duty limits (FDTL rules)**. If pilots exceed maximum duty hours due to delays, they must be taken off duty, worsening cancellations.

In railways:

Fog severely reduces visibility for loco pilots, causing **slow speeds and massive delays**.

To deal with this, Indian Railways has introduced:



| Clear your doubts now.



**Fog Safety Devices (FSDs)** – GPS-based handheld devices that warn drivers of signals, gates, and landmarks.

**Automatic Train Protection (ATP)** – **Kavach system**, which displays signals inside the cab and can **automatically apply brakes**.

**Modified signalling systems** to limit the number of trains in fog-prone sections.

**Luminous strips** on signals for better visibility.

The advanced **Kavach 4.0** is planned for wider deployment to strengthen fog-time safety.

Overall, technology has **reduced risks**, but cannot fully eliminate **capacity loss and cascading delays** during dense fog.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Type of fog involved

#### Radiation fog

Forms on clear winter nights

Caused by rapid ground cooling + moisture condensation + stagnant air

Intensified by **smog and air pollution**

### 2. Impact on aviation

Airports implement **Low Visibility Procedures (LVPs)**

Key technologies:

**Instrument Landing System (ILS)** – ground-based radio navigation system

**CAT IIIB** – allows landings at ~50 m visibility

Limitations:

Not all airports/aircraft/pilots are certified



| Clear your doubts now.



Increased spacing between flights → **lower runway capacity**

Causes **delays, diversions, cancellations**

Network effect:

Disruptions at major hubs (e.g., Delhi) **cascade across airline routes**

Human factor:

**Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL)** rules can ground crew even without flights

### 3. Impact on railways

Trains may be delayed **10–12 hours or more**

Fog reduces visibility of:

Signals

Level crossings

Trackside warnings

### 4. Technological measures by Indian Railways

(a) Fog Safety Device (FSD)

**GPS-based handheld device**

Gives **audio-visual alerts**

Shows:

Signals

Warning boards





Level crossing gates

Over **25,000 FSDs** deployed, mostly in Northern Railway

(b) Kavach (Automatic Train Protection system)

Displays signal and movement data **inside the locomotive**

Enables safe running **without visual signal spotting**

Automatically **applies brakes** if the pilot fails to act

**Kavach 4.0** planned for large-scale rollout

(c) Other measures

Modified automatic signalling systems

Reduced train density in fog-prone sections

Luminous strips on signalling equipment

## 5. Broader significance

Shows limits of technology in **weather-dependent transport systems**

Highlights importance of:

**Safety-first regulation**

**Infrastructure modernisation**

**Climate-adaptive transport planning**

Relevant to:



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Disaster management

Infrastructure resilience

Transport safety reforms

[Could Trump's credit card rate cap nudge policy change in India?-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

US President Donald Trump has proposed a **temporary cap of 10% on credit card interest rates** for one year, calling current US rates (20–30% or higher) exploitative. Though it still needs approval from Congress and regulators, the announcement has revived debate globally — including in India.

Indian credit card users often pay **much higher interest than Americans**, commonly **36% to 48% per year**, and sometimes even more. There is **no legal cap** on credit card interest in India. A **Supreme Court ruling in late 2024** clarified that banks are legally allowed to charge **over 30%** on credit card dues.

Experts say that while a rate cap could **reduce the debt burden** of cardholders, it could also:

Make banks **restrict credit**, especially for risky borrowers

Lead to **fewer rewards and benefits**

Push some borrowers toward **informal or costlier lenders**

In India, regulators (RBI) have so far preferred **disclosure, risk controls, and consumer awareness** instead of fixing an interest-rate ceiling. Trump's proposal is unlikely to immediately change Indian policy, but it may **trigger wider discussions**.

### Key Takeaways

1. What Trump has proposed (US context)

Cap credit card APRs at **10% for one year**

Objective: **consumer protection**

Requires:

US Congress approval



| Clear your doubts now.



## Regulator cooperation

Similar Bills in the past (Sanders, Hawley, AOC) **failed due to industry resistance**

### 2. Credit card interest: India vs US

**US typical APRs:** ~20–30%

**India typical APRs:** ~36–48% annually

India has **no statutory cap** on credit card interest

**Supreme Court (2024):** Banks can legally charge **above 30%**

### 3. India's regulatory approach

Credit cards regulated by **RBI**

RBI allows banks **freedom to set rates**

Regulatory focus is on:

**Transparency and disclosure**

**Risk management**

**Financial stability**

**Consumer awareness**

Not on strict interest rate ceilings

### 4. Arguments for an interest rate cap

Sharp reduction in **borrowing burden**



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## Relief for **highly indebted cardholders**

Could prevent **debt traps**

### 5. Arguments against a cap

Banks may:

Reduce card issuance

Tighten eligibility

Loss of interest income may mean:

Fewer rewards, cashback, benefits

Risk of shift toward:

**Unregulated or costlier credit sources**

### 6. Rising credit card usage in India

Total credit cards (Nov 2025): **11.5 crore**

Growth:

**7.1% year-on-year**

**0.7% month-on-month**

End-2024: **9.95 crore cards**

Public sector banks leading growth due to:

Cross-selling



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More cautious private bank lending

RBI data shows:

Rising **outstanding debt**

Rising **overdues and delinquencies**

## 7. Why this matters for India

Links to:

**Household debt**

**Consumer protection**

**Financial stability**

**Regulatory philosophy**

Shows contrast between:

**Price controls vs market-based regulation**

[Should the age of consent be lowered?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

India's age of consent is **18 years** under the **POCSO Act, 2012** and the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023**. Any sexual activity involving a person below 18 is legally treated as an offence, **even if the minor says it was consensual**.

The Supreme Court, in **January 2026 (State of UP vs Anurudh)**, acknowledged that POCSO is increasingly being used in cases of **consensual romantic relationships between adolescents**, often filed by families against a partner. The Court asked the government to think about **corrective measures**, reviving the national debate on the age of consent.

Supporters of lowering it to **16 years** argue that:

The law ignores **adolescent autonomy and reality of teenage relationships**.



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Many POCSO cases involve **willing relationships**, not abuse.

It leads to **criminalisation of young people**, not protection.

Other countries allow 16 as the age of consent with safeguards.

Opponents warn that:

Lowering the age would **weaken child protection**.

It may **legitimise exploitation, trafficking and grooming**.

Most abuse happens by **known persons**, where “consent” is often coerced.

A clear 18-year rule creates a **strong, non-negotiable safety barrier**.

The real challenge is to **protect children from abuse** without **criminalising normal adolescent relationships**. Many experts suggest not lowering the age outright, but introducing a “**close-in-age**” (**Romeo-Juliet**) exemption for consensual relationships between adolescents, along with strong safeguards.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Current legal position

Age of consent in India: **18 years**

Laws:

**POCSO Act, 2012** (gender neutral)

**Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 – Section 63**

Any sexual act involving a person below 18 = **offence regardless of consent**

Mandatory reporting under **Section 19, POCSO**



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## 2. Historical evolution

IPC 1860: **10 years**

1891: **12 years**

Later raised to **14**, then **16**

2012 (POCSO) and 2013 amendment: raised to **18**

## 3. Why the debate has intensified

Rising POCSO cases involving **16–18-year-olds**

Studies show:

**NFHS-4:** 39% girls had sexual experience before 18

**Enfold study:** ~24–25% POCSO cases involved consensual relationships

Many victims **refuse to testify** against accused partners

## 4. Arguments for lowering the age / modifying the law

Recognises **sexual autonomy of older adolescents**

Prevents **misuse of POCSO in romantic cases**

Reduces **criminalisation of young people**

International practice:

Many countries keep age of consent at **16**

Use “**close-in-age / Romeo-Juliet**” exemptions





## 5. Arguments against lowering the age

Risk of **weakening child protection**

Abuse often by **family, neighbours, teachers**

“Consent” may hide:

Grooming

Coercion

Power imbalance

Parliamentary and Law Commission stance:

**Standing Committees (2011, 2012):** opposed lowering age

**Law Commission 283rd Report (2023):** lowering would make POCSO a “paper law”

## 6. Judicial trends

Courts increasingly recognise tension between:

**Strict law**

**Social reality**

SC (2024–25):

Reaffirmed **no consensual sex under POCSO**

But in rare cases used **Article 142** to avoid harsh outcomes

Several High Courts have urged:

Recognition of **adolescent romantic relationships**



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## Need for **legislative rethink**

### 7. Core policy dilemma

#### **Adolescent autonomy vs Child protection**

Bright-line rule gives clarity

But blanket criminalisation causes:

Trauma to adolescents

Court overload

Misuse by families

### 8. Emerging middle path

Do **not** lower age outright

Introduce:

**Close-in-age exemptions (16–18 years, 3–4 year gap)**

**Mandatory judicial scrutiny**

Strong punishment where **coercion, grooming, authority, or trafficking** is involved

Parallel focus on:

Comprehensive **sex education**

Adolescent health services

Gender-sensitive policing

[India's maritime policy: how it has evolved and what lies ahead-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

International relations



| Clear your doubts now.



## Easy Explanation

India's geography makes the sea as important as the Himalayas. While invasions came mostly from the land, India's **civilisational expansion happened through the seas** — trade with West Asia, Africa and Southeast Asia, cultural exchanges, and naval power under rulers like the **Cholas and Marathas**.

The book *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime India* shows that India's maritime outlook has moved through three broad phases:

**Historical phase** – India was a major maritime civilisation with strong shipbuilding, navigation and oceanic trade traditions.

**Strategic phase** – After independence, thinkers like **K.M. Panikkar** stressed that control of the Indian Ocean is crucial to India's security and sovereignty.

**Contemporary phase** – India today views the oceans not just as trade routes, but as a **strategic, economic, technological and ecological space**.

In recent decades, India has:

Expanded naval presence

Built strategic partnerships (Australia, Japan, France, ASEAN, island states)

Shifted the Navy's role from a coastal force to a **net security provider**

Linked maritime policy to the **Indo-Pacific vision, Blue Economy, and climate resilience**

The future challenge is to balance:

Competition and cooperation with China

Indo-Pacific strategy recalibration

Maritime security with sustainable economic use of the oceans.

## Key Takeaways

1. Why the maritime domain is central to India

India sits at the **centre of the Indian Ocean**



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Over **90% of India's trade by volume** moves by sea (static GS fact relevance)

Jawaharlal Nehru's warning: Control of the Indian Ocean affects both **India's trade and independence**

Maritime space today includes:

Security

Trade & connectivity

Technology

Climate and ecology

## 2. India's maritime history

Ancient–medieval period:

Strong seafaring traditions

Indo-Arab trade networks

Cholas as major naval power (“Nautical Tigers”)

K.M. Panikkar:

First modern Indian maritime strategist

Argued Indian Ocean is India's strategic lifeline

Key conceptual shift:

Indian Ocean not just a “route” but a **human and economic space**



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### 3. Evolution of India's maritime strategy

Boundary diplomacy:

India peacefully demarcated maritime boundaries with all neighbours **except Pakistan**

Strategic partnerships:

Australia, Japan, France, ASEAN, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, Indonesia

Indo-Pacific framework:

India as a **balancing and stabilising power**

Growing emphasis on:

Multilateralism

Maritime governance

Connectivity corridors

### 4. China factor in maritime policy

Rising **Sino-Indian maritime rivalry**

Concerns over:

BRI-driven port infrastructure

Strategic encirclement

Scholars recommend:

Consultative mechanisms

Rules of engagement at sea



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Avoiding a zero-sum maritime order

## 5. Power projection and security role

2000s turning point:

Anti-piracy operations in Arabian Sea

India becomes **“net security provider”**

Indian Navy's role today:

Sea lane protection

Humanitarian assistance & disaster relief (HADR)

Strategic deterrence

Regional maritime stability

## 6. Indo-Pacific and current recalibration

Indo-Pacific dominated discourse for two decades

Its prominence now challenged by:

Ukraine war

West Asia crisis

Red Sea disruptions

Shifts in US National Security Strategy

India must:



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Refine Indo-Pacific strategy

Balance autonomy with partnerships

## 7. New frontiers of maritime policy

The handbook highlights emerging focus areas:

### **Blue Economy**

Sustainable fisheries

Offshore energy

Marine biotechnology

### **Maritime technology**

Underwater domain awareness (UDA)

Autonomous underwater systems

### **Climate and resilience**

Coastal security

Rising sea levels

Disaster preparedness

### **Governance**

Maritime institutions

Connectivity regulation

Environmental protection



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## 8. Big shift in India's maritime outlook

From:

Coastal defence mindset

To:

Oceanic strategy integrating:

Security

Economy

Technology

Environment

Diplomacy

[Conservation practices in the Global South undermine rights: researchers-The Hindu Science](#)

Environment

### Easy Explanation

A new research paper in *Nature* argues that **many conservation practices in the Global South still follow a colonial mindset** — one that protects wildlife by **excluding, criminalising, and marginalising indigenous and local communities**.

Historically, conservation began during the **European colonial period**, when forests were declared “pristine wilderness” and people who had lived there for generations were **evicted and treated as threats** rather than as custodians. This thinking, the paper says, still shapes conservation today.

The result is:

**Human rights abuses** in protected areas

**Criminalisation of forest-dependent communities**

Conservation campaigns that **value animals over human suffering**

The article recalls cases like:



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A farmer in Nepal who died after torture by forest rangers

Tribal communities prosecuted around Nagarahole

Urban outrage over a tigress's killing while ignoring rural human deaths

The authors argue that **indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs)** are often the **most effective stewards of ecosystems**, and excluding them actually **weakens conservation**.

They propose shifting from “**fortress conservation**” to **inclusive, rights-based conservation**, where nature protection and human dignity go together.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Core argument of the research

Conservation in the Global South still carries a **colonial legacy**

Wildlife protection often comes at the cost of:

Human rights

Indigenous livelihoods

Community autonomy

This process involves “**othering**”:

Creating an “us vs them” narrative

Treating forest communities as intruders, not partners

### 2. What is “othering” in conservation?

Portraying indigenous people as:

Encroachers



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Backward

Threats to nature

Leads to:

Evictions from protected areas

Police and forest violence

Criminal cases for traditional livelihoods

### 3. Colonial roots

Modern conservation began in the **19th century colonial era**

Colonisers:

Created game reserves

Removed local communities

Promoted the idea of “people-free wilderness”

This mindset still influences:

Wildlife laws

Forest governance

Global NGO campaigns

### 4. Indian context

British India:



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Displaced communities for forestry, plantations, and reserves

Established hunting parks for elites

Contemporary India:

Urban elite dominate conservation discourse

Traditional forest use often criminalised

Conflicts in places like:

Nagarahole

Nilgiris

Himalayan Van Gujjar regions

Example:

Tiger Avni case showed **urban-rural divide** in conservation ethics

5. What the paper criticises

“Fortress conservation” model:

Strict protected areas

People seen as enemies

Neoliberal conservation:

Ecotourism for elites

Monetisation of wildlife



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Over-emphasis on animal rights with **little attention to rural human suffering**

## 6. What the paper supports

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs):

Are often **effective environmental stewards**

Have deep ecological knowledge

Conservation should integrate:

Human rights

Community agency

Ecological protection

## 7. Proposed four-step framework

The researchers recommend:

**Engage and support human rights** in conservation

**Ensure agency and decision-making power** for IPLCs

**Challenge dominant conservation narratives** rooted in colonial thinking

**Create new educational spaces** led by and for BIPOC communities

## 8. Indian alternatives already attempted

People-centric conservation movements:

Madhav Gadgil – People's Biodiversity Registers



| Clear your doubts now.



Ashish Kothari – Kalpavriksh

Keystone Foundation – Nilgiris

Shift in language toward “**coexistence**”, but practice still lags behind

## 9. Core policy tension

Wildlife protection vs Human rights

Scientific conservation vs Social justice

Urban environmentalism vs Rural livelihoods

The paper argues that **conservation without social justice is neither ethical nor sustainable.**

[The year gone by, the Quad's year of interregnum-The Hindu Editorial](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The Quad (India, US, Japan, Australia) remains central to Indo-Pacific geopolitics, especially as **US–China rivalry intensifies**. But **2025 was unusual**.

Although President Trump returned to office and signalled that the Quad is a **priority**, the group **failed to hold a leader-level summit** in 2025 (which India was to host). This created speculation about whether the Quad was weakening.

However, the Quad **did not stagnate**. Important initiatives continued:

Coast Guard cooperation (Quad-at-Sea)

Port infrastructure partnership

Malabar naval exercise

Regular Foreign Minister-level meetings

So, 2025 was not collapse, but an “**interregnum**” — a transition year marked by leadership changes in the US and Japan and shifting global crises.



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The key argument of the article is:

The Quad showed **institutional resilience**, but it urgently needs a **leader-level summit** to renew political momentum, strategic clarity, and visibility.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. What is the Quad?

Members: **India, USA, Japan, Australia**

Revived: **2017**

Core objective:

**Free, open, inclusive Indo-Pacific**

**Rules-based order**

Character:

Not a military alliance

Platform for **strategic coordination + regional public goods**

### 2. Why 2025 was different

No **leader-level summit** held in 2025

Leadership transitions:

Trump returned (US)

New Prime Minister in Japan (Oct 2025)

Global disruptions:

Ukraine, Gaza, Red Sea, Iran tensions



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Hence described as:

**“Year of interregnum”** (pause, not decline)

### 3. Signals that Quad remains a priority

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio hosted Quad FM's in:

**January 2025**

**July 2025**

Confirms Quad's continued salience in US Indo-Pacific policy

### 4. Major Quad-linked activities in 2025

#### (a) Quad-at-Sea: Ship Observer Mission (June 2025)

First operationalised

Enhances **Coast Guard cooperation**

Focus on:

Maritime domain awareness

Search & rescue

Law enforcement

#### (b) Ports of the Future Partnership (Mumbai, Oct 2025)

Sustainable, resilient port infrastructure

Supports:



| Clear your doubts now.



Supply chains

Regional connectivity

Blue economy

(c) Malabar Naval Exercise (Guam)

Quad navies participated

Focus:

Interoperability

Maritime security

Deterrence signalling

5. Why leader-level summits matter

Quad has **no treaty, no secretariat**

Leaders' meetings provide:

Political legitimacy

Strategic convergence

Launch of new initiatives

Most Quad innovations since 2021 emerged from **leader summits**

6. Strategic significance

Quad acts as:



| Clear your doubts now.



Balancing platform vis-à-vis China

Provider of regional public goods

Norm-setter in the Indo-Pacific

Its survival despite turbulence shows:

Shift from ad-hoc grouping to **durable strategic mechanism**

## 7. What lies ahead

Diplomatic efforts underway for **early 2026 leader summit**

Quad must:

Recalibrate Indo-Pacific strategy

Integrate security with development, climate, tech, and connectivity

Maintain unity amid US policy shifts

**13th January 2026**

[For second straight time, ISRO sees third-stage issue-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

ISRO's first launch of the year (PSLV-C62) failed because the rocket developed a problem in its **third stage**. This is the **second time in a row** that a PSLV mission has failed at the **same stage** (earlier in May 2025).

The rocket worked normally in the **first and second stages**, which lift the vehicle high above Earth and give it most of its speed. Trouble started in the **third stage**, whose main job is to **rapidly increase speed** so the spacecraft can **stay in orbit instead of falling back to Earth**.

In the earlier failure, ISRO had found that the **pressure inside the engine's combustion chamber dropped unexpectedly**, reducing thrust. When pressure drops, the rocket cannot accelerate enough, and gravity pulls it down instead of letting it orbit. Monday's failure is suspected to be **similar**, though the final report is awaited.

The third stage is especially tricky because at this point:

the rocket is moving almost **horizontally**,



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it must reach extremely **high orbital speeds (26,000–28,000 km/h)**,

even a small loss of thrust can cause total mission failure.

Since PSLV is ISRO's **most reliable and commercially important rocket**, repeated failure raises **serious concerns about reliability, manufacturing quality, and mission assurance**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. About the PSLV

PSLV = **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle**

ISRO's **workhorse rocket** for over 30 years

Major launcher of **Earth-observation and commercial foreign satellites**

#### Four-stage rocket:

1st stage – solid fuel (lift-off)

2nd stage – liquid fuel (builds altitude + speed)

3rd stage – solid fuel (**critical acceleration stage**)

4th stage – liquid fuel (**precise orbital insertion**)

### 2. Why the third stage is crucial

Rocket is already high but **not yet in stable orbit**

Must achieve **very high horizontal speed**

Failure to reach this speed → **cannot maintain orbit** → **falls back to Earth**

Thrust depends on **high pressure inside the combustion chamber**



| Clear your doubts now.



### 3. What likely went wrong

#### **Drop in combustion chamber pressure**

Possibly due to **manufacturing defect or leakage**

Lower pressure → lower thrust → insufficient acceleration

### 4. Why this failure is serious

#### **Second consecutive PSLV failure**

#### **3 of last 6 ISRO missions unsuccessful**

PSLV is a **major revenue earner** (foreign satellite launches)

Raises concerns about:

Quality control

Industrial manufacturing standards

Commercial credibility

### 5. Broader implications

Space missions have **very thin error margins**

Repeated failure in the same stage suggests a **systemic technical or production issue**

However, ISRO has a strong history of **investigation, correction, and recovery**

[The genesis of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, now part of US policy under Trump-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### **Easy Explanation**

The **Monroe Doctrine** dates back to **1823**, when US President **James Monroe** warned European powers not to **re-colonise or interfere** in the Americas. At that time, many Latin American countries had just become independent from Spain, and the US feared that European empires might return.



| Clear your doubts now.



Monroe told the US Congress that:

the **Western Hemisphere was closed to further European colonisation**, and

any European interference would be seen as a **threat to US security**.

In return, the US promised it would **not interfere in European affairs**.

Over the next 200 years, this doctrine did not remain fixed. As US power grew, especially after the **Spanish-American War (1898)**, it was increasingly used not just to block Europe, but to **justify US dominance in Latin America**.

In **1904**, President **Theodore Roosevelt** added a major expansion (the **Roosevelt Corollary**), claiming that the US had the right to **intervene inside Latin American countries** if they were unstable or “misgoverned.” This openly turned the doctrine into a tool of **intervention and imperial control**.

Recently, President **Donald Trump invoked the Monroe Doctrine** after the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Scholars argue that this use is **not about stopping Europe**, but about **direct US intervention**. It represents a further shift: the US no longer even claims an external threat — it asserts power **purely on the basis of its own national interest**.

This shows how a doctrine originally framed as **anti-colonial** has gradually evolved into a **justification for US imperialism** in Latin America.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Origin of the Monroe Doctrine (1823)

Announced by **President James Monroe**

Context: fear of **European recolonisation** of Latin America

Two core principles:

**Non-colonisation:** No new European colonies in the Americas

**Non-interference:** Europe should not interfere in American states

In return: US would **stay out of European conflicts**

### 2. Original character

Presented as **anti-colonial and defensive**



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Sought to protect **newly independent Latin American states**

Also aimed at protecting **US national security**

### 3. Transformation over time

After **1898 (Spanish-American War)**, the US emerged as a global power

The doctrine's meaning became **contested**

Two interpretations developed:

Justification for **US regional hegemony**

Framework for **inter-American cooperation**

### 4. Roosevelt Corollary (1904)

Added by **Theodore Roosevelt**

Asserted US right to **intervene in internal affairs** of Latin American countries

Turned the doctrine into an explicit tool of **interventionism**

Marked shift from **anti-colonialism to imperial policing**

### 5. Venezuela and historical use

In **1895 Venezuela–British Guiana border dispute**, US used the doctrine to push back Britain

US leaders began to see themselves as **“practically sovereign”** in the Western Hemisphere

### 6. Trump's invocation and the “Trump Corollary”

Invoked after action against **Venezuela**



| Clear your doubts now.



No European or external power involved

Signals a further shift:

US intervention **without even the excuse of foreign threat**

Scholars see this as **open assertion of US imperial power**

## 7. Core scholarly critique

Doctrine is **highly ambiguous**

Its vagueness allows **repeated reinterpretation**

Simultaneously carries:

**Anti-colonial language**

**Imperial practice**

[The 'heavy' lure of Venezuela's crude for the US-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

Although the **United States is the world's largest oil producer and a major exporter**, it still has a strong interest in **Venezuelan crude oil**. This is not because the US lacks oil, but because **most US refineries are designed for a different kind of oil than what the US mainly produces today**.

Most Venezuelan oil is **"heavy" and "sour"** — meaning it is **thick, dense, and high in sulphur**. In contrast, most US oil production today (especially shale oil) is **"light" and "sweet"** — thin and low in sulphur.

Many large US refineries, particularly along the **Gulf Coast**, were built decades ago, when the easiest oil available came from **Venezuela, Mexico, and Canada**. These refineries were **expensively engineered to process heavy crude**, not light shale oil. Rebuilding them to suit light oil is **extremely costly and often not economically viable**.

So even though the US exports large quantities of its own light oil, it still needs to **import heavy crude** to keep these complex refineries running efficiently. Venezuela, which holds the **largest proven oil reserves in the world**, is geographically close and naturally suited for this role.

Heavy crude is also **cheaper than light crude**, making it financially attractive for complex refineries. However, most countries with large heavy-oil reserves — **Venezuela, Iran, Russia** — have **strained relations with Washington**, adding a strong **geopolitical dimension** to energy trade.

Thus, US interest in Venezuela is not just political — it is also deeply rooted in **refinery economics, energy infrastructure, and market structure**.



| Clear your doubts now.



## Key Takeaways

### 1. Nature of Venezuelan crude

Mostly **heavy and sour crude**

High viscosity, high sulphur content

More difficult and expensive to refine

Usually **cheaper** than light sweet crude

### 2. Nature of US crude production

Dominated by **light, sweet shale oil**

Easier to refine

Large surplus exported internationally

### 3. The refinery mismatch problem

Many US refineries (especially Gulf Coast) were built in the **20th century**

Designed for **heavy crude from Latin America and Canada**

Shale boom happened only in the **2000s**

Major refinery redesign is **capital-intensive and financially unattractive**

Therefore, US still needs to **import heavy crude**

### 4. Why Venezuela is strategically attractive

Holds **largest proven oil reserves in the world** (300+ billion barrels)

Located close to US refining hubs



| Clear your doubts now.



Supplies exactly the kind of oil US complex refineries are optimized for

Potential for **large, steady, low-cost heavy crude supply**

## 5. Economic logic

Heavy crude is **cheaper feedstock**

Complex refineries become profitable **only if they process heavy crude**

Using expensive light oil in such refineries **distorts economics**

## 6. Geopolitical layer

Major heavy-oil holders: **Venezuela, Iran, Russia**

All have **adversarial relations** with the US

Sanctions on Venezuela earlier pushed its oil towards **China**

China and Russia invested heavily in Venezuela's petroleum sector

## 7. Historical context of US–Venezuela oil ties

Venezuela was a **major US oil supplier till early 2000s**

Hugo Chávez's nationalisation (2007) led US oil companies to exit

Corruption, mismanagement and sanctions damaged Venezuela's oil output

China became Venezuela's main buyer over the last two decades

[Reza Pahlavi: Son of the Shah of Iran, and a divisive figure - The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

## Easy Explanation

Iran has been witnessing **major protests since late December**, triggered by inflation, economic distress, and political repression. Amid this turmoil, **Reza Pahlavi**, son of Iran's last Shah, has tried to re-enter the political spotlight.



| Clear your doubts now.



Reza Pahlavi is the **eldest son of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi**, who was overthrown in the **1979 Islamic Revolution**. Living mostly in the United States, he has long projected himself as a potential leader of the Iranian opposition in exile. Recently, he has given several interviews and claimed that **protesters are chanting his name**.

The Pahlavi dynasty began in **1925**, when Reza Shah Pahlavi seized power after a coup, ending the Qajar dynasty. His son, Mohammad Reza Shah, ruled Iran during the Cold War era.

Although Mohammad Reza Shah introduced **modernisation and social reforms**, his regime was **authoritarian**. The secret police, **SAVAK**, became notorious for torture and repression. Popular discontent, involving both secular and religious groups, finally led to the **1979 revolution**, after which Iran became an **Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini**.

Reza Pahlavi has spent decades abroad trying to unite the opposition, but with **little success**, due to a fragmented opposition and the strong grip of Iran's current institutions.

He is considered **divisive** because of:

his **visit to Israel in 2023**, a country viewed as Iran's enemy,

his **open praise for US leaders**, which many Iranians associate with past foreign interference, especially the **1953 US-backed coup** that removed Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh after he nationalised Iran's oil.

Many analysts argue that Pahlavi's messaging appears aimed more at **Western capitals** than at building a mass base inside Iran.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Background of Reza Pahlavi

Born in Tehran, eldest son of Iran's last Shah

Lives in exile, mainly in the United States

Has repeatedly attempted to lead an **opposition-in-exile movement**

### 2. The Pahlavi dynasty

Founded in **1925** by Reza Shah Pahlavi

Came to power after overthrowing the Qajar dynasty

Iran under the Shah pursued **centralisation and modernisation**





### 3. Mohammad Reza Shah's rule

Promoted modern reforms but ruled **authoritarianly**

**SAVAK** secret police symbolised repression

Grew close to the West, especially the US

### 4. The 1953 turning point

Prime Minister **Mohammad Mossadegh** nationalised oil

Threatened British and US interests

**CIA-backed coup** removed Mossadegh

Deepened Iranian resentment of Western interference

### 5. The 1979 Islamic Revolution

Broad-based protests against the Shah

Shah fled Iran

Iran became an **Islamic Republic** after referendum

Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as Supreme Leader

### 6. Why Reza Pahlavi is divisive today

Seen as linked to a **discredited monarchy**

Accused of relying on **foreign backing**

2023 visit to Israel angered many Iranians





Public praise of US leaders fuels suspicion

## 7. Current relevance

Protests since December have created **political opening**

Pahlavi trying to rebrand as a **national unifier**

Scholars doubt his ability to unite Iran's fractured opposition

[Equality isn't enemy of growth.High inequality erodes social trust-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

Polity

### Easy Explanation

Public debate in India often treats **equality as harmful** — as anti-growth, anti-entrepreneurship, bureaucratic, or driven by resentment. The article argues this framing is **misleading**. Equality is not just morally appealing; it is also **economically and institutionally necessary**.

First, the idea that **poverty reduction matters but inequality does not** is false. When income gains are concentrated at the top, **growth reduces poverty more slowly**. High inequality weakens investment in public goods like **health, education, sanitation, and social protection**, which are essential for people to permanently escape poverty. India's persistence of malnutrition, poor learning outcomes, job insecurity, and stagnant wages despite decades of growth shows the **limits of growth without distribution**.

Second, inequality does not naturally support entrepreneurship. Extreme wealth concentration **narrows who can take risks**. When access to credit, education, and networks depends on inherited wealth, entrepreneurship becomes the preserve of a small elite. More equal societies **broaden the base of entrepreneurs**, reduce the cost of failure, and improve the use of talent. High inequality also pushes talent into **rent-seeking sectors** (lobbying, speculation, regulatory manipulation) instead of productive innovation.

Third, equality does not require heavy bureaucracy. In fact, **high inequality often leads to more discretionary state power** — special subsidies, regulatory favours, selective enforcement, and bailouts for large firms. By contrast, **universal public services** reduce discretion, corruption, and political capture.

Finally, egalitarianism is not about “pulling the rich down.” It is about preventing inequality from **damaging social trust, democracy, and long-term growth**. High inequality makes elites fearful and controlling, increases over-regulation, and weakens democratic citizenship. Equality acts as a **form of social insurance for capitalism**.

The real public concern is not that some people are rich, but that **wealth turns into excessive political and social power**, distorting institutions and hollowing out democracy.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Poverty vs inequality is a false debate

High inequality **reduces the poverty-reducing impact of growth**



| Clear your doubts now.



Concentrated gains → weaker improvement for the poor

Unequal societies underinvest in:

health

education

nutrition

sanitation

social security

Result: growth without durable human development

## 2. Inequality and growth

Equality is often a **precondition for broad-based growth**

Extreme inequality can:

depress mass consumption

weaken investment demand

slow human-capital formation

In modern economies, high inequality is **more likely to impede growth** than support it

## 3. Inequality and entrepreneurship

Extreme inequality:

restricts access to risk-taking



| Clear your doubts now.



concentrates entrepreneurship in elite groups

encourages rent-seeking over innovation

More equal societies:

expand the pool of entrepreneurs

lower entry barriers

reduce catastrophic costs of failure

#### 4. Inequality, state power, and regulation

High inequality often needs:

selective subsidies

regulatory exemptions

bailouts

discretionary governance

Universal public provisioning is:

simpler

less corrupting

less prone to political capture

#### 5. Inequality and social trust

High inequality erodes:



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social cohesion

democratic citizenship

institutional credibility

It produces fear among elites and over-regulation of society

Equality functions as “**social insurance for capitalism**”

## 6. Nature of public resentment

People do not resent wealth itself

They resent the **conversion of wealth into unaccountable power**

Threat: oligarchic shaping of policy and public values

## 7. Core message

Framing equality as “anti-growth” is a red herring

Silencing inequality debates often protects **oligarchy**, not the poor

[BMC elections: the rise of fluid alliances-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Polity

## Easy Explanation

The **Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)** elections are not routine civic polls. They are a **high-stakes political battle** for control of **India’s richest municipal body** (budget over ₹74,000 crore) and are being seen as a **referendum on Maharashtra’s new political order** after years of splits, defections, and realignments.

Mumbai has become the centre of **fluid, confusing alliances**, where former rivals have joined hands, old allies have broken apart, and even partners at the state level are fighting separately in the city.

The most striking development is the **reunion of Uddhav Thackeray’s Shiv Sena (UBT) and Raj Thackeray’s MNS**—bitter rivals for decades—who are now invoking **Marathi identity and Balasaheb Thackeray’s legacy** to counter the **BJP–Shinde Sena Mahayuti**, which currently has a strong organisational edge and several unopposed wins.

At the same time, the **Congress has broken from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA)** and allied with the **Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA)** to mobilise **Dalit and minority voters**, rejecting the Sena-MNS tie-up as divisive.



| Clear your doubts now.



Meanwhile, **Ajit Pawar's NCP** is contesting alone in Mumbai, despite being part of the Mahayuti elsewhere—showing how **local politics has diverged from state-level alliances**.

The election reflects how the **2019 split in the Shiv Sena weakened its long-standing control over the BMC**, allowing the BJP to rise through superior organisation and multi-cornered contests.

Thus, the BMC election is about more than civic governance: it tests whether **Mumbai still emotionally belongs to the Thackerays** or has decisively shifted toward the **BJP–Shinde Sena power structure**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why the BMC election matters

BMC is **India's richest civic body** (₹74,000+ crore budget)

Controls urban infrastructure, contracts, and patronage networks

Outcome will influence **Maharashtra's broader political balance**

### 2. Defining feature: fluid alliances

Former rivals now allies; former allies now opponents

“Everyone vs everyone” pattern

Shows rise of **transactional and tactical politics** in urban India

### 3. Major political blocs

BJP–Shinde Sena (Mahayuti)

Organisationally strongest

Already secured **many unopposed seats**

BJP contesting 137 seats; Shinde Sena 90

Banking on **cadre strength, governance pitch, and post-split consolidation**



| Clear your doubts now.



## Sena (UBT)–MNS

Historic reunion of Uddhav and Raj Thackeray

Campaign built around:

Marathi Manos identity

Balasaheb Thackeray's legacy

Youth mobilisation

Attempt to reclaim lost Sena base

## Congress–VBA

Congress exits MVA in Mumbai

Alliance aimed at:

Dalit consolidation

Minority mobilisation

Criticising Thackeray–MNS tie-up as polarising

## Ajit Pawar's NCP

Contesting alone in BMC

Though aligned with Mahayuti elsewhere

Highlights **local autonomy and alliance instability**

## 4. Structural shift in Mumbai politics

Shiv Sena's **2019 split weakened its BMC dominance**



| Clear your doubts now.



2017 BMC polls already showed:

Decline of Sena's secure majorities

Rise of BJP through multi-cornered contests

BJP's organisational growth now gives it a **systemic advantage**

#### 5. Voter blocs being targeted

Dalits → Congress, VBA

Marathis → Sena (UBT), MNS

Minorities → VBA, Congress

Women → BJP (large number of female candidates)

#### 6. Larger political themes

Decline of stable coalitions

Rise of **identity politics + organisational politics**

Increasing separation between **state-level and municipal alliances**

Fragmentation of opposition space

#### 7. What the election symbolises

Not just civic governance, but a test of:

Thackeray legacy vs BJP machinery

Emotional memory vs political momentum



| Clear your doubts now.



[How Trump is violating international law-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that the **US military action in Venezuela**, including the **capture of President Nicolás Maduro** and the declaration that the US would “run” the country and exploit its oil, amounts to a **grave violation of international law**.

Under the **UN Charter**, no country is allowed to use military force against another country’s **territorial integrity or political independence** unless:

it is acting in **self-defence** after an armed attack (Article 51), or

it has **authorisation from the UN Security Council**.

In this case, Venezuela had **not attacked the US**, and there was **no UN approval**. Therefore, the intervention has **no legal basis**. The justification of fighting “narco-terrorism” is seen as weak, since most US drug deaths are linked to fentanyl (largely from other supply chains), while Venezuela is only a **minor source of cocaine**. The article suggests the **real motive is oil**, as Venezuela holds the **largest proven oil reserves in the world**.

The piece also places this in a wider historical context. During the Cold War, the US and Soviet Union **checked each other’s power**, preventing unilateral military action. Since the **collapse of the USSR in 1991**, the US has increasingly acted without fear of counter-balancing power, engaging in **pre-emptive wars and regime change** (Iraq, Libya, Syria).

The Venezuela action is presented as evidence that the world has entered a phase of **unchecked power politics**, undermining the international legal order. The article concludes that only **China (possibly with Russia)** can emerge as a counter-balance, and that India must strengthen its own strategic and defence capacities in a world where law is being overridden by force.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Core legal violation

Breach of **Article 2(4) of the UN Charter**

Prohibits use of force against another state’s sovereignty

No **UN Security Council authorisation**

No valid claim of **self-defence (Article 51)**





## 2. Why the justification is weak

“Narco-terrorism” does not meet the legal threshold for war

Venezuela is only a **modest source of cocaine** to the US

Trump’s own statements highlight **oil and corporate interests**

## 3. Principle of sovereignty

Forcible capture of a sitting head of state

Declaration of intent to “run” another country

Direct assault on **political independence of a UN member state**

## 4. Breakdown of balance of power

Cold War: bipolar system (US–USSR) restrained unilateral action

Post-1991: rise of **unipolarity**

Expansion of **pre-emptive war and regime-change interventions**

## 5. Historical parallels cited

1971 Bangladesh War: Soviet naval counter-deployment checked US pressure

1973 Yom Kippur War: Soviet threat restrained Israeli action

These show how balance of power once **prevented extreme escalation**

## 6. Emerging global order

China is the **only realistic counter-weight** to the US





Possible but fragile **Russia–China alignment**

Growing trend towards **power politics over rule-based order**

## 7. Implications for India

US actions often **ignore India's security sensitivities**

India cannot yet act as a counter-balancer

Needs to strengthen its:

military-industrial base

strategic autonomy

defence preparedness

[If data is the new oil, what does that make data centres?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that while “**dumping**” in **global trade is often dismissed as a red herring**, it becomes a real concern when **governments push policies that benefit a few commercial players even if they harm the public interest**. The author warns that India could face a similar risk with the rapid push to become a **global data-centre hub**.

Data centres are not inherently bad. Well-designed ones can support the digital economy. But **bad data centres** can:

consume enormous amounts of **electricity**,

draw heavily on **scarce water**,

strain local **grids and infrastructure**,

and offer **few long-term jobs** in return.

The danger is that **resource-intensive, poorly designed facilities** that face resistance in richer countries may shift to places like India, where **zoning laws are weak, environmental enforcement is patchy, and governments offer aggressive incentives**.



| Clear your doubts now.



Examples from the **US and Chile** show growing public opposition to data centres over **water stress, secrecy, and inadequate environmental reviews**. When approvals become difficult in such countries, companies may look to the **Global South**, where costs can be externalised more easily.

India is particularly vulnerable because:

it is actively courting data centres,

multiple States offer **subsidies and fast-track clearances**,

many regions are already **water-stressed**, and

regulators have documented gaps in **environmental monitoring and enforcement**.

The article stresses that the answer is **not to ban data centres**, but to ensure **early community engagement, strict environmental conditions, transparency, and proper cost-sharing**, so India attracts **good data centres, not dumped ones**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. What “data dumping” means in this context

Shifting **resource-intensive, low-benefit data centres** to countries with:

weak zoning

poor environmental enforcement

high development aspirations

Externalising environmental and infrastructure costs onto the public

### 2. Good vs bad data centres

Good data centres

Located where **power and water availability are sustainable**

Pay for **grid upgrades**



| Clear your doubts now.



High server utilisation

Use **efficient and climate-appropriate cooling**

Minimise potable water use

Measure and disclose performance data

Bad data centres

Located in **water-stressed or ecologically fragile zones**

Inefficient cooling and airflow

Heavy reliance on backup power

Appear efficient on paper but wasteful in practice

3. Why India is high-risk

Rapid projected growth in capacity this decade

Strong government incentives and expedited approvals

Many cities already **water-scarce**

Power grids already under strain

Documented regulatory weaknesses (CAG, Supreme Court, NGT)

4. Global trend

Rising community resistance in the **US and Latin America**

Objections over:



| Clear your doubts now.



water consumption

secrecy in approvals

inadequate environmental review

Pushback is forcing developers to seek **easier jurisdictions**

## 5. Core governance challenge

Data centres are:

capital-intensive

low on permanent employment

Benefits accrue to companies, while **costs fall on local communities**

## 6. Warning signs for citizens and policymakers

Excessive incentives:

land and power subsidies, diluted environmental rules, fast-tracked clearances

Hidden infrastructure costs:

unclear who pays for grid upgrades, households cross-subsidising industry

Poor siting:

projects in arid or seasonally stressed basins without binding water limits

Lack of transparency:

secrecy clauses, shell companies, inaccessible environmental filings

## 7. Why India still has safeguards

Data centres need serious grid and fibre infrastructure

India has active courts and tribunals



| Clear your doubts now.



Strong civil society and media scrutiny

## 8. Core message

India should compete for **efficient, locally beneficial data centres**, not become a **dumping ground for environmentally costly digital infrastructure**.

[China's reactor pushes density limit; widens path to power-The Hindu Science](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

Nuclear fusion reactors try to produce energy the same way the Sun does — by forcing **hydrogen atoms to fuse** at extremely high temperatures, releasing vast energy. For this to work on Earth, three things must be very high together:

**temperature, plasma density, and confinement time** (called the *triple product*).

Scientists have long faced a major obstacle called the **Greenwald density limit**. If the plasma inside a tokamak (donut-shaped fusion reactor) becomes too dense, it usually becomes unstable and collapses, damaging the reactor. This meant engineers assumed density could not go beyond this limit.

China's **EAST fusion reactor** has now **broken this barrier**. Researchers achieved **stable plasma at up to 65% higher density than the Greenwald limit**, without collapse. This was done by carefully managing how the plasma interacts with the reactor walls and cooling the region where plasma touches the walls (the **divertor**).

They used:

**microwave heating (ECRH)** at startup,

**extra deuterium gas**, and

**lithium-coated tungsten walls** to reduce harmful impurities.

Cooling the divertor reduced the release of tungsten atoms into the plasma. Fewer impurities meant less heat loss and more stability. This pushed the plasma into what theory calls a "**density-free regime**", where the old density limit no longer applies.

This does not mean fusion power is solved. The experiment lasted only seconds and at low power. But it shows that **future reactors may operate at much higher fuel densities**, making it easier to achieve **self-sustaining fusion (ignition)**.

This breakthrough is important for **ITER**, the large international fusion project in France (in which India is a partner), because higher density could allow fusion at **lower temperatures or shorter confinement times**.

### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



### 1. What is the core breakthrough?

Stable plasma achieved at **1.3 to 1.65 times the Greenwald limit**

Achieved on China's **EAST tokamak**

Entered the “**density-free regime**”

### 2. Why density matters in fusion

Fusion success depends on the **triple product**:

density × temperature × confinement time

Higher density → more collisions → higher fusion probability

Previously thought density was strictly capped

### 3. What is the Greenwald limit?

An empirical density limit in tokamak reactors

Beyond it, plasma usually becomes unstable and collapses

Linked to reactor size and plasma current

### 4. How scientists overcame the limit

**Electron Cyclotron Resonance Heating (ECRH)** at startup

Higher initial **deuterium gas pressure**

**Lithium-conditioned tungsten walls**

Cooler **divertor region**, reducing wall damage and impurities





## 5. Role of plasma-wall interaction

Hot plasma knocks wall atoms (tungsten) into plasma

Tungsten radiates heat, destabilising plasma

Cooling divertor → fewer impurities → higher stable density

## 6. Supporting theory

Based on **Plasma-Wall Self-Organisation (PWSO) theory (2021)**

Predicts two regimes:

density-limit regime

density-free regime (newly demonstrated)

## 7. Why this matters for fusion power

Higher density could allow:

lower operating temperatures

shorter confinement times

more practical reactor designs

Direct relevance for **ITER** and future power plants

## 8. What it does NOT mean

Fusion is **not yet commercially viable**

Experiments were:





low power

short duration

Extreme densities still pose new instability risks

## 9. Strategic relevance

Strengthens China's position in **fusion research**

Important for **global fusion roadmap**

Significant for India due to its **ITER investment**

**14th January 2026**

['Need to see which way Venezuela military goes'-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

This is an interview of Yashvardhan Kumar Sinha (former Indian Ambassador to Venezuela) after the unexpected capture of President Nicolas Maduro by US forces.

The US operation was swift and surprisingly easy, suggesting either inside help or military neutrality.

Though Maduro is gone, his system is still intact.

Vice-President Delcy Rodriguez has become interim president, but key Maduro loyalists (interior and defence ministers) remain in power.

The US claims it is "running Venezuela", but in reality no one clearly controls the country.

Everything now depends on which way the Venezuelan military goes.

On the economy:

Venezuela's oil sector collapsed due to nationalisation, loss of foreign companies, brain drain, lack of technology, mismanagement, and US sanctions.

Its oil is heavy and costly to refine, so revival will be slow even if US companies return.

On India:

India once imported Venezuelan oil and ONGC Videsh had fields there.

After sanctions, ties weakened.

India's response is very cautious, reflecting multi-alignment and hedging, given the importance of US relations.

### Key Takeaways

#### Political and Strategic

Maduro's capture represents unilateral US intervention without multilateral sanction.

There is a power vacuum: an interim government exists, but real authority is uncertain.

Military loyalty is the decisive factor.



| Clear your doubts now.



## Democracy and Stability

The 2024 opposition victory has not translated into power.  
There is a possibility of delayed elections and prolonged instability.  
This raises concerns over sovereignty and regime-change politics.

## Oil and Economy

The collapse was due to nationalisation without capability, exit of US firms, brain drain, infrastructure decay, and sanctions.

Recovery will need time, technology, and massive investment.  
Venezuelan crude is heavy, sour oil, making it costly to process.

## Global Order

Such actions weaken the rules-based international order.  
They may embolden other powers to act unilaterally.

## India Angle

Earlier, India had oil imports, ONGC Videsh projects, and pharma and IT presence.  
Now there is reduced engagement and cautious diplomacy.  
This reflects India's strategy of multi-alignment and strategic hedging.

[India's assertion, Pakistan's cession: How China took Shaksgam Valley-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

## Easy Explanation

Shaksgam Valley (also called the Trans-Karakoram Tract) lies **north of the Siachen Glacier** in the Hunza-Gilgit region, which is under **Pakistan's illegal occupation**.

India has **always claimed Shaksgam as its territory**. Pakistan controlled it till 1963.

In **1963**, Pakistan signed a **boundary agreement with China** and **illegally ceded Shaksgam Valley to China**.

India **never accepted this agreement** and considers it **illegal and invalid**, since Pakistan had **no sovereignty** over the area to transfer it.

Recently, China reaffirmed its claim based on this 1963 agreement.

India responded officially that:

Shaksgam Valley is **Indian territory**,

the China-Pakistan boundary agreement is **illegal**, and

projects like **CPEC are unacceptable** because they pass through **Indian territory under illegal Pakistani occupation**.



| Clear your doubts now.



Historically, China had already asserted itself in the region by building a road through **Aksai Chin in the 1950s**, over Indian claims.

Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru strongly objected in Parliament (1963)**, saying China was **interfering in Indo-Pak relations** and trying to exploit the Kashmir issue for its **expansionist policy**.

In **2022**, the **Government of India stated** that:

China illegally occupies **about 38,000 sq km** of Indian territory in Ladakh, and

Pakistan illegally ceded **5,180 sq km in Shaksgam Valley** to China.

Shaksgam has gained renewed importance due to its **proximity to CPEC**, which connects **Gwadar (Pakistan)** to **Kashgar (China)**, giving China strategic access and an alternative trade-energy route.

## Key Takeaways

### Geography and Strategic Location

Located **north of Siachen Glacier** in the Trans-Karakoram region.

Extremely harsh terrain, difficult habitation.

Strategically sensitive due to proximity to **Ladakh, Aksai Chin, and CPEC corridor**.

### Legal and Sovereignty Issues

India has **never recognised the 1963 China-Pakistan boundary agreement**.

Pakistan had **no legal authority** to cede Shaksgam to China.

India considers China's presence there **illegal occupation**.

### Historical Context

China built infrastructure in the wider region in the **1950s (Aksai Chin road)**.

1963 agreement came soon after the **1962 India-China war**.



| Clear your doubts now.



Nehru accused China of **interfering in Indo-Pak relations and pursuing expansionism**.

### China-Pakistan Nexus

Shaksgam reflects the deepening **China-Pakistan strategic partnership**.

The agreement undermined ongoing **India-Pakistan talks on Kashmir**.

### CPEC Angle

Shaksgam's relevance has increased because of **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**.

India opposes CPEC as it passes through **PoK and illegally occupied areas**.

Gives China a **strategic land route linking Xinjiang to Gwadar port**.

### Current Indian Position

Shaksgam Valley is **Indian territory**.

The 1963 agreement is **illegal and void**.

Chinese infrastructure activity there is **unacceptable**.

[In a volatile world, Germany and India move towards a stable Indo-Europe-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

### International relations

#### Easy Explanation

This article analyses **German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's visit to India** and explains why it is strategically important in today's unstable global order.

The visit is not just about improving bilateral ties. It is about shaping a new strategic space called **"Indo-Europe"** — a closer political, economic and security linkage between **India and Europe**.

The background is global disruption:

The US is becoming more unilateral and inward-looking.



| Clear your doubts now.



China is more assertive globally.

Europe is being forced to rethink its dependence on **Russian energy, Chinese supply chains, and American security guarantees.**

India faces **US trade pressure, Chinese military challenges, and overdependence on Russian weapons.**

India and Germany want to **expand strategic space** by working more closely with each other and embedding this cooperation in a wider **India–Europe framework.**

The talks produced **concrete outcomes:**

Renewed push to finalise the **EU–India Free Trade Agreement.**

Decision to develop a **joint defence industrial roadmap.**

Germany is undergoing **major rearmament** after the Ukraine war and doubts about long-term US security commitment.

It is now the **world's fourth-largest defence spender.**

Defence spending could rise to **3.5% of GDP (~\$200 billion annually).**

For India, partnership with a rearming Germany offers an opportunity for **defence modernisation through co-development and co-production.**

The article links this moment to history:

During World War I, Germany supported Indian revolutionaries against British rule.

The 1915 Kabul expedition showed India's long tradition of **seeking external partners to expand strategic space.**

Today's version is different but follows the same logic:

Germany is taking more responsibility for Europe's security.

India is hedging beyond the US by deepening ties with **Europe, especially Germany.**



| Clear your doubts now.



The Indo-Europe idea is:

Not an alliance.

Not a replacement for NATO or Quad.

A **supplementary strategic geometry** to strengthen multipolar stability.

It aims to combine:

**India's market size and demography**

With **Europe's industrial and technological strength.**

Examples include:

India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor

Cooperation on critical minerals and green hydrogen

Maritime cooperation in the western Indian Ocean.

The goal is **resilience** — the ability to hedge against volatility without losing strategic autonomy.

## Key Takeaways

### Global Context

Declining certainty of US leadership and rising Chinese assertiveness are reshaping global alignments.

Europe is reassessing dependence on Russia, China and the US.

India faces simultaneous pressure from the US and strategic rivalry with China.

### Indo-Europe Concept

A new strategic geography linking **India and Europe.**



| Clear your doubts now.



Not a military alliance, but a framework for **economic, technological and security cooperation**.

Intended to support a **multipolar and more resilient world order**.

### India–Germany محور

Germany emerging as a **major military and industrial power** due to rearmament.

India seeking partners beyond Russia and the US for **defence modernisation**.

Focus on **co-development and co-production** in defence.

### Trade and Economic Dimension

Push to conclude **EU–India Free Trade Agreement**.

Indo-Europe seeks to integrate:

India's large market

Europe's advanced manufacturing and technology.

### Strategic Significance

Helps hedge against a tightening **China–Russia continental alignment**.

Expands India's strategic options beyond traditional partners.

Supports burden-sharing in Eurasia without undermining US partnerships.

### Historical Continuity

India has long used external partnerships to expand strategic space.

Today's Indo-Europe reflects a modern form of that strategy.

### India's Foreign Policy Signal



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Shift from dependence-based partnerships to **diversified strategic autonomy**.

Strategic autonomy redefined as **productive diversification**, not equidistance.

[Is the government seeking phones' source code?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Science and technology

## Easy Explanation

### What is the issue?

Reports said the Indian government was considering asking **smartphone companies to share their source code with third-party testing agencies**.

Another reported proposal was that companies would need to **inform the government before pushing major software updates**.

The government has **officially denied** that it is demanding disclosure of source code, and says discussions are still exploratory.

### What is source code?

Source code is the **core set of instructions** that makes software work.

It defines **how an operating system and apps function internally**.

Even Android phones, though partly open source, contain **large proprietary modifications** by each company.

Companies protect source code because it is:

**Commercially valuable intellectual property**, and

**Sensitive from a security perspective**.

### Why is disclosure controversial?

Normally, companies **do not share full source code with governments**, except in very limited defence-related cases.

If full source code becomes accessible, attackers can **more easily find vulnerabilities**, increasing the risk of:



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hacking

data breaches

cyber-espionage

This debate comes soon after public backlash against a DoT order to **pre-install the Sanchar Saathi app**, which many feared could enable surveillance or create security risks.

### Is the government formally asking for source code?

In 2023, the National Centre for Communication Security (under DoT) issued draft standards called **ITSARs** under the **Mandatory Testing and Certification of Telecommunication Equipment (MTCTE)** framework.

These standards applied to “consumer equipment”, including smartphones.

After the **Telecommunications Act, 2023**, smartphone oversight shifted mainly to **MeitY** (IT Ministry), since phones already undergo **BIS certification**.

MeitY says it is keeping an “**open mind**” and no final rules have been framed.

### Why is there civil society pushback?

The **Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF)** argues that:

Draft standards are **still publicly available**.

Discussions are happening **without transparency**.

There has been **no open public consultation**.

IFF demands release of:

meeting records

draft proposals

and wider stakeholder consultations.



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## Key Takeaways

### Technology and Governance

Source code is the **foundation of digital systems** and central to both **innovation and cybersecurity**.

Mandatory disclosure would represent a **major expansion of state oversight over private technology platforms**.

### Cybersecurity Implications

Full code access increases risk of:

vulnerability discovery

cyberattacks

system compromise

Modern security relies on **controlled disclosure, audits, and patching**, not blanket exposure.

### Legal and Regulatory Context

Debate is linked to:

ITSAR standards

MTCTE framework

Telecommunications Act, 2023

Shift of smartphone oversight from DoT to MeitY.

### Economic and Innovation Concerns

Companies fear loss of:

trade secrets



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competitive advantage

trust of global users.

Could discourage **foreign investment and manufacturing**.

### Civil Liberties and Transparency

Raises concerns about:

potential surveillance

opaque regulatory processes

lack of public consultation.

### Governance Challenge

Core policy tension:

national security and regulatory oversight

versus digital rights, cybersecurity, and innovation freedom.

[Are India's small towns being increasingly urbanised?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

India usually talks about urbanisation through megacities, but the real change is happening in **small towns (population below 1 lakh)**, which form the vast majority of India's nearly 9,000 towns.

The rise of small towns is linked to **changes in capitalism**.

From the 1970s–1990s, big cities dominated industrial growth and job creation.

Today, metros face **overcrowding, high land prices, infrastructure breakdown and high living costs**.



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Because large cities have become too expensive and congested, **capital and labour are shifting to small towns.**

Small towns are becoming:

logistics and warehouse hubs

agro-processing centres

construction and service economies

consumption markets.

They absorb:

migrant workers pushed out of metros

rural youth with shrinking agricultural opportunities.

These towns are not “semi-urban”. They are **fully urban spaces**, shaped by **cheap land, insecure labour, weak regulation and low political attention.**

However, this is not inclusive urban growth. It is often the **urbanisation of rural poverty:**

informal work dominates

platform and gig work without security is expanding

women are concentrated in low-paid home-based labour.

New power structures are emerging:

real estate agents

contractors

micro-finance actors



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political intermediaries.

Government urban policy remains **metro-centric**.

Schemes like AMRUT mainly serve big cities.

Small towns depend on fragmented projects.

As a result:

tanker water economies grow

groundwater is over-extracted

ecological stress increases

local governments remain weak and underfunded.

The article argues for a shift:

recognise small towns as India's main urban future

design town-specific planning

strengthen municipalities

regulate capital and platform economies.

## Key Takeaways

### Pattern of Urbanisation

India's urbanisation is shifting from **metro-centric growth to dispersed small-town expansion**.

Small towns are becoming key sites of **labour absorption and capital circulation**.

### Economic Drivers



| Clear your doubts now.



Over-accumulation in metros: high land prices, infrastructure overload, rising costs.

Small towns offer cheaper land, weaker regulation and flexible labour.

### Nature of Growth

Growth is largely **informal, insecure and unequal**.

Represents the **urbanisation of rural distress**, not planned development.

### Governance Deficit

Urban missions remain biased towards large cities.

Small-town municipalities lack funds, staff and planning capacity.

Outsourced planning weakens local participation.

### Environmental Risks

Fragmented infrastructure leads to:

groundwater depletion

tanker economies

rising ecological stress.

### Policy Implications

Small towns must be treated as the **core of India's urban future**.

Need integrated town-level planning (housing, livelihoods, transport, ecology).

Municipal empowerment is essential.

Platform economies and digital capital must be regulated to protect labour and local interests.



| Clear your doubts now.



## [What an edible insects stall revealed about acceptance. 'normal' food-The Hindu Science](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

The article is based on observations at an **edible insects stall in Bengaluru**, which explored why many people feel discomfort about eating insects, even before thinking about taste or nutrition.

Most visitors believed insect-eating was a **foreign practice**, even though **entomophagy (eating insects)** has long existed in India, especially in parts of **Northeast India** like Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, where insects are traditionally eaten and sold in local markets.

At the stall, people tried foods like **cricket cookies, chilli garlic crickets, and fried silkworms**.

Nearly **60% were first-time tasters**.

Many reactions shifted from hesitation to surprise once taste replaced imagination.

Taste played a major role in changing perception.

Visitors compared insects to familiar foods (beans, eggs), making them seem less “alien.”

Insects are often promoted globally as a **sustainable protein source** because:

They are rich in **protein, vitamins, and micronutrients**.

Around **80% of an insect's body is edible**, compared to about 55% in poultry.

They need **far less land, water, and feed** than conventional livestock.

Despite this, urban populations are **moving away from insect-based foods**.

Urbanisation has created **cultural distance** from traditional food practices.

Insects are often labelled as “rural”, “backward”, or “non-modern”.

The hesitation is not just about food, but about **class, aspiration, and ideas of progress**.



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Even visitors who supported sustainability expressed doubts:

Can insects be filling?

Can they replace existing food groups?

Should the communities that developed these practices get recognition?

The stall functioned as a **low-pressure public space** where people could experiment without judgement.

Offering insects in **processed forms (cookies)** reduced psychological resistance.

Researchers highlighted the importance of **scientific insect rearing**, not wild harvesting, to ensure:

sustainability

safety

consistent nutrition.

## Key Takeaways

### Food Culture and Society

What is considered “normal food” is shaped by **culture, class, and urban aspiration**, not just nutrition.

Urbanisation has distanced people from **traditional and indigenous food practices**.

### Entomophagy in India

Insect consumption has long existed in several Indian regions, especially the **Northeast**.

Its invisibility in cities reflects **cultural hierarchy, not absence**.

### Nutrition and Sustainability

Insects are:



| Clear your doubts now.



high in protein and micronutrients

highly resource-efficient

low in environmental footprint.

They are frequently cited as a **future food** in the context of climate stress and food insecurity.

### Urban Disconnect

Urban attitudes often frame insect-eating as “backward” or “rural”.

Sustainability is easier to discuss than to practise.

### Innovation and Public Engagement

Public stalls and exhibitions can:

challenge food stereotypes

normalise alternative proteins

allow curiosity before rejection.

### Policy and Research Dimension

Scaling edible insects requires:

regulated rearing systems

food safety standards

ethical acknowledgement of traditional knowledge.

15th january 2026

[US Options in Iran could unsettle region,hurt India-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation



| Clear your doubts now.



The United States and Iran are once again on a collision course after mass protests in Iran and a harsh government crackdown. While both sides say diplomacy is still open, the situation is volatile, and the US has signalled it is prepared to use force if talks fail. India is closely watching these developments because any escalation in West Asia directly affects its diplomacy, energy security, and millions of Indians living in the region.

The **first option** for the US is diplomacy. Iran has long experience in negotiating its way out of crises, as seen earlier during sanctions and the nuclear deal talks. The Trump administration has also publicly said diplomacy is its preferred route — but with a warning that “all options remain on the table.”

If diplomacy collapses, the US could move to **calibrated military strikes**. These could target Iranian military bases, Revolutionary Guards’ infrastructure, command centres, or weapons depots. The US has already built up a strong naval presence in the region, positioning warships in the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea. More extreme actions could include targeting senior Iranian leaders, as happened in 2020 when Qassem Soleimani was killed.

However, **air strikes alone are unlikely to bring regime change**. Experts point out that it is nearly impossible to overthrow a government purely through bombing from the air. That leads to the next and most dangerous option: **ground intervention**. Putting American troops inside Iran would risk a long, bloody war, strong Iranian resistance, and domestic backlash in the US, especially given memories of Iraq and Afghanistan.

For **India**, any US–Iran conflict is deeply worrying. Diplomatically, it would be hard for India to openly support US military action. Economically, even though India now imports little oil from Iran, it still depends heavily on West Asia for energy. Strategically, if Iran retaliates against US bases in Saudi Arabia, UAE, or Qatar, the entire region could destabilise.

With **8–9 million Indians living in West Asia** and nearly **60% of India’s energy needs** coming from the region, war would threaten evacuations, remittances, oil supplies, and inflation at home. This is why India is urging its citizens to leave Iran and monitoring developments with extreme caution.

## Key Takeaways

### Current situation

Protests in Iran and violent crackdowns have escalated tensions

The US says diplomacy is open, but military options are on the table

India has advised its citizens to leave Iran

### US Option 1: Diplomacy

Iran has a history of negotiating under pressure

The Trump administration publicly prefers talks, for now

### US Option 2: Limited military strikes

Possible targets: military bases, Revolutionary Guards, weapons depots



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US naval build-up in the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea shows aggressive readiness

Leadership strikes are also a possibility

### **Limits of air power**

Air and naval attacks alone are unlikely to topple the Iranian regime

Regime change “from the sky” is considered unrealistic

### **US Option 3: Ground intervention**

Would mean American troops inside Iran

High risk of casualties, long war, and domestic backlash in the US

Could spiral into a full-scale regional conflict

### **Why this matters to India**

India would struggle to diplomatically back US military action

Risk of regional instability if Iran targets US bases in Gulf countries

### **India's core concerns**

8–9 million Indians live and work in West Asia

About 60% of India's energy comes from the region

Any war could disrupt oil supplies, raise prices, and fuel inflation

### **Bottom line**

Diplomacy is the least damaging option

Military escalation would destabilise West Asia



| Clear your doubts now.



India has the most to lose from a prolonged US–Iran conflict

[Graft law:Shielding honest officers vs unmasking the corruptThe Indian Express The Explained Page](#)

Governance

### Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court has delivered a **split verdict** on the constitutional validity of **Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA)** — a provision that requires **prior government approval before police can even begin an enquiry or investigation** against a public servant for decisions taken in official duty.

The case highlights a deep and long-standing dilemma: **how to protect honest officers from harassment while ensuring corrupt officials are not shielded.**

One judge, **Justice K V Viswanathan**, upheld Section 17A but **reinterpreted it**. He agreed that honest officers need protection so that fear of investigation does not cause “policy paralysis”. But he also admitted that letting the government decide whether its own officials should be investigated is flawed. To fix this, he ruled that all such requests must be **screened by an independent body — the Lokpal (and Lokayuktas in states)**. If the Lokpal finds a prima facie case, the government must grant approval. In his view, this keeps the protection but removes political control.

The other judge, **Justice B V Nagarathna**, struck the law down completely. She held that Section 17A **protects the corrupt more than the honest**, blocks even preliminary enquiry, and creates a clear **conflict of interest** because the government decides whether it can be investigated. She also said the law is **discriminatory**, since it protects decision-makers but not lower-level officials. She rejected the idea of inserting the Lokpal into the law, calling it **judicial legislation**.

Because the judges disagreed, the case will now go before a **larger bench**.

At the heart of the disagreement lies how to read past rulings. Earlier Supreme Court judgments had struck down similar provisions that blocked investigations into senior officials. Justice Nagarathna said Section 17A is the same old protection in a new form. Justice Viswanathan said those rulings mainly objected to executive control and rank-based discrimination — both of which, he believes, can be cured through independent Lokpal screening.

### Key Takeaways

#### What Section 17A does

Requires **prior government approval** before enquiring into public servants

Applies to decisions and recommendations made in official duty

#### Core constitutional tension

Protect honest officers from harassment



| Clear your doubts now.



Ensure corrupt officials are not shielded

### Justice K V Viswanathan's view

Protection is necessary to prevent **policy paralysis**

Government control is problematic

Solution: **independent screening by Lokpal/Lokayukta**

Section 17A upheld, but only with this interpretation

### Justice B V Nagarathna's view

Section 17A **blocks investigations at the very start**

Government cannot be an impartial approver

Creates **conflict of interest** and **political control**

Discriminates between types of officials

Declared **unconstitutional in full**

### Major legal disagreement

Whether courts can insert Lokpal into the law

Whether prior approval itself fatally weakens anti-corruption enforcement

### Past judgments in focus

Earlier rulings struck down similar protections for officials

Nagarathna: Section 17A is "old wine in a new bottle"

Viswanathan: defects can be cured through independence



| Clear your doubts now.



## What happens next

Case referred to the **Chief Justice**

A **larger Constitution bench** will decide

## Why this matters

Will shape the future of **anti-corruption investigations**

Determines the balance between **bureaucratic protection and accountability**

[Trump's tariffs reduced China's surplus with US — and made it the world's headache-The Indian Express The Explained Page](#)

Economy

## Easy Explanation

China's latest data shows its **trade surplus hit a record \$1.2 trillion in 2025**, even after years of US attempts to curb it through tariffs. This is striking because US Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden both justified tough trade action by pointing to China's massive surplus.

At first glance, Trump's tariffs seem to have worked. **China's surplus with the US fell sharply** — from about \$327 billion in late 2024 to about \$257 billion in late 2025. Chinese exports to the US dropped, and US imports from China became costlier. In that narrow sense, tariffs reduced America's bilateral trade gap with China.

But globally, the opposite happened. **China's total trade surplus with the world actually rose by over 20% in one year**. Chinese goods that could not enter the US in the same volume were redirected to **other markets across Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America**. In effect, Trump's tariffs **did not shrink China's dominance — they spread it**. The US problem became **the world's problem**.

This matters because such massive and persistent surpluses create **three big risks**.

First, a **financial risk**: countries cannot endlessly import more than they export without running down foreign exchange reserves.

Second, a **macroeconomic risk**: if China produces everything cheaply, industries and jobs in other countries weaken.

Third, a **political risk**: economic distress fuels resentment against globalisation, trade and migration.

Critics argue China's advantage is not purely market-driven. It allegedly rests on **suppressed wages, an undervalued currency, heavy state subsidies, and overproduction**, allowing firms to sell cheaply and dominate markets.

The article ends by posing the dilemma facing countries like **India**. Despite trade barriers, China's surplus with India continues to rise. Should India **open up further** to benefit consumers with cheaper goods, or **restrict imports** to protect domestic industry and jobs? There is no easy answer — it is a classic trade-off between **consumer benefit, industrial survival, and economic security**.

## Key Takeaways

**China's surplus at a record**



| Clear your doubts now.



China's global trade surplus reached **\$1.2 trillion in 2025**

Has grown nearly tenfold since the mid-2000s

### Did Trump's tariffs work?

**Yes (bilaterally):** China's surplus with the US fell sharply

**No (globally):** China's total surplus **rose by over 20%**

### What actually happened

Chinese exports to the US declined

Chinese goods were redirected to **other global markets**

China's worldwide trade dominance increased

### Why this is a problem

**Financial strain:** countries cannot sustain endless deficits

**Economic strain:** domestic industries and jobs suffer

**Political strain:** fuels backlash against globalisation

### Why China is winning

Low wages and weak currency

Heavy state subsidies

Overcapacity and ability to sell at very low prices

### Global imbalance issue

Even within single countries, regional dominance creates unrest



| Clear your doubts now.



At the world level, China's dominance magnifies this problem

### India's dilemma

China's surplus with India keeps rising

Choice between:

cheaper imports for consumers

protecting domestic industry and employment

### Bottom line

US tariffs reduced America's deficit with China

But they **shifted China's surplus to the rest of the world**

Managing China's trade dominance is now a **global challenge**, not just a US one

[Why Himachal's first satellite mountain township is being opposed by residents-The Indian Express The Explained](#)  
[Page](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

The Himachal Pradesh government has revived plans to build its **first planned satellite mountain township** at **Jathiya Devi**, about 14 km from Shimla, to reduce pressure on the capital and create a new economic and residential hub. The project, to be executed by **HIMUDA**, was first approved in 2014 and is now moving into the land acquisition stage through a **Social Impact Assessment (SIA)**.

The proposed township will cover **about 249 hectares across multiple villages**, with housing, commercial zones, non-polluting industries, green spaces, riverfront development, smart transport, and disaster-resilient planning. Authorities project benefits such as **jobs, better infrastructure, education, healthcare access, and planned urban growth**.

However, the plan has triggered **strong resistance from local residents**. Eight villages under Gram Panchayat Bagi passed a resolution **opposing any land acquisition**. Villagers fear **displacement, loss of fertile agricultural land, destruction of ancestral homes and temples, and livelihood insecurity**.

A major concern is **compensation**. Many landholdings are jointly owned, meaning payouts may be fragmented and insufficient. Residents also point out that **earlier land acquired for the project remains unused**, which has deepened mistrust.

The SIA itself acknowledges that the project could affect **hundreds of families**, disrupt livelihoods, and require removal of houses, schools, shops, canals and even temples.



| Clear your doubts now.



HIMUDA has tried to reassure locals, saying **no land will be taken forcibly**, houses may be excluded, and a “middle path” will be explored. But whether this township moves ahead will depend on how convincingly the government resolves **land, livelihood, trust and environmental concerns**.

## Key Takeaways

### What is the project

Himachal's **first satellite mountain township** at Jathiya Devi

Conceived in **2014**, now revived by HIMUDA

Aimed at easing pressure on Shimla and creating a new urban hub

### What is planned

About **249 hectares** across 8–9 villages

Housing (HIG, MIG, LIG, EWS), commercial and light industrial zones

Green areas, river development, smart transport, helipad, eco-planning

Phase I: **895 housing units** over 84 hectares

### Who will be affected

**386 households** directly impacted

**158 households** face livelihood disruption

Loss of common lands, farms, houses, temples, schools, shops

### Why locals are opposing

Fear of **displacement and loss of fertile agricultural land**

Threat to **ancestral homes and religious sites**

**Mistrust** due to earlier unused acquired land



| Clear your doubts now.



Anxiety over **fragmented and inadequate compensation**

### Compensation issue

Land is often **jointly owned**, reducing individual payouts

Villagers demand **clarity and assurance** before any acquisition

### What the SIA admits

Possible **displacement, asset loss, livelihood impacts**

But projects **jobs, infrastructure, social upliftment and sustainability**

### HIMUDA's stand

Claims **no forced acquisition**

Houses and fertile land may be excluded

A "**middle path**" is being explored

### What lies ahead

Project still uncertain

Will depend on handling of **local resistance, compensation, and environmental safeguards**

### Core conflict

**Planned urban development vs protection of rural livelihoods and land rights**

[Sergio Gor's arrival signals that a reset of India-US ties is within reach-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

Sergio Gor's arrival as the new **US Ambassador to India** marks a shift in how Washington wants to handle relations with New Delhi. At just 38 and a close confidant of **President Donald Trump**, Gor represents a **deal-making, transactional style of diplomacy** rather than the traditional emphasis on shared values. His biggest asset is **direct access to Trump**, which gives India a rare backchannel at a time when ties are under serious strain.



| Clear your doubts now.



India–US relations are currently weighed down by **severe trade frictions**. Punitive US tariffs — now as high as **50%** — have sharply hit Indian exports, making India less competitive than countries like Vietnam or Indonesia. Disputes over market access and India’s continued oil purchases from Russia have further complicated the partnership. Gor’s main challenge is to **defuse this tariff war** without appearing to dilute Trump’s “America First” agenda.

His first day brought a quick positive signal: he announced **India’s inclusion in Pax Silica**, a new US-led technology and AI supply-chain partnership from which India had initially been excluded. This corrected a diplomatic slight and reaffirmed India’s importance in the global tech and AI race.

Three potential breakthroughs could define Gor’s success. First, **ending or reducing punitive tariffs** through a comprehensive trade deal. Second, **reviving the Quad Summit in India** and securing a Trump visit, which would restore strategic momentum. Third, reshaping economic ties so the US treats India not as a trade offender but as a **core partner in building alternatives to China-centric supply chains**. Only after this could sensitive shifts — such as reducing Russian oil imports in favour of US energy — become politically feasible for India.

There are irritants too. Washington’s **recent warmth towards Pakistan**, including Trump’s overt praise for Pakistan’s army chief and reports of US interest in Pakistani ports and minerals, has unsettled New Delhi. Gor’s additional role as a regional envoy could help manage these tensions — or complicate them.

Overall, Gor’s appointment signals that **a reset is possible**, but only if he can move beyond rhetoric and **architect real deals** — especially on trade and strategic cooperation.

## Key Takeaways

### A new style of diplomacy

Sergio Gor represents a **transactional, deal-first approach**

His biggest advantage: **direct access to President Trump**

### State of India–US relations

Ties strained by **50% punitive tariffs**

Indian exports to the US have fallen sharply

Disputes over market access and Russian oil imports persist

### Immediate positive signal

India included as a **full member of Pax Silica**

Restores India’s place in US technology and AI supply-chain plans

### Three major opportunities



| Clear your doubts now.



A **comprehensive trade deal** to reduce tariffs

### Revival of the Quad Summit in India

A possible **Trump visit** to reset strategic ties

### Strategic importance

US could recast India as a **pillar of non-China supply chains**

Would strengthen cooperation on defence, tech, and critical minerals

### Energy dimension

With a trade deal, India could more easily shift some energy imports from **Russia to the US**

### Complication: Pakistan

US warming towards Pakistan has caused concern in India

Gor's regional role could either ease or deepen this unease

### Bottom line

Gor's arrival signals a **chance for a major reset**

Success depends on **ending the trade war and restoring high-level strategic momentum**

[Kashi & the Tamil Sangamam: A celebration of unity, a cultural confluence-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

Art and Culture

### Easy Explanation

The article reflects on the **Kashi–Tamil Sangamam**, a cultural initiative meant to strengthen bonds between **Tamil Nadu and Kashi (Varanasi)** and, more broadly, between different regions of India. It presents the Sangamam as a modern expression of an ancient Indian tradition of **confluence (sangam)** — where diverse cultures meet, exchange ideas, and deepen unity while preserving their uniqueness.

Kashi is portrayed as a civilisational centre that has attracted seekers, scholars, and saints for thousands of years, and one that has long-standing links with Tamil culture — through spiritual geography (Kashi–Rameswaram), institutions, and figures like **Kumaraguruparar Swamikal** and **Subramania Bharati**.



| Clear your doubts now.



Since its launch in **2022**, the Kashi–Tamil Sangamam has evolved each year: bringing scholars, students, artisans, farmers, and professionals together; using technology to overcome language barriers; focusing on Indian knowledge systems; and, in 2025, promoting “**Tamil Karkalam**” (**Learn Tamil**). Events included translations of classical Tamil texts, cultural programmes, academic discussions, exhibitions, and a symbolic **Tenkasi-to-Kashi expedition** highlighting cultural unity.

A major emphasis is on **youth participation**, people-to-people contact, and hospitality extended by local communities. The initiative is presented not as a one-time festival, but as a **living platform for national integration**, aligned with the idea of “**Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat**”. The conclusion links the Sangamam with India’s seasonal festivals, underlining how shared traditions continue to nurture unity and harmony.

## Key Takeaways

### Purpose of Kashi–Tamil Sangamam

Platform to strengthen cultural unity between Tamil Nadu and Kashi

Celebrates India’s diversity within a shared civilisational ethos

### Why Kashi matters

Ancient centre of spirituality, learning, and cultural exchange

Deep historical links with Tamil culture and saints

### Evolution of the Sangamam

Started in 2022, expanded in scale and themes each year

2023: greater use of technology and wider participation

2024: focus on Indian knowledge systems

2025: theme of **learning Tamil (Tamil Karkalam)**

### Major activities

Cultural performances, exhibitions, and academic discussions

Translation of *Tholkappiyam* into Indian and foreign languages

Sage Agastya Vehicle Expedition from Tenkasi to Kashi



| Clear your doubts now.



Outreach activities like health, eye, and digital literacy camps

### Youth and people-to-people connect

Strong participation of young people

Encourages pride in heritage, creativity, and cultural exchange

### Role of institutions and communities

Special trains by Indian Railways

Hospitality by local families and administration in Uttar Pradesh

### Broader significance

Strengthens national integration beyond politics

Builds emotional and cultural bridges between regions

### Overall message

The Sangamam embodies “**Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat**”

Cultural exchange, festivals, and shared traditions are powerful tools for long-term national unity

[What is the Malayalam Language Bill, 2025?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Governance

### Easy Explanation

The **Malayalam Language Bill, 2025** was passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly in October 2025 and is now awaiting the Governor’s assent. The Bill seeks to **formally make Malayalam the official language of Kerala** and expand its use across government work, education, courts, public communication and the digital space.

A major provision is that **Malayalam will become the compulsory first language in all government and aided schools up to Class 10**. The Bill also proposes that laws be introduced in Malayalam, court judgments be translated in a phased manner, and that special institutional support be created — including a **Malayalam Language Development Directorate** and IT tools to promote Malayalam in the digital domain.

The Bill was brought after an earlier 2015 Malayalam language law failed to get Presidential assent because it conflicted with central laws and minority rights. The new Bill claims to correct those defects.



| Clear your doubts now.



However, the **Karnataka government has strongly opposed the Bill**, calling it unconstitutional. Its main concern is that making Malayalam the compulsory first language could **harm the Kannada-speaking linguistic minority**, especially in **Kasaragod district**, where many students currently study Kannada as their first language.

Kerala has responded that the Bill **protects linguistic minorities**, allowing them to use their mother tongues (Kannada, Tamil, Tulu, Konkani) for official communication in notified areas, and says it is fully aligned with the Constitution and the Official Languages Act.

The controversy now centres on whether the Bill's safeguards are sufficient — or whether compulsory Malayalam in schools will still **weaken minority languages in border regions**.

## Key Takeaways

### What is the Malayalam Language Bill, 2025?

A law to **formally declare Malayalam as Kerala's official language**

Extends its use to **government, courts, education, public communication and IT**

Awaiting the **Governor's assent**

## Main provisions

Malayalam to be **compulsory first language in government and aided schools up to Class 10**

Bills and ordinances to be **introduced in Malayalam**

**Phased translation** of court judgments

Creation of a **Malayalam Language Development Department & Directorate**

Promotion of Malayalam in the **digital and open-source ecosystem**

## Why was a new Bill needed?

A similar **2015 Bill failed to get Presidential assent**

It conflicted with:

Official Languages Act, 1963

Minority language protections



| Clear your doubts now.



Three-language formula

Right to Education Act

The 2025 Bill claims to **remove these defects**

### Why Karnataka opposes it

Calls it “**unconstitutional**”

Fears damage to **Kannada-speaking minority in Kasaragod**

Concern that **Kannada may lose first-language status in schools**

Points to decline in Kannada-medium schools

Wants **explicit exemption** for Kannada-speaking areas

### What Kerala says

Bill includes **special protections for linguistic minorities**

Minorities can use their **mother tongue for official communication**

Clause 7 provides **non-obstante safeguards**

Claims alignment with **Articles 346 & 347** and central law

### Current status

Bill passed by Kerala Assembly

**Opposition from Karnataka escalated to Governor/President level**

Future depends on **Governor's decision and possible constitutional scrutiny**

### Core issue



| Clear your doubts now.



## Promotion of Malayalam vs protection of linguistic minority rights

### [What is futuristic marine and space biotechnology?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Science and technology

#### Easy Explanation

**Futuristic marine and space biotechnology** means using two of Earth's most extreme and underexplored frontiers — the **deep oceans and outer space** — to develop new biological knowledge, materials, and manufacturing processes.

**Marine biotechnology** studies marine microbes, algae and organisms that survive in high pressure, salinity and low light. These can yield **new medicines, enzymes, biomaterials, food ingredients and biofuels**.

**Space biotechnology** studies how life behaves in **microgravity and radiation**. This helps develop systems for **space food, human health, life-support recycling, and biological manufacturing** for long-duration missions.

India needs these technologies because it has a **huge coastline and marine biodiversity**, but still imports many marine products. At the same time, India's expanding space ambitions require **biological systems that can function beyond Earth**.

At present, India's marine biotech output is still small, and space biotech is mostly driven by **ISRO with limited private participation**. Countries like the **US, EU and China** are far ahead, investing heavily in marine bioprospecting and space-based life science.

If India invests early and systematically, marine and space biotechnology can become **strategic growth engines**, helping India lead in future **biomanufacturing, sustainable materials, and space life sciences**.

#### Key Takeaways

What is futuristic marine and space biotechnology?

Marine biotechnology uses ocean organisms (microbes, algae, deep-sea life) to develop medicines, enzymes, biomaterials, food ingredients and bioenergy.

Space biotechnology studies life under microgravity and radiation to support space farming, human health, drug research and closed-loop life-support systems.

Why does India need them?

India has a long coastline and vast Exclusive Economic Zone, but its marine biotech potential is underutilised.

These technologies can create new sources of food, fuels and biomaterials while reducing pressure on land and freshwater.



| Clear your doubts now.



Space biotechnology is essential for India's long-term human spaceflight and deep-space ambitions.

Together, they can make India a leader in advanced biomanufacturing.

Where does India stand today?

Seaweed and marine biomass production is still limited; India imports many marine-derived industrial products.

Initiatives like the Blue Economy mission, Deep Ocean Mission and BioE3 are pushing marine biomanufacturing.

ISRO runs microgravity biology experiments, but private sector participation remains low.

What are other countries doing?

The EU funds large marine bioprospecting and algae-based biomaterials programmes.

China has rapidly expanded seaweed farming and marine bioprocessing.

The US leads in space biotechnology through ISS-based research on microbes, medicine and life-support systems.

What should be done next?

India needs a dedicated national roadmap with clear targets and timelines.

Public funding, private investment and integrated research infrastructure must be expanded.

Early action can secure long-term strategic and technological advantage.

Core issue

Whether India can move fast enough to convert marine and space ecosystems into leadership in futuristic biotechnology.

**16th January 2026**

[The message in India's late entry to US-led groupings-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations



| Clear your doubts now.



## Easy Explanation

The article explains why India was added late to “Pax Silica”, a new US-led strategic grouping focused on semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and critical minerals.

Earlier too, India had entered the US-led Minerals Security Partnership one year after its launch. A similar delay happened with Pax Silica, where India was not in the first list and was brought in about a month later. This sends a subtle message in diplomacy.

Pax Silica is designed to reduce dependence on China by building secure and trusted supply chains for critical minerals, chips, and advanced technologies. The countries chosen initially all had clear strengths, such as advanced manufacturing, control over key chip-making machines, rich critical mineral reserves, strong logistics hubs, or leading innovation ecosystems.

India was initially left out because it is seen as lacking cutting-edge technologies and major control over critical mineral resources. Its later inclusion is being viewed as a goodwill gesture by the incoming US ambassador, but it also highlights that global strategic groupings are driven more by real capabilities than political goodwill.

The main message for India is that to be a first-choice strategic partner, it must develop strong technological, manufacturing, and resource-based advantages.

## Key Takeaways

### What is Pax Silica

Pax Silica is a US-led strategic initiative aimed at building secure supply chains in critical minerals, semiconductors, energy inputs, and AI-related technologies. It seeks to counter China’s dominance, prevent coercive dependencies, and build trusted technology ecosystems.

### Why Pax Silica matters

It covers the entire high-tech value chain, from minerals and chips to data centres and digital infrastructure. Countries that control these inputs will be able to shape global technology rules, standards, and access.

### Why India was not in the first list

India is not seen as a major holder of critical minerals and does not yet possess strong cutting-edge chip or AI manufacturing capabilities. Other members brought very specific strengths such as chip technology, mineral reserves, logistics control, and innovation hubs.

### Message for India

Strategic partnerships today are based on what countries can contribute. India must be viewed as a serious technology producer, manufacturing base, and innovation hub, not only as a geopolitical partner.

### Opportunities for India

India can attract US and allied investment, integrate into non-China supply chains, and support its own goals in semiconductors, AI, and critical minerals.

### Risks for India

Deeper involvement may expose India to Chinese economic pressure and will highlight domestic capability gaps in technology and resources.



| Clear your doubts now.



## Strategic lesson

In the emerging global order, power will lie with those who control critical minerals, advanced manufacturing, and core technologies. Pax Silica shows where future leverage will be located.

[Behind change in Karnataka law, Coorg's unique land record system-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## Polity

### Easy Explanation

The Karnataka government has amended its land revenue law to modernise a very old and unique land record system in the Coorg (Kodagu) region.

In Kodagu, many lands are held under the **Jamma Bane system**, which dates back to the time of the **Kodava kings and the British**. These lands were originally granted to families for military service. Over generations, the land continued within families, but the **official land records still carried only the name of the original grantee (pattedar)**.

Even after 40–50 years and multiple inheritances, names were not properly updated. Because of this, present-day owners often **did not have clear legal ownership documents**, making it difficult to sell land, register property, or take bank loans.

The Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964 did not properly recognise the **joint-family and hereditary nature** of Jamma Bane lands. This led to confusion, disputes over succession, and problems in mutation (updating ownership records).

To solve this, the state passed the **Karnataka Land Revenue (Second Amendment) Act, 2025**. It gives legal power to revenue officials in Kodagu to **correct and update land records**, so that the names of actual holders, joint family members, and current owners are properly recorded, in line with the law followed in the rest of Karnataka.

The goal is to **bring Kodagu's land records into the modern legal framework**, reduce disputes, and give people clear ownership rights.

### Key Takeaways

#### What are Jamma Bane lands

- “Jamma” means hereditary
- A unique land tenure system found only in Kodagu district
- Lands were granted between 1600 and 1800 by Coorg rulers and the British
- Given in return for military service
- Include paddy fields and forested highlands, many later converted into coffee estates

#### What was the problem

- Land records continued in the name of original grantees for generations
- Joint family ownership was not clearly recorded
- No clear entries for inheritance, survivorship, and alienation
- Difficulties in mutation, registration, sale, and bank loans
- Frequent disputes over succession and ownership

#### Why the amendment was needed

- Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964 lacked specific provisions for Jamma Bane lands
- Old Kodagu practices were inconsistent with state land law
- No statutory recognition of the special nature of these holdings
- Need to protect rights of all joint family members



| Clear your doubts now.



## What the 2025 amendment does

- Empowers tahsildars and revenue officials in Kodagu to correct land records
- Allows recording of current owners, joint holders, occupants, mortgagees, landlords, and tenants
- Brings Kodagu land records in conformity with the Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964
- Ensures consistency with land administration in the rest of the state

## Why this matters

- Modernises colonial-era land records
- Provides legal clarity and ownership security
- Reduces disputes over inheritance and succession
- Helps landowners access formal credit and property markets
- Integrates customary land systems with modern governance

[Most road accidents occur in known zones, solutions lie in focused efforts-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

## Easy Explanation

A joint report by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and SaveLIFE Foundation has studied the **100 districts with the highest road accident fatalities** in India during 2023–24.

The most important finding is that **most road deaths are happening in known locations** — specific road stretches, corridors, and crash-prone spots. This means fatalities are **predictable and preventable**.

The report shows that **59% of deaths did not involve any traffic violation**, pointing to **poor road engineering and design** as a major cause. More than half of deaths occurred between **6 pm and 12 am**, highlighting risks related to visibility, fatigue, and weak enforcement.

India continues to rank **first in the world in road accident deaths**. In just these 100 districts, over **89,000 people died in two years**, accounting for more than **one-fourth of all road deaths** in the country.

The study found that a large share of fatalities happened on **critical corridors and crash-prone sites**, mostly due to **head-on collisions, rear-end crashes, and pedestrian accidents**. Common engineering failures included **damaged crash barriers, faded road markings, poor lighting, and unsafe roadside structures**.

The report stresses that **no new schemes are needed**. What is required is **focused use of existing funds**, targeted engineering fixes, stronger enforcement, and better emergency medical response.

The core message is that India can significantly reduce road deaths by **concentrating resources on identified high-risk zones** and fixing known systemic weaknesses.

## Key Takeaways

### Scale of the crisis

- India ranks first globally in road accident fatalities
- 89,085 deaths in top 100 districts during 2023–24
- These districts account for over 25% of total national road deaths
- Around 3.5 lakh deaths occurred nationwide in two years

### Where most deaths are happening

- 42% of fatalities on critical corridors
- 58% of fatalities at identified crash-prone locations
- Around 54% of deaths occurred on just 18 major target corridors
- Most accidents concentrated on specific, known road stretches



| Clear your doubts now.



### When deaths are occurring

- 53% of fatalities happened between 6 pm and 12 am
- Indicates higher risks due to low visibility, fatigue, and weak monitoring

### Type of crashes causing most deaths

- 72% fatalities from head-on collisions, rear-end crashes, and pedestrian accidents

### Role of road engineering

- 59% of fatalities involved no traffic violation
- Major causes include damaged crash barriers, faded markings, unsafe roadside structures, poor signage, and inadequate lighting
- Poor DPRs and weak civil engineering identified as key contributors

### State-wise concentration

- Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of high-fatality districts
- Followed by Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Rajasthan

### Emergency response gaps

- Only 18.8% victims used 108 ambulances
- 57% depended on private ambulances
- Many victims were not hospitalised in time

### Case example: Nashik Rural

- Highest fatalities among all districts
- 50 critical locations accounted for 26% of deaths
- Majority deaths due to head-on, rear-end, and pedestrian crashes

### What the report recommends

- Corridor-wise Road Safety Surveys by NHAI and state PWDs
- Site-specific engineering corrections under IRC and MoRTH guidelines
- Strengthening police stations for focused enforcement
- Auditing and expanding 108 ambulance coverage
- Aligning existing budgets toward engineering, enforcement, and trauma care

### Core policy message

- No new schemes required
- Focus must be on targeted interventions, better coordination, and sustained leadership
- Road safety depends on systems, not slogans

[In Gujarat, India's 1st state-funded lab to study most lethal pathogens-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

India's first state-funded **Bio-Safety Level-4 (BSL-4) laboratory** is being set up in **Gandhinagar, Gujarat**. Union Home Minister Amit Shah laid its foundation stone, calling it a major step toward strengthening **India's health security and biotechnology capacity**.

A BSL-4 lab represents the **highest level of biological containment**. Such facilities are used to study the **world's most dangerous and life-threatening pathogens**, which are highly infectious and usually have **no proven vaccines or treatments**. These include viruses such as **Ebola, Nipah, Marburg, Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever, and Kyasanur Forest Disease**.

The Gujarat facility will be only the **second civilian BSL-4 lab in India** (after the National Institute of Virology, Pune) and the **first fully funded and controlled by a State government**. It will also have animal biosafety laboratories, allowing research on **zoonotic diseases** that spread from animals to humans.



| Clear your doubts now.



The lab will help India in **real-time outbreak response, vaccine and drug development, and advanced research**, and will be built to **strict international safety standards**. It has also been declared a **national facility**, meaning scientists across India will be able to use it.

Overall, this project strengthens India's preparedness for **future pandemics, biosecurity threats, and emerging infectious diseases**.

## Key Takeaways

### What is a BSL-4 facility

- Highest level of biological containment
- Used to study the most lethal and highly infectious pathogens
- Designed for viruses with high fatality rates and limited or no treatment
- Supports research on vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics, and outbreak response

### Why the Gujarat lab is important

- India's first state-funded BSL-4 laboratory
- Second civilian BSL-4 lab in the country after NIV Pune
- Built and operated under the Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre
- Declared a national facility with guidance from expert institutions

### Pathogens to be studied

- Ebola virus
- Nipah virus
- Marburg virus
- Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever virus
- Kyasanur Forest Disease virus
- Other highly dangerous human and zoonotic pathogens

### Infrastructure and features

- Cost: about Rs 362 crore
- Area: around 11,000 square metres
- Will include BSL-4, BSL-3, BSL-2 labs
- Will also include ABSL-4 and ABSL-3 animal laboratories
- Built according to stringent international biosafety standards

### Why India needs such labs

- To respond rapidly to deadly disease outbreaks
- To strengthen pandemic preparedness
- To boost indigenous vaccine and drug research
- To handle zoonotic disease threats
- To reduce dependence on foreign high-containmentment facilities

### India's current biosafety ecosystem

- Only one civilian BSL-4 lab operational earlier (NIV Pune)
- DRDO set up a BSL-4 lab in Gwalior in 2024
- India is expanding a national network of BSL-2 and BSL-3 labs
- Globally, around 69 BSL-4 labs are operational or under development

### Strategic significance

- Strengthens health security and bio-defence
- Enhances India's role in global disease surveillance
- Supports "One Health" approach linking human and animal health
- Positions India better for future pandemics



| Clear your doubts now.



International relations

## Easy Explanation

The article argues that in a year of global economic uncertainty, India must **speed up a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the European Union.**

The global backdrop is unfavourable. The US economy, though showing short-term growth, is built on fragile foundations such as AI-driven investment bubbles, high consumer inequality, and Trump's tariff-heavy policies, which risk inflation, debt stress, and demand slowdown. China's economy is even more worrying, with slowing long-term growth, a real estate crisis, ageing population, and weakening consumption. Its export growth is also unstable, driven by trade diversion that the US and others are beginning to block.

In this situation, **traditional global trade engines are weakening.** For India, this means future trade growth from the US and China will be limited, except in some services. Therefore, India must focus on **regional trade agreements**, especially with the **EU and the UK.**

The EU is already **India's fourth-largest trading partner** and a major source of foreign direct investment. Germany, as the EU's economic leader, is playing a central role in reviving India-EU trade talks. The new momentum also opens space to negotiate **movement of skilled professionals (Mode 4)**, technology cooperation, and deeper investment ties.

The article's core message is that a comprehensive **India-EU FTA combining goods, services, skilled mobility, and investment** could become a key growth driver for India in an unstable global economy.

## Key Takeaways

### Global economic context

- US growth driven by consumption and AI investment, but structurally weak
- Risks from Trump's tariff strategy, inflation, and rising government debt
- China facing long-term slowdown, real estate crisis, and ageing population
- Global demand outlook weakening, making traditional trade routes uncertain

### Why global trade prospects are limited

- US demand may contract due to tariffs and debt stress
- China's export surge based on trade diversion, now facing barriers
- Developing countries imposing higher tariffs on Chinese goods
- Overall environment unfavourable for broad-based global trade growth

### Why India must look toward the EU

- EU is India's fourth-largest export market
- EU increasingly reassessing partnerships amid tensions with the US
- EU seeking skilled labour and reliable economic partners
- Regional trade agreements become more important than global trade flows

### Role of Germany

- Germany dominates EU trade and industrial capacity
- India-Germany cooperation may act as a bridge to a full India-EU FTA
- Germany strong in advanced manufacturing, technology, and infrastructure

### Importance of Mode 4 (movement of professionals)

- EU facing skilled labour shortages
- Germany's Skilled Immigration Act already supports Indian professionals





- Mode 4 could become a major negotiating pillar in the India-EU FTA
- Services trade could become as important as goods trade

### FDI and technology dimension

- EU cumulative FDI in India around \$120 billion by 2024
- FDI is a major long-term source of technology transfer
- Trade and FDI are complementary, not substitutes
- Electronics, infrastructure, and high technology are priority areas

### Strategic value of an India-EU FTA

- Reduces dependence on US and China-centric trade
- Strengthens India's integration with advanced economies
- Supports manufacturing, services exports, and technology inflows
- Enhances resilience in a fragmented global economy

### Bottomline of the article

- India's rush to sign FTAs must now deliver concrete economic outcomes
- A comprehensive India-EU agreement covering goods, services, skilled mobility, and investment is urgently needed
- Accelerating the India-EU FTA could define India's trade strategy in an unpredictable global year

17th January 2026

[A US attack on Iran may be more show than substance-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that a possible **US attack on Iran is more about signalling and pressure than about actually overthrowing the Iranian regime.**

Although President Trump has made **contradictory statements**—sometimes talking about negotiations, sometimes threatening force—the US is **not well-placed for a full military conflict** with Iran right now. Its military assets are stretched, regional allies are cautious, and there is **no clear US plan** for what comes after an attack.

Iran, meanwhile, is following a **dual strategy**:

showing it is **ready for war**,

while keeping **diplomatic channels open**, mainly because it badly needs **sanctions relief** to deal with its economic crisis.

The ongoing protests inside Iran are **not strong or unified enough** to guarantee regime change, and foreign military intervention may actually **strengthen nationalism** instead of weakening the regime.

Overall, the article suggests that any US strike, if it happens, would likely be **limited and symbolic**, not aimed at real regime change.

### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## 1. US threats are inconsistent and constrained

Trump's statements oscillate between **support for protests, talks, and military action**.

The US currently lacks **ideal military readiness** for a major Iran operation.

Regional partners like **Saudi Arabia and UAE oppose a war** due to economic and stability concerns.

There is **no coherent US objective** that a strike would clearly achieve.

## 2. Any US attack is likely to be symbolic

A full-scale intervention risks **chaos, instability, and long-term entanglement**.

The most probable scenario is a **limited strike** to preserve US "credibility," followed by **controlled Iranian retaliation**.

## 3. Iran's strategy: deterrence + diplomacy

Iran signals it is **ready for war but open to dialogue**.

It maintains **backchannel diplomacy** (notably via Oman).

Economic crisis and sanctions pressure push Tehran to **avoid escalation**, but it also wants to **raise the cost** for the US.

## 4. Protests are not a reliable trigger for regime change

No strong evidence that protests represent a **nationwide revolutionary movement**.

The Iranian state retains **institutional unity** (government, reformists, IRGC).

The regime is actively **controlling the narrative** and projecting internal stability.

## 5. Foreign intervention may backfire

Iran has a strong memory of **foreign interference (1953 coup)**.





A US attack could **shift protests into nationalist support for the regime**.

Historically, **airpower alone has not toppled cohesive regimes** without civil war.

6. Outcome remains highly uncertain

Both **US military success** and **protest-led regime collapse** are deeply uncertain.

Hence, current US posturing is more about **pressure and optics** than decisive action.

[India must widen, and deepen, its export pool to offset US tariffs-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

India's latest trade data shows that **exports are growing very slowly**, while **imports are rising faster**, leading to a **large trade deficit**. The real concern is not just the headline numbers, but what happened **after the US imposed 50% tariffs** on many imports.

A closer, month-by-month analysis (by HSBC) shows that India's **export momentum weakened sharply after August 2025**, when US tariffs came into force. Exports to the **US have clearly fallen**. Although exports to **China have increased slightly**, the rise is **too small to compensate**. Exports to the **rest of the world are almost flat**.

Because exports bring in dollars, weak exports can **put pressure on the rupee**. Therefore, India cannot rely heavily on the US market anymore and must **diversify its export destinations and products**, finding **new markets and deepening old ones** to protect growth.

### Key Takeaways

1. Trade balance is worsening

December 2025 exports: **\$38.5 bn (only 1.8% YoY growth)**

Imports: **\$63.55 bn (~9% YoY rise)**

Trade deficit: **~\$25 bn**, indicating weak external demand and strong import dependence.

2. Export momentum has weakened post-tariffs

Sequential (m-o-m, seasonally adjusted) growth fell from **0.7% (Jan–July 2025)** to **0.1% (Aug–Dec 2025)**.

Indicates a **clear slowdown after US imposed 50% tariffs**.



| Clear your doubts now.



### 3. Impact is broad-based across sectors

Slower growth in **electronics, engineering goods, petroleum, textiles**.

Sequential decline in **pharma, chemicals, gems & jewellery**.

Suggests tariffs are **not a sector-specific shock but an economy-wide drag**.

### 4. Exports to the US have declined sharply

Sequential export momentum to the US fell from **+1.9% to -1.4%** after tariffs.

Confirms the **direct negative impact of protectionism**.

### 5. China and Rest of World not compensating

Exports to China rose only about **\$2 bn/month**, versus a **\$7 bn/month fall to the US**.

Exports to the rest of the world are **largely flat** → no natural substitute markets yet.

### 6. Macroeconomic concern: pressure on the rupee

Lower exports → **lower dollar inflows** → **downward pressure on the rupee**.

Could worsen **current account balance and imported inflation**.

### 7. Policy implication: diversify export base urgently

India must **widen its export pool** (new products, new sectors).

Must **deepen non-US markets** (Africa, Latin America, West Asia, ASEAN, EU, Global South).

Focus on **trade agreements, logistics, competitiveness, and value-added manufacturing**.

[New Trump tariff could be last straw for basmati exports to Iran -The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy



| Clear your doubts now.



## Easy Explanation

India's basmati rice exports to Iran are under serious threat because of **two simultaneous shocks**.

First, President Trump has announced a **new 25% tariff on any country doing business with Iran**. This creates fear among Indian exporters that even indirect trade routes (via Dubai or government tenders) could become risky, with **no assurance of payments**.

Second, Iran itself has **stopped giving subsidised dollars** to importers from January 1. Earlier, rice importers got dollars at a very cheap official rate. Now they must buy dollars at the open market rate, which is **almost five times costlier**. This makes importing basmati rice **much more expensive and often unviable**.

Iran is India's **third-largest basmati market**. Because of sanctions, currency collapse, and political unrest, exporters are already facing **falling orders and declining prices in Indian mandis**.

The article argues that Trump's new tariff may be the "**last straw**" that severely weakens, or even breaks, India's basmati export trade with Iran.

## Key Takeaways

1. Iran is a critical market for Indian basmati

2024–25 exports to Iran: **\$753 million**, third after Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

About **8.55 lakh tonnes** of basmati shipped to Iran.

In 2025–26 so far, exports to Iran **rose sharply**, even as Iraq and Saudi Arabia declined.

2. New US tariff creates uncertainty shock

Trump announced an **additional 25% tariff on countries trading with Iran**.

Even before formal enforcement, it has **frozen new contracts**.

Exporters fear **payment defaults and banking blockages**.

3. Iran's own forex reform is a bigger structural blow

Iran ended its **subsidised exchange rate** for essential imports.

Dollar rate jumped from **28,000 tomans to ~130,000 tomans**.

This makes basmati imports **far costlier and commercially unviable**.





#### 4. Indirect trade routes are also at risk

Large volumes go via **UAE (Dubai)** due to better banking channels.

New US tariff threatens even these **safer intermediary routes**.

#### 5. Immediate impact seen in Indian markets

Falling mandi prices of **Pusa 1509 and Pusa 1718** basmati.

Paddy prices have dropped, hurting **farmer incomes**.

Shows how **geopolitics directly transmits to rural markets**.

#### 6. Long-term trend already weak due to sanctions

Basmati exports to Iran **peaked in 2018–19**.

After US sanctions returned, exports fell and **payment risks increased**.

Current developments deepen an already fragile trade relationship.

#### 7. Larger economic message for India

Over-dependence on **sanction-prone, geopolitically unstable markets** is risky.

Highlights need to **diversify agricultural export destinations**.

Shows vulnerability of India's farm exports to **currency crises, sanctions, and financial channels**.

[Multilateralism à la carte, the Washington way - The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article says the US is no longer committed to multilateralism as a principle. Instead, it is practicing “**multilateralism à la carte**” — choosing international institutions **only when they suit American interests**, and leaving, weakening, or bypassing those that don't.



| Clear your doubts now.



On January 7, the US announced it would **withdraw from 66 international bodies**, including many in the UN system. This comes on top of earlier exits (UNESCO, Paris Agreement, Human Rights Council, climate institutions). Together, these moves show that US participation in global institutions is now seen as **temporary, reversible, and conditional**.

Washington is using four tools:

**Exit** institutions,

**Obstruct** them from within,

**Bypass** them through small coalitions,

**Make participation conditional** on US interests.

This approach weakens trust in the global system. When the main architect of multilateral institutions treats commitments as optional, **rules lose credibility**, institutions fragment, and power replaces predictability.

For India, this world is risky. India benefits from **stable trade rules, climate finance mechanisms, health cooperation, and technology standards**. A fragmented system increases uncertainty and costs, even if it also opens limited space for India to step up diplomatically.

The article concludes that US power can force outcomes, but **legitimacy comes from institutions**. By hollowing them out, the US may gain short-term flexibility but will weaken the long-term foundations of global order.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. The US has formally embraced “multilateralism à la carte”

Withdrawal from **66 international bodies**, including **31 UN-linked institutions**.

Multilateralism is no longer a pillar, but a **menu of choices**.

Commitments are treated as **reversible political decisions**, not long-term obligations.

### 2. Four instruments define the new US approach

**Exit** – Leaving institutions outright (UNESCO, Paris Agreement, Human Rights Council).

**Obstruction** – Staying but paralysing them (e.g., **WTO appellate body blockade**).

**Bypass** – Creating selective coalitions (e.g., **Pax Silica** instead of WTO/UN routes).



| Clear your doubts now.



**Conditionality** – Participation only if institutions align with **US sovereignty and interests**.

### 3. From rules-based order to leverage-based order

Earlier US strategy: shape outcomes **through institutions and rules**.

Current strategy: use institutions **only when useful**, otherwise rely on **power, coalitions, and pressure**.

Signals shift from **system leadership to transactional engagement**.

### 4. Multilateral institutions are being structurally weakened

Climate governance undermined by moves around **UNFCCC and Paris framework**.

Trade dispute resolution crippled at the **WTO**.

Global governance moving from **universal frameworks to fragmented groupings**.

### 5. Global consequences

**Trust deficit** in international cooperation.

Allies hedge, smaller states seek patrons.

Institutions plan for **American absence**.

**Fragmentation of standards**, higher transaction costs, unequal rule-making power.

### 6. Implications for India

Harms India's core interests:

**Predictable trade rules**

**Credible climate finance**



| Clear your doubts now.



## Global health coordination

## Stable technology standards

Opens limited space for **Indian leadership**, but vacuums are not neutral.

Fragmentation raises costs even for rising powers like India.

### 7. Strategic message of the article

Power can compel, but **legitimacy sustains leadership**.

Institutions convert power into **durable influence**.

“À la carte multilateralism” offers flexibility, but produces:

weaker legitimacy

unstable governance

short-term bargains instead of shared systems.

**18th January 2026**

[What happened to ISRO's PSLV-C62 mission?: TH FAQ](#)

### **Easy Explanation**

On January 12, ISRO launched the PSLV-C62 rocket from Sriharikota. It was carrying India's EOS-N1 satellite and 15 other satellites from India and several foreign countries. Soon after launch, ISRO announced that something had gone wrong near the end of the rocket's third stage, called PS3, and that the mission had faced an anomaly.

According to ISRO officials, the rocket performed normally in the early stages. The problem started towards the end of the PS3 stage, when the rocket began spinning uncontrollably. This abnormal spinning, known as a roll-rate disturbance, caused the rocket to deviate from its planned path. Because of this, the rocket could not place the satellites into their intended orbits.

Thailand's space agency, whose satellite was onboard, confirmed that the malfunction in the third stage led to loss of control and that the rocket and satellites likely fell back into the atmosphere and burned up over the southern Indian Ocean. The incident looked similar to another recent failure, PSLV-C61, which also failed due to problems in the third stage.

The earlier PSLV-C61 mission failed in May 2025 when the third stage suffered a drop in pressure, leading to mission failure. In both cases, the rocket worked well initially but failed during the PS3 stage, preventing satellite deployment.



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After the C61 failure, ISRO set up a Failure Analysis Committee (FAC) to investigate the cause. This committee studies data from the mission, reconstructs what went wrong, and suggests corrective steps before the rocket can fly again. Although the FAC submitted its report on PSLV-C61 to the Prime Minister's Office, the findings have not been made public yet. Experts have criticised this lack of transparency, especially since another similar failure has now occurred.

For PSLV-C62, ISRO has said that a detailed analysis is underway, but it has not yet confirmed whether a new FAC has been formed. Meanwhile, questions remain about why details of past failures have not been shared publicly, unlike in earlier ISRO missions.

The failure of PSLV-C62 is particularly significant because it is the first time a PSLV mission carrying customer satellites from Indian and foreign organisations has failed. Some of the foreign satellites were insured, but several Indian private satellites were not, meaning their developers will bear the losses. The cost of losing EOS-N1, a defence satellite, will be borne by India.

## **Key Takeaways**

### **What happened in PSLV-C62**

- Rocket launched on January 12 with EOS-N1 and 15 other satellites
- Anomaly occurred near the end of the third stage (PS3)
- Rocket began spinning and deviated from its path
- Satellites could not be deployed

### **Similarity with earlier failure**

- PSLV-C61 also failed in the third stage
- C61 failure involved pressure drop in PS3
- Both missions failed after a normal early ascent

### **Role of Failure Analysis Committee (FAC)**

- Formed after major mission failures
- Reconstructs events using data and expert inputs
- Recommends corrective actions before return to flight
- C61 report submitted to PMO but not made public

### **Transparency concerns**

- FAC report on PSLV-C61 not released publicly
- No detailed summary shared by ISRO this time
- Experts have raised concerns after repeated PS3 failures

### **Impact of the failure**

- First PSLV failure involving commercial customer satellites
- Some foreign satellites were insured
- Indian private satellites were reportedly uninsured
- Cost of EOS-N1 loss will be borne by India

[Has an Arbitration Council been constituted?: TH FAQ](#)

## **Easy Explanation**

Almost six years ago, in 2019, Parliament amended India's Arbitration and Conciliation Act to improve arbitration in the country. A key part of this reform was the creation of the Arbitration Council of India (ACI), which was meant to regulate and promote institutional arbitration. However, even after all these years, the government has still not set up the ACI.

The ACI was planned as a central body to improve arbitration standards in India. Its idea came from a 2017 report led by Justice B.N. Srikrishna, which recommended moving away from slow, court-heavy dispute resolution and towards professional arbitration institutions. The Council was supposed to grade arbitration institutions, recognise



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bodies that certify arbitrators, and maintain records of arbitration awards. It was also meant to be led by a senior judge or an expert in arbitration, along with senior government officials.

From the start, the ACI faced criticism. Many experts felt that because most members were to be appointed by the government, the body would not be independent. This raised concerns because the government itself is the biggest party involved in disputes in India. Critics also pointed out that major arbitration hubs like Singapore and Hong Kong do not have government-controlled regulators; instead, they rely on strong, independent arbitration institutions. There were also worries that allowing unlimited arbitral institutions and excluding foreign arbitrators would lower quality and reduce India's appeal for international disputes.

In 2024, the government introduced a new draft amendment Bill to revive institutional arbitration. This draft changes how arbitral institutions are defined and gives them more powers, such as extending deadlines, reducing arbitrators' fees for delays, and replacing arbitrators. These powers currently lie with courts. The idea is to reduce court interference and speed up arbitration. However, the Bill is still under consideration and has not yet been passed.

The draft Bill also aims to limit when courts can step in during arbitration. It proposes narrowing the time periods when courts can grant interim relief and introduces the idea of emergency arbitrators who can give urgent relief before the arbitration tribunal is fully formed. This is meant to prevent delays caused by lengthy court proceedings before arbitration even begins.

Despite these reforms, a major challenge remains: trust. Many parties in India still prefer ad hoc arbitration because they worry about the independence and efficiency of domestic arbitration institutions. Unless this trust gap is addressed, India will struggle to become a global arbitration hub.

## Key Takeaways

### **Background of the Arbitration Council of India**

- Proposed in 2019 amendments to the Arbitration Act
- Based on Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee recommendations
- Still not constituted by the government

### **Proposed role of the ACI**

- Promote and regulate institutional arbitration
- Grade arbitral institutions
- Accredite arbitrators through recognised bodies
- Maintain records of arbitration awards

### **Concerns about independence**

- Majority of members appointed by the government
- Government is the largest litigant in India
- Fear of bias and lack of neutrality
- No similar regulator in leading arbitration hubs

### **Key changes in the 2024 draft Bill**

- Redefines what counts as an arbitral institution
- Removes court-only powers and gives them to institutions
- Allows institutions to extend timelines and replace arbitrators

### **Reducing court interference**

- Limits courts' power to grant interim relief
- Introduces emergency arbitrators
- Aims to reduce delays and speed up arbitration

### **Way forward for India**

- Build trust in domestic arbitral institutions
- Ensure independence and competence



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- Move away from ad hoc arbitration
- Compete with global arbitration centres

## [The revolution will not be televised: TH Profiles](#)

### International Relations

#### **Easy Explanation**

Iran went through one of its most dangerous moments in decades during 2025–26. President Masoud Pezeshkian, who came to power promising reforms, openly admitted that the country was “stuck”. Iran’s economy was already in deep trouble because of long-standing Western sanctions, high inflation, a collapsing currency, drought, and frequent power and water cuts. The June 2025 war with Israel and the U.S. made things worse, pushing the country closer to a breaking point.

The spark came in late December 2025, when traders in Tehran’s Grand Bazaar went on strike over the rapid fall of the rial. This was significant because the bazaar has historically played a major role in Iran’s political upheavals, including the 1979 revolution. Protests soon spread across the country as economic anger turned into political unrest.

As demonstrations grew, the situation took on an international dimension. U.S. President Donald Trump issued strong warnings to Iran’s leadership and encouraged protesters. Israel’s intelligence agency, Mossad, openly called on Iranians to take to the streets. Iran responded by shutting down the internet and launching a violent crackdown. By January 10, security forces used lethal force to suppress the protests. Independent groups abroad claimed thousands were killed, while the Iranian government admitted to “hundreds” of deaths.

Although the protests were crushed, the crisis exposed deeper structural problems. Iran has experienced many protest waves before, but this one was especially dangerous because it coincided with external military threats. Sanctions have severely weakened Iran’s economy by cutting oil revenues, freezing foreign assets, and blocking investment. Attempts at reform, such as cutting subsidies and raising taxes, only increased public anger.

Iranian officials argue that foreign powers exploited genuine economic protests to push for regime change. Western and Israeli support for opposition figures like Reza Pahlavi reinforced this belief. However, despite predictions of collapse, the Iranian state held together. The security forces remained loyal, and the opposition stayed fragmented.

For now, the Islamic Republic has survived, but stability has not returned. The economy remains fragile, sanctions continue, and public trust is badly damaged. Iran is caught between an economy under siege, a state unable to reform fast enough, and powerful external rivals seeking to weaken or overthrow the regime. The deeper crisis, as many Iranians see it, is unresolved.

#### **Key Takeaways**

##### **Economic crisis as the root cause**

- Iran’s economy is under extreme stress due to sanctions, inflation, currency collapse, drought, and war
- June 2025 war with Israel and the U.S. sharply worsened conditions

##### **Trigger of the protests**

- Strike by Tehran’s Grand Bazaar traders over the falling rial
- Bazaar’s symbolic role amplified the political impact

##### **State response**

- Internet shutdown and violent crackdown
- Large death toll claimed by rights groups
- Protests eventually suppressed but at high cost

##### **Role of sanctions**

- Sanctions cut oil revenue, freeze assets, and block investment





- Budget deficits financed by money printing led to hyperinflation
- JCPOA collapse removed hopes of economic relief

### External involvement

- U.S. and Israel openly encouraged protests
- Mossad and Western figures promoted regime change narratives
- Iran claims protests were hijacked by foreign actors

### Why the regime survived

- Security forces stayed loyal
- Opposition remained divided and lacked leadership inside Iran
- State institutions did not fracture

### Long-term implications

- Iran is not stable despite ending protests
- Economy remains fragile and public anger unresolved
- External pressure and internal unrest are likely to continue

[Scientists find space flight affects immune genes, deforms brain: TH Science](#)

Science

### Easy Explanation

As humans plan longer stays in space — first on the Moon and later on Mars — scientists need to understand how living in space affects the human body. Space is very different from Earth because of microgravity (near weightlessness) and higher radiation, both of which can change how our bodies function.

In one study published in *Science*, researchers sent human immune cells to the International Space Station and studied how they behaved there. They found that space conditions changed how genes inside these cells worked. Some genes became overactive, especially those linked to the heart, brain, and senses like vision and smell. This may help explain why astronauts sometimes face heart problems, sleep disturbances, and sensory issues in space. At the same time, genes that help repair DNA and allow cells to divide became less active, raising concerns about long-term health risks such as weaker immunity or higher chances of disease.

Another study focused on how spaceflight affects the brain itself. Earlier research had shown that the brain shifts slightly inside the skull in microgravity, but it did not look closely at which parts of the brain move. In this new research, scientists compared brain scans of astronauts before and after space missions with people on Earth who stayed in a head-down tilt position for two months to simulate weightlessness.

The study found that different parts of the brain move and change shape in different ways during spaceflight. Areas involved in movement and sensation shifted the most. In astronauts who spent about a year in space, a part of the brain that helps control movement moved upward by more than 2 mm. The researchers also noticed that astronauts whose balance-related brain regions shifted more had greater difficulty maintaining balance after returning to Earth.

Although the studies had limitations, such as small sample sizes and imperfect simulations of space conditions, they provide valuable insights into how space affects the immune system and brain. This knowledge is crucial for keeping astronauts healthy during future long-duration missions.

### Key Takeaways

#### Impact of space on immune cells

- Space conditions change how genes in immune cells behave
- Genes linked to heart, brain, vision, and smell become overactive
- DNA repair and cell division genes become less active, raising long-term health concerns



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### Health implications for astronauts

- Changes may explain heart risks, sleep problems, and sensory disturbances
- Reduced DNA repair could increase vulnerability to disease over time

### Brain changes in microgravity

- Spaceflight causes different brain regions to shift and deform
- Movement and sensation-related areas are most affected
- Longer missions lead to greater brain movement

### Effect on balance and movement

- Shifts in certain brain regions are linked to poorer balance after return to Earth
- These effects are reversible but can affect post-mission recovery

### Limits of current research

- Small number of astronauts studied
- Earth-based simulations cannot fully copy space conditions
- Despite limits, studies improve understanding of long-term spaceflight risks

[Can datacentres in orbit solve for AI models' energy demand?: TH Science](#)

Science

### Easy Explanation

Data centres already consume a large amount of electricity, and the rise of artificial intelligence has made this problem much bigger. AI systems need powerful computers called GPUs and TPUs, which run continuously and consume enormous energy. As AI use keeps growing, companies are struggling to find enough electricity to run these data centres sustainably.

To tackle this, Google Research is exploring an unusual idea: putting AI data centres in space and powering them entirely with solar energy. In space, sunlight is available almost all the time, so satellites could generate clean energy without relying on Earth's power grids.

AI data centres are different from traditional ones. Normal data centres mostly need bandwidth to send data to users. AI data centres, however, need extremely fast connections inside the data centre itself, because machines constantly talk to each other while training models. For example, some AI data centres use connections that are millions of times faster than normal home internet.

Google's "Project Suncatcher" imagines a group of satellites flying very close to each other, always facing the sun. These satellites would work together, sharing data among themselves using very high-speed links, while only sending limited information back to Earth. This is similar to how ChatGPT needs massive internal data flow, while users only send short questions and receive short answers.

However, many challenges remain. Space radiation can damage computer chips over time, although Google's tests show its AI chips are more resistant than expected. Cooling is another big problem: on Earth, data centres use liquid cooling, but in space, heat must be released into a vacuum while being constantly exposed to sunlight. Maintenance is also difficult, because repairing equipment in orbit is expensive and slow.

The biggest question is cost. Launching and replacing satellites must be cheaper than running data centres on Earth. Google believes falling launch costs and free solar power could make space data centres economically viable in the future. Still, similar experiments, like Microsoft's underwater data centres, were eventually abandoned. Whether space-based data centres will succeed remains uncertain, but past satellite technologies show that bold ideas can sometimes work.

### Key Takeaways

#### Why AI data centres consume so much power

- AI workloads need dense clusters of GPUs and TPUs



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- Most energy is used for internal computing, not user communication
- AI growth is pushing global electricity demand higher

#### Google's space data centre idea

- Project Suncatcher proposes AI data centres in orbit
- Powered entirely by continuous solar energy
- Uses clusters of closely spaced satellites

#### Bandwidth and architecture difference

- AI data centres need ultra-fast internal connections
- Downlink to Earth is less important than satellite-to-satellite links
- Similar to AI models needing fast internal communication

#### Technical challenges

- Space radiation can damage chips over time
- Cooling systems must work in a vacuum
- Maintenance and repairs in orbit are difficult

#### Economic feasibility

- Launch and replacement costs must compete with Earth-based centres
- Google expects launch prices to fall significantly by the 2030s
- Free solar power could reduce long-term operating costs

#### Uncertain future

- Past experiments like underwater data centres failed
- Satellite technology has surprised sceptics before
- Space data centres remain a high-risk, high-reward idea

19th January 2026

## India's record rice output comes with challenges-The Indian Express Explained Page

Economy

### Easy Explanation

1. What has happened?

India's rice production has **almost quadrupled since 1970**.

In just the last **5 years**, output rose sharply due to expansion of cultivated area and procurement.

India now leads the world in rice production and exports.

2. Why is paddy so popular?

**Assured MSP procurement** by government agencies.

**Higher net returns** compared to many other crops.

**Stagnation in yields of crops like cotton and maize**, making rice a safer choice.

Strong **export demand** (both basmati and non-basmati).

3. What are the problems?

Rice is **highly water-intensive** leading to severe **groundwater depletion**, especially in Punjab and Haryana.

**Huge excess stocks** far above buffer norms, increasing storage and subsidy burden.



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**Uneven productivity** across states.

Dominance of rice is hurting **crop diversification, nutrition security, and soil health.**

#### 4. What is the government planning?

Promote **crop diversification** towards pulses and oilseeds.

Propose **financial incentives** for farmers who shift away from paddy.

Use the **₹1.36 lakh per hectare savings** (economic cost of rice) to fund diversification.

Focus on **low-yield and water-stressed districts** first.

### Key Takeaways

#### India's global position

India produced **~150 million tonnes** of rice in 2024–25.

Accounts for **28% of global rice output.**

Largest exporter of both **basmati and non-basmati rice.**

#### Production trends

Paddy area increased by **36% since 1969–70.**

Production almost **quadrupled.**

Major growth concentrated in the **last 5 years.**

#### Stock and procurement issues

Rice stocks are **far above buffer norms.**

About **38% of national output** procured by FCI.

Over **56% of procurement** from Punjab, Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

High fiscal burden due to **storage, transport and subsidies.**

#### Why farmers prefer paddy

**Assured MSP plus procurement.**

**Higher net returns** than maize and many pulses.

Other crops show **yield stagnation or decline.**

#### Environmental and structural problems

Rice needs **1–3 tonnes of water per kg.**

Causes **groundwater depletion** and ecological stress.

**Large inter-state yield gaps.**

Threatens **nutrition security and crop diversity.**

#### Government's diversification strategy

Incentives for **shifting from rice to pulses and oilseeds.**

Each hectare moved away saves about **₹1.36 lakh** for the government.

Targeting **low-yield and water-stressed districts.**

Linked to goals of **import reduction, water conservation, and nutrition security.**



| Clear your doubts now.



# Election, lottery, election: How Mumbai will get new mayor-The Indian Express Explained Page

Polity

## Easy Explanation

1. Why can't Mumbai get a mayor immediately?

The mayor is **not directly elected by the public**.

The mayor's post is **reserved by rotation** (SC/ST/OBC/Women).

The **exact category is decided through a lottery**, not in advance.

Only after this is officially notified can corporators elect the mayor.

2. What is the reservation system?

Based on the **74th Constitutional Amendment**, which mandates reservation in urban local body leadership.

In Maharashtra, the **Municipal Corporations Act** provides reservation for:

Scheduled Castes

Scheduled Tribes

Other Backward Classes

Women

The post **rotates every term** to ensure representation of different groups.

3. Why is a lottery used?

To keep the process **neutral and non-political**.



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To prevent governments from **manipulating reservation** to suit political interests.

To ensure **fair rotation** among social categories over time.

#### 4. How is the lottery conducted?

Urban Development Department issues a **notification**.

Officials prepare a **rotation list** based on past terms.

A **public draw of lots** is held and a chit is picked.

The reservation category is **officially declared**.

#### 5. What happens after the lottery?

BMC convenes a **special meeting**.

Only corporators belonging to the **declared category** can contest.

The mayor is elected by a **simple majority** (in Mumbai, more than **114 out of 227 corporators**).

#### 6. What powers does the Mumbai mayor have?

The mayor is the **ceremonial head** and “first citizen” of Mumbai.

Presides over **general body meetings** and maintains order.

Has a **casting vote** in case of a tie.

**Does not control finances or administration** — these lie with the **Municipal Commissioner (IAS officer)** appointed by the state government.

#### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## Constitutional and legal basis

Rooted in the **74th Constitutional Amendment Act**.

Implemented in Maharashtra through the **Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act**.

Reservation applies to **SCs, STs, OBCs and women**.

## Why mayor's election is delayed

Mayor is **indirectly elected**.

Reservation category is decided by **draw of lots**.

Election can begin **only after formal constitution of the House and lottery notification**.

## Purpose of lottery system

Ensures **political neutrality**.

Prevents **manipulation of reservation**.

Enables **rotational social representation**.

## Election procedure

Lottery by **Urban Development Department**.

Special BMC meeting to elect mayor.

**Simple majority** required (114+ in 227-member House).

## Nature of the mayor's office

Mayor is **ceremonial head**, not executive authority.





Administrative and financial control rests with the **Municipal Commissioner**.

Mayor's role: **presiding, representation, maintaining decorum, casting vote**.

Governance significance

Highlights the **difference between political leadership and executive authority** in urban governance.

Shows how **constitutional mandates shape local government functioning**.

[‘The way Trump is using Monroe Doctrine is not how it was originally conceived’-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The interview discusses what the recent US intervention in Venezuela and Donald Trump's rhetoric reveal about how power is being exercised in today's world. The speaker argues that Trump's claim that the US can act freely in Venezuela because it lies in the Western Hemisphere mirrors the justification used by Russia in Ukraine. This shows a shift from a rules-based international system towards raw power politics, where geography and dominance matter more than international law.

Although there may have been legal or moral arguments against the Maduro regime, the concern raised is about the language and method adopted — unilateral, imperial, and dismissive of national sovereignty. This, the speaker warns, sets a dangerous precedent.

The original Monroe Doctrine of 1823 aimed to keep European colonial powers out of the Americas. It was not meant to assert US imperial dominance. Trump's interpretation distorts this idea by turning it into a justification for regional supremacy. If this approach becomes normalised, other powers like China may also claim exclusive control over their regions, encouraging a return to spheres of influence.

The interview also highlights a broader global trend towards the normalisation of authoritarian practices. Two drivers are identified. First, social media promotes polarisation, emotional politics, and conspiracy theories while weakening rational public debate. Second, the technological revolution has produced extreme inequality, creating resentment and instability across both democracies and autocracies.

Finally, the speaker argues that what is often described as “transactional” international politics is better understood as corruption. Across many countries, political power is increasingly merged with personal economic gain. Leaders use office for enrichment, enabled by financial secrecy and digital tools, eroding institutions and democratic accountability.

### Key Takeaways

Changing global order

Shift from a **rules-based international system** to **power-based unilateralism**

Increasing use of **geography and dominance** as justification instead of international law



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Stronger resemblance to **authoritarian power logic**

Monroe Doctrine — reinterpretation

Original intent: **block European colonialism** in the Americas

Trump's usage: **claim of US regional supremacy**

Reflects return of **spheres of influence politics**

Global consequences

Encourages other powers, especially **China**, to assert regional dominance

Weakens **sovereignty, international law, and multilateralism**

May provoke **regional balancing and resistance**, particularly in Latin America

Normalisation of authoritarian practices

Social media promotes **polarisation, anger, and conspiracy theories**

Weakens **rational debate and democratic culture**

Similar political pathologies emerging across very different societies

Technology and inequality factor

Tech revolution created **extreme concentration of wealth**

Large populations feel **left behind and resentful**

Fuels **instability in both democracies and autocracies**



| Clear your doubts now.



## Transactionalism vs corruption

Present trend better described as **elite capture of the state**

Political office used for **personal and familial enrichment**

Enabled by **financial secrecy, digital tools, and weak oversight**

## Relevance for India

Raises concerns about **erosion of sovereign equality**

Signals **decline of multilateralism**

Highlights risk of **authoritarian legitimacy**

Emphasises need for **ethical political leadership**

[SC's Tiger Global case verdict could reshape future of cross-border deals-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## Economy

### Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court has ruled that Tiger Global's \$1.6-billion stake sale in Flipkart to Walmart is taxable in India, even though the investment was routed through Mauritius-based entities. The Court held that Tiger Global cannot automatically claim benefits of the India–Mauritius Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA).

Tiger Global argued that its capital gains were exempt under the “grandfathering” clause, because the shares were bought before April 1, 2017, when India changed its tax treaty with Mauritius. It also relied on Tax Residency Certificates (TRCs) to claim treaty benefits.

However, Indian tax authorities said the Mauritius entities were not independent decision-makers and were effectively conduits, with real control lying elsewhere. The Authority for Advance Rulings (AAR) rejected Tiger Global's claim. Though the Delhi High Court later ruled in Tiger Global's favour, the Supreme Court has now reversed that decision.

The Court has clearly held that mere possession of a TRC is not enough. Indian authorities can examine the “economic substance” and real control behind offshore entities. If an entity is only a shell used for tax avoidance, treaty benefits can be denied.

This judgment is significant because it marks a shift away from formal, paper-based treaty claims to a substance-over-form approach. It strengthens the hands of Indian tax authorities and may reshape how foreign investors structure deals, exits, and valuations. It also increases tax uncertainty and litigation risk for venture capital and private equity funds.

### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## Supreme Court ruling

Tiger Global's Flipkart stake sale to Walmart is taxable in India

Benefits of the India–Mauritius DTAA denied

Supreme Court overturned the Delhi High Court verdict

## Core legal principle established

TRC alone is not sufficient to claim treaty benefits

Indian tax authorities can look beyond formal incorporation

Emphasis on economic substance, real control, and decision-making

Reinforces the doctrine of “substance over form”

## Grandfathering clause impact

Investments made before April 1, 2017 are not automatically protected

Even “grandfathered” deals can be scrutinised for treaty abuse

Economic reality can override mechanical treaty claims

## Implications for foreign investors

Higher tax uncertainty and litigation risk

Offshore structures using Mauritius and Singapore face closer scrutiny

Exit planning, valuation models, and indemnity clauses may need redesign

Increased importance of real operational substance in holding entities



| Clear your doubts now.



## Impact on startup and VC ecosystem

Could affect venture capital and private equity exits

May temporarily dampen foreign investor sentiment

Pushes funds to adopt more transparent and robust structures

## Broader policy and governance significance

Strengthens India's fight against treaty shopping and tax avoidance

Signals the end of automatic DTAA benefit claims

Aligns with global trends under BEPS and anti-avoidance frameworks [To complete reform drive, rationalise food and fertiliser subsidies-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

Economy

## Easy Explanation

The article argues that if the government is serious about being in “Reform Express” mode, it must urgently **rationalise food and fertiliser subsidies**, which together consume nearly **₹4–4.5 trillion** of the Union Budget.

Despite good macro indicators — projected **7.4% GDP growth** and low inflation — agricultural growth is slowing and farm prices have collapsed. Onion, potato and pulse prices are far below last year's levels and even below MSP in many cases. This shows that current policies are **hurting farmers while subsidising consumers**.

The problem lies in **distorted incentives**. Heavy subsidies on power, fertilisers and assured procurement push farmers towards rice, wheat and sugarcane, discouraging pulses and oilseeds. This weakens nutrition security, worsens water stress, and undermines self-sufficiency goals.

On food subsidy, the article questions the logic of giving **free grain to 56% of the population** when extreme poverty is estimated at only about **5%**. It calls the present system fiscally wasteful, nutritionally weak, and politically motivated. The author suggests **gradually reducing coverage**, moving towards **cash transfers**, and converting fair price shops into **nutrition hubs** supplying pulses, milk, eggs, fruits and vegetables.

On fertiliser subsidy, the article highlights the **over-subsidisation of urea**, which leads to soil degradation, groundwater pollution and rising greenhouse gas emissions. The suggested reforms include **direct cash transfers to farmers, bringing urea under nutrient-based subsidy (NBS), and shifting fertiliser subsidy administration to the Agriculture Ministry**.

The core message is that **true agricultural reform requires moving from price and product subsidies to income support, nutrition security, and sustainable farming incentives**.

## Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## Economic and fiscal context

Food subsidy likely to touch **₹2.25 trillion**

Fertiliser subsidy may reach **₹2 trillion**

Together around **8–8.5% of Union Budget**

Agricultural GDP growth slowing despite low inflation

## Farm distress and price collapse

Onion prices down **~48%**, potato **~35%**

Pulses selling **10–30% below MSP**

Indicates **consumer benefit but farmer distress**

Makes self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds difficult

## Structural distortion in agriculture

Incentives skewed towards **rice, wheat, sugarcane**

Driven by:

Free/subsidised power

Cheap urea

Open-ended procurement

Discourages **crop diversification**

Aggravates **water stress and soil degradation**





## Food subsidy: key concerns

FCI economic cost:

Rice ~₹42/kg

Wheat ~₹30/kg

Free food to ~**813 million people (56% population)**

Extreme poverty only about **5%**

System is:

Fiscally heavy

Nutritionally weak

Economically irrational

## Food subsidy: suggested reforms

Gradually reduce coverage:

56% → 40% → 25% → ~15%

Free food limited mainly to **antyodaya households**

Shift towards **cash transfers**

Convert FPS into **nutrition hubs**

Promote pulses, oilseeds, milk, eggs, fruits, vegetables





## Fertiliser subsidy: key problems

Second-largest subsidy, bigger than Agriculture Ministry budget

### **Overuse of urea**

Leads to:

Soil imbalance

Groundwater contamination

Higher GHG emissions

20–25% leakage

## Fertiliser subsidy: reform agenda

Move towards **direct benefit transfer to farmers**

### **Decontrol fertiliser pricing**

Bring **urea under Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS)**

Shift fertiliser subsidy to **Ministry of Agriculture**

Link support to **balanced nutrient use**

## Strategic reform vision

Merge food and fertiliser subsidies with **expanded PM-Kisan**

Shift from:

Product subsidies → **income support**



| Clear your doubts now.



Calorie security → **nutrition security**

Input distortion → **sustainable farming**

### [How should India tackle child trafficking?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Polity

#### Easy Explanation

Child trafficking remains a serious human rights crisis in India. The Supreme Court, in **K.P. Kiran Kumar vs State**, recently reaffirmed that trafficking **grossly violates children's fundamental right to life and dignity** under the Constitution and issued strict guidelines to prevent such crimes. Despite large rescue operations, conviction rates remain extremely low, showing major gaps in investigation, prosecution, and rehabilitation.

Internationally, the **Palermo Protocol (2000)** defines child trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for exploitation. In India, **Section 143 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023** provides a comprehensive definition of trafficking, covering coercion, deception, abuse of power, and inducement for purposes of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude, forced labour, and organ removal.

The **Constitution of India** protects children through **Articles 23 and 24**, which prohibit trafficking, forced labour, and employment in hazardous industries, and through **Article 39(e) and (f)**, which direct the State to protect children from abuse, exploitation, and abandonment. These are supported by a wide legal framework including the **JJ Act, POCSO Act, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, and Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013**.

The Supreme Court has consistently adopted a **humanistic and preventive approach**, issuing landmark directions in cases such as **Vishal Jeet (1990)**, **M.C. Mehta (1996)**, and **Bachpan Bachao Andolan (2011)**.

The article stresses that trafficking is driven by **poverty, migration, unemployment, family breakdown, disasters, and now digital platforms**, which are increasingly used for recruitment. Tackling child trafficking therefore requires not only strict law enforcement but also **social protection, rehabilitation, digital monitoring, and strong Centre-State coordination**, since police and public order fall under the State List.

#### Key Takeaways

Scale and seriousness of the problem

Thousands of children rescued every year

Conviction rate only about **4.8% (2018–2022)**

Supreme Court: trafficking **violates Article 21 (right to life and dignity)**

Indicates **weak enforcement, poor investigation, and low deterrence**



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## Palermo Protocol (2000)

UN Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking

Defines child trafficking as:

Recruitment

Transportation

Transfer

Harbouring

Receipt of a child

Purpose must be **exploitation**

Consent of child is **irrelevant**

## Trafficking under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023

Section 143 defines trafficking

Covers acts done through:

Force, threats, coercion

Abduction, fraud, deception

Abuse of power or inducement

Exploitation includes:

Sexual exploitation

Slavery and servitude



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Forced labour

Organ removal

Emphasises **substance over consent**

Constitutional protection of children

Article 23: prohibits trafficking and forced labour

Article 24: bans child labour in hazardous industries

Article 39(e): protection from abuse

Article 39(f): right to healthy development with dignity

Establishes **State's duty to protect children from exploitation**

Supporting legal framework

BNS Sections 98–99: selling and buying of minors

Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956

Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 (care, protection, rehabilitation)

Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013 (expanded trafficking definition)

POCSO Act, 2012:

Gender-neutral

Covers sexual offences and child pornography

Fast-track courts for speedy trials



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## Severe punishments including life imprisonment

### Judicial approach

Vishal Jeet v. Union of India (1990):

Trafficking is a serious socio-economic evil

Preventive and rehabilitative approach needed

M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu (1996):

Prohibition of child labour in hazardous industries

Bachpan Bachao Andolan v. Union of India (2011):

Directions to tackle trafficking and exploitation

K.P. Kiran Kumar case:

Trafficking violates fundamental rights

Issued strict prevention guidelines

### Causes increasing vulnerability

Poverty and unemployment

Migration and disasters

Family breakdown

Marginalisation and lack of education

Growing misuse of **social media and online platforms** for recruitment



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What India must do

Strengthen **prevention, rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration**

Improve **investigation quality and conviction rates**

Regulate and monitor **digital platforms**

Protect **social and economic rights of children**

Build victim-centric support systems

Importance of Centre–State coordination

Police and law & order are **State subjects**

Trafficking networks are **inter-State and transnational**

Requires:

Central intelligence and databases

Inter-State task forces

Uniform SOPs

Financial and institutional support from Centre

[Can the Chinese government arrest its ageing problem?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

China is facing a serious demographic crisis. Its population has been **declining since 2022**, and the UN projects that by 2050, nearly **40% of Chinese people will be over 60 years of age**. This means China is “**getting old before getting rich**,” threatening its workforce size, economic growth, and pension sustainability.

To prevent this, President **Xi Jinping abolished the one-child policy in 2016**, moving first to a **two-child policy**, and later a **three-child policy in 2021**. The aim was to reverse falling birth rates and stabilise the age structure. However, fertility has continued to decline.



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Beijing has since rolled out multiple pronatalist and workforce-support measures. These include **financial subsidies for new parents**, lowering kindergarten costs, improving early-childhood infrastructure, and launching campaigns to create a “**birth-friendly society**.” At the same time, China has **raised the retirement age** to manage a shrinking workforce and delay the fiscal crisis of pension funds, which are projected to run out by **2035**.

However, these policies face deep structural obstacles. **High living costs, job insecurity, expensive childcare and education, healthcare costs, urban lifestyles, and changing social attitudes** discourage young people from having children. The legacy of the one-child policy has also created a **severe gender imbalance**, with around **30 million more men than women**, further depressing marriage and birth rates.

The Chinese leadership increasingly frames population growth as part of “**national rejuvenation**,” placing particular emphasis on women’s roles. Yet the article argues that state-driven moral pressure and surveillance cannot overcome the **economic and social realities** shaping family choices.

## Key Takeaways

### Demographic background

China’s population declining since **2022**

By **2050**, about **40%** of population projected to be over 60

Rapid ageing + shrinking workforce

Risk of economic slowdown and fiscal stress

### Why Xi abolished the one-child policy

To counter **falling birth rates**

To prevent **future labour shortages**

To slow the pace of **population ageing**

Two-child policy (2016) → Three-child policy (2021)

Objective: support “**national rejuvenation**”

### Why China raised the retirement age

Workforce is **shrinking rapidly**



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Men: **60** → **63 years**

Women:

White-collar: **55** → **58**

Blue-collar: **50** → **55**

To:

Maintain labour supply

Delay pension burden

Prevent collapse of pension fund (projected **2035**)

Pronatalist policies introduced

**Childbirth subsidies** (3,600 yuan for first three years)

Added **VAT on contraceptives** (discouraging birth control)

Reduced **kindergarten fees** and waived final-year fees

Salaries of kindergarten teachers placed under **fiscal guarantees**

Expanded age limits for **civil service exams**

Government campaigns for:

Marriage

Childbearing

“Birth-friendly society”



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Proposals like:

Reducing “bride price”

“Love courses” in universities

Administrative and social interventions

Officials contacting women about:

Menstrual cycles

Pregnancy planning

Strong state involvement in **private family decisions**

Framing motherhood as a **national duty**

Structural challenges to higher fertility

High cost of:

Housing

Healthcare

Education

Childcare

Youth unemployment

Urban lifestyle preferences

Career pressures on women



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## Long-term psychological impact of one-child policy

### Gender imbalance crisis

Around **30 million more men than women**

Result of son preference during one-child era

Fewer marriages → fewer births

Social instability risks

### Why current policies are failing

Economic insecurity outweighs incentives

Cultural attitudes towards family have changed

Trust deficit between youth and state narratives

Financial support insufficient relative to living costs

### Strategic significance

Threatens China's:

Manufacturing base

Military manpower

Economic growth

Pension sustainability

Could reshape China's long-term global power trajectory



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29th January 2026

[Many questions in Trump's Board of Peace invite-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The US has invited India to join a new body called the “**Board of Peace**”, proposed by former President **Donald Trump** as part of his Gaza peace plan.

Originally, this Board was meant to **only supervise Gaza's temporary administration till 2027**, under a UN-approved plan. It was supposed to help a technocratic Palestinian committee run basic services in Gaza after the war.

However, the **new charter** sent to countries (including India) shows that the Board has **changed drastically**:

It is no longer limited to Gaza.

It now claims it will work to resolve “**global conflicts.**”

It is being set up as a **new international organisation**, separate from the UN.

**Donald Trump will remain its chairman personally**, even when he is not US President.

Countries can even become **permanent members by paying \$1 billion.**

So India is not just being asked to help Gaza — it is being asked to join a **Trump-controlled global peace body** with vague powers, unclear accountability, and possible military commitments.

This raises serious questions for India about **sovereignty, neutrality, legality, and strategic costs.**

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. What is the Board of Peace?

A body proposed by Donald Trump under his 2025 Gaza peace plan.

Initially approved by the UN only to supervise Gaza's transition and function till end-2027.

Now expanded into a new international organisation claiming to handle global conflicts.

#### 2. How its mandate has changed

Earlier:



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Limited to Gaza only

Temporary body

Under UN-approved peace framework

Now (as per new charter):

Role expanded to “resolving global conflict.”

No mention of Gaza specifically.

Designed like a mini-UN with articles, executive board, dispute systems, funding rules.

Open-ended future, not time-bound.

This reflects Trump’s known distrust of the UN and attempt to create a parallel global body.

### 3. Trump’s extraordinary control

Trump will be Chairman personally, not as US President.

He can only be removed if he resigns himself or his own appointees unanimously declare him incapable.

Even then, his chosen successor takes over.

Implication: Member countries would be part of an organisation effectively controlled by one individual.

### 4. Membership terms raise red flags

Normal membership: 3-year tenure

Permanent membership: by paying \$1 billion in the first year

Members must agree “to be bound by the Charter.”

Concerns include monetisation of global governance and possible erosion of sovereign decision-making.

### 5. Possible military and political risks

The peace plan also includes an International Stabilization Force for Gaza.

Board members may be pressured to provide troops or fund security operations.

This could drag countries into West Asian military entanglements and compromise India’s strategic



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autonomy.

## 6. Who runs the Board?

Executive leadership includes Marco Rubio, Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, Tony Blair, Ajay Banga, and business and political figures close to Trump.

Parallel Gaza bodies created include NCAG, High Representative for Gaza, and Gaza Executive Board.

Notably, there is no Palestinian representative on the Gaza Executive Board, and even Israel is uneasy about some members.

## 7. Why this is tricky for India

If India accepts, it joins an organisation not rooted in the UN system, headed permanently by Trump, with unclear jurisdiction over “global conflicts.”

India risks loss of diplomatic neutrality, being tied to US-centric conflict frameworks, and future military or financial obligations.

India must weigh this against its support for multilateralism and UN-based order, ties with Arab countries, Israel, Iran and the Global South, and its principle of strategic autonomy.

[What US annexation of Greenland could mean for NATO, Russia-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

## Easy Explanation

Donald Trump has again said that the US should **take over Greenland**, even hinting that a **military option is not ruled out**. Greenland is an autonomous territory of **Denmark**, which is a **NATO member**.

If the US tries to annex Greenland, it would mean **one NATO country using force against another NATO country's territory**. This would create an unprecedented crisis inside NATO because NATO's core principle (Article 5) is that **an attack on one member is an attack on all**. NATO was never designed to handle a situation where **the aggressor itself is a NATO member**.

Such a move would **shatter NATO unity**, directly benefit **Russia**, divert attention from **Ukraine**, and weaken the existing Western security system. Ironically, the US already enjoys **full military access to Greenland** under a 1951 treaty and does not need to seize it.

Behind Trump's Greenland push are not only security arguments, but also **business and ideological interests** (rare earths, Arctic routes, tech-libertarian projects). The most worried country would be **Canada**, which could feel strategically encircled. If NATO weakens, it could trigger **new nuclear ambitions** in countries like Germany, Poland, Japan, and South Korea.

Overall, a Greenland takeover would not strengthen Western security — it could **collapse NATO and destabilise the global order**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why Greenland matters

Greenland is strategically located in the **Arctic**, critical for missile defence, shipping routes, and surveillance.

It is believed to hold **rare earth minerals** under its ice sheets.



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The US already has **long-standing military access** through a 1951 treaty and once operated **17 bases** there.

## 2. Direct impact on NATO

Denmark administers Greenland and is a **NATO member**.

A US takeover would mean a NATO state violating another NATO state's territory.

This creates an unsolvable contradiction for **Article 5 (collective defence)**.

NATO could effectively **collapse or become dysfunctional**.

## 3. Why this helps Russia (and China)

NATO infighting would **weaken pressure on Russia**, especially regarding Ukraine.

Putin would benefit from NATO being distracted and divided.

Though US officials warn of Russia-China Arctic cooperation, their main activity is **near Alaska, not Greenland**.

Targeting Greenland **does little to counter actual Russian moves**.

## 4. The US doesn't need annexation

The US already enjoys **military rights and basing access** in Greenland.

It voluntarily shut most bases after the Cold War.

Any security expansion could happen **without violating Danish sovereignty**.

## 5. Who is pushing the Greenland idea in the US

Tech and business figures like **Peter Thiel, Elon Musk, Ronald Lauder**.

Motivations include **rare earths, Arctic dominance, experimental libertarian settlements, and real-estate style geopolitics**.



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Shows the merging of **business interests with strategic decision-making**.

## 6. Canada's deep concern

A US-controlled Greenland would **strategically surround Canada**.

Canadian analysts have begun openly debating **nuclear weapons options**.

Indicates serious fear of a **collapsed North American security balance**.

## 7. Global nuclear ripple effects

If NATO weakens or implodes:

Germany and Poland may reconsider nuclear choices.

Japan and South Korea may move towards nuclearisation.

This could trigger a **multi-regional nuclear arms race**.

## 8. Core strategic conclusion

A US annexation of Greenland would likely:

Destroy NATO unity

Strengthen Russia's global position

Undermine rules-based order

Accelerate nuclear proliferation

[Blockbuster drug, proven against a range of cancers, may get much cheaper - The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Science and technology

## Easy Explanation



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A recent **Delhi High Court verdict (January 12)** has allowed Indian company **Zydus Lifesciences** to manufacture and sell a **biosimilar version of Nivolumab**, a blockbuster cancer immunotherapy drug currently patented by **Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS)**.

Nivolumab is used to treat several cancers, especially lung cancer, and works by **boosting the immune system's ability to attack cancer cells**. It is sold as **Opdivo globally** and **Opdyta in India**.

The patent is due to **expire in May 2026**, but since it is close to expiry and because of the **huge public interest involved**, the court allowed Zydus to enter the market early.

This is significant because Nivolumab is **extremely expensive in India** and is **not covered under Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY)**. With biosimilars, treatment costs could drop to **one-third or one-fourth**, making life-saving immunotherapy accessible to many more cancer patients.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. What happened in court

Delhi High Court allowed Zydus Lifesciences to sell a biosimilar of Nivolumab.

Patent held by Bristol Myers Squibb was to expire soon.

Court prioritised **public interest, affordability, and proximity of patent expiry**.

Earlier single-judge order blocking Zydus was overturned.

### 2. Why this matters for patients

Nivolumab costs around **₹2.5–3 lakh per month** in India.

PM-JAY does **not cover immunotherapies**.

Zydus claims its version "Tishta" will cost **₹3.86–6.46 lakh per year**.

Biosimilars could reduce prices by **70% or more**.

### 3. About the drug: Nivolumab

It is a **monoclonal antibody** and an **immunotherapy drug**.

It enhances the body's immune response against cancer.





Unlike chemotherapy, it **does not broadly damage healthy cells**.

Widely used in **lung cancer and several advanced cancers**.

Can be used after surgery, in metastatic cancer, or along with chemo/radiotherapy.

#### 4. Why it is called a breakthrough

US FDA designated Nivolumab as a **“Breakthrough Therapy.”**

This class of drugs has **changed modern oncology**, improving survival and quality of life.

#### 5. Corporate and economic context

Nivolumab earns BMS **billions of dollars annually**.

High prices were maintained due to **patent protection**.

Entry of Indian biosimilars challenges **global pharma monopolies**.

#### 6. Broader implications

Boost to India’s **biosimilar and pharmaceutical manufacturing sector**.

Strengthens India’s role as the **“pharmacy of the Global South.”**

Highlights the tension between **patent rights and public health**.

[In Mohanlal case, how Kerala HC outlined liability in endorsements-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Polity

#### Easy Explanation

The Kerala High Court has ruled that **actor Mohanlal cannot be held liable in a consumer case merely because he appeared in advertisements** of Manappuram Finance.

Two borrowers had taken gold loans after seeing ads featuring Mohanlal. They later alleged that the company charged a **higher interest rate than promised** and filed a consumer case not only against the company and its manager, but also against Mohanlal as brand ambassador.

The High Court set aside proceedings against the actor, holding that **an endorser is not automatically responsible for a company’s unfair trade practice**. Liability can arise **only if there is a clear and direct link between the**



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**endorser and the consumer's transaction**, such as personal inducement, participation in the deal, or specific misleading claims attributable to the endorser.

Since Mohanlal had **no role in the loan transaction, no interaction with the borrowers, and made no personal assurances**, the court ruled that responsibility lay only with the company and its officials.

The case against Manappuram Finance will continue, but the actor has been discharged.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. What the case was about

Borrowers took gold loans from Manappuram Finance.

They claimed they were influenced by ads featuring Mohanlal.

They alleged unfair trade practice due to higher interest rates.

Mohanlal was made a party as brand ambassador.

### 2. Core legal question

Can a brand ambassador be held liable in a consumer dispute **only for appearing in advertisements?**

### 3. What the Kerala High Court held

Mere appearance in advertisements is **not enough** to impose liability.

There must be a **clear nexus between the endorser and the transaction**.

No pleadings showed that Mohanlal persuaded the borrowers or took part in the loan process.

The alleged assurance came from the **company's manager, not the actor**.

### 4. Interpretation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019

Section 2(18): Defines "endorsement" broadly.

Section 21: Deals with false or misleading advertisements and empowers the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA).





Section 21(5): Protects endorsers who have exercised **due diligence**.

The Act does **not automatically extend liability** of unfair trade practices to endorsers.

## 5. Role of 2022 CCPA guidelines

They require endorsers to exercise due diligence.

The court clarified these guidelines operate **within Section 21** and do not expand civil liability in consumer disputes.

## 6. Key legal principle laid down

Unfair trade practice arises from **failure of the service provider to deliver what is promised**.

That failure is attributable to the **company, not the brand ambassador**, unless a direct role is shown.

## 7. Practical implication

Brand ambassadors are **not per se liable** for a company's conduct.

They may be liable only if:

They make specific false claims.

They actively induce consumers.

They fail to exercise due diligence in misleading advertisements.

## 8. Broader significance

Protects celebrities from blanket consumer liability.

Reinforces distinction between **advertising endorsement and transactional responsibility**.

Strengthens clarity on **endorser liability under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019**.

[New state of matter is a solid-liquid hybrid-The Hindu Science](#)

Science



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## Easy Explanation

Scientists from **Ulm University (Germany)** and the **University of Nottingham (UK)** have discovered a **new state of matter at the nanoscale** that behaves like a **solid and a liquid at the same time**.

This is not like ice-water slush. Inside a **single metal nanoparticle**, some atoms are **fixed in place (solid-like)** while others are **freely moving (liquid-like)**. Because both exist together, the particle shows **mixed and entirely new properties**.

They studied nanoparticles of **platinum, palladium and gold** placed on **graphene** using **high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM)**. They found that some metal atoms get trapped in graphene's atomic gaps and remain stationary, forming a **solid "shell" that corrals a liquid metal core**.

Because of this confinement, the nanoparticles stayed **liquid at very low temperatures (200–300°C)**, far below the normal freezing point (~500°C). When they finally froze, they did not form normal crystals, but a **disordered solid (amorphous state)**.

This discovery is important because such hybrid nanoparticles could be used to make **better catalysts**, especially **platinum-on-carbon catalysts** used in **hydrogen fuel cells**, which currently lose efficiency due to clumping and poisoning.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. What has been discovered

A **new nanoscale state of matter** that is a **solid–liquid hybrid**.

Within a single nanoparticle, **some atoms are stationary (solid-like)** while others are **mobile (liquid-like)**.

### 2. Why it is new

Traditionally, solids and liquids are treated as **separate phases**.

This study shows that at the **nanoscale, phase boundaries can coexist inside one particle**.

### 3. How it was observed

Using **high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM)**.

Metals studied: **platinum, palladium, gold**.

Nanoparticles were deposited on **graphene**.

### 4. What physically causes the hybrid state





Some metal atoms get **trapped in graphene's atomic gaps** and become stationary.

These atoms form a **solid perimeter** that corrals a **liquid metal core**.

## 5. Most important property discovered

The nanoparticle can **remain liquid far below its normal freezing point** (200–300°C instead of ~500°C).

When it freezes, it forms a **disordered (amorphous) solid**, not a normal crystal.

## 6. Scientific significance

Shows that the **solid–liquid boundary is not sharp at the nanoscale**.

Reveals **new thermodynamic behaviour** of matter at extremely small scales.

## 7. Technological relevance

Highly relevant for **heterogeneous catalysis**.

Platinum-on-carbon catalysts are central to **hydrogen fuel cells and methanol fuel cells**.

Corralling could prevent **clumping and poisoning**, keeping catalysts **active for longer**.

## 8. Future application potential

Designing **long-lasting, high-efficiency catalysts**.

Advancements in **clean energy technologies**, especially **hydrogen-powered systems**.

[What is T.N.'s new hybrid pension model?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Governance

## Easy Explanation

Tamil Nadu has announced a new pension system called the **Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS)**, effective from **January 1, 2026**. It is a **hybrid model** combining elements of the **Old Pension Scheme (OPS)**, **Andhra Pradesh Guaranteed Pension Scheme (APGPS)** and the Centre's **Unified Pension Scheme (UPS)**.

Earlier, employees who joined service **before April 1, 2003** are under OPS, which guarantees pension fully funded by the government, with periodic revisions and DA increases. Those who joined **after 2003** fall under the



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**Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS)**, similar to NPS, where there is **no guaranteed pension** and benefits depend on market-linked investments.

Due to growing staff pressure to restore OPS, but also serious concerns about **unsustainable pension liabilities**, Tamil Nadu has chosen a **middle path**. TAPS assures a fixed pension like OPS, but keeps **employee and government contributions** like CPS.

Under TAPS, employees will get an assured pension equal to **50% of the last drawn basic pay**, DA increases like serving employees, and family pension benefits. However, there will be **no pension reset linked to future pay commissions**, which was the biggest financial burden under OPS.

The State expects short-term fiscal stress but believes TAPS will be **more sustainable in the long run**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Background: three pension systems in play

**OPS (pre-2003):** Non-contributory, fully government-funded, pension reset after Pay Commissions, DA parity.

**CPS/NPS (post-2003):** 10% employee + government contribution, market-linked returns, no assured pension.

**Growing demand:** Many States restoring OPS, despite RBI warnings of future fiscal risks.

### 2. Why Tamil Nadu avoided full OPS return

Pension liabilities rising sharply due to **pension reset and rising life expectancy**.

Pension payments once touched **16% of revenue receipts**.

CPS corpus (~₹84,507 crore in 2025) earning **low, safe returns**.

RBI and former RBI governors warned OPS benefits current staff at the **cost of future generations**.

### 3. Political and policy context

DMK promised OPS in 2021.

Andhra Pradesh introduced **APGPS (2023)**.

Centre launched **Unified Pension Scheme (UPS, 2024)**.

Tamil Nadu committee (2025) recommended a hybrid solution → **TAPS (2026)**.





#### 4. Core features of TAPS

Effective from **January 1, 2026**.

**10% employee contribution + matching government contribution.**

**Assured pension = 50% of last drawn basic pay** (not 12-month average).

**DA increase at par with serving employees.**

**No pension reset** linked to future Pay Commissions.

**Minimum service not mandatory** for assured payout (unlike UPS).

#### 5. Family and retirement benefits

**Family pension:** 60% of last drawn pension.

**Death-cum-Retirement Gratuity (DCRG):** up to ₹25 lakh.

**Special compassionate pension** for CPS retirees before TAPS.

#### 6. Fiscal impact

One-time cost: ~₹13,000 crore.

Annual contribution: ~₹11,000 crore.

Government expects long-term pension burden to stay **below OPS levels**, though next 7 years will be fiscally tight.

#### 7. Who is covered and response

About **6 lakh employees** currently under CPS.

Sections of employees still unhappy, as full OPS not restored.

Uncertainty remains on acceptance, similar to lukewarm response to UPS.



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## 8. Broader significance

Reflects India's search for a **balance between social security and fiscal sustainability**.

Signals a shift from pure defined-benefit to **assured-but-contributory pension models**.

Important for debates on **inter-generational equity and State finances**.

[Why SIR verification needs to be completely digitised-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Polity

### Easy Explanation

The Election Commission's **Special Intensive Revision (SIR) 2.0** was meant to use technology to clean voter lists and include every eligible citizen. Instead, it has caused **fear, confusion and hardship** because the process still relies heavily on **paper forms, manual scrutiny and physical hearings**, even though the EC already has a capable digital platform called **ECINet**.

As a result, even highly credible citizens — Nobel laureates, senior police officers, vice-chancellors, monks, retired officials — have been summoned to prove their identity or residence. Large numbers of genuine voters have been marked "**non-mapped**" due to defects in old electoral rolls from 2002-04, and many names appear to have been wrongly deleted.

Instead of correcting institutional errors digitally, the burden has been shifted to citizens, who are being asked to file inappropriate forms and attend hearings, sometimes risking **legal consequences** for mistakes that are not theirs.

The article argues that the solution is not more hearings, but **end-to-end digital verification** — online document uploads, backend cross-checks, real-time status updates, and audit trails — to make voter verification faster, more accurate and humane, and to protect public trust in elections.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. What SIR 2.0 is supposed to do

A technology-driven exercise to clean electoral rolls and include all eligible voters.

Supported by EC's digital platform **ECINet**, capable of data entry, verification and audits.

#### 2. What is going wrong

Heavy reliance on **paper forms, manual notices and physical hearings**.

Defective **2002–04 legacy rolls** reused as the base.

Even eminent citizens summoned to prove identity.



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Widespread anxiety, confusion and procedural indignity.

### 3. Two major problems flagged

**Mass deletions** from the 2024 final rolls (nearly 6.5 crore nationwide alleged).

Huge numbers of “**non-mapped**” voters due to old data gaps.

Example: Uttar Pradesh anomalies between draft SIR rolls and Panchayat rolls.

### 4. Shifting institutional failure onto voters

Long-standing voters forced to prove residence again.

Summoned to short-notice hearings for EC's own data errors.

Asked to use **Form 6** (meant for first-time voters), falsely declaring they were never enrolled.

This exposes genuine voters to possible liability under **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023**.

### 5. Why full digitisation is essential

EC already has the technology; failure lies in **not deploying it fully**.

Digital verification would reduce human error, delays and harassment.

Enables real-time tracking, backend cross-verification and audit trails.

### 6. What a digital-first SIR should look like

Automatic SMS/email updates on application status.

Online upload of documents through ECINet.

Backend verification using unique IDs.

Real-time correction of draft rolls.



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Assisted digital access for those not tech-savvy.

## 7. Democratic significance

Electoral integrity depends on **trust, inclusion and dignity**.

Manual, coercive processes risk **disenfranchising genuine voters**.

Digitisation strengthens transparency, accountability and public confidence.

## 8. Core conclusion

The problem is not lack of technology, but **poor institutional choices**.

Digital-first verification is essential to safeguard both **electoral rolls and democratic legitimacy**.

[In a changing world, it is 'small tables, big dividends'-The Hindu Editorial](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

India's 2026 diplomacy signals a shift away from relying only on big, slow multilateral forums like the UN or G20. Inviting the **European Union's top leadership** as Republic Day chief guests shows India's growing focus on **coalitions and compact groupings** rather than single-country relationships.

The article argues that the world today is full of "**leadership gaps**"—areas where problems need coordination, but no great power can effectively lead. These are "**white spaces**." India's opportunity lies in filling these gaps through **small, functional platforms** that can deliver results.

Three such spaces stand out:

**Europe (EU):** standards, trade rules, green and digital regulations

**BRICS:** redefining purpose, development finance, Global South voice

**Quad:** regional public goods, maritime security, disaster response

Instead of ideological blocs, India should build **working coalitions** focused on **delivery**—trade frameworks, development tools, digital standards, disaster relief, AI governance and resilient supply chains.

In a fractured world, "**small tables**" where like-minded partners can act quickly may generate "**big dividends**" for India's strategic and economic interests.

### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## 1. Strategic signal from Republic Day 2026

EU leadership invited as chief guests, not a single country.

Indicates India's focus on **institutional partnerships and blocs**.

Reflects recognition that **bilateral diplomacy alone is insufficient**.

## 2. Concept of “white spaces” in diplomacy

Areas where **global problems exist but no power can convene solutions**.

Opportunity for India to shape **rules, standards and public goods**.

Requires choosing **sustainable, priority-driven coalitions**.

## 3. Europe as the first major test

Focus not on capitals but on **EU institutions**.

India–EU FTA critical for:

Market access

Supply chain reconfiguration

Protection from US trade unpredictability

Also about **data rules, competition law, carbon and sustainability standards**.

EU seeks to hedge against both **China risk and US volatility**.

## 4. BRICS: political white space

Expanded BRICS is **larger but less coherent**.

India as 2026 chair can:



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Push functional outcomes

Strengthen **New Development Bank tools**

Avoid anti-West or de-dollarisation posturing

India's role: **balance reform without confrontation.**

## 5. Quad: public goods platform

Should focus on **capabilities as services** for the Indo-Pacific.

Areas:

Maritime domain awareness

Disaster relief

Port resilience

India can anchor Quad as a **non-provocative, capacity-building grouping.**

## 6. Limits of big multilateral forums

UN strong in legitimacy, weak in delivery.

G20 increasingly paralysed by geopolitics and domestic politics.

Shift underway from **universal forums to flexible coalitions.**

## 7. New emerging “small tables”

AI Impact Summit (Delhi, Feb 2026)

Pax Silica (AI and semiconductor supply chains)

Peace-building forums like the proposed **Board of Peace**



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Shows rapid multiplication of **issue-based coalitions**.

## 8. Core message for India

Power today lies less in size of forum, more in **ability to deliver outcomes**.

India's edge will come from:

Choosing the right tables

Anchoring functionality over ideology

Providing public goods

Bridging divides.

21st January 2026

[Trump's great trade reset made China great again-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

Donald Trump's second term has been marked by aggressive trade wars, withdrawal from global institutions, military actions, and threats even against traditional allies. His stated goal was to further isolate China and curb its economic power.

But the opposite seems to have happened.

Instead of weakening China, Trump's tariffs and confrontational diplomacy have pushed many countries away from the US and towards Beijing. China's global trade surplus has hit new highs, its economy has grown about 5%, and it has strengthened trade ties with countries like Canada, South Korea, and is set to host leaders from the UK and Germany.

As the US steps back from its traditional role as anchor of global trade, countries are reshaping supply chains without America. China has used this moment to integrate more deeply with Asia, West Asia, Africa, and parts of Europe.

India too is cautiously recalibrating. With relations with the US strained by tariffs, New Delhi has modestly reopened economic engagement with China, though it remains wary due to border tensions and strategic distrust.

Overall, Trump's "great trade reset", meant to contain China, has instead accelerated a world where China is seen as an unavoidable economic partner — and where US reliability is increasingly questioned.

### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## Trump's first year back in power

Launched trade wars, withdrew from institutions, imposed steep tariffs, and escalated geopolitical tensions.

Sought to build on a bipartisan US strategy to isolate China.

Triggered global economic and political uncertainty.

## Unintended outcome: China strengthened

China's trade surplus rose to record levels.

Chinese economy grew around 5% despite tariffs.

Beijing deepened integration with the rest of the world instead of being isolated.

## Global realignments

Canada announced a "new strategic partnership" with China.

South Korea's President visited Beijing after a long gap.

UK Prime Minister and German Chancellor are set to visit China.

Countries are increasingly bypassing the US and building direct trade ties.

## Shifting supply chains

Global trade volumes remain near historic highs.

Trade growth is strongest within Asia, West Asia, and Africa.

Average trade distances are increasing, showing diversification away from the US-centric system.

## Perception shift worldwide

Polls suggest many countries now expect China's influence to grow.



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The US is increasingly viewed as unreliable and coercive.

Europe is rearming and looking more to Brussels than Washington.

### India's position

India-US economic ties have weakened due to tariffs.

India has cautiously reopened engagement with China.

Exports to China are rising, while shipments to the US are falling.

India is seeking limited economic gains from China without strategic concessions.

### Core argument of the article

Trump's attempt to weaken China has accelerated a multipolar trade order.

The US is retreating from its post-war role, while China is filling the space.

The world is not de-globalising — it is reorganising, increasingly around China rather than the US.

[Who pays for Trump tariffs? Almost exclusively Americans - The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

### International relations

#### Easy Explanation

A new study by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy shows that Donald Trump's renewed tariff war has not made foreign countries "pay". Instead, the burden has fallen almost entirely on Americans.

When the US raises tariffs, foreign exporters are not cutting their prices to compensate. They are simply selling less to the US. That means US importers pay higher costs, and these costs are passed on to American consumers as higher prices. In effect, tariffs are working like an extra hidden consumption tax on Americans.

US customs revenue did go up sharply in 2025, but this money largely came out of the pockets of American households and firms, not foreign governments or exporters. American companies that depend on imported inputs are especially hurt, as they face disrupted supply chains, higher costs, and lower profits.

This pattern is especially clear for heavily tariffed countries like Brazil and India. Their exporters did not make goods cheaper for the US market; instead, they cut export volumes and shifted sales to other regions.

Overall, Trump's tariffs have reduced trade volumes but not foreign prices, meaning Americans are paying more while global exporters redirect their goods elsewhere.

#### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## Who really pays the tariffs

Nearly 96% of the tariff burden is borne by American importers and consumers.

Tariffs are effectively working as a consumption tax on Americans.

The idea that “foreign countries pay” is contradicted by the data.

## What the Kiel Institute study found

Based on over 25 million shipment-level transactions worth \$4 trillion.

US customs revenue rose by about \$200 billion in 2025.

Foreign exporters did not cut prices; Americans paid more.

## Exporter behaviour

Exporters chose to reduce volumes, not prices.

Goods sold to the US became fewer, not cheaper.

Foreign firms rerouted exports to other markets instead of absorbing losses.

## Impact on US businesses

Firms using imported inputs faced higher costs and supply-chain disruptions.

Companies had to either cut profits, raise consumer prices, or find new suppliers.

Investment and production decisions were negatively affected.

## Brazil and India case

Brazil faced tariffs of up to 50%, India up to 50% after escalation.

Exports to the US dropped sharply (up to 18–24%).



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Prices charged by exporters stayed roughly the same.

Why prices didn't fall

Exporters had alternative markets in Europe and Asia.

Supply chains are "sticky" and slow to adjust.

Cutting prices enough to offset high US tariffs would have severely hurt exporters' margins.

Overall conclusion

Trump's tariffs did not shift costs to foreign countries.

They raised prices inside the US, reduced trade volumes, and disrupted supply chains.

The main losers are American consumers and firms, not foreign exporters.

[For India's apple sector, import concessions just the latest red flag-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

India's apple farmers — especially in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir — are facing growing pressure from two sides: rising imports and climate stress.

Under the recently concluded India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, India reduced the import duty on New Zealand apples from 50% to 25% for April–August. Farmers fear this will flood the market with cheaper imported apples exactly when they depend on selling stored domestic apples, hurting prices and incomes.

At the same time, domestic apple production itself has become more uncertain. Climate change, erratic rainfall, reduced snowfall, floods and landslides have lowered yields, worsened fruit quality, increased plant diseases and disrupted transport routes like the Jammu–Srinagar highway.

Because of this double squeeze, Himachal's Chief Minister and farmer groups are demanding higher import duties, seasonal import bans and stronger government support to protect nearly 2.5 lakh apple-growing families.

The apple sector's concern is not just about one FTA — it reflects deeper vulnerabilities in India's hill agriculture economy.

### Key Takeaways

Why the issue has come up

India cut import duty on New Zealand apples from 50% to 25% under the FTA.

Imports are allowed during April–August under a quota system.

This overlaps with the Indian off-season when farmers sell stored apples.



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## Why farmers are worried

Cheaper imports could undercut domestic apples.  
Off-season sales are crucial for farmers' income.  
High-density Indian varieties enter markets from June onward, directly clashing with imports.

## Economic importance of apples

Apples form about 80% of Himachal's fruit output.  
Apple economy  $\approx$  ₹4,500 crore in Himachal Pradesh,  $\approx$  ₹12,000 crore in J&K.  
Around 2.5 lakh farmers depend on apple cultivation.

## Climate and structural challenges

Erratic rainfall, less snowfall and warming temperatures are increasing disease risks.  
Floods and landslides have cut yields and disrupted transport.  
In 2023, Himachal output fell nearly 28% due to floods.  
In 2025, excessive rain damaged quality; nearly 1 LMT apples did not reach markets.

## Demands from states and farmers

Increase apple import duty to 100%.  
Ban apple imports from July to November.  
Provide targeted subsidies, infrastructure and productivity support.

## Bigger issue

The apple sector's stress is not only from imports.  
Climate vulnerability, logistics disruptions and lack of long-term support make hill agriculture fragile.  
Trade concessions are becoming a "red flag" because domestic resilience is weak.

[A question at Davos: Are we back to the era of kings? - The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

## International relations

### Easy Explanation

When Donald Trump speaks at Davos, he is not just another leader addressing a global forum — he represents a direct challenge to the modern, rules-based international order. Instead of working through institutions, alliances and established diplomatic systems, Trump increasingly conducts foreign policy like a personal enterprise: using tariffs as pressure tools, threatening territorial changes (like Greenland), and sidelining traditional bureaucracies.

Some scholars describe this shift as "**neo-royalism**" — a return to personalised rule, where national interest is shaped less by institutions and more by the preferences, instincts and grievances of a powerful leader and his close circle. This marks a break from the modern system built over centuries, where foreign policy was handled by professional diplomats, guided by laws, procedures and long-term strategy.

This trend has emerged because large sections of the public — especially in the US — have lost trust in expert elites after failures such as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, financial crises, hyper-globalisation, and the rise of China. Trump's politics draws strength from this anger, presenting him as a sovereign who can override technocrats and global institutions.

At the same time, power is not only concentrating at the top (neo-royalism), but also fragmenting downward into private actors like tech giants, satellite companies and data firms — a trend likened to "**neo-feudalism**." Together, these weaken the modern state system.



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For countries like India, this world is harder to navigate. Deals become unpredictable, institutions weaker, and power more personalised. India and other middle powers will need strong domestic institutions to protect their interests in this new landscape.

## Key Takeaways

What is changing in global politics

- Trump openly challenges institutional, rules-based international order.
- Foreign policy increasingly driven by personal authority, not institutions.
- Tariffs, threats, and unilateral actions replace negotiated diplomacy.

Neo-royalism: the core idea

- Power concentrated in the hands of the leader and his inner circle.
- Policies shaped by personal preferences, not long-term national strategy.
- Institutions, diplomats and bureaucracies lose influence.

Why this shift is happening

- Public distrust of expert elites after wars, economic crises and globalisation.
- Failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, finance, and China policy weakened credibility.
- Leaders like Trump exploit this vacuum with strongman-style politics.

Break from the modern order

- Since the 17th–20th centuries, foreign policy was institutionalised.
- States acted through bureaucracies, not sovereign whim.
- Trump-era politics resembles pre-modern personalised rule.

Beyond neo-royalism: neo-feudalism

- Power also shifting to private actors like tech firms and satellite networks.
- Companies increasingly shape war, information, and political outcomes.
- State authority weakens from both the top and bottom.

Global pattern, not just the US

- Similar leadership styles visible in Russia, China, and Turkey.
- Suggests a broader structural change, not a one-off anomaly.

Implications for India

- Deals become more transactional and unpredictable.
- Institutions offer less protection in global politics.
- India and other middle powers need strong domestic institutions and coherence to protect national interests.

[The importance of Pax Silica for India-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

International relations

## Easy Explanation

The global economy is entering a new phase where **semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and rare earth elements (REEs)** are becoming as important as oil once was. These technologies power everything from smartphones and electric vehicles to defence systems and data centres. Because China currently dominates the



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processing and supply of many rare earths, countries are increasingly worried about overdependence on a single source.

To address this, the US launched **Pax Silica** in December 2025 — an initiative aimed at securing critical mineral supply chains, building trusted semiconductor and AI ecosystems, and reducing coercive dependencies. The idea is to create a trusted technology bloc that links minerals, manufacturing, logistics and digital infrastructure.

Although India was not invited initially, the new US Ambassador has announced that **India will soon be included**. This matters because India has a fast-growing digital economy, a large skilled workforce, rising semiconductor and AI investments, and strong tech ties with the US, Japan, Israel and Singapore.

However, joining Pax Silica also brings challenges. India would be the first developing country and first non-US ally in the group. It will want to protect its strategic autonomy and nurture domestic firms through subsidies and regulations — which may not always align with the preferences of richer Pax Silica members.

As the world likely moves toward **two major tech–mineral blocs — China’s and Pax Silica’s — India will need to carefully position itself**, balancing opportunity with autonomy.

## Key Takeaways

### What is Pax Silica

- US-led initiative launched in December 2025.
- Focuses on semiconductors, AI, critical minerals, and digital infrastructure.
- Aims to reduce dependence on China and build trusted supply chains.

### Why Pax Silica matters globally

- New technologies are reshaping economic and strategic power.
- Rare earths and chips are now central to national security and growth.
- China’s export controls and dominance exposed global vulnerabilities.

### Who are the main participants

- US, Japan (technology)
- Australia (lithium, rare earths)
- Netherlands (ASML, chip lithography)
- South Korea (memory chips)
- Israel (AI, cyber, defence tech)
- UK (AI research and start-ups)
- UAE, Qatar (capital and AI ecosystems)
- EU, Canada, OECD, Taiwan are observers.

### Why India is important to Pax Silica

- Large and fast-growing digital and AI market.
- Semiconductor and AI missions with big funding.
- Investments by Tatas, Micron and other global firms.
- Strong talent pipeline in engineering and computer science.
- Ongoing supply-chain partnerships with Japan, Singapore and Israel.

### What India gains

- Access to trusted critical mineral and chip supply chains.
- Faster scaling of semiconductor and AI ecosystems.
- Reduced vulnerability to Chinese export restrictions.



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Deeper integration into advanced manufacturing networks.

## Challenges for India

First developing country and first non-ally in Pax Silica.

Risk of pressure on strategic autonomy.

Possible conflicts over subsidies, procurement and industrial policy.

Expectation gap with high-income member states.

## The road ahead

World may split into two dominant tech–mineral systems: China's and Pax Silica's.

China unlikely to build inclusive supply chains for emerging economies.

India likely to tilt toward Pax Silica but with cautious negotiations.

India must balance technology access with policy space and autonomy.

[How reusability can lead to sustainable, cost-effective access to space-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

## Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

Space is no longer dominated only by governments. Private companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin have transformed the sector by introducing **reusable rockets**, making space launches cheaper, more frequent, and more sustainable. Earlier, rockets were mostly **expendable** — used once and thrown into the ocean. Now, parts of rockets, especially the **first stage**, are designed to return safely and fly again.

Rockets face a fundamental problem: **most of their weight is fuel**. The famous Tsiolkovsky equation shows that more fuel is needed just to lift fuel itself, leaving very little room for the actual satellite. To manage this, rockets use **stages**, throwing away empty parts mid-flight. Reusability builds on this idea by **recovering stages instead of discarding them**, turning spaceflight from a “disposable” activity into a **transport system**, like aircraft.

SpaceX has demonstrated this most successfully — landing rocket boosters vertically and reusing them **more than 30 times**, cutting launch costs drastically and increasing launch frequency. Other countries and firms, including in China, are following this model.

India, through ISRO, is also working on **reusable launch vehicle (RLV)** concepts, including winged spaceplanes and vertically landing boosters. To remain competitive in the trillion-dollar global space economy, India will need to treat **reusability as a core design principle**, not an add-on.

### Key Takeaways

#### Why reusability matters

Space industry expected to exceed **\$1 trillion by 2030**

Reusable rockets reduce cost per kg to orbit by **5–20 times**

Enables higher launch frequency and long-term sustainability

Shifts spaceflight from “throwaway rockets” to a **transportation model**

#### The basic rocket problem

Rockets fight **gravity and air drag**

Over **90% of rocket mass is fuel and tanks**

Less than **4% is actual payload**

Tsiolkovsky equation shows why space travel has a severe **weight penalty**



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## Why rockets use stages

Staging removes “dead weight” mid-flight  
Improves efficiency of remaining rocket  
Traditional rockets (PSLV, LVM-3) discard all stages into the ocean  
Reusability aims to **recover instead of discard**

## How reusability works

First stage slows down using **engine burns and air drag**  
Lands vertically on land or ocean platforms  
SpaceX has recovered Falcon 9 boosters **520+ times**  
Starship aims to be **fully reusable** for Moon and Mars missions

## Global progress

SpaceX: routine partial reusability  
Blue Origin: recovered New Glenn booster  
China: rapid progress in reusable launch tech  
Several companies now pursuing **fully reusable rockets**

## Limits to reusability

Engines and tanks suffer **fatigue, heat stress, microfractures**  
Reuse limited by **safety, inspection cost, and refurbishment time**  
SpaceX has reused some boosters **over 30 times**

## Where India stands

ISRO working on:  
Winged Reusable Launch Vehicle (runway landing)  
Vertical booster recovery (retro-propulsion)  
Technology development ongoing, but not yet operational

## What India needs to do

Make reusability a **non-negotiable design feature**  
Fewer stages with **partial or full recovery**  
Focus on:  
High-efficiency engines  
Advanced materials  
Rapid refurbishment  
High launch cadence  
Essential to stay competitive in the commercial space era

[Bridging the Gulf-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## International relations

### Easy Explanation

The UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed’s short but high-profile visit to India signals a deepening of India–UAE ties, especially in **defence and security**, at a time when West Asia is becoming more unstable. While the visit announced economic commitments like expanding trade, an LNG deal, and UAE investments in Gujarat, the most significant outcome was the decision to work towards an **India–UAE Strategic Defence Partnership** — the first such framework India would have with the UAE.



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This comes amid rising tensions within the Gulf — especially between the UAE and Saudi Arabia — alongside instability linked to Iran protests, Gaza, U.S. intervention threats, and new regional military alignments involving Pakistan and possibly Türkiye. These shifts are reshaping the Gulf's security architecture.

For India, the region is crucial: nearly **10 million Indians live there**, it supplies a major share of India's energy needs, and it anchors India's connectivity projects like **Chabahar, INSTC, and IMEC**. Any defence alignment with one Gulf country can affect ties with others. Hence, while the UAE partnership opens strategic opportunities, India must proceed **carefully and balanced**, avoiding entanglement in Gulf rivalries.

## Key Takeaways

### What happened

- UAE President MbZ made a brief visit to Delhi
- Focus on economic expansion and strategic cooperation
- Decision to work towards an **India–UAE Strategic Defence Partnership**

### Economic outcomes

- Target to **double bilateral trade to \$200 billion**
- \$3 billion LNG deal**
- UAE investments announced in Gujarat
- UAE already India's:
  - 3rd largest trading partner
  - 2nd biggest export destination
  - 7th largest foreign investor

### Why the defence partnership matters

- First such strategic defence framework between India and UAE
- Signals deeper military and security cooperation
- Being closely watched in West Asia and South Asia
- Could affect existing regional power equations

### Unstable regional context

- Growing rift between **UAE and Saudi Arabia**
- Conflicts and tensions involving:
  - Sudan
  - Iran protests and U.S. threats
  - Gaza ceasefire uncertainty
  - Israeli strike in Qatar (2025)
- Saudi–Pakistan defence pact and possible Türkiye involvement
- Overall shift towards a more militarised and fragmented Gulf

### Why India must be cautious

- Nearly **10 million Indians** live in the Gulf
- Region is central to India's **energy security**
- India's connectivity projects depend on multi-country cooperation:
  - Chabahar Port
  - International North–South Transport Corridor
  - India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor





## Core strategic challenge for India

- Deepen ties with UAE without alienating:
  - Saudi Arabia
  - Iran
  - Other Gulf partners
- Avoid being drawn into regional rivalries
- Maintain India's traditional **balanced West Asia policy**

[The EV boom is accelerating a copper crunch-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

The global push towards electric vehicles (EVs) is often seen only as a clean-technology success story. But behind this transition lies a serious and growing constraint: **copper**. EVs use **four to five times more copper** than conventional petrol or diesel vehicles. Copper is essential for batteries, motors, wiring, charging stations, and power grids.

As EV sales have exploded over the past decade, copper demand has risen almost in perfect sync. However, **copper supply has not kept pace**. Years of underinvestment, falling ore quality, long mine-development timelines (10–15 years), and environmental resistance have slowed new production. As a result, the world may enter a **structural copper deficit from as early as 2026**.

This looming shortage could raise EV costs, delay charging infrastructure, and slow down decarbonisation plans. At the same time, **China has emerged as the dominant player**, consuming the bulk of EV-related copper and controlling much of the battery and processing ecosystem. The EV transition, therefore, is not just about technology — it is also about **critical minerals, geopolitics, and supply-chain security**. Without rapid expansion of mining, recycling, and material innovation, copper availability may become the main brake on global electrification.

### Key Takeaways

#### Why copper matters for EVs

- Copper is critical for:
  - EV batteries, motors, wiring
  - Charging infrastructure
  - Power transmission and grids
- EVs use **4–5 times more copper** than internal combustion vehicles
- No large-scale viable substitute currently exists

#### EV growth and copper demand are tightly linked

- EV sales (2015 → 2025): ~0.55 million → ~20 million units
- EV-related copper demand: ~27,500 tonnes → over **1.28 million tonnes**
- Copper demand has grown **faster than EV sales** (elasticity often above 1)
- Even with efficiency gains, **absolute copper demand will keep rising**

#### Emerging global copper deficit

- Supply growth constrained by:
  - Declining ore grades
  - Long gestation of new mines
  - Environmental opposition
- Global demand may exceed supply from **2026 onwards**



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Projected deficit:

~2 million tonnes (2026)

~4.5 million tonnes (2028)

~8 million tonnes (2030)

Shortfall equals output of the world's **top 10 copper mines combined**

Economic and climate implications

Higher EV and infrastructure costs

Slower rollout of charging networks

Risk to decarbonisation and net-zero timelines

Copper may become the **main bottleneck** of the energy transition

China's strategic dominance

Nearly **60% of global EV-related copper demand**

Controls over **70% of battery cell manufacturing**

Strong leverage over:

Pricing

Supply contracts

Resource-rich regions

EU and US are far behind; India's copper demand from EVs is still small but rising

What the situation demands

Accelerated copper mining projects

Major push in **recycling and circular economy**

Investment in **material efficiency and alternatives**

**Integration of resource strategy into energy-transition policy** 24th January 2026

[‘The antibiotic pipeline is running dangerously dry’-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Science and technology

## Easy Explanation

This article discusses a serious public health crisis called **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)** — when bacteria stop responding to antibiotics.

Dr Kamini Walia from ICMR explains that because of **excessive and improper use of antibiotics**, bacteria are becoming stronger and medicines are becoming ineffective. As a result, even **simple infections are becoming difficult or impossible to treat**.

In India, antibiotics are often taken for **coughs, colds and diarrhoea**, even though many of these are **viral infections** where antibiotics do not work. People self-medicate, depend on pharmacists, and doctors also sometimes prescribe antibiotics unnecessarily.

Hospitals have become major centres of resistant infections. Patients admitted for other diseases often **acquire drug-resistant infections during treatment**, which can become fatal.

Globally, very **few new antibiotics are being developed**, and almost none are truly new types. This means we are **using up our existing antibiotics without replacements**.

There is some hope: if certain antibiotics are **stopped for a period**, bacteria can again become sensitive to them (as seen earlier in typhoid treatment).



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The article also explains that while animals and the environment play a role, in India **human misuse is the biggest driver** of resistance.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Scale of the Problem

AMR is called a “silent pandemic.”

2.67 lakh deaths in India (2021) were attributable to AMR.

Studies show:

83% Indians carry resistant bacteria

1 in 10 hospital infection patients are resistant to last-resort antibiotics.

India has ~18% of world population → nearly 20% of global resistant infections.

### 2. Why AMR is Increasing in India

#### (a) Behavioural Causes

Antibiotics taken for viral illnesses (cold, flu, diarrhoea).

Self-medication and OTC purchases.

Preventive (prophylactic) over-prescription by doctors.

#### (b) Hospital Factors

Heavy antibiotic use → bacteria mutate.

Patients admitted for one disease acquire resistant infections inside hospitals.

Resistance genes spread rapidly between bacteria.

### 3. Weak Antibiotic Pipeline (Global Issue)

Very few new antibiotics approved in last 20 years.



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Almost no new drug classes.

Risk: we may soon have no effective antibiotics left.

This threatens surgery, cancer treatment, transplants and ICU care.

#### 4. Community Infections Becoming Dangerous

Examples: typhoid, UTI, diarrhoea, pneumonia.

Resistance seen against fluoroquinolones, ceftriaxone, azithromycin.

Stopping overused drugs can restore effectiveness (example: older typhoid drugs).

#### 5. Role of Animals and Environment

Indian studies show:

Major resistance driven by human antibiotic use, not animals.

High overlap between human and hospital-environment bacteria.

Low overlap with animal samples.

Concern: antibiotic residues in food disturb gut microbiome.

Human gut acts as a reservoir of resistance genes.

#### 6. Data Gaps

ICMR network covers only 25 tertiary hospitals.

Data biased towards severe hospital cases.

India needs large-scale national surveillance like Japan (2000 hospitals).

#### 7. Solutions Highlighted



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### (a) Antibiotic Stewardship

Better than sudden bans.

Kerala model since 2015: rational prescribing, awareness, gradual OTC restrictions.

### (b) Alternatives to Antibiotics

Phage therapy (viruses that kill bacteria).

Monoclonal antibodies.

Still experimental, customised, and limited.

[Echoes of Gujarat as Rajasthan looks to bring 'disturbed areas' law-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

## Polity

### Easy Explanation

This article discusses the Rajasthan government's plan to introduce a law declaring some localities as "disturbed areas" to regulate property transactions. The stated aim is to prevent "demographic imbalance" and "improper clustering." The proposal closely resembles Gujarat's Disturbed Areas Act, 1991, which was enacted after communal riots to prevent forced or distress sales of property.

Under Gujarat's law, when an area is declared "disturbed," anyone who wants to sell property there must take prior permission from the district collector. The collector conducts an inquiry to ensure that the sale is voluntary and at fair market value. Without approval, the transaction becomes void.

However, over time, critics and courts have pointed out that the law can be misused to control who can live where. This raises constitutional concerns because the Constitution guarantees freedom of residence and prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Gujarat High Court has limited the scope of the Act, repeatedly ruling that the collector can only check whether the sale involves free consent and fair price. The court has struck down attempts to block sales on vague grounds such as "demographic equilibrium" or "improper clustering." Amendments made in 2020 expanding these powers are currently stayed.

Rajasthan's proposal echoes the language of these stayed amendments, which is why it has already triggered constitutional concerns.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. What is the 'Disturbed Areas' law?

Origin: Gujarat Disturbed Areas Act, 1991 (post-communal riots).

Objective: Prevent "distress sales" caused by fear or coercion.





Provision:

State can notify an area as “disturbed.”

Any property transfer there needs prior permission of district collector.

Collector must verify free consent and fair market value.

Transactions without permission are void.

## 2. Why is Rajasthan’s proposal controversial?

Rajasthan wants to curb “demographic imbalance” and “improper clustering.”

Language mirrors Gujarat’s 2020 amendments, which are currently stayed.

Raises fear of the state regulating the demographic composition of neighbourhoods.

## 3. Constitutional concerns

Article 19(1)(e): Right to reside and settle in any part of India.

Article 15: Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

Regulating who can buy property where may indirectly violate these guarantees.

## 4. Status of Gujarat law in courts

Constitutional validity under challenge before Gujarat High Court.

2020 amendments (demographic equilibrium, proper clustering, polarisation) stayed since 2021.

Court restrained the state from issuing notifications based on expanded vague powers.

## 5. Key judicial interpretation

Collector’s role is limited to:



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Checking free consent

Ensuring fair market value

Not allowed to deny permission based on:

Law and order apprehensions

Objections of neighbours

Community identity of buyers or sellers

## 6. Important Gujarat HC ruling (March 2020)

Sale by Hindu owner to Muslim buyer blocked citing law and order.

HC quashed the order.

Held that police reports and neighbourhood objections are irrelevant if sale is genuine.

## 7. Broader implications

Risk of:

Segregation of communities

State control over private property choices

Indirect discrimination

Highlights tension between:

Public order powers of the state

Fundamental rights of citizens

[Coming this year: Foundational Census phase seeking data on internet use & more-The Indian Express Explained](#)

[Page](#)

Governance



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## Easy Explanation

The government has officially notified the questions for the first phase of Census 2027, called the **Houselisting and Housing Census**. This phase will be conducted from **1 April to 30 September 2026** and will form the base for the entire Census exercise. The second phase, population enumeration, will begin in **February 2027**. This Census will also include **India's first nationwide caste enumeration since 1931**.

Unlike population enumeration, houselisting does not focus on individuals. Instead, it records **every structure and household in the country** and captures details about **housing conditions, basic amenities and assets**. Each household will be given a unique Census number that will later be used to count individuals.

This time, houselisting has been completely redesigned. It will follow a **digital-first approach**, using mobile applications, GPS tagging and real-time monitoring dashboards. For the first time, **self-enumeration** will be allowed, where households can fill their details online and enumerators will only verify them.

The questions have also been expanded. Along with housing conditions, the Census will now collect data on **internet access, digital devices, cooking fuel, assets and cereal consumption**, reflecting how living standards and policy priorities have changed over the last decade.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Timeline and significance

Houselisting phase: 1 April – 30 September 2026

Population enumeration: from February 2027

First nationwide caste count since 1931

Houselisting is the foundational stage on which the entire Census is built.

### 2. What is the houselisting phase?

Creates an inventory of:

Buildings

Census houses

Households

Covers residential, commercial and mixed-use structures.

Provides data on housing conditions and household assets.



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Assigns unique Census house and household numbers.

### 3. How it will be conducted

Digital-first Census.

Enumerators will use mobile applications.

First-ever provision for self-enumeration through a government portal.

Geo-tagging of every Census house.

Real-time monitoring via Census Management and Monitoring System dashboards.

### 4. Why it has been redesigned

2011 houselisting was paper-based and slow.

2026 exercise will use:

GPS tagging

Standardised drop-down menus

Instant validation checks

Faster aggregation and processing.

Treated as the backbone for:

Digital enumeration

Geo-referencing

Quality control



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Linking housing data with individual socio-economic and caste data.

## 5. Categories of questions (33 items)

Identification and structure: building number, house material, condition.

Household composition: size, head of household, SC/ST/other category.

Ownership and space: ownership status, number of rooms, overcrowding.

Water, sanitation and energy: drinking water, toilet, wastewater outlet, LPG/PNG, lighting.

Fuel and digital connectivity: cooking fuel and internet access.

Assets and consumption: ownership of devices and vehicles, main cereal consumed.

## 6. What is new this time

Questions on:

Internet access

Digital devices

Gas connection type

Vehicle ownership

Cereal consumption

Mobile number to be collected for follow-ups and information sharing.

## 7. Why these questions matter

Data will guide schemes like:

PM Awas Yojana



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Jal Jeevan Mission

Swachh Bharat Mission

Ujjwala Yojana

Helps identify housing shortages, energy access, sanitation gaps and digital divide.

Reflects shift in understanding deprivation — from only shelter to connectivity, clean energy and mobility.

[Corporate India's sales data raises questions over GDP growth-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

The government's First Advance Estimates say that India's GDP will grow by **8% in nominal terms** and **7.4% in real terms** in the current financial year.

Nominal GDP includes inflation, while real GDP removes inflation. Normally, India's nominal GDP growth is around **11–12%**, so **8% nominal growth is weak**, even though **7.4% real growth looks strong**. This unusual combination has raised doubts.

Economists and critics argue that if the economy is really growing strongly, then **corporate India's sales should be rising much faster**, because large companies are usually the fastest-growing part of the economy.

However, data from the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** shows that **corporate net sales growth has been consistently in single digits for the last 10 quarters**, and is **lower than nominal GDP growth**.

For the December 2025 quarter, early results from 319 companies indicate that sales growth has slowed further. Overall, corporate sector sales grew only about **5.8% year-on-year** in the first three quarters of 2025-26.

This weak corporate sales performance raises questions about whether the official GDP growth numbers are **overstating the strength of the non-farm economy**.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Official GDP estimates

Nominal GDP growth: ~8%

Real GDP growth: ~7.4%

Nominal growth usually ~11–12% historically.

Low nominal + high real growth is unusual.

#### 2. Why the data looks inconsistent



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GDP is an average of the entire economy.

Agriculture and informal sectors grow slowly.

Corporate sector normally grows faster than GDP.

If GDP is strong, corporate sales should be much higher.

### 3. What corporate data shows (CMIE)

Corporate net sales growth:

In single digits for 10 consecutive quarters.

Lower than nominal GDP growth.

First three quarters of 2025–26:

Average sales growth ~5.8% (nominal).

December 2025 quarter early data:

Growth losing momentum.

### 4. Source of the concern

Data based on:

~5,000 companies for previous quarters.

319 early-reporting companies for Dec 2025.

Suggests non-farm economy may not be growing as strongly as official GDP claims.

### 5. Implications

Raises credibility and measurement questions about GDP.



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Indicates possible weakness in:

Demand

Private consumption

Investment

Important for policy on:

Employment

Tax revenues

Monetary policy

[Delimitation after 2027, redrawing power in India-The Hindu Editorial](#)

Polity

### Easy Explanation

After Census 2027, India must undertake **delimitation** — the constitutional process of redrawing Lok Sabha constituencies and redistributing seats among States based on population.

This will be the **first inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats since 1976**. For nearly 50 years, seat allocation has been frozen at 1971 population levels so that States which controlled population growth would not be punished. This freeze expires after the first Census post-2026.

Today, representation is still based on an India of **54.8 crore people**, not the current **147 crore**. The next delimitation will therefore radically alter political power.

The major problem is that population growth has been **uneven**. Southern and western States achieved low fertility through better health and education. Northern States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continue to grow faster. If seats are allocated purely by population, northern States will gain massive political power, while southern States' influence will decline — even if they gain seats in absolute terms.

Projections show that in a larger Lok Sabha of about **888 seats**, Uttar Pradesh could rise from **80 to 151 seats**, and Bihar from **40 to 82**, together controlling more than **one-fourth of the House**. Tamil Nadu and Kerala would gain seats numerically, but their **share** would fall.

This creates a moral and federal dilemma: **Should States be penalised for good population control?**

The author suggests multiple options — from extending the freeze, using weighted formulas, strengthening the Rajya Sabha's federal role, splitting large States, to phased redistribution — stressing that delimitation must balance **democracy, federalism, and political stability**.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. What is delimitation?



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Constitutional process of:

Redrawing constituency boundaries.

Redistributing Lok Sabha seats among States.

Mandated after every Census.

Frozen since 1976 at 1971 population levels.

84th Constitutional Amendment (2001) extended freeze till first Census after 2026.

## 2. Why post-2027 delimitation is historic

First inter-State seat redistribution in ~50 years.

Will:

Reallocate Lok Sabha seats.

Redraw all constituencies.

Implement 33% women's reservation.

Likely completion only by 2031–32 → women's quota unlikely before 2034 elections.

## 3. Core federal challenge

Population divergence:

South/West: below-replacement fertility.

North: higher fertility.

Population-only formula means:



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Northern States gain dominance.

Southern States lose influence.

Raises ethical question: punishing success in governance.

#### 4. Political impact projections

Lok Sabha expanded to ~888 seats:

Uttar Pradesh: 80 → 151

Bihar: 40 → 82

Combined share > 26%.

Even if southern States don't lose seats, their bargaining power declines.

Parliament works on **absolute numbers**, not proportions.

#### 5. Constitutional and legal tensions

Extending freeze may violate:

Article 14 (equality of vote).

Removing freeze risks:

Federal imbalance.

Regional alienation.

Union Home Minister's assurance: "not one seat will be reduced" for southern States — politically helpful but mathematically insufficient.

#### 6. Options suggested in the article



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Extend the freeze further.

Expand Lok Sabha so no State loses seats.

Weighted formula (population + development indicators).

Strengthen Rajya Sabha as true federal chamber:

Restore domicile rule.

Reduce population dominance.

Consider equal-State or tiered representation.

Bifurcate Uttar Pradesh into multiple States.

Phased redistribution over two elections.

## 7. Institutional and procedural safeguards

Delimitation Commission must include:

Demographers

Constitutional experts

Federalism specialists

Transparent functioning and public hearings essential.

SC/ST seat allocation and constituency placement must avoid manipulation.

## 8. Why this matters for Indian democracy

Will reshape:



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Coalition politics

Centre-State relations

Regional influence

Risk of:

Federal distrust

Perception of political domination

Opportunity to modernise representation if done carefully.

[India and the EU — a fit partnership in a divided world-The Hindu Editorial](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that the India–European Union (EU) relationship has entered a decisive phase. The upcoming visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa to India — as chief guests at the 2026 Republic Day and co-chairs of the India–EU Summit — symbolises a serious geopolitical alignment, not just diplomacy.

Globally, traditional alliances are becoming unreliable. India is facing trade pressure and harsh rhetoric from the U.S., while Europe has experienced energy and security vulnerabilities. Both now recognise that **strategic autonomy** — not dependence on any one power — is essential.

For many years, India–EU ties remained underdeveloped despite their potential. Both were more focused on the U.S. But today’s global instability, China’s assertiveness and America’s unpredictability have created urgency for India and Europe to work closely.

The core pillars of the partnership are a long-pending **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** and a proposed **Security and Defence Partnership**. The FTA could expand cooperation in textiles, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, digital trade and services. However, India is concerned about the EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which could act as a non-tariff barrier.

On defence, cooperation could bring technology access, joint production and stronger coordination in the Indian Ocean, supporting India’s “Make in India” and Europe’s diversification goals.

Strategically, India and the EU could together offer a model of a **balanced, multipolar partnership** based on sovereignty, flexibility and mutual respect.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Why India–EU ties are gaining urgency

Visit of top EU leaders as Republic Day chief guests.



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16th India–EU Summit signals strategic reset.

Both sides reassessing partnerships due to:

U.S. unpredictability.

China's assertiveness.

Over-dependence risks (energy, markets, security).

## 2. Long-standing problem

Relationship historically under-realised.

Negotiations episodic and slow.

Both previously prioritised ties with the U.S.

## 3. Free Trade Agreement (FTA): strategic importance

Negotiations ongoing since 2007.

Potential benefits:

Textiles & apparel (India exports).

Pharma & chemicals.

Automobiles & machinery.

Digital trade & IT services.

Seen as a **geopolitical insurance policy**.

## 4. CBAM — major friction point

EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.



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20–35% effective carbon levy on steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers.

India views it as a non-tariff barrier.

Linked to debate on climate equity and development space.

## 5. Defence and security cooperation

EU proposal: Security and Defence Partnership.

Would include:

Defence co-production.

Technology sharing.

Joint exercises.

Indian Ocean coordination.

Supports India's "Make in India" in defence.

## 6. Strategic autonomy as the shared core

Both want:

Reduced over-dependence.

Flexible partnerships.

Independent decision-making.

Neither wants veto power from:

Washington.



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Beijing.

Moscow.

## 7. Global significance

India–EU partnership can:

Strengthen multipolarity.

Revitalise multilateralism.

Offer a sovereignty-respecting partnership model.

Could shape trade, climate, technology and security norms.

26th January 2026

[Why EU deal is better for farmers than one with US-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that **India–European Union (EU) relations have entered a decisive, strategic phase**. The upcoming visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa to India — as **chief guests at the 2026 Republic Day and co-chairs of the India–EU Summit** — is not symbolic diplomacy, but a signal of serious geopolitical alignment.

Globally, old certainties are breaking down. **The U.S. has become unpredictable in trade and geopolitics**, while **Europe has faced deep vulnerabilities in energy and security**. India, meanwhile, is navigating pressure from both Western trade policies and China’s growing assertiveness. In this environment, both India and the EU increasingly see **strategic autonomy — rather than dependence on any one power — as essential**.

Despite natural complementarities, **India–EU relations remained underdeveloped for years**, as both focused more on ties with the United States. Today, however, **global instability, China’s rise, and shifting U.S. priorities** have created urgency for a closer partnership.

Two pillars define this new phase:

**A long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** to expand cooperation in textiles, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, digital trade, and services. However, India is wary of the EU’s **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**, which it sees as a climate-linked non-tariff barrier.

**A proposed Security and Defence Partnership**, which could enable technology access, defence co-production, and coordination in the Indian Ocean — aligning India’s “Make in India” goals with Europe’s desire to



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diversify security partners.

Strategically, the India–EU partnership could become a model of a **balanced, multipolar relationship** based on sovereignty, flexibility, and mutual respect, rather than bloc politics.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why India–EU ties are gaining urgency

Top EU leaders invited as Republic Day 2026 chief guests

16th India–EU Summit signals a strategic reset

Both sides reassessing partnerships due to:

U.S. unpredictability

China's growing assertiveness

Risks of over-dependence (energy, markets, security)

### 2. Long-standing problem

Relationship historically under-realised despite potential

Engagement episodic, slow, and technocratic

Both India and EU earlier prioritised ties with the U.S.

### 3. Free Trade Agreement (FTA): strategic importance

Negotiations ongoing since 2007

Potential cooperation in:

Textiles and apparel

Pharmaceuticals and chemicals

Automobiles and machinery

Digital trade and IT services

Seen not just economically, but as a geopolitical insurance policy

### 4. CBAM — major friction point

EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism



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Could impose 20–35% effective carbon levy on:

- Steel
- Aluminium
- Cement
- Fertilisers

India views it as a non-tariff barrier

Linked to debates on climate justice and development space

## 5. Defence and security cooperation

EU proposal for a Security and Defence Partnership

Likely areas:

- Defence co-production

- Technology sharing

- Joint exercises

- Indian Ocean coordination

Supports India's Make in India in defence and Europe's diversification goals

## 6. Strategic autonomy as the shared core

Both seek reduced over-dependence, flexible partnerships, independent decision-making

Neither wants veto power from Washington, Beijing, or Moscow

## 7. Global significance

India–EU partnership can strengthen multipolarity and revitalise multilateralism

Offers a sovereignty-respecting partnership model

Can shape norms in trade, climate, technology, and security

[In times of Trump, what India and the EU can offer each other-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The article argues that **India–European Union relations are reaching a long-delayed moment of strategic maturity**, especially in the context of global uncertainty and the return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency.



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It recalls how even in 2002, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke of a natural symmetry between India and Europe based on democracy and multipolarity. Yet, despite early momentum like the first India–EU Summit in 2000, the relationship remained under-realised for decades.

Now, with European Council President António Costa and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visiting India as **Republic Day chief guests and co-chairing the 16th India–EU Summit**, the partnership is being repositioned as a **reliable, strategic alternative** at a time when the U.S. is unpredictable and global power equations are unstable.

India is valuable to the EU as the **world's largest democracy, fastest-growing major economy, and a rising manufacturing and technology hub**. Europe, for India, offers a **dependable Western partner**, opportunities for trade, investment, education, technology and a counterbalance in a volatile geopolitical environment.

Three major outcomes are expected from this phase:

A **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** to boost trade, investment and youth opportunities

A **Security and Defence Partnership** to deepen strategic cooperation

A **Mobility Partnership** to expand legal pathways for Indian students and professionals

At the same time, differences remain — over **Russia–Ukraine, human rights, and Europe's approach to China and Pakistan** — showing that the relationship is strategic, not sentimental.

Overall, the article presents India–EU ties as a partnership whose time has finally come, shaped by realism, shared interests and the search for strategic autonomy.

## Key Takeaways

### Why this moment matters

Top EU leaders visiting as Republic Day chief guests for the first time

16th India–EU Summit signals a shift from transactional to strategic engagement

Triggered by U.S. unpredictability, global instability and China's rise

### Historical arc of relations

Diplomatic ties since 1962

Early promise under Vajpayee, but decades of underperformance

Relationship long overshadowed by U.S. priorities



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## Why India and the EU need each other

India offers scale, growth, youth, technology capability and democratic legitimacy

EU offers market access, capital, technology, education opportunities and geopolitical reliability

Both seek diversified partnerships in a multipolar world

## Trade and economic partnership

India–EU FTA expected as a major outcome

EU is India's largest trading partner in goods (~\$136 bn in 2024–25)

Talks also ongoing on investment protection and air transport agreements

FTA seen as growth driver and geopolitical stabiliser

## Security and defence cooperation

Security and Defence Partnership expected

EU has such partnerships only with Japan and South Korea in Asia

Opens scope for technology cooperation, defence collaboration and Indo-Pacific coordination

## Migration and mobility pillar

Mobility Partnership Agreement expected

Indians are the largest recipients of EU study and work authorisations

Indian professionals are the top beneficiaries of EU Blue Cards

Europe emerging as a key destination for Indian talent

## Strategic context: Trump era and global volatility



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Europe positioning itself as a reliable partner as U.S. policy becomes uncertain

India benefits from diversified Western engagement beyond Washington

### Points of divergence

Different positions on Russia–Ukraine war

EU concerns over human rights

India expects stronger EU stance on China and Pakistan

### Overall significance

India–EU partnership moving towards a comprehensive strategic compact

Anchored in multipolarity, strategic autonomy and institutionalised cooperation

Potential to shape trade, technology, security and mobility architectures

[Camels, ponies, raptors at R-Day Parade: Role of Army animal wing-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Internal security

### Easy Explanation

For the first time in Republic Day Parade history, the Indian Army's **Remount and Veterinary Corps (RVC)** will present a **specialty curated animal contingent** featuring not just dogs, but also **Bactrian camels, Zanskar ponies and raptors**. Adding to the significance, the contingent will be led by **Captain Harshita Raghav**, one of the first women officers inducted into the RVC in 2023.

The RVC is a specialised arm of the Indian Army responsible for the **breeding, training, deployment and medical care of military animals** such as horses, mules and dogs. These animals remain operationally critical, especially in **high-altitude, remote and inaccessible terrains** where vehicles and aircraft are limited.

Historically, the Corps traces its roots to **1779**, making it one of the oldest branches of the Indian Army. It has supported operations ranging from **logistics and reconnaissance to counter-terrorism, disaster rescue and UN missions**.

This year's contingent highlights how animals continue to act as **force multipliers** for the Indian Army. Bactrian camels will showcase cold-desert logistics capability, Zanskar ponies will represent endurance at extreme altitudes, while Army dogs and raptors will demonstrate modern surveillance, detection and combat-support roles.

The article also underlines the **sacrifices of Army animals**, citing recent canine casualties in counter-terror operations and rescue missions, reinforcing their status as the Army's "silent warriors".

### Key Takeaways



| Clear your doubts now.



## What is the Remount and Veterinary Corps (RVC)

Specialised corps of the Indian Army

Responsible for breeding, rearing, training and veterinary care of Army animals

Supports combat, reconnaissance, logistics, counter-terrorism and disaster response

One of the oldest branches, founded in 1779

Awarded the President's Flag in 1989

Headquarters: Meerut

## Why this year's parade is significant

First time a full animal contingent (beyond dogs) is part of the Republic Day Parade

First time the RVC contingent is led by a woman officer

Showcases animals as force multipliers in modern warfare

## Composition of the 2026 R-Day animal contingent

Bactrian camels – transport in Ladakh's cold desert

Zanskar ponies – high-altitude endurance and logistics

Army dogs – explosive detection, tracking, guarding, rescue, combat roles

Raptors – specialised surveillance and operational tasks

## Operational importance of Army animals

Mules and ponies: logistics in high-altitude and inaccessible terrain

Dogs: mine and explosive detection, counter-terrorism, disaster and avalanche rescue, search and combat support



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Animals remain cost-effective, reliable and terrain-adapted assets

### **Indigenisation of Army dog breeds**

Indigenous breeds inducted: Mudhol Hound (2016), Rampur Hound, Chippiparai, Kombai, Rajapalayam (2023–25)

Supports Atmanirbhar Bharat and climate-adapted military capability

### **RVC beyond the battlefield**

Participation in UN missions

Military diplomacy and training under NCC

Veterinary outreach in remote areas

Supply of trained animals to friendly countries

### **Operational legacy**

Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka

Kargil conflict logistics support

Disaster response in Wayanad (2024), Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand floods

### **Sacrifice and symbolism**

Many Army animals have died in active duty

Recent examples: K-9 dogs Kent, Phantom, Mansi and Axel

Reinforces the idea of animals as “silent warriors” of the Indian Army

[Nuclear power expansion is an R&D challenge-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

Economy

### **Easy Explanation**



| Clear your doubts now.



The Draft National Electricity Policy aims to align India's power sector with two big goals:

**Climate commitments** – especially India's target to cut emissions intensity of GDP by 45% by 2030.

**Development needs** – ensuring reliable, 24x7 electricity for a growing economy, including energy-intensive sectors like AI, data centres, and advanced manufacturing.

While renewable energy will remain the backbone of future power generation, solar and wind are **intermittent**. Coal plants will still act as buffers, but the policy clearly looks for a **long-term non-fossil substitute**.

That is where **nuclear energy** comes in.

The policy proposes a **10-fold increase in nuclear power capacity by 2047**. Nuclear energy is almost carbon-free and provides **continuous baseload power**, unlike renewables.

To support this, Parliament recently passed the **SHANTI Act**, which allows faster expansion of nuclear energy. The draft policy builds on this by promoting:

**Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)**

**Direct nuclear power use by industries**

SMRs are smaller, safer, easier to install, and can be located close to demand centres, replacing polluting captive coal plants in industrial hubs.

However, reaching **100 GW of nuclear power in 21 years is extremely ambitious**.

India has **limited and low-grade uranium**, and depends on imports from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Canada. Therefore, policymakers must seriously invest in **R&D to harness India's vast thorium reserves**.

Globally, thorium has not been widely used because nuclear technology historically evolved around uranium and plutonium for military purposes. India's major challenge is now to **scale up research, technology, and fuel-cycle capabilities** to make thorium-based nuclear energy commercially viable.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Why nuclear power is being pushed

Essential for **deep decarbonisation**

Provides **stable, non-intermittent baseload power**

Supports **emerging sectors** (AI, data centres, high-tech manufacturing)

Helps reduce long-term dependence on fossil fuels



| Clear your doubts now.



## 2. Major policy signals

Target of **10× nuclear capacity expansion by 2047**

Integration of nuclear into long-term power planning

Implementation support through the **SHANTI Act**

Promotion of **Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)**

Allowing **industrial and commercial direct nuclear usage**

## 3. Importance of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)

Smaller land requirement

Faster and easier deployment

Enhanced safety features

Can replace **captive coal-based industrial plants**

Can be located near demand centres → reduces transmission losses

## 4. Core challenge: nuclear fuel security

India has **poor-quality and limited uranium**

High **import dependence**

Strategic vulnerability in long run

## 5. Thorium as India's long-term solution

India has one of the **world's largest thorium reserves**



| Clear your doubts now.



Fits India's **three-stage nuclear programme**

Requires **massive R&D investment**

Technology not yet commercially mature

## 6. Real bottleneck: Research & Development

Thorium extraction and utilisation

Advanced reactor design

Fuel reprocessing and safety systems

Indigenous nuclear technology ecosystem [The issues surrounding Governors' address-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Polity

## Easy Explanation

The article discusses the growing controversies around the **Governor's annual address to State legislatures**, especially in Opposition-ruled States. Under the Constitution, the Governor is required to deliver a policy address at the beginning of the first session of every year and after elections. This address is not the Governor's personal speech; it is drafted by the **elected State government** and outlines its achievements and future policies.

Historically, even during British rule and in the Constituent Assembly debates, it was clearly understood that the Governor's address must reflect the views of the **Council of Ministers**, not the Governor's own opinions. The Supreme Court has also repeatedly affirmed that the Governor is only a **constitutional head**, bound by ministerial advice.

However, in recent years, some Governors have **skipped parts of the address, refused to read it, or avoided delivering it altogether**, particularly in States ruled by Opposition parties. Examples include Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Such actions violate constitutional conventions and Supreme Court judgments, and raise concerns about the **politicisation of the Governor's office**.

The article argues that while the Governor plays an important role in India's quasi-federal structure, the office should not be used to undermine elected governments. As a reform measure, it highlights the recommendations of the **Sarkaria and Punchhi Commissions**, which proposed that **Chief Ministers be consulted before appointing Governors**, to reduce friction and restore constitutional balance.

## Key Takeaways

### Historical background of Governor's address

Government of India Act, 1935 allowed Governors to address provincial legislatures



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Under provincial autonomy (1937), speeches were prepared with elected ministries

Constituent Assembly intended the address to reflect the elected government's policies, not personal views

### **Constitutional provisions (Articles 175 and 176)**

Article 175: Governor *may* address the House(s) — discretionary

Article 176: Governor *shall* address the House(s):

At the first session after each Assembly election

At the first session of every year

Address is mandatory and drafted by the Council of Ministers

Followed by a “Motion of Thanks” and legislative debate

### **Role of the Governor clarified by the Supreme Court**

Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974): Governor is a constitutional head, bound by ministerial advice

Nabam Rebia case (2016): Address under Articles 175 and 176 must be on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers

### **Current constitutional concerns**

Governors skipping parts of the address (Tamil Nadu, Kerala)

Refusal or failure to deliver the address (Tamil Nadu since 2024)

Delivering personal statements instead of Cabinet-approved speeches (Karnataka)

Seen as violations of constitutional conventions and judicial rulings

### **Why this is a serious issue**



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Governor's oath (Article 159) requires protection of the Constitution

Actions undermine legislative accountability and elected governments

Indicates increasing politicisation of the Governor's office

### Federalism and the Governor's role

Governor is nominal executive head like the President at the Union level

Also acts as a link between Centre and States

Must not weaken the basic structure principle of federalism

### Way forward: Sarkaria and Punchhi Commission recommendations

Chief Minister should be consulted before appointment of Governor

Aim: reduce political confrontation and restore constitutional propriety

Seen as a practical reform rather than abolishing the post [When can courts interfere in an ongoing investigation?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Polity

### Easy Explanation

The Supreme Court has recently clarified the **limited circumstances in which courts can interfere with an ongoing criminal investigation**.

In *State of U.P. vs Mohd Arshad Khan (Dec 2025)*, the Supreme Court set aside an Allahabad High Court order that had directed a **time-bound investigation** and granted **protection from arrest** without even quashing the FIR. The Court held that:

Courts should interfere **only when delay itself causes serious prejudice**.

Giving protection from arrest without quashing the FIR is generally **not justified**.

**Time-bound investigations must be an exception, not the rule.**



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Earlier, in *Satya Prakash Bagla vs State (Delhi HC, Nov 2025)*, the Delhi High Court clarified that the phrase “**no coercive steps**” is mainly about **protecting personal liberty**, and does **not automatically stop investigation** or prevent steps like **freezing bank accounts**.

The larger legal framework comes from the Supreme Court’s landmark judgment in *Neeharika Infrastructure vs State of Maharashtra (2021)*.

The Court held that:

**Police have a statutory right and duty** under the CrPC to investigate cognisable offences.

Courts **must not normally interfere** with investigations.

Investigation can be stopped **only when the FIR discloses no cognisable offence at all**.

The power to quash proceedings must be used **sparingly, carefully, and in exceptional cases**, where non-interference would lead to **miscarriage of justice**.

On the issue of “no coercive steps”, the Supreme Court cautioned High Courts against passing **vague interim orders** like “no coercive action” without reasons. If a court intends to:

stay arrest, or

stay investigation,

it must **clearly say so and give reasons**, showing application of mind.

The Delhi High Court added that “coercive steps” has **no fixed meaning**. Its interpretation depends on:

what relief was sought, and

what the court intended to protect (usually personal liberty, not the investigation itself).

## Key Takeaways

1. General rule: courts should not interfere

Investigation of cognisable offences is the **exclusive domain of police**.

Courts should **not thwart or obstruct** investigations.

Separation of functions: police investigate, courts adjudicate.



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## 2. When courts *can* interfere

Courts may intervene only when:

The FIR **discloses no offence at all**, or

The case is **manifestly malicious**, or

**Non-interference would cause miscarriage of justice**, or

**Delay itself causes serious prejudice.**

## 3. Quashing of FIR / investigation

Power under **Section 482 CrPC (now Section 528 BNSS)** and **Article 226.**

Must be exercised **sparingly, with circumspection, and in rare cases.**

## 4. Time-bound investigations

Should be **exceptional**, not routine.

Only justified when delay **violates fairness or causes real prejudice.**

## 5. “No coercive steps” orders

Supreme Court (Neeharika):

Vague orders like “no coercive action” are **discouraged.**

Courts must:

clarify what is restrained (arrest? investigation?), and

record **reasons.**

Delhi High Court (Satya Prakash Bagla):



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“No coercive steps” **does not automatically stop investigation.**

Usually relates to **personal liberty**, not to evidence collection.

Its meaning depends on **context and relief sought.**

6. What is NOT normally permitted

Blanket stay on investigation.

Protection from arrest **without quashing FIR.**

Vague interim orders with **no reasoning.**

27th January 2026

[In China's series of purges, why latest one stands out-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

China has been carrying out repeated purges of top military and political leaders for the past few years, officially in the name of “anti-corruption”. The latest case stands out because **Zhang Youxia**, Vice-Chairman of China’s highest military body — the **Central Military Commission (CMC)** — has been placed under investigation.

This is unprecedented because Zhang was:

The **second-most powerful officer in the PLA** after Xi Jinping

A **war veteran and decorated general**

Someone with **personal and family ties to Xi Jinping**

Along with Zhang, **Liu Zhenli**, another senior CMC member, is also under investigation. Due to earlier purges, most CMC positions are already vacant. As a result, **China’s top military command is now almost empty**, effectively controlled only by Xi Jinping and one recently appointed vice-chairman.

The official charge is “serious violations of discipline and law” — language commonly used for corruption. However, Chinese military media also accused Zhang of **undermining Xi’s authority over the armed forces**, which suggests this is not just about money, but also about **political loyalty and control.**

There are multiple theories:



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Failure to control associates and relatives

Taking bribes for promotions

Forming political cliques

Even allegations of **leaking sensitive nuclear information** (unconfirmed)

This purge raises serious concerns about the **stability, professionalism, morale, and war-readiness of the PLA**, especially when China is asserting itself around **Taiwan, the South China Sea, and along the Himalayan border**.

Rather than weakening Xi, many analysts believe this shows that **Xi's control is so strong that even his own loyalists are not safe**.

### Key Takeaways

#### Why this purge is exceptional

Zhang Youxia was Vice-Chairman of the CMC, the highest military decision-making body.

He was personally close to Xi and among the most senior generals in China.

Never before has a serving CMC Vice-Chairman been removed at this level.

#### Collapse of collective military leadership

Out of 7 CMC members, most posts are vacant or under investigation.

The body overseeing procurement, nuclear forces, and war planning is severely depleted.

Indicates extreme centralisation of power in Xi Jinping.

#### Shift from corruption to political control

Official language goes beyond corruption to accuse Zhang of:

Undermining Xi's command system

Encouraging political networks in the army



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Suggests fear of internal challenge within the PLA.

### Impact on China's military effectiveness

Constant purges remove experienced commanders.

Disrupts long-term war planning, institutional continuity, and officer morale.

Raises doubts whether the PLA is truly ready for high-intensity conflict, especially over Taiwan.

### What this says about Xi Jinping

Shows Xi is unchallenged and dominant.

Willing to purge even insiders.

But also reflects deep insecurity and persistent corruption and factionalism inside the military.

Strengthens personal control, but may weaken institutional capacity.

### Relevance for India and global politics

Direct relevance for the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea, and India-China military balance.

A weakened or unstable PLA leadership can increase risks of miscalculation, adventurism, and internal power struggles.

[Month ago.Pentagon flagged PLA 'disruption' from removals-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

The US Pentagon has officially warned that China's repeated removal of senior PLA officers is **disrupting the Chinese military's functioning and planning**.

This comes after reports that **General Zhang Youxia**, China's most senior uniformed officer and Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), is under investigation. The Wall Street Journal claimed the probe may involve **leaking sensitive information related to China's nuclear weapons programme to the US** (not officially confirmed).

Zhang is extremely important because he is **Xi Jinping's closest military ally** and the **second-most powerful figure in the PLA**. Along with him, another top general, **Liu Zhenli**, is also under investigation.



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Earlier purges had already removed several generals, including another Vice-Chairman and heads of key departments. After the latest removals, **China's top military command body (CMC) has only two members left** — Xi Jinping and a recently appointed disciplinary official.

The Pentagon's annual China Military Power Report (December) said these purges have:

Created **uncertainty about priorities**

**Reverberated through the ranks**

Exposed **corruption in defence procurement**, even causing technical failures like faulty missile silo lids

The US assessment is that while these investigations may **disrupt PLA operational readiness in the short term**, China could try to use them to clean up systemic corruption and rebuild later.

Overall, the removals show that **Xi Jinping is willing to purge even the most senior and politically critical officers**, but they also raise serious concerns about the **cohesion, morale, and war-planning capacity of the PLA**, especially with China's 2027 military modernisation and Taiwan goals in mind.

## Key Takeaways

### Pentagon's warning on PLA disruption

US Defence Department says senior-level purges have caused uncertainty in PLA priorities.

Investigations are reverberating through the ranks and hurting organisational stability.

Short-term operational effectiveness is likely being disrupted.

### Why Zhang Youxia's case matters

Zhang is Vice-Chairman of the CMC and China's most senior serving general.

He is considered Xi Jinping's closest ally inside the military.

His removal is among the most serious military purges in decades.

### CMC almost hollowed out

Multiple CMC members have been detained, suspended, or expelled.



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The CMC has shrunk from seven members to just two.

This weakens collective military leadership and concentrates power in Xi.

### **Corruption at the highest level**

Pentagon notes corruption across all PLA services.

Defence procurement corruption has caused real capability failures.

By late 2024, corruption had reached even the CMC level.

### **Political loyalty over professional stability**

Purges target not only corruption but also perceived disloyalty.

Even officers responsible for enforcing loyalty have been removed.

Shows Xi's zero-tolerance approach, even at the cost of disruption.

### **Implications for China's war preparedness**

Loss of experienced commanders hurts continuity and planning.

Raises doubts over progress toward China's 2027 military modernisation goals.

Has direct relevance for Taiwan contingency planning and regional security.

### **What it signals about Xi Jinping**

Demonstrates extreme centralisation of control over the military.

Projects authority and fear, but also reveals deep internal problems.

Strengthens Xi politically, but weakens military institutional health.

[India to expand its hypersonic arsenal with LR-AShM missile-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Science and technology



| Clear your doubts now.



## Easy Explanation

India showcased its **Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-AShM)** for the first time at the **77th Republic Day Parade**, signalling a major step in its entry into the hypersonic weapons domain.

LR-AShM is a **hypersonic glide missile** being developed by DRDO mainly to meet the **Indian Navy's coastal and sea-denial requirements**. It is designed to hit **both static and moving targets**, especially large naval assets like **warships and aircraft carriers**, at ranges of around **1,500 km**.

The missile is launched using a **two-stage solid rocket booster**. After the booster phase, the hypersonic vehicle **detaches and glides unpowered through the atmosphere at speeds above Mach 5**, while performing manoeuvres. Because it flies **low, extremely fast, and unpredictably**, it is **very difficult for enemy radars and missile defence systems to detect or intercept**.

DRDO states that the missile can cover **1,500 km in about 15 minutes**. Future variants are planned with ranges up to **3,500 km**. One successful test was conducted on **November 16, 2024, off the Odisha coast**. Warhead and sensor integration is ongoing, and induction into the Navy is expected in **2–3 years**.

Parallely, India is also working on **hypersonic cruise missiles using scramjet engines**, which are powered throughout flight and fly within the atmosphere — a more complex but strategically valuable capability.

Overall, LR-AShM significantly strengthens India's **maritime strike capability, sea-denial strategy, and deterrence posture in the Indian Ocean Region**, especially amid growing Chinese naval presence.

## Key Takeaways

### What is LR-AShM

Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile developed by DRDO.

Hypersonic glide vehicle meant primarily for the Indian Navy.

Designed to strike both moving and fixed maritime targets.

## Core technical features

Two-stage solid rocket booster followed by unpowered hypersonic glide.

Speeds above Mach 5, with reported peak around Mach 10.

Flies at low altitude with manoeuvres, making interception extremely difficult.

## Range and performance

Approximate range of 1,500 km, covered in about 15 minutes.



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Future versions planned up to 3,500 km.

Can carry different payloads depending on mission profile.

### **Operational significance**

Capable of neutralising all classes of enemy warships.

Key asset for sea-denial operations.

Strengthens India's deterrence in the Indian Ocean Region.

### **Strategic value for India**

Places India among a small group of hypersonic-capable nations.

Enhances maritime power projection against technologically advanced navies.

Supports India's response to expanding Chinese naval presence.

### **Development status**

Successful test conducted on 16 November 2024 off Odisha coast.

Warhead and sensor integration underway.

Expected induction into Navy within 2–3 years.

### **Broader hypersonic programme**

India working on both hypersonic glide vehicles and hypersonic cruise missiles.

Cruise missiles will use scramjet engines for sustained powered flight.

Represents long-term shift toward next-generation strategic weapons.

[India has most road accident deaths in the world.Can 'talkingcars' curb these?-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy



| Clear your doubts now.



## Easy Explanation

India records the **highest number of road accident deaths in the world**, far ahead of China and the US. To address this, the Union government is planning to roll out a **Vehicle-to-Vehicle (V2V) communication system**, often called “talking cars”.

V2V is a **wireless safety technology** that allows vehicles to exchange real-time data such as **speed, location, braking, and direction**. Each vehicle will have an **On-Board Unit (OBU)** that sends and receives alerts. If a car brakes suddenly, encounters fog, black spots, obstacles, or a parked vehicle, **nearby vehicles automatically receive warnings**.

The Department of Telecommunications has allocated **radio spectrum** for this system. The technology is similar to aviation safety systems where aircraft continuously broadcast their position to avoid collisions.

India plans to **first mandate OBUs in new vehicles**, then retrofit older vehicles. The government is currently finalising **technical standards with automobile manufacturers** and a joint task force has been set up with the telecom department. OBUs are expected to cost around **₹5,000–₹7,000 per vehicle**. The aim is to implement the system **within the year**.

While the system can significantly improve safety, challenges include **spectrum limitations, accuracy of alerts, privacy risks, and vulnerability to cyberattacks**. Several countries including the **US, Europe, and China** already use or are expanding V2V systems.

## Key Takeaways

### Why V2V is being introduced

India has the highest road accident deaths globally.

China has about 36% and the US about 25% of India's fatalities.

V2V aims to reduce collisions through real-time warnings.

### What is V2V technology

Wireless system that lets vehicles “talk” to each other.

Shares speed, location, braking and movement data.

Inspired by aviation collision-avoidance systems.

### How the system will work

Vehicles will be fitted with On-Board Units (OBUs).

OBUs detect other vehicles within about 300 metres.



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Drivers receive alerts about sudden braking, obstacles, fog, black spots and parked vehicles.

### India's rollout plan

30 GHz spectrum allocated by Department of Telecommunications.

New vehicles to get OBUs first, older vehicles later.

Standards being developed with OEMs.

Joint MoRTH-DoT task force created.

Targeted implementation within this year.

### Cost and infrastructure

OBUs expected to cost ₹5,000-₹7,000 per vehicle.

Spectrum to be provided free under National Frequency Allocation Plan.

Part of MoRTH's road safety programme.

### Challenges and concerns

Spectrum band may not support all vehicles.

Risk of wrong alerts causing accidents.

Large-scale data collection raises privacy issues.

Cybersecurity threats to intelligent transport systems.

### Global comparison

US is the global leader in V2V deployment.

Europe integrating V2V into new vehicles and smart cities.



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China a major adopter.

UAE, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Mexico in pilot stages.

### [How will U.S. exit affect solar alliance?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

International relations

#### Easy Explanation

The U.S. government announced on January 7 that it will **withdraw from 66 international organisations**, including the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**, saying these bodies no longer serve American interests.

The ISA was launched in **2015 by India and France** and is **headquartered in Gurugram, India**. Its goal is to make **solar energy cheaper, easier, and safer to invest in**, especially for **developing and tropical countries**. It does not build power plants itself but helps countries with **financing, risk reduction, capacity building, and project facilitation**. Today, it has **120+ member countries** across Africa, Asia, and island regions. The U.S. joined late, in **2021**, and has contributed only about **\$2.1 million**, roughly **1% of ISA's funds**.

Financially, the U.S. exit **will not weaken the ISA's operations**. India has said ongoing programmes, training, and technical support will continue.

For **India's solar sector**, there is **no direct negative impact**. India does not depend on the U.S. for solar equipment. As of late 2025, India's **solar module manufacturing capacity is about 144 GW**, and **solar cell capacity about 25 GW**, both expanding rapidly. India still imports heavily from **China**, the world's dominant supplier, not the U.S. Therefore, **solar power costs, electricity tariffs, and domestic projects remain unaffected**.

Investment in Indian solar projects is also **unlikely to slow**, because most projects are driven by **domestic power demand, long-term government contracts, and Indian or global financial institutions**, not U.S. climate policy.

The **real risk lies outside India**, especially in **Africa and poorer developing countries** where ISA is very active. These regions rely on **international climate finance and confidence**. When a major power like the U.S. steps back, lenders may become cautious, projects may slow, and funding may be harder to mobilise. This could affect **Indian companies expanding abroad** and India's broader **climate diplomacy in the Global South**.

Overall, this is **not a shock for India's solar industry**, but a **test of India's leadership** in global climate cooperation.

#### Key Takeaways

##### What is the International Solar Alliance (ISA)

Launched in 2015 by India and France.

Headquarters: Gurugram, India.

120+ member countries, mainly from tropical and developing regions.

Focus: financing support, risk reduction, and faster solar adoption.

The U.S. joined in 2021 and contributed about \$2.1 million.

##### What the U.S. exit means for the ISA

Financial impact is minimal (only about 1% of ISA funds).

Day-to-day operations and training programmes will continue.

However, U.S. exit reduces global climate confidence and technical partnership.

##### Impact on India's solar manufacturing



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No dependence on the U.S. for solar panels or equipment.  
India's module capacity ~144 GW; cell capacity ~25 GW and rising.  
India mainly imports from China, not the U.S.  
Project costs and electricity tariffs in India remain unaffected.

### Impact on investments in India

Indian solar projects driven by domestic demand and long-term contracts.  
Funding comes largely from Indian banks, global funds, and development institutions.  
No major threat to project pipeline or solar jobs.  
Possible upside: Indian manufacturers may find export opportunities if U.S. reduces domestic renewable push.

### Where the real economic risk lies

Africa and poorer developing nations depend heavily on global climate finance.  
U.S. withdrawal may slow funding, delay projects, and raise investor caution.  
Indian companies operating abroad could feel secondary effects.

### Strategic and diplomatic implications for India

ISA is a key tool of India's Global South diplomacy.  
Helps India build influence, open markets, and support Indian firms overseas.  
U.S. exit increases India's leadership burden within ISA.

### Overall assessment

India's domestic solar sector remains stable.  
The challenge is a more fragmented global climate order.  
For India, this is a stress test of leadership, not a structural setback.

### [How is China framing its Antarctic ambitions?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Environment

### Easy Explanation

China has proposed a new domestic law called the "**Antarctic Activities and Environmental Protection Law**", submitted in December 2025 to its Parliament. The purpose is to create a **comprehensive legal framework** to regulate all Chinese activities in Antarctica.

The draft law applies not only to **Chinese citizens and organisations**, but also to **foreign entities operating from China or using Chinese ports** to go to Antarctica. It lays down rules for **scientific expeditions, research, tourism, fisheries, shipping, and environmental protection**.

Importantly, China is **framing its Antarctic ambitions in peaceful and environmental terms**. The draft law aligns itself with the **Antarctic Treaty System**, explicitly **prohibiting military activities**, banning **mineral exploitation (except scientific research)**, and introducing **environmental impact assessments, supervision mechanisms, and accountability provisions**.

China's Antarctic presence has grown steadily since its first expedition in 1984. It now runs **five permanent research stations** across different Antarctic regions and operates **advanced polar icebreakers**, allowing year-round operations.

Officially, China presents its goals as:

Climate and polar science  
Environmental protection



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International cooperation  
Strengthening participation in Antarctic governance

However, beyond science, China is also seeking to become a **rule-shaping actor** within the Antarctic Treaty System and to build **long-term strategic presence and technological capabilities** in extreme environments.

The proposed law signals that China wants to **institutionalise its Antarctic role through domestic legislation**, moving from ad-hoc policies to a legally backed polar strategy.

## Key Takeaways

### What China's draft law is about

Titled "Antarctic Activities and Environmental Protection Law".  
Submitted in December 2025 for first reading.  
Covers expeditions, research, fisheries, tourism, and shipping.  
Applies to Chinese entities and foreign actors operating from China.

### How China is framing its ambitions

Emphasises peaceful use and environmental protection.  
Aligns itself with the Antarctic Treaty System.  
Prohibits military activities, weapons testing, troop deployment, and strategic military use.  
Bans mineral exploitation except for scientific research.

### Environmental governance focus

Introduces environmental impact assessments.  
Provides for supervision and post-incident accountability.  
Addresses tourism regulation, waste management, and marine pollution.

### China's Antarctic footprint

First expedition: 1984.  
Antarctic Treaty consultative party: 1985.  
Operates five research stations (Great Wall, Zhongshan, Taishan, Kunlun, Qinling).  
Possesses modern icebreakers (Xuelong, Xuelong-2).  
Capable of year-round, multi-zone scientific research.

### Strategic objectives behind the framing

Support climate science and environmental planning.  
Build long-term presence without territorial claims.  
Upgrade polar technology and logistics capabilities.  
Shift from rule-taker to rule-shaper within Antarctic governance.

### Implications for the Antarctic Treaty System

Shows China is formalising Antarctic engagement through domestic law.  
Reflects growing use of national legislation by major powers to shape treaty compliance.  
Increases the importance of monitoring how domestic laws influence Antarctic governance.

### Overall assessment

China is projecting itself as a responsible scientific and environmental stakeholder.  
At the same time, it is consolidating long-term strategic and governance influence in Antarctica.



| Clear your doubts now.



Science

## Easy Explanation

All living things release heat. Traditionally, scientists said this heat is the “price” life pays to maintain order — because living systems are highly organised, they must dump heat to compensate for the decrease in entropy.

But measurements show that organisms release **about 100 times more heat than this explanation alone would require**. So where does the extra heat come from?

A new study by researchers from the **University of Freiburg, STFC Daresbury Laboratory, and the University of Edinburgh** suggests the extra heat comes from the way cells **run and control their chemistry**.

Inside every cell, thousands of chemical reactions happen simultaneously. These reactions must be fast, accurate, stable, responsive to sudden changes

To achieve all this, cells keep many chemical reactions **far from equilibrium**. Instead of letting reactions settle into a quiet balance, cells continuously **pump energy in**, forcing reactions to run strongly in one direction.

The researchers focused on **ATP hydrolysis** ( $\text{ATP} \rightarrow \text{ADP} + \text{phosphate}$ ), the main energy reaction of life. In nature, this reaction should reach a balance. But cells maintain ATP levels **around 10 billion times higher than equilibrium**, constantly producing new ATP and using it up to power cellular work.

Running reactions so far from equilibrium allows cells to **do work, control reactions precisely, and respond quickly**. But it also inevitably produces **large amounts of heat**. This “excess heat” is therefore not waste — it is the **cost of keeping life flexible, accurate, and alive**.

In short, life pays a “heat tax” not just to stay ordered, but to keep its chemistry **driven, controlled, and useful**.

## Key Takeaways

### Why the study matters

Living organisms release far more heat than needed just to maintain order.  
Traditional entropy-based explanations fall short by about two orders of magnitude.

### Core idea of the new research

Extra heat comes from cells keeping their chemical reactions far from equilibrium.  
Cells constantly push reactions in one direction using energy.

### Role of far-from-equilibrium chemistry

Allows useful work to be done.  
Enables precision, speed, and robustness in cellular reactions.  
Prevents chemical systems from becoming inactive.

### ATP as the key example

Reaction:  $\text{ATP} \rightarrow \text{ADP} + \text{phosphate}$ .  
Cells maintain ATP levels about 10 billion times higher than equilibrium.  
Achieved by continuous ATP production and controlled breakdown.

### Why this produces so much heat





Constant energy input and reaction cycling dissipates heat.  
Heat is the unavoidable byproduct of keeping chemistry driven and controllable.

### Biological meaning

Heat release is the “price” for versatility, accuracy, and adaptability.  
Evolution has favoured this high-energy, high-heat strategy.

### Broader implication

Life is not close to chemical rest.  
It survives by operating in a permanently driven, non-equilibrium state.

[Reviewer burnout drives AI use yet human oversight remains crucial-The Hindu Science](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

The global peer-review system is under severe strain. In 2020 alone, scientists spent about **130 million hours (nearly 15,000 years)** reviewing papers. With research output rising rapidly, qualified reviewers are overburdened. This **reviewer burnout** is pushing journals, especially in STEM fields, to increasingly use **artificial intelligence (AI)** to support the review process.

AI is already being used to **screen manuscripts**, detect **plagiarism**, check **formatting**, flag **image manipulation**, and match papers to suitable reviewers. These tools can significantly reduce routine workload and speed up the early stages of peer review.

However, experts strongly caution that **AI cannot replace human reviewers**. Machines struggle with judging **novelty, scientific significance, contextual methodology, and conceptual soundness**. There are also serious risks: AI can **amplify errors**, fabricate citations, reinforce existing biases, and spread incorrect science at scale if not carefully supervised.

Researchers stress that AI should be used only for **bounded, supportive tasks**, while **final judgement, deep scrutiny, and creative evaluation must remain human-led**. Without strong human oversight, AI could accelerate misinformation rather than improve science.

The consensus emerging across academia is that AI should **augment human expertise, not replace it**. In fact, as AI use grows, the value of **expert human judgement becomes even more important**, not less.

### Key Takeaways

#### Why journals are turning to AI

Peer review burden is extremely high (130 million hours in 2020).

Rapid growth in scientific publishing is straining reviewer pools.

Reviewer burnout is pushing publishers toward AI support systems.

### Where AI is being used



| Clear your doubts now.



Plagiarism detection and integrity checks.

Prescreening of manuscripts.

Reviewer matching and scope alignment.

Detecting image manipulation, data fabrication patterns, and biased language.

### **What AI can do well**

Automate routine and repetitive tasks.

Analyse large volumes of text and data quickly.

Identify hidden patterns and cross-disciplinary links.

Improve efficiency in early stages of peer review.

### **Why human oversight remains crucial**

Humans are needed to judge novelty, importance, and scientific context.

AI cannot reliably assess methodological soundness in complex fields.

Constructive scientific feedback requires human expertise.

### **Major risks of AI-driven peer review**

Amplification of errors and flawed summaries.

Generation of fake or misleading citations.

Hidden biases from training data and algorithms.

Over-representation of highly cited but possibly flawed research.

Rapid spread of non-replicable or incorrect science.



| Clear your doubts now.



## Creativity and science

AI mainly produces incremental insights.

It cannot generate fundamentally new hypotheses.

True creativity involves reframing problems and challenging assumptions — still a human domain.

## Best-practice safeguards suggested

Use AI only for clearly defined support tasks.

Always verify AI outputs against primary sources.

Avoid reliance on a single model.

Build strong quality-assessment frameworks.

## Overall conclusion

AI is reshaping scientific publishing.

But the future of peer review must be **AI-assisted, human-governed**.

As machines become stronger, **human judgement becomes more, not less, important**.

28th January 2026

[How shifting trade winds nudged India-EU talks across finish line-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

## Easy Explanation

India and the European Union have formally concluded negotiations on a long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which began in 2007 but made decisive progress only in the last six months. The sudden acceleration was driven less by bilateral enthusiasm and more by **dramatic shifts in the global trade order**.

The most important external trigger has been the **United States' aggressive protectionism**. The US imposed steep tariffs on Indian goods and repeatedly threatened the EU with trade action over technology regulation, Greenland, and climate issues. This created deep uncertainty for both India and the EU, for whom the US remains the largest export market. As American buyers reduced orders, Indian exporters began losing market share to competitors like Vietnam and Bangladesh.

At the same time, **multilateral institutions like the WTO have weakened**, pushing countries to rely more on bilateral and regional trade agreements.



| Clear your doubts now.



Another major driver is **China's growing dominance in manufacturing and global supply chains**, reflected in its massive trade surplus. Both India and the EU remain heavily dependent on Chinese industrial inputs, pharmaceuticals, electronics, and clean-tech components. This over-dependence, exposed sharply during Covid-19, has encouraged both sides to pursue **"de-risking" and supply-chain diversification**, making each other more attractive partners.

The negotiations were also eased by **India's recent FTAs with the UK, New Zealand and others**. The India-UK FTA in particular broke long-standing deadlocks (especially on automobiles), signaling that India was now willing to selectively open sensitive sectors — something the EU had demanded earlier.

Overall, the India-EU FTA is not merely a commercial agreement. It is a **geo-economic response to US unpredictability, China's overcapacity, and the fragmentation of the global trade system**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Global trade order is undergoing a structural shift

The US is moving away from liberal trade towards protectionism and tariff-based coercion.

Multilateral institutions like the WTO are losing relevance.

Countries are increasingly relying on bilateral and regional FTAs.

### 2. US protectionism acted as the immediate trigger

The US imposed steep tariffs on Indian exports and repeatedly threatened the EU.

Trade uncertainty disrupted export planning for both India and Europe.

Indian exporters risk permanent loss of the US market, accelerating diversification.

### 3. China's manufacturing dominance is the deeper structural factor

China's record trade surplus reflects its grip over global manufacturing.

India and the EU depend heavily on China for industrial inputs and intermediates.

Both are pursuing "de-risking" and supply-chain diversification strategies.

### 4. Strategic sector vulnerabilities drove convergence

Overdependence is high in automobiles, batteries, pharmaceuticals, and clean-tech sectors.





EU tariffs on Chinese EVs and India's high auto duties show growing strategic anxiety.

India-EU cooperation is aimed at building resilient industrial and supply chains.

## 5. India's recent FTAs changed the negotiating dynamic

India's FTAs with the UK and others showed flexibility on sensitive sectors.

Opening of the automobile sector removed a long-standing obstacle.

Strengthened the EU's confidence in concluding a comprehensive deal.

## 6. The India-EU FTA is fundamentally geo-economic

It is shaped by US unpredictability, China's overcapacity, and fragmented globalisation.

The deal goes beyond trade to include strategic and supply-chain considerations.

Reflects India and the EU's attempt to position themselves in a multipolar economic order.

[New UGC regulations sharpen provisions against caste bias-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

In January 2026, the University Grants Commission notified the **UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026**, aimed at eradicating discrimination — especially caste-based discrimination — in higher education institutions. These regulations were framed following **Supreme Court intervention** in petitions linked to the deaths of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, which had brought institutional caste bias into national focus.

The new regulations replace the largely advisory 2012 framework and introduce a **formal enforcement architecture** within every higher education institution. Universities and colleges are now mandatorily required to establish **Equal Opportunity Centres (EOC), Equity Committees, and Equity Squads**, supported by 24-hour helplines and designated Equity Ambassadors.

Unlike the 2012 regulations, the 2026 framework provides for **monitoring by the UGC and punitive action against non-compliant institutions**, including debarment from UGC schemes, denial of permission to offer courses, and removal from the list of grant-eligible institutions.

However, the regulations have triggered political and student protests. Critics argue that the absence of penalties for false complaints and the strong compliance provisions could lead to harassment of general category students and institutional misuse. Supporters counter that stronger mechanisms were necessary because earlier advisory guidelines failed to prevent entrenched discrimination.



| Clear your doubts now.



Overall, the regulations mark a shift from **symbolic commitment to enforceable institutional accountability** in addressing caste and identity-based discrimination in higher education.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Background and rationale

Regulations notified after Supreme Court intervention in cases linked to Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi.

Aim to address persistent caste-based and identity-based discrimination in higher education.

Replace the UGC's 2012 "equity regulations".

### 2. Objectives of the 2026 regulations

Eradicate discrimination on grounds of caste, religion, race, gender, place of birth, and disability.

Provide special protection to SCs, STs, OBCs, EWS, and persons with disabilities.

Promote full equity and inclusion across higher education institutions.

### 3. Mandatory institutional architecture

Equal Opportunity Centre (EOC) to oversee equity policies, coordinate with authorities, and provide support.

Equity Committee to inquire into complaints and recommend action within fixed timelines.

Equity Squads to remain mobile on campus to prevent discrimination.

24-hour Equity Helpline and appointment of Equity Ambassadors made compulsory.

### 4. Stronger enforcement compared to 2012 regulations

2012 framework was largely advisory and lacked penalties.

2026 regulations empower UGC to monitor compliance through a national-level mechanism.

Non-compliant institutions can face debarment from schemes, loss of course approvals, and denial of grants.

### 5. Expanded and clearer procedural framework



| Clear your doubts now.



Detailed composition of committees specified.

Time-bound inquiry and reporting mechanisms introduced.

OBCs explicitly included, unlike in the 2012 regulations.

## 6. Nature of the controversy

Critics allege risk of harassment of general category students.

Objections to absence of penalties for false complaints.

Protests by sections of students and political actors demanding rollback.

Supporters argue enforceability is essential to correct institutional failure.

## 7. Broader significance

Signals a shift from moral guidance to regulatory oversight.

Places institutional accountability at the centre of social justice in education.

Likely to become a test case for balancing equity enforcement with procedural safeguards.

[US quits Paris deal, but has chosen to remain in some climate bodies - The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Environment

### Easy Explanation

The United States has officially exited the **2015 Paris Agreement** after the one-year notice period ended. This follows its recent withdrawal from over 60 international organisations and agreements, many of them related to climate change. These include bodies such as the **UNFCCC, IPCC, IRENA, International Solar Alliance and IUCN**, reflecting the Trump administration's open hostility towards climate action and the clean energy transition.

However, the US has **not exited all climate-linked organisations**. It remains in bodies such as the **UN Environment Programme (UNEP), International Energy Agency (IEA), and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**. This selective withdrawal shows that the US is not abandoning multilateralism entirely, but is instead reshaping its participation to protect strategic and economic interests.

One reason for staying engaged is to **influence ongoing negotiations** that could affect American industries — such as talks on a **Global Plastics Treaty** under UNEP and discussions at the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** on taxing shipping emissions. Even if the US exits formal negotiations, unfavourable global agreements could still hurt American exporters through trade restrictions.



| Clear your doubts now.



Another key reason is **continued dominance over technical institutions**. Bodies like the WMO rely heavily on US agencies such as **NOAA and NASA** for satellites, climate data and forecasting systems. Remaining inside such organisations allows Washington to **retain agenda-setting power and informational control**, even while rejecting binding climate commitments.

Overall, the pattern reflects a shift from cooperative climate leadership to **interest-driven, selective multilateralism**.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. US has formally exited the Paris Agreement and major climate bodies

Withdrawal completed after the mandatory one-year notice period.

US also exited UNFCCC, IPCC, IRENA, ISA and IUCN.

Moves align with the administration's rejection of climate action and energy transition.

### 2. US has not exited all climate-related institutions

Remains a member of UNEP, IEA and WMO.

Shows selective rather than total disengagement from global climate governance.

### 3. Core logic: prioritising American economic and strategic interests

Continued membership helps monitor and influence treaties that could affect US industry.

Example: UNEP-led Global Plastics Treaty negotiations.

Example: IMO talks on taxing shipping emissions to reach net zero by 2050.

### 4. Even withdrawal cannot fully insulate the US from global climate rules

Unfavourable international agreements can still impact US exports through import restrictions.

Hence, remaining inside some bodies allows early influence over rule-making.

### 5. Institutional dominance is a major factor

WMO depends heavily on US technological infrastructure and satellite systems.





US agencies like NOAA and NASA underpin global weather and climate monitoring.

Staying inside preserves decision-making leverage.

## 6. Broader implication for global climate governance

Shift from leadership to transactional multilateralism.

Weakens collective climate action while strengthening power politics within institutions.

Adds uncertainty to global negotiations on emissions, plastics, and clean energy.

[Behind Telangana Police move to bring FIRs to door step-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Governance

### Easy Explanation

In a first-of-its-kind initiative, the Telangana Police have introduced **on-site registration of FIRs**, allowing complaints to be recorded at the victim's residence, hospital, place of offence, or any location chosen by the complainant in specified sensitive cases. This marks a shift from India's traditional **station-centric FIR system** to a **citizen-centric policing model**.

Earlier, FIRs could only be registered at police stations, often creating physical, psychological, and social barriers for victims, especially in cases involving women, children, caste atrocities, or bodily harm. Telangana CID has stated that many victims are in vulnerable or traumatic conditions and may not be in a position to approach police stations, even though **prompt FIR registration is crucial for justice delivery**.

Under the new process, upon receiving oral or telephonic information about a cognisable offence, any police officer (including under Zero FIR provisions) can immediately go to the victim's location, record the complaint, forward it to the jurisdictional police station for formal registration, and hand over a copy of the FIR at the same place. Police can also record statements under the **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita** on-site and simultaneously secure the crime scene and evidence.

The initiative aims to improve **access to justice, victim dignity, and institutional responsiveness**, aligning policing practices with constitutional values and victim-centric criminal procedure.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Nature of the reform

Telangana allows FIR registration at the complainant's home or chosen location.

First such state-level formal initiative in India.

Shifts policing from station-centric to citizen-centric.

#### 2. Departure from the traditional FIR system



| Clear your doubts now.



Earlier, FIRs were registered only at police stations.

Victims had to physically approach the police, often facing trauma and social pressure.

New system reduces procedural and psychological barriers.

### 3. Categories of cases covered

Offences against women and children.

Offences affecting the human body.

Property-related offences.

Cases under:

POCSO Act

SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act

Telangana Prohibition of Ragging Act

### 4. New procedural mechanism

Police can proceed immediately to victim's residence, hospital, or place of choice.

Complaint recorded on-site and forwarded for formal FIR registration.

FIR copy given to victim at the same location.

Statements can be recorded under Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita.

Police secure crime scene and evidence simultaneously.

### 5. Rationale behind the move



| Clear your doubts now.



Many victims are physically or mentally unfit to visit police stations.

Delays in FIR registration weaken investigation and justice outcomes.

Focus on dignity, safety, and accessibility.

## 6. Broader governance significance

Strengthens access to justice and victim protection.

Reinforces the principle of responsive and compassionate policing.

Can become a model for procedural reform in criminal justice administration. [The impact of India-EU FTA for AI and semiconductor tech-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

India and the European Union have finalised their Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and also launched a **Comprehensive Strategic Agenda for 2030**. This deal is not only about lowering tariffs. A major new feature is **deep cooperation in advanced technology**, especially **artificial intelligence (AI)** and **semiconductors**.

On semiconductors, India and the EU have accepted that India is still far from building the world's most advanced chip factories. So instead, they are focusing on **chip design, advanced packaging, and prototyping**, especially a technique called "**heterogeneous integration**". This means packing different kinds of chips (logic, memory, sensors) into one unit, which is extremely important for AI systems. This area gives high value but needs less investment than ultra-advanced fabrication plants.

India brings a huge pool of **chip design engineers**, while Europe brings **top-class research facilities**. The agreement connects these strengths to build **indigenous AI hardware** and reduce dependence on the US and China.

On AI, the deal links the **European AI Office** with India's **IndiaAI Safety Institute**. They will jointly develop rules and tests for **safe and trustworthy AI**. Over time, they may even accept each other's safety certificates. This can make India and the EU a **standards-setting bloc** in global AI governance.

The deal is supported by **research funding and startup finance**, especially through possible Indian access to the EU's Horizon Europe programme and European deep-tech funds.

Overall, the FTA turns the India-EU relationship into a **technology partnership for strategic autonomy**, not just a trade partnership.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. FTA expands from trade to critical technologies

Covers joint R&D in AI and semiconductors.

Links European AI Office with India's AI institutions.

Part of a broader Strategic Agenda for 2030.



| Clear your doubts now.



## 2. Focus on advanced packaging, not only chip factories

Emphasis on “heterogeneous integration”.  
Targets high-value segments crucial for AI hardware.  
Avoids immediate race for ultra-advanced fabrication.

## 3. Clear division of strengths

India: large chip design talent base.  
EU: advanced research and prototyping infrastructure.  
Goal: indigenous AI hardware and reduced external dependence.

## 4. Semiconductor policy now tied directly to AI needs

Shift from general-purpose chips to AI-specific chips.  
Creation of a future-oriented technology market.

## 5. Regulatory innovation through ‘Blue Valleys’

Indian manufacturing zones aligned to EU standards.  
Easier integration into European supply chains.  
Extends EU technical norms to Indian production.

## 6. Creation of a common market for AI

Joint safety testing and evaluation of AI models.  
Possibility of mutual recognition of AI audits.  
Strengthens India-EU influence over global AI rules.

## 7. Impact on rights and regulation

EU rights-based AI standards may shape Indian AI products.  
Potential for stronger bias control and privacy safeguards.  
Risk of dual standards for exports and domestic use.

## 8. Financial backing for deep tech

Possible access to Horizon Europe research funds.  
European Innovation Council linked with Start-up India.  
Provides “patient capital” for high-risk technologies.

## [What's happening in Syria's Kurdish regions?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

International relations

### Easy Explanation

After the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s regime in December 2024, many expected Syria to move towards peace and inclusion. Instead, the country has seen renewed instability. The latest flashpoint is in **northeastern Syria**, where fighting has broken out between the new government led by **Ahmed al-Sharaa** and the **Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**.

Since 2012, when Assad’s forces withdrew from the northeast, Syrian Kurds created their own self-governing region called **Rojava**, officially known as the **Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES)**. They built political institutions and armed forces, and later became the main ground force fighting Islamic State with US support.



| Clear your doubts now.



After coming to power, Sharaa promised national unity and wants to **re-establish a strong centralised Syrian state**. He signed an agreement with the SDF to integrate Kurdish forces into the national military, but Kurds refused to give up the **autonomy** they have exercised for more than a decade. Talks stalled, and in January, government forces moved into areas controlled by the SDF, triggering fighting.

Damascus now wants to **dissolve Kurdish military control**, take over oil fields and border crossings, and place all regions under central authority. At the same time, it has offered **cultural concessions** such as recognising Kurdish as a national language and declaring Newroz a national holiday — but without accepting political autonomy.

Türkiye supports Damascus because it views the main Kurdish militia (YPG) as linked to the PKK, which it considers a terrorist organisation. The US earlier backed the Kurds against ISIS, but is now moving closer to Damascus to stabilise Syria and counter Iranian and Russian influence.

Although a ceasefire and integration framework exist, serious disagreements remain. Kurds are willing to withdraw from Arab-majority areas, but not from their core regions like **Kobane, Qamishli and al-Hasakah**. The situation remains tense, with fears of wider conflict and the possible return of Islamic State elements.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Background of Kurdish autonomy in Syria

Kurds are about 10% of Syria's population.  
Since 2012, they have run a de-facto autonomous region in the north and east (Rojava).  
Political authority: Democratic Union Party (PYD).  
Military force: YPG, later expanded into the SDF with US backing.

### 2. Role of the SDF in the anti-ISIS war

SDF was the main ground force defeating Islamic State.  
Controlled large territories including Raqqa and Deir al-Zour.  
Built parallel administrative institutions during the civil war.

### 3. Immediate cause of the current fighting

New Syrian leadership wants a centralised state.  
Kurds want to retain political and military autonomy.  
Talks on integration failed, leading to military confrontation.  
Government forces pushed the SDF out of parts of eastern Syria.

### 4. What Damascus wants now

End Kurdish military autonomy.  
Integrate SDF fighters individually into the national army.  
Take control of oil fields, borders, and administrations.  
Offer cultural recognition but not political self-rule.

### 5. Türkiye's position

Sees PYD/YPG as linked to the PKK.  
Strongly opposes any Kurdish autonomous zone near its border.  
Supports Damascus in weakening the SDF.  
Ongoing peace talks with PKK make Ankara more assertive.

### 6. The US position

Previously relied on SDF to defeat ISIS.  
Still maintains limited troops in northeastern Syria.





Has warmed to Damascus after Sharaa aligned with US security interests.  
Now supports a centralised Syria to counter Iran and Russia.

## 7. Current status and risks

Ceasefire exists but is fragile.  
SDF losing control in Arab-majority regions.  
Core Kurdish areas remain heavily contested.  
Risk of renewed insurgency and ISIS resurgence due to instability.

## 8. Broader significance

Highlights unresolved ethnic and federalism questions in post-war Syria.  
Shows limits of minority autonomy in post-conflict state-building.  
Regional powers shaping Syria's future more than internal consensus.

[A spark to drive India's e-LCV transition-The Hindu Editorial](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs) — small delivery trucks used heavily by e-commerce and logistics companies — form the **backbone of India's goods transport system**. Yet, while passenger cars have long been regulated for fuel efficiency and emissions, **LCVs remained outside strict norms**.

This is now changing. In July 2025, the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)** proposed India's first fuel-consumption standards for LCVs (to apply from 2027–2032). This is important because LCVs account for **almost half of India's commercial vehicles**, but only **2% are electric**.

Today's electric LCVs are few, have small batteries, limited range, and higher upfront costs. Although they are cheaper to run over time, **lack of central incentives** and weak regulations have slowed adoption.

The article explains that **fuel-efficiency standards can push electrification only if they are strict enough**. If standards are mild, manufacturers prefer improving petrol/diesel vehicles rather than investing in electric models. Studies show that once standards cross a certain emissions threshold, **electric vehicles become the cheaper compliance option**.

BEE's proposed standard barely crosses this threshold. While it introduces "**super credits**" (which make electric vehicles count extra in regulatory calculations), it also extends benefits to hybrids and improved diesel vehicles. This may allow companies to meet targets **without seriously shifting to electric vehicles**.

The author argues that India has the tools — regulations, credits, and technology — but must use them smartly. Without strict norms and focused incentives, India risks repeating the passenger-car experience, where EVs remain a tiny share even after many years of regulation.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. LCVs are a major but neglected emissions segment

Sub-3.5 tonne delivery vehicles dominate e-commerce logistics.  
Accounted for ~48% of commercial vehicles in 2024.  
Yet remained outside strong fuel-efficiency regulation until now.

#### 2. India has proposed its first fuel-efficiency standards for LCVs

Draft notified by Bureau of Energy Efficiency in July 2025.



| Clear your doubts now.



To run from 2027 to 2032.

Signals policy shift towards regulating commercial transport emissions.

### 3. Electrification levels remain extremely low

Only about 2% of LCVs are electric.

High upfront cost, limited models, and weak incentives restrict demand.

Central scheme (PM E-DRIVE) excludes LCVs; only some States support them.

### 4. Why regulation design matters

If standards are weak, companies upgrade diesel engines instead of shifting to EVs.

Passenger cars show this clearly: only ~3% electric after 8 years of CAFE norms.

### 5. Economic tipping point for electrification

Research shows ~116.5 g CO<sub>2</sub>/km is the point where EVs become cheaper than ICE upgrades.

BEE's proposed 115 g CO<sub>2</sub>/km barely crosses this line.

Enough to allow EV entry, but not enough to force mass adoption.

### 6. Role of super credits

Electric LCVs counted multiple times for compliance.

Assigned zero CO<sub>2</sub> for regulatory calculations.

Makes EVs more attractive on paper, encouraging early adoption.

### 7. Risk of over-accommodating hybrids and ICE vehicles

Credits also given to hybrids and improved diesel vehicles.

Allows manufacturers to delay full electrification.

May fragment the market and prolong fossil-fuel dominance.

### 8. Core policy message

India needs **stringent standards + targeted incentives + timely rollout**.

Otherwise, LCV electrification may stagnate like the passenger-car segment.

### 9. Broader significance

LCV regulation is crucial for urban pollution control, logistics decarbonisation, and climate commitments.

Can become a key driver of India's clean transport transition if designed well.

29th January 2026

[Discombobulator: The system that US likely used in Venezuela attack-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Science and technology

#### Easy Explanation

The US claimed it used a secret system called the "Discombobulator" in a military operation in Venezuela. Experts say this is probably not a single weapon, but a combination of advanced technologies used together to disable military defences and disorient soldiers. The aim is not large-scale destruction, but to temporarily paralyse both human forces and defence infrastructure so that operations can be carried out with minimal direct fighting. Such a system fits into modern warfare concepts like hybrid warfare, electronic warfare, cyber warfare, and "suppression of enemy air defences", where the focus is on information dominance and system disruption rather than bombs alone.



| Clear your doubts now.



The discombobulator may have included non-lethal directed-energy weapons to affect humans, such as heat-ray systems that cause intense burning sensation on the skin, sonic weapons that emit high-intensity sound waves causing nausea and confusion, and laser dazzlers that temporarily blind soldiers. It may also have involved electronic warfare tools like high-power microwave weapons to burn out electronic circuits, cyber tools to penetrate military networks, and systems to jam or take control of radars, sensors, and air-defence systems. Together, these can disable both people and machines without widespread physical destruction.

### Key Takeaways

- The “Discombobulator” is likely not one weapon, but a package of systems combining directed-energy, electronic warfare, and cyber capabilities.
- Its main purpose is to disorient soldiers and disable defence infrastructure rather than cause mass casualties.
- It reflects the shift from conventional warfare to hybrid and grey-zone warfare.
- Possible human-targeted systems: Active Denial System (heat ray), acoustic/sonic weapons, visual laser dazzlers, vortex air-pulse devices.
- Possible equipment-targeted systems: high-power microwave weapons, cyber operations, radar and sensor jamming, power-grid disabling tools.
- Such technologies are linked to “Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD)” operations.
- UPSC relevance: internal security, science & technology, cyber and electronic warfare, future of warfare, ethics of non-lethal weapons.

[House Panel flagged safety gaps in charter planes months ago-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Governance

### Easy Explanation

Months before the recent charter aircraft crash in Maharashtra, a Parliamentary Standing Committee had warned that India’s civil aviation safety framework was under strain, especially in the fast-growing private and charter aviation segment. The committee noted that while air traffic and private flying have expanded rapidly, regulatory oversight, inspections, and technical manpower have not grown at the same pace, creating safety vulnerabilities.

The report highlighted that non-scheduled operators often function with weaker maintenance systems, thinner safety teams, and less robust operational control compared to commercial airlines. It stressed that private operators may lack advanced operational control centres, structured flight planning systems, and strong real-time monitoring, increasing risks during bad weather, diversions, or emergencies.

The committee also flagged systemic stress on the DGCA, which it described as overburdened and operating largely in reactive mode. It called for more technical staff, stronger training systems, and data-driven predictive safety oversight. Air Traffic Control was identified as another weak link, with rising traffic loads, staff shortages, fatigue risks, and the need for faster modernisation of surveillance, navigation, and communication systems.

Overall, the panel warned that India’s rapid aviation growth must be matched with equal or greater emphasis on safety, especially in private aviation, ATC capacity, and regulatory enforcement.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Background and Context

- Parliamentary Standing Committee set up after the June 2025 Air India crash.
- Report tabled in August last year, months before the recent charter crash.
- Focused on gaps in India’s civil aviation safety framework.

#### 2. Core Concern: Growth Outpacing Oversight



| Clear your doubts now.



- Rapid expansion of aviation not matched by regulatory capacity.
- Oversight, surveillance, and enforcement lag behind traffic growth.
- Creates systemic safety vulnerabilities.

### 3. Problems in Private and Charter Aviation

- Uneven maintenance standards and weak documentation.
- Lean technical and safety teams.
- Lack of advanced operational control centres.
- Weaker flight planning, weather assessment, and real-time monitoring.
- Higher risks during diversions and adverse weather.

### 4. Recommendations for Non-Scheduled Operators

- Mandatory and fully functional Safety Management Systems.
- Stricter audits and surprise inspections by DGCA.
- Safety processes to be on par with scheduled airlines.

### 5. Regulator Under Strain (DGCA)

- Described as overburdened and reactive.
- Shortage of technical manpower.
- Need for stronger training systems.
- Shift towards data-driven, predictive safety oversight.

### 6. Air Traffic Control (ATC) Concerns

- Rising traffic loads without proportional staffing increase.
- Fatigue and workload stress among controllers.
- Risk of human error, especially in peak hours and poor weather.
- Need for faster modernisation of navigation, communication, and surveillance systems.

### 7. Infrastructure and Compliance Gaps

- Smaller airports lagging behind traffic growth.
- Need to upgrade runway safety areas, navigational aids, and emergency response.
- Safety recommendations often not implemented effectively.
- Need for a centralised monitoring mechanism.

### 8. Overall Warning

- India's fast aviation growth must be matched with equal or greater focus on safety.
- Private aviation, ATC systems, and regulatory enforcement are critical weak links.
- Growth without safety strengthening increases systemic risk.

[Most European luxury cars won't get cheaper in India-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### **Easy Explanation**

After India and the European Union formally concluded negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), headlines highlighted that import duties on European cars would fall sharply from about 110% to 10%. This created the impression that European luxury cars would soon become much cheaper in India. However, industry experts point out that the real impact will be limited.



| Clear your doubts now.



The key reason is that over 90% of European cars sold in India by brands like Mercedes, BMW, and Audi are not fully imported. They are brought in as completely knocked down (CKD) kits and assembled in India, attracting a much lower duty of around 16–17%, not 110%. Since the big tariff cut applies mainly to completely built units (CBUs), only a small fraction of ultra-luxury cars that are fully imported will see noticeable price reductions.

Therefore, most mainstream luxury models are unlikely to become significantly cheaper. Only ultra-high-end brands such as Ferrari, Lamborghini, or some Porsche models — which are imported as CBUs — may benefit meaningfully. Even here, the weakening rupee and other cost factors may dilute the gains. Historically, automobiles have been a politically sensitive part of India–EU trade talks, and the deal reflects a compromise based on the complementary strengths of both sides.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Headline Announcement vs Reality

- India–EU FTA proposes tariff cuts on European cars from ~110% to 10%.
- Created expectations of much cheaper European cars in India.
- Actual market impact likely to be limited.

### 2. Duty Structure is the Key

- Big tariff cut applies only to Completely Built Units (CBUs).
- Over 90% of European cars sold in India are Completely Knocked Down (CKD) units.
- CKDs already attract much lower duty of about 16–17%.

### 3. Impact on Major Luxury Brands

- Mercedes, BMW, Audi mainly assemble cars in India.
- They already pay lower CKD duties, not 110%.
- Hence, prices of most luxury models may not fall much, or at all.

### 4. Who May Actually Benefit

- Ultra-luxury brands like Ferrari, Lamborghini, Porsche import CBUs.
- These fully imported cars may see noticeable price cuts.
- Even here, currency depreciation may offset some benefits.

### 5. Market and Industry Response

- Auto stocks fell on fears of increased European competition.
- Industry leaders said no immediate price cuts should be expected.
- Final impact depends on detailed FTA terms and implementation timeline.

### 6. Broader Trade Context

- India–EU FTA concluded after negotiations stretching back to 2007.
- Automobile tariffs were the most politically sensitive issue.
- Deal reflects “complementarity”: India strong in small cars, EU in bigger vehicles.

[Can the ED file writ petitions before Courts?-The Hindu Text and Context](#)

Polity

## Easy Explanation



| Clear your doubts now.



The Supreme Court has agreed to examine whether the Enforcement Directorate (ED) can file writ petitions before constitutional courts under Articles 32 and 226. This question has arisen from a legal challenge by the Kerala and Tamil Nadu governments against a Kerala High Court judgment which held that the ED, being a statutory body, is entitled to invoke the writ jurisdiction of High Courts.

The controversy originates from the diplomatic gold smuggling case in Kerala. After allegations were made that ED officials coerced accused persons to implicate political leaders, the Kerala government constituted a Commission of Inquiry. The ED challenged this decision in the Kerala High Court, seeking writs to quash the notification establishing the Commission. Kerala objected, arguing that the ED is merely a department of the Union government, not a juristic person, and therefore lacks the legal capacity to file a writ petition.

The High Court rejected this argument, holding that the ED exercises statutory powers under FEMA and PMLA and therefore has the right to approach constitutional courts. Kerala and Tamil Nadu have now moved the Supreme Court, contending that disputes between the Centre and States should be decided only under Article 131, and warning that allowing the ED to file writs could disturb the federal balance. The Supreme Court's decision will have major implications for Centre–State relations and the scope of central investigative agencies' powers.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Constitutional Background: Writ Jurisdiction

- Supreme Court issues writs under Article 32.
- High Courts issue writs under Article 226.
- Writs include habeas corpus, mandamus, certiorari, prohibition, and quo warranto.
- Article 226 is wider: for fundamental rights and “any other purpose”.
- Writ jurisdiction is discretionary.

### 2. What is the Legal Question Before the Supreme Court

- Whether the ED can file writ petitions before High Courts and the Supreme Court.
- Whether ED has the legal personality (locus standi) to sue.
- Whether such disputes should instead go directly to the Supreme Court under Article 131 (Centre–State disputes).

### 3. Case at the Centre of the Dispute

- Linked to the Kerala diplomatic gold smuggling case.
- Kerala government set up a Commission of Inquiry alleging conspiracy against State leaders.
- ED challenged this notification before the Kerala High Court.
- Sought writs of mandamus and certiorari to quash the Commission.

### 4. Kerala Government's Core Argument

- ED is only a department of the Union government.
- ED is not a juristic person or body corporate.
- Therefore, it cannot sue or be sued in its own name.
- Any dispute is effectively Centre vs State → must be under Article 131 before the Supreme Court.
- Relied on the 2003 SC judgment (Chief Conservator of Forests case).

### 5. What the Kerala High Court Held

- ED is a statutory body under FEMA and PMLA.
- ED officers are statutory authorities.
- Lack of juristic personality is a “technical/trivial defect”.
- ED has the right to invoke Article 226.
- Its statutory functions entitle it to seek constitutional remedies.

### 6. Arguments by Kerala and Tamil Nadu in Supreme Court

- Legal capacity to sue is not a trivial issue.
- Deputy Director of ED is only an officer, not a legal person.
- Neither FEMA nor PMLA grants ED independent legal personality.
- High Court ruling emboldens ED to bypass Article 131.
- Tamil Nadu says it faces similar issues with ED intervention.



| Clear your doubts now.



## 7. Federal and Institutional Implications

- Whether ED is an independent statutory entity or merely an arm of the Union.
- Whether States owe any “public duty” to the ED.
- Whether Centre can indirectly litigate against States via agencies.
- Could redefine Centre–State power balance.
- Impacts autonomy of States and reach of central agencies.

## 8. Why This Case is Important

- Clarifies legal status of ED.
- Determines limits of writ jurisdiction.
- Affects use of investigative agencies in federal disputes.
- Has consequences for federalism, separation of powers, and constitutional remedies.

[Can international patent law handle a permanent presence in space?-The Hindu Science](#)

Science

### Easy Explanation

As humans move from short missions to **permanent or long-term living in space** (space stations, Moon bases, Mars missions), innovation will no longer be occasional but continuous and essential for survival. Technologies for water extraction, energy generation, waste recycling and life-support systems will be constantly modified by **multinational teams working together on shared infrastructure**.

This creates a serious legal problem: **international patent law is based on territory**, but **outer space belongs to no country**. On Earth, patents work because inventions happen within a country’s borders. In space, there are no borders. Current international law tries to solve this by linking jurisdiction not to location, but to the **state that registers a space object**. So, if an invention is made aboard a space station module registered by a country, that country’s patent law applies.

This system works reasonably well for the International Space Station, which is neatly divided into national modules. But future lunar or Martian settlements will be **integrated, mobile, and collaborative**, making it unclear where an invention “happens” and who owns it. Registration-based jurisdiction may no longer reflect real innovation processes.

There is also a deeper concern. International space law prohibits national appropriation of celestial bodies and treats outer space as the **province of all humankind**. Yet patents grant exclusive control. If essential survival technologies become patented and legally restricted, they could function as **de facto control over access to space resources**, contradicting the spirit of space law.

The article argues that this is not a minor technical issue but a **structural mismatch** between territorial intellectual property law and the realities of permanent human presence in space. Without new international frameworks, patent law risks becoming fragmented, manipulable, and inconsistent with the principles of outer space governance.

### Key Takeaways

#### 1. Core Problem: Space Innovation vs Territorial Patent Law

- Patent law is based on territorial jurisdiction.
- Outer space is not subject to national sovereignty.
- Permanent human presence means continuous, shared innovation.
- This creates uncertainty about ownership and enforcement of patents.

#### 2. Current Legal Basis in Space Law

- Outer Space Treaty bans national appropriation of celestial bodies.
- Article VIII allows states to retain jurisdiction over registered space objects.



| Clear your doubts now.



- Jurisdiction applies to the state of registry, not physical location.
- Patent law is extended to space through registration of spacecraft.

### 3. The ISS Model and Its Limits

- ISS modules are treated as national territories for legal purposes.
- This works because the station is fixed, segmented, and structured.
- Future Moon or Mars bases will be integrated and multinational.
- Clear territorial anchors will not exist in permanent settlements.

### 4. Why Future Space Habitats Complicate Patents

- Inventions will be developed incrementally and collaboratively.
- Hardware, software and operations will span multiple platforms.
- It will be unclear where the “act of invention” legally occurs.
- Registration choices may override real contribution and control.

### 5. Conflict with Non-Appropriation Principle

- Space must be used for the benefit of all humankind.
- Patents grant exclusive technological control.
- In space, essential survival systems may be patented.
- This can amount to de facto exclusion without territorial claims.

### 6. Risks of Registration-Based Jurisdiction

- Allows strategic registration in weak-enforcement states.
- Encourages regulatory arbitrage similar to “flags of convenience”.
- Produces uneven and fragmented patent enforcement.
- Weakens credibility of global intellectual property protection.

### 7. Unresolved Legal Grey Areas

- Whether “temporary presence” doctrine applies to space objects.
- Whether patented equipment in multinational missions infringes rights.
- No treaty clearly answers these questions.
- Operational accords cannot resolve ownership and enforcement.

### 8. Broader Significance

- Reflects mismatch between Earth-based law and space realities.
- Raises questions of equity, access, and technological control.
- Impacts future space governance and commercialisation.
- Calls for new international frameworks on space intellectual property.

[India, the beautiful — but first, India the functional-The Hindu Editorial](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

Despite its extraordinary natural, cultural and spiritual diversity, India attracts far fewer foreign tourists than its potential allows. Compared to smaller countries like Singapore and Thailand, India lags badly in tourist arrivals and tourism revenue. This gap reflects not a lack of attractions, but weaknesses in how India functions as a tourist destination.

The article argues that India’s tourism challenge rests on three major issues: **image, infrastructure**, and the everyday experience of “India itself”. Negative perceptions about safety, sanitation, scams, and bureaucracy dilute the impact of branding campaigns like “Incredible India”. Poor last-mile connectivity, inconsistent infrastructure, and high costs in mid-range and luxury travel further reduce competitiveness. Additionally, crowds, weak service culture, shortage of trained staff, and unfriendly immigration experiences discourage repeat visits.



| Clear your doubts now.



To fix this, India needs a multi-pronged strategy: targeted tourism branding, infrastructure upgrades, safety and skill development, visa reforms, and sustainable tourism practices. Tourism is not just about leisure—it is a powerful job creator and a strategic economic tool, especially for absorbing unskilled and semi-skilled labour. If India refines how it presents and manages itself, it can convert its civilisational depth into a world-class tourism economy.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. India's Tourism Paradox

- India has vast natural, cultural, and historical assets.
- Foreign tourist arrivals and earnings remain modest.
- India underperforms compared to smaller Asian countries.

### 2. Three Core Problems Identified

- Image: global perception shaped by safety, sanitation, scams, and bureaucracy.
- Infrastructure: weak last-mile connectivity and poor tourist facilities.
- "India itself": crowds, service gaps, harassment, and lack of professionalism.

### 3. Image and Branding Challenges

- Branding alone cannot offset negative global narratives.
- Safety concerns, especially for women, harm perception.
- India needs segmented branding, not a single narrative.
- Promote thematic circuits: spiritual, adventure, luxury, heritage, sports.

### 4. Infrastructure Gaps

- First impressions start at airports, immigration, taxis, and Wi-Fi.
- Poor roads, signage, and public toilets hurt tourist experience.
- Heritage sites need better maintenance and digitalisation.
- India is costly in mid-range and luxury tourism compared to Southeast Asia.

### 5. Service Culture and Human Resource Issues

- Tourism workforce faces ~40% shortage of trained staff.
- Lack of multilingual guides and professional hospitality training.
- Tourism seen as a fallback job, not a respected profession.

### 6. Immigration and Visa Bottlenecks

- E-visas helped, but ease of travel still lags behind peers.
- Unfriendly immigration practices damage India's image.
- Need faster, simpler visas and long-term multi-entry options.
- India must tolerate criticism as part of democratic maturity.

### 7. Proposed Reform Agenda

- Targeted rebranding with clearly defined tourism circuits.
- Public-private partnerships for heritage site management.
- Nationwide clean tourism campaign.
- Expansion of tourist police, especially women officers.
- Skill development across hotels, homestays, and local services.

### 8. Sustainability and Responsible Tourism

- Promote eco-tourism and community-based tourism.
- Regulate footfalls at fragile sites.
- Balance growth with environmental and cultural preservation.

### 9. Economic and Strategic Importance

- Tourism generates more jobs than manufacturing per unit investment.
- Crucial for employment of unskilled and semi-skilled workers.
- Can reduce youth unemployment and social instability.
- Deserves policy priority, tax support, and GST reform.



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## 10. Core Message

- India does not need reinvention, but refinement.
- Fixing image, infrastructure, and experience is essential.
- Tourism is both an economic opportunity and a strategic imperative.

30th January 2026

[Why Thorium-based nuclear power generation is key to securing India's energy independence-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

#### Why thorium matters for India

India's nuclear strategy is shaped by one hard fact: the country has **limited uranium but one of the world's largest thorium reserves**. Uranium can be used directly as nuclear fuel, but thorium cannot. Thorium must first be converted into **Uranium-233 (U-233)**, which is a fissile material capable of sustaining nuclear reactions. Achieving this conversion at scale is the key to India's long-term energy independence.

#### India's three-stage nuclear plan in simple terms

India's nuclear programme was designed to overcome uranium scarcity.

In **Stage 1, Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)** use uranium to generate electricity and also produce plutonium.

In **Stage 2, Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)** use plutonium to breed more fissile material.

In **Stage 3**, thorium is converted into U-233, enabling a self-sustaining thorium-based nuclear system.

This strategy remains scientifically sound and relevant even today.

#### What has changed in recent years

Earlier, India could not build enough reactors to irradiate thorium because domestic uranium supplies were scarce. This constraint has eased because India now **imports uranium**, allowing rapid expansion of PHWR capacity. As a result, reactors meant primarily for power generation can now also be used to **convert thorium into U-233 simultaneously**.

#### Why PHWRs are now central to the thorium transition

PHWRs are uniquely suited for India's thorium ambitions. They can operate on natural or lightly enriched fuel and allow thorium to be placed in the reactor for irradiation. With growing PHWR capacity, India can start producing U-233 **without waiting for large numbers of fast breeder reactors** to come online.

#### Role of HALEU with thorium in PHWRs

Using small quantities of **HALEU (High-Assay Low-Enriched Uranium)** along with thorium in PHWRs can significantly improve efficiency. This combination increases fuel burn-up, lowers overall fuel costs, improves safety margins, and speeds up the conversion of thorium into U-233. Economically and technologically, this is a "drop-in" solution that fits existing reactor designs.

#### Why waiting for fast breeders alone is risky

Fast breeder reactor development has faced delays due to technological complexity. Relying only on FBRs to generate U-233 would push India's thorium phase far into the future. Using PHWRs as interim irradiation platforms helps India **regain lost time** and move earlier into the thorium stage.



| Clear your doubts now.



## The long-term goal

India ultimately aims to deploy **thorium-based reactors**, especially **thorium molten salt reactors**, that can produce electricity while breeding enough U-233 to sustain themselves. This would allow nuclear power to grow in line with India's development needs without long-term dependence on imported fuel.

## Key takeaways

India's three-stage nuclear programme remains valid, but **execution sequencing can be accelerated**.

Importing uranium has removed the biggest bottleneck in scaling up PHWR capacity.

**Large PHWR fleets can act as irradiation platforms** to convert thorium into fissile U-233.

Use of **Thorium + HALEU "drop-in" fuel in PHWRs** offers:

Lower fuel costs

Better safety margins

Higher fuel burn-up

Faster thorium conversion

Waiting for full-scale fast breeder reactor deployment would **delay energy independence**.

Fast reactors are still important, but **should not block early thorium deployment**.

**Thorium Molten Salt Reactors** represent the long-term goal for self-sustaining nuclear power.

Compared to imported Light Water Reactors, **PHWRs are more uranium-efficient and cheaper** in the long run.

Thorium-based nuclear power is essential for:

Long-term energy security

Reduced import dependence

Supporting India's "Viksit Bharat" vision



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## [Gandhi's ideal of Gram Swaraj, and why true devolution of power to villages has yet to happen-The Indian Express](#) [Explained Page](#)

Polity

### Easy Explanation

The idea of Gram Swaraj has returned to public debate after the Union Budget 2026–27 announced the Mahatma Gandhi Gram Swaraj Initiative and amid criticism over the renaming of the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**. Critics argue that removing Gandhi's name from flagship rural schemes weakens not just symbolism but the philosophy of village self-rule that Gandhi considered essential for India's democracy.

For **Mahatma Gandhi**, Gram Swaraj meant villages functioning as self-sufficient republics. Each village would govern itself through an elected panchayat, produce its own basic necessities like food and cloth, ensure social equality, and follow the principles of non-violence and cooperation. Gandhi believed that political freedom would be hollow if villages remained dependent on cities and distant authorities.

Gandhi treated Gram Swaraj as a lived practice rather than a theoretical ideal. His work in Champaran and the establishment of Sevagram Ashram reflected his emphasis on rural self-reliance, dignity of labour, and community-led governance. Through his writings in *Harijan* and *Young India*, he repeatedly warned that cities were prospering by exploiting villages, and that true national regeneration must begin from the grassroots.

After Independence, however, India's development strategy focused largely on industrialisation, urban growth, and centralised planning. Cities became hubs of investment and employment, while villages lagged behind. This widened rural–urban disparities and triggered large-scale migration, often forcing villagers into insecure and substandard urban living conditions.

Although rural development policies were introduced — including land reforms in some states and employment schemes — they did not transform villages into economically self-reliant units. Poor education and healthcare, caste-based divisions, and limited non-farm livelihoods continued to constrain rural life. Even democratic decentralisation, introduced through constitutional reforms, remained incomplete.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment gave Panchayati Raj Institutions constitutional status, but real power over finances, officials, and planning largely stayed with state governments. Panchayats often function as implementing agencies rather than autonomous decision-makers. Initiatives like **Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana** showed that without strong political will and local empowerment, village development programmes deliver uneven results.

Genuine Gram Swaraj requires financial, administrative, and political devolution to villages — something higher levels of governance have been reluctant to allow. As Gandhi himself acknowledged, building a truly self-sufficient village is the work of a lifetime. For India's lakhs of villages, Gram Swaraj remains an unfinished democratic project.

### Key Takeaways

#### Meaning of Gram Swaraj

- Villages as self-governing and self-sufficient republics
- Emphasis on local production, social equality, and moral self-rule
- Panchayats as the core units of democracy

#### Post-Independence trajectory

- Development strategy prioritised cities and industry
- Rural–urban inequalities widened over time
- Migration became a survival strategy for rural populations

#### Role of welfare and decentralisation



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Schemes like MGNREGS provided livelihood security but not self-reliance  
73rd Constitutional Amendment gave panchayats legal status  
Actual control over funds and administration remained limited

### Why true devolution has not happened

Political reluctance to share power with local bodies  
Bureaucratic centralisation and top-down planning  
Weak ownership of village-centric development programmes

### Current relevance

Renaming of schemes has revived debate on Gandhi's legacy  
Gram Swaraj highlights limits of symbolic reforms without structural change  
Remains a long-term goal requiring sustained political and social commitment

[From definitions to action, how 2012 UGC equity guidelines vary from 2026 regulations-The Indian Express](#)  
[Explained Page](#)

Sociology

### Easy Explanation

The debate around equity and discrimination in higher education intensified after the **Supreme Court of India** stayed the 2026 equity regulations issued by the **University Grants Commission**, and directed that the older 2012 regulations continue for now. The 2026 rules were framed to strengthen institutional responses to discrimination, especially caste-based discrimination, but they triggered protests from sections of students who argued that the new framework could institutionalise caste divisions and lead to misuse.

A major conceptual shift between the two sets of rules lies in definitions. The 2012 regulations adopted a broad and inclusive definition of discrimination, covering unfair treatment on multiple grounds and explicitly recognising harassment, victimisation, and ragging as forms of discrimination. The 2026 regulations, by contrast, introduce a separate and specific definition of "caste-based discrimination", limiting it to discrimination against SCs, STs, and OBCs. This narrowing raised concerns before the court, especially about whether discrimination against students outside these categories would be excluded or weakened.

Another key difference is the move from detailed description to institutional discretion. The 2012 guidelines clearly listed concrete acts that would amount to discrimination — from bias in admissions and evaluation to segregation in hostels and caste-based remarks in classrooms. The 2026 regulations remove this exhaustive list and instead ask Equal Opportunity Centres within institutions to prepare illustrative lists. Critics argue that this dilutes clarity and legal certainty, while supporters say it allows flexibility across institutions.

At the same time, the 2026 framework shifts from being largely advisory to being enforcement-oriented. For the first time, punitive action has been introduced: institutions that fail to comply can lose access to UGC schemes, grants, or even permission to offer programmes. A national-level monitoring mechanism has also been proposed, something that was absent in the 2012 rules.

The institutional architecture has also been significantly expanded. While the 2012 regulations merely recommended Equal Opportunity Cells without specifying their powers or composition, the 2026 rules mandate Equal Opportunity Centres with equity committees that must include representation from SCs, STs, OBCs, women, and persons with disabilities. They also lay down procedures, timelines, helplines, and equity squads for handling complaints — moving from intent to action.

Ironically, the 2026 regulations were framed following petitions by the mothers of Rohit Vemula and Payal Tadvi, who had asked for stronger safeguards against caste discrimination. Yet, the Supreme Court questioned whether the new rules, by narrowing definitions and removing explicit illustrations of discrimination, amounted to a regression rather than an advance in protective regulation.



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## Key Takeaways

### Conceptual approach

**2012 regulations:** Broad, inclusive understanding of discrimination

**2026 regulations:** Separate and narrower definition of caste-based discrimination

### Definitions

#### 2012

Defined discrimination expansively

Explicitly included harassment, victimisation, and ragging

#### 2026

Separates “discrimination” and “caste-based discrimination”

Limits caste discrimination to SCs, STs, and OBCs

Omits harassment and ragging as defined categories

### Treatment of specific discriminatory acts

#### 2012

Clearly listed acts like hostel segregation, biased evaluation, caste labelling, and derogatory remarks

#### 2026

Removes detailed list

Leaves identification of discriminatory acts to institutions

### Enforcement and penalties

#### 2012

Largely advisory, no punitive mechanism

#### 2026

Introduces penalties such as loss of grants and programme approvals

Establishes national monitoring mechanisms

### Institutional mechanisms

#### 2012

Equal Opportunity Cells with limited guidance

#### 2026

Mandatory Equal Opportunity Centres

Equity committees with social-category representation

Defined procedures, timelines, helplines, and equity squads

### Constitutional and legal concerns

Questions over narrowing the scope of protection

Fear of regression in a protective framework

Supreme Court scrutiny on redundancy and exclusion in definitions

### Current status

Supreme Court has stayed the 2026 regulations

2012 regulations continue to apply until further orders

[Economic Survey flags the right questions-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

### Economy



| Clear your doubts now.



## Easy Explanation

The **Economic Survey 2025–26**, presented by the **Ministry of Finance**, highlights a set of economic paradoxes confronting India. On the surface, macroeconomic indicators appear strong: GDP growth is healthy, inflation is under control, corporate and bank balance sheets are robust, GST rates have been rationalised, and several trade agreements and reforms have been undertaken. Yet, beneath this stability lie worrying signals — weak household consumption, sluggish merchandise exports, lack of a broad-based revival in private investment, foreign capital outflows, and a depreciating rupee.

One key concern flagged by the Survey is India's dependence on capital inflows to sustain a stable balance of payments. When such inflows slow down, the rupee comes under pressure. Although the Survey argues that the rupee's valuation does not truly reflect India's economic fundamentals, it nevertheless affects investor sentiment. In a global environment marked by risk aversion, money moving into safe-haven assets like gold, and the absence of a compelling India-centric AI or tech growth narrative, currency weakness becomes more consequential.

The Survey also draws attention to the rise of what it calls "fiscal populism", especially at the state level. Many states have expanded unconditional cash transfer schemes, which together amounted to about ₹1.5 lakh crore in 2025–26. While such schemes may have social and political appeal, they significantly reduce fiscal space for capital expenditure and productivity-enhancing investments. With nearly 62% of states' revenue receipts tied up in committed expenditures such as salaries, pensions, interest payments, and subsidies, the scope for growth-oriented spending is shrinking.

On growth prospects, the Survey projects GDP growth of 6.8–7.2% in 2026–27, lower than the 7.4% estimated for 2025–26. Sustaining a 7% growth rate in an uncertain global environment will be difficult and will require careful policy choices. The Survey, therefore, serves less as a celebratory document and more as a cautionary one, raising hard questions about investment, exports, fiscal priorities, and investor confidence. The real test lies in whether these concerns are meaningfully addressed in the forthcoming Union Budget.

## Key Takeaways

### Macroeconomic paradox

- Strong growth, low inflation, and healthy balance sheets
- Simultaneous weakness in consumption, exports, and private investment
- Foreign capital outflows despite stable fundamentals

### Rupee and capital flows

- India relies heavily on capital inflows for balance of payments
- Slowing inflows weaken the rupee
- Currency valuation affects investor sentiment even if fundamentals are strong

### Global investment environment

- Shift of global capital towards safe-haven assets
- India lacks a strong AI or tech-led investment narrative
- Need to boost export earnings and foreign currency inflows

### Fiscal populism at the state level

- Rising unconditional cash transfers by states
- Cash transfers of 11 states reached ₹1.5 lakh crore in 2025–26
- Reduced fiscal space for productive capital expenditure

### State finances

- 62% of states' revenue receipts locked in committed expenditures



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Limited room for development and growth-oriented spending

## Growth outlook

GDP growth projected at 6.8–7.2% in 2026–27

Sustaining ~7% growth amid global uncertainty will be challenging

## Policy signal

Survey raises the right questions rather than offering easy answers

Focus now shifts to whether the Union Budget responds to these concerns

[Central Public Sector Enterprises' comeback highlights need for similar reform at state level-The Indian Express the Ideas Page](#)

Economy

## Easy Explanation

Over the last decade, **Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)** in India have undergone a significant transformation. Once associated with policy paralysis, inefficiency, and financial stress, CPSEs have emerged as major contributors to growth, investment, and fiscal stability. This turnaround has occurred in a global context where public-sector enterprises across countries have been reformed to improve efficiency, adopt better governance standards, leverage technology, and support green transitions. According to the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development**, public-sector ownership still accounts for a sizeable share of listed companies and market capitalisation worldwide.

In India, a key driver of CPSE reform was the **New PSE Policy of 2020** under the Atmanirbhar Bharat framework. This policy clearly distinguished between strategic and non-strategic sectors. In non-strategic sectors, the government reduced its presence, while in strategic areas such as defence, energy, and space, it retained only a limited number of CPSEs and opened space for private participation. This clarity of ownership and role helped improve performance and accountability.

The results are visible in CPSE finances. The number of profit-making CPSEs has risen sharply, losses have declined, and net profits have more than doubled over the decade. Their net worth and paid-up capital have expanded significantly, and their contribution to the central exchequer has grown strongly. Listed CPSEs have also outperformed broader market indices, with market capitalisation tripling since 2015. CPSEs have become a major source of capital formation, accounting for a meaningful share of national savings and financing investment largely from internal resources rather than external borrowing.

Financial CPSEs, particularly public sector banks, illustrate the depth of this turnaround. After the twin balance sheet crisis, bank mergers, better regulation, and rapid technology adoption restored profitability and improved balance sheets. Returns on assets and equity have turned decisively positive, making PSU banks once again systemically strong institutions.

CPSEs have also expanded their role beyond domestic markets. They have contributed increasingly to exports, especially in defence, engineering, and commodities. Defence exports, in particular, have touched record levels. In the green transition, CPSE-led initiatives — including large-scale railway electrification, renewable energy adoption, and hydrogen trials — underline their importance in India's decarbonisation strategy. Overseas expansion by oil CPSEs has further strengthened India's energy security.

However, challenges remain. Rapid technological change demands continuous skill upgradation and higher investment in research and development. Market competition will intensify, and CPSEs must remain agile to sustain gains.

Most importantly, the success of CPSE reforms highlights a stark contrast with **state-level public sector enterprises**, many of which remain inefficient, opaque, and fiscally burdensome. Extending similar reforms —



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focusing on transparency, governance, strategic clarity, and accountability — to state PSEs could unlock regional growth, improve state finances, and replicate at the sub-national level what CPSEs have achieved nationally.

## Key Takeaways

### Global context of PSE reforms

- Public enterprises still play a large role globally
- Reforms focus on efficiency, governance, technology, and green transition
- OECD data shows significant state ownership in listed companies

### India's CPSE reform framework

- 2020 New PSE Policy classified sectors as strategic and non-strategic
- Government exited most non-strategic sectors
- Limited CPSE presence retained in strategic areas with private participation

### Financial turnaround of CPSEs

- Profit-making CPSEs increased; loss-making ones declined
- Net profits more than doubled over a decade
- Net worth and paid-up capital rose sharply
- Contribution to the central exchequer increased substantially

### Role in investment and savings

- CPSEs are a major source of capital formation
- Account for about 10% of national savings
- Investment largely financed internally, reducing external dependence

### Public sector banks' revival

- Post-crisis reforms restored profitability
- Strong improvement in ROA and ROE
- Faster technology adoption and consolidation improved resilience

### Exports and global presence

- Rising contribution to defence and engineering exports
- Defence exports reached record highs
- Oil CPSEs expanded overseas assets, strengthening energy security

### Green transition leadership

- Large-scale railway electrification
- Expansion of solar, wind, and hybrid renewable capacity
- Early adoption of hydrogen and low-carbon technologies

### Future challenges

- Need for continuous skill upgrades
- Greater focus on R&D and innovation
- Adapting to fast-changing technology and markets

### State-level reform imperative

- Many state PSEs remain inefficient and opaque
- Replicating CPSE-style reforms can boost regional development



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Transparency and governance reforms at state level are the next frontier

## [From moon to MRIs: how space research has transformed healthcare-The Hindu Science](#)

Science and technology

### Easy Explanation

Space research has quietly transformed modern healthcare, often in ways that patients and even doctors do not realise. Technologies developed to survive and operate in extreme space environments have repeatedly found applications in medicine on Earth. Under the space programme of **National Aeronautics and Space Administration**, more than 2,000 such “spinoff” technologies have been documented since 1976, many of which are now used as commercial healthcare products. India, through **Indian Space Research Organisation**, has also contributed by transferring over 350 technologies to Indian industries, including several in the biomedical sector.

One of the most significant impacts has been in medical diagnostics and imaging. The digital image-processing techniques used today in MRI, CT scans, ultrasounds, and mammography were originally developed to analyse lunar, planetary, and astronomical images. Methods such as noise reduction, contrast enhancement, image segmentation, and data fusion were first applied to space and plasma-physics data, and later adapted to clinical radiology. These advances allow doctors to obtain clearer images even at low radiation doses or weak signal strengths.

Space research has also driven the miniaturisation of medical devices. Compact blood analysers and lab-on-chip technologies emerged from the need to conduct blood tests in microgravity aboard spacecraft. Similarly, infrared sensors initially designed to measure stellar temperatures led to the development of infrared ear thermometers. Wearable health devices that monitor heart rate, ECG, respiration, and movement trace their origins to astronaut bio-telemetry systems used for continuous health monitoring in space.

Improvements in materials and life-support systems designed for spacecraft have enhanced infection control and patient safety. Advanced air and water purification systems, antimicrobial surfaces, and sterilisation techniques were refined to manage contamination in closed spacecraft environments and are now widely used in hospitals, catheters, implants, and clinical settings.

Space technology has also reshaped healthcare delivery and logistics. Satellite communication enables telemedicine in remote and disaster-prone areas, supports teleradiology, and facilitates specialist consultations. Earth-observation satellites help track disease outbreaks, map vector habitats, and assess disaster-related health risks. Solar-powered vaccine refrigerators and drone-based medical supply delivery systems also evolved from space-mission requirements.

In medical devices and interventions, collaboration with space agencies has resulted in innovations such as ventricular assist devices, advanced pacemakers, rehabilitation robotics, and improved prosthetics. ISRO’s low-cost heart pump, developed using rocket materials, exemplifies how space-grade engineering can address critical healthcare needs. Even everyday products like invisible braces, scratch-resistant lenses, space blankets, and 3D-printed medical nutrition have roots in space research.

Overall, while space exploration is often debated for its costs, its contributions to healthcare are undeniable. For countries like India, space-derived technologies offer scalable, cost-effective solutions that can significantly improve healthcare access, quality, and resilience.

### Key Takeaways

Space research and healthcare link

Space missions require extreme reliability, miniaturisation, and safety  
These requirements drive innovations later adapted for medical use



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## Diagnostics and imaging

MRI, CT, ultrasound, and mammography use space-derived image-processing  
Techniques include noise reduction, contrast enhancement, and image fusion  
Enables clearer images at lower radiation doses

## Medical devices and wearables

Wearable health monitors evolved from astronaut bio-telemetry  
Infrared thermometers trace origins to stellar temperature sensors  
Lab-on-chip and compact blood analysers developed for microgravity

## Materials, sterilisation, and infection control

Air and water purification systems originated in spacecraft life-support  
Antimicrobial and low-outgassing materials now used in hospitals  
Improved implant coatings and clinical surfaces

## Telemedicine and health logistics

Satellite-based telemedicine aids remote and disaster-hit areas  
Earth-observation data supports disease surveillance  
Solar vaccine refrigerators and medical drones evolved from space tech

## Advanced medical interventions

Ventricular assist devices and pacemakers benefit from space engineering  
ISRO-developed low-cost heart pump uses rocket-grade materials  
Prosthetics, rehabilitation robotics, and cochlear implants improved via space research

## Broader significance

Space research delivers indirect but high social returns  
Especially valuable for emerging economies with healthcare access gaps  
Investment in space science strengthens healthcare systems on Earth

[Will removing curbs on Chinese FDI help India?-The Hindu Editorial](#)

## Economy

### Easy Explanation

India is considering easing restrictions on Chinese firms bidding for government contracts and potentially relaxing curbs on Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) that were imposed after the 2020 Galwan clash. This has revived an important policy question: whether Chinese investment can help India's economy without compromising national security.

Those in favour of a calibrated opening argue that Chinese FDI could support India's manufacturing ambitions, help integrate India into global supply chains, boost exports, and reduce dependence on imports from China by producing more within India itself. Given India's large trade deficit with China, encouraging Chinese firms to manufacture locally rather than export finished goods could improve the balance. Sectors such as electronics, electric vehicles, and consumer manufacturing are often cited as areas where Chinese firms have technological strengths and scale advantages.

However, the benefits are not automatic. Policymakers must first clearly define India's economic and industrial objectives and identify which sectors are sensitive from a national security perspective. Strategic areas such as ports



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near naval bases, the digital economy, data-intensive platforms, and critical infrastructure raise concerns about data flows, surveillance risks, and possible disruption during crises. In contrast, non-sensitive consumer goods may pose fewer risks.

Supply-chain realities also matter. Global supply chains function efficiently only in low-tariff, low-barrier environments, with components crossing borders multiple times. Unless India eases tariffs and non-tariff barriers on inputs and improves logistics, it may struggle to become a true manufacturing hub. While some Chinese firms like Xiaomi and Oppo have operated successfully in India, scaling this experience across sectors will require regulatory certainty and infrastructure upgrades.

From China's perspective, investing in India helps manage excess capacity at home, bypass China-specific trade barriers in Western markets, and access one of the fastest-growing consumer markets globally. Yet India faces stiff competition from Southeast Asian economies such as Vietnam and Bangladesh, which currently offer more export-friendly conditions.

India's experience with Apple manufacturing shows both opportunity and limits. Final assembly has shifted to India, but many components still come from China, and special concessions were needed for Chinese suppliers. The expected demonstration effect of large-scale relocation away from China has so far been limited.

Overall, removing curbs on Chinese FDI can help India only if it is guided by a clear, security-first roadmap and accompanied by broader trade, infrastructure, and regulatory reforms.

## Key Takeaways

### Potential economic benefits

- Can expand manufacturing capacity and exports
- Helps integrate India into global supply chains
- Local production may reduce import dependence on China
- Brings access to Chinese technology, scale, and capital

### National security concerns

- Sensitive sectors include digital platforms, data, ports, and critical infrastructure
- Risks of surveillance, data leakage, and operational disruption
- Need for clearly defined red lines before liberalisation

### Supply chain constraints

- Efficient supply chains need low tariffs and easy component imports
- Non-tariff barriers and logistics remain major hurdles
- India must identify areas of genuine comparative advantage

### China's incentives

- Excess industrial capacity at home
- Pressure from U.S. and European trade restrictions
- Desire to diversify production bases and reduce geopolitical risk
- Access to India's fast-growing domestic market

### India's limitations

- Infrastructure and logistics gaps
- Ease-of-doing-business challenges
- Strong competition from ASEAN economies
- Weak "China-plus-one" demonstration effect so far





## Policy bottom line

Chinese FDI can help only under a selective, security-first approach  
Benefits depend on complementary reforms in trade and industry  
Blanket liberalisation risks deepening strategic dependence

31st January 2026

[Budget 2026: The 3 big macro worries for India - The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

## Easy Explanation

As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman prepares to present **Budget 2026**, the macroeconomic backdrop throws up three interlinked concerns that limit what the Budget can realistically achieve. A Union Budget has very little flexibility because a large part of government spending is already committed — salaries, pensions, interest payments, and subsidies cannot be easily altered year to year. Moreover, the choices in the coming Budget are constrained by how the economy has performed in the current financial year (2025–26).

The first major worry is **weak nominal GDP growth**. While India continues to be described as the fastest-growing major economy, these claims usually refer to *real* GDP growth (adjusted for inflation). For Budget-making, however, what matters more is *nominal* GDP — the total value of goods and services at current prices. Nominal GDP is the base on which tax revenues are calculated. If nominal GDP grows slower than expected, government revenues fall short, forcing either higher borrowing or expenditure cuts. India's nominal GDP growth has been steadily decelerating over the years and is now estimated at just about 8% for 2025–26, much lower than earlier expectations. This weak nominal growth threatens all fiscal calculations.

The second concern is **weak tax buoyancy**. Even if GDP grows, tax revenues do not automatically rise at the same pace. Tax buoyancy measures how responsive tax collections are to GDP growth. The government had assumed a buoyancy of around 1.1 — meaning tax revenues would grow faster than nominal GDP. Instead, actual buoyancy has fallen to about 0.6. In simple terms, tax collections are growing much slower than both expectations and even the weak nominal GDP growth. This sharp underperformance significantly squeezes the government's fiscal room.

The third macro worry is **weak private corporate investment**. Boosting private investment has been a central policy objective of the government for years. Corporate tax cuts, a sharp rise in public capital expenditure, production-linked incentives (PLI), and later tax relief for consumers were all meant to revive private investment. Yet, data show that private corporate investment remains below pre-pandemic levels. Firms are hesitant to invest because demand growth is not strong enough to justify large new capacities.

Compounding this problem, foreign investors have been pulling money out of Indian markets in the past year. This has put pressure on the rupee, adding both economic and political stress. Together, weak nominal growth, poor tax buoyancy, and sluggish private investment form the core macroeconomic challenges that Budget 2026 must grapple with — even though the Budget itself has limited tools to fix them.

## Key Takeaways

### Weak nominal GDP growth

Nominal GDP matters more than real GDP for Budget calculations  
Slower nominal growth reduces tax revenues directly  
Nominal GDP growth for 2025–26 is around 8%, well below earlier expectations  
Forces difficult choices between higher borrowing and spending cuts

### Weak tax buoyancy

Tax collections are growing slower than GDP



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Actual tax buoyancy has fallen to around 0.6 versus an assumed 1.1  
Gross tax revenues are lagging even weak nominal GDP growth  
Further constrains fiscal space for the government

### Weak private corporate investment

Corporate tax cuts and higher public capex have not revived investment  
PLI schemes and demand-side tax relief have had limited impact  
Firms are not seeing enough demand to justify fresh investments

### Capital flows and the rupee

Global investors have reduced exposure to India  
Capital outflows have weakened the rupee  
Adds macroeconomic and political pressure on the Finance Minister

### Overall Budget constraint

Large share of expenditure is pre-committed  
Budget has limited ability to address structural macro weaknesses  
Main challenge is managing trade-offs, not announcing big shifts

[Why Economic Survey has raised India's potential growth rate-The Indian Express Explained Page](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

The **Economic Survey 2025–26**, led by **V Anantha Nageswaran**, has raised India's **potential economic growth rate** from 6.5% to 7% at a time when actual GDP growth is being widely debated. This has drawn attention because potential growth is not the same as the annual GDP growth number that dominates headlines.

Potential growth refers to how fast an economy can grow **without creating excessive inflation**. If an economy grows faster than its potential, demand outpaces supply, pushing up prices. If it grows slower than its potential, resources like labour and capital are underutilised. In that sense, potential growth is the economy's "speed limit" under normal conditions.

Raising actual GDP growth in a sustainable way therefore requires raising potential growth itself. The Survey explains that potential growth depends on three core factors: the stock of capital in the economy (such as infrastructure and machinery), the quantity and quality of labour, and total factor productivity (TFP), which captures how efficiently capital and labour are used.

India's potential growth has not always been high. According to research cited by the Survey (including work by the **Reserve Bank of India**), potential growth was around 8% during the high-growth phase of 2003–08, fell to about 7% between 2009 and 2015, and declined further to around 6.5% by the time the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

The Survey argues that this decline has now been partially reversed. Over the last three years, a series of cumulative policy reforms appear to have lifted India's medium-term growth capacity closer to 7%. On the capital and supply side, initiatives such as the **Production Linked Incentive Scheme**, logistics reforms, and FDI liberalisation have strengthened manufacturing and production capacity.

On the labour side, consolidation of labour laws, reduced regulatory compliance burdens, and state-level reforms have begun to lower frictions in labour markets. At the same time, sustained investments in education, skilling, and apprenticeships are improving workforce quality and employability. Together, these changes are expected to raise productivity and efficiency.



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The Survey stresses that such improvements in potential growth are credible only when reforms are persistent and macroeconomic stability is maintained. It notes that India broadly meets these conditions. However, it also cautions that external factors such as geopolitical conflicts and global economic disruptions could still prevent India from fully realising this higher potential growth path.

## Key Takeaways

### What potential growth means

- Indicates how fast the economy can grow without triggering inflation
- Different from annual (actual) GDP growth
- Acts as the economy's sustainable "speed limit"

### Why raising potential growth matters

- Allows higher long-term GDP growth without inflationary pressure
- Prevents underutilisation of labour and capital
- Makes growth more durable and less volatile

### Drivers of potential growth

- Capital stock: infrastructure, machinery, and physical assets
- Labour input: workforce size, skills, and employability
- Total factor productivity: efficiency in using capital and labour

### India's past trend

- Around 8% during 2003–08 high-growth phase
- Fell to ~7% between 2009–15
- Dropped further to ~6.5% around the Covid-19 period

### Why the Survey raised it to 7%

- Cumulative impact of recent policy reforms
- Manufacturing push via PLI and logistics reforms
- FDI liberalisation improving supply capacity

### Labour market improvements

- Labour law consolidation and lower compliance burden
- State-level regulatory reforms
- Increased investment in skilling, education, and apprenticeships

### Conditions for success

- Reforms must be persistent, not one-off
- Macroeconomic stability is essential

### Key risk factors

- Geopolitical conflicts
- Global economic shocks
- External disruptions limiting realisation of potential

[RTI isn't idle curiosity, it's accountability-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

Governance



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## Easy Explanation

The **Economic Survey 2025–26** rightly underlines India's resilience in a volatile global environment and identifies the reforms needed to sustain growth — especially boosting innovation, manufacturing scale, and export competitiveness. It correctly argues that the government must act as an enabler rather than a heavy-handed controller of the economy. However, the Survey falters when it treats civic scrutiny of governance as a potential obstacle to efficiency and entrepreneurship.

The Survey calls for a re-examination of the **Right to Information Act**, particularly provisions that require disclosure of policy deliberations, arguing that such transparency may “unduly constrain governance”. This interpretation misunderstands the role of transparency in a democracy. Public access to official records does not paralyse decision-making; instead, it sheds light on how policies evolve, why certain options are chosen over others, and whether decisions are grounded in reason and evidence.

The RTI Act has fundamentally altered the relationship between citizens and the state by reducing information asymmetry. It has empowered citizens to question public authorities on policy outcomes, service delivery, and use of public funds. Far from being an instrument of “idle curiosity”, RTI has fostered an argumentative democratic culture that keeps bureaucrats accountable and cautious in the exercise of power.

The Act's impact is evident in its role in exposing major scams such as Vyapam and the Adarsh Housing Society case, and in strengthening financial accountability. RTI disclosures helped bring scrutiny to banking irregularities and led to landmark rulings by the **Supreme Court of India**, which directed the **Reserve Bank of India** to disclose information on wilful defaulters and non-performing assets of public sector banks. These outcomes demonstrate how transparency enhances, rather than undermines, economic governance.

At the same time, the effectiveness of the RTI framework has been diluted in recent years. The **Digital Personal Data Protection Act** exempts large categories of personal information from disclosure, narrowing the scope of transparency. Additionally, the government has at times avoided scrutiny by claiming the absence of data on critical issues such as migrant worker deaths during Covid-19, exam paper leaks, and farmers' suicides.

While the Economic Survey does acknowledge RTI as a “powerful tool for reform”, its suggestion to re-examine the law runs counter to its own governance-centred philosophy. A transparent bureaucracy is not a hindrance to growth; it is a prerequisite for a stable, predictable, and fair economic environment.

### Key Takeaways

#### RTI and democratic accountability

- RTI reduces information asymmetry between citizens and the state
- Strengthens accountability of bureaucracy and public institutions
- Encourages reasoned and transparent policymaking

#### Why transparency aids governance

- Disclosure explains why policies were accepted or rejected
- Improves predictability and trust in public administration
- Creates a stable environment for economic decision-making

#### RTI is not “idle curiosity”

- Has exposed major scams like Vyapam and Adarsh Housing
- Played a role in uncovering banking and financial irregularities
- Acts as a governance-enhancing tool, not an obstruction

#### Judicial reinforcement of RTI

- Supreme Court rulings mandated RBI disclosures



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Strengthened financial probity and public sector bank accountability  
Reinforced transparency as part of public interest

### Recent dilution of RTI framework

Data protection law exempts wide categories of information  
Government claims of “no data” reduce public scrutiny  
Weakens citizens’ ability to demand accountability

### Critique of Economic Survey’s stance

Survey underestimates the value of civic scrutiny  
Re-examining RTI risks undermining transparency  
Governance reforms should deepen, not dilute, RTI

### Bottom line

RTI is central to accountable governance  
Transparency supports growth-friendly institutions  
The government should strengthen RTI in line with its reform agenda

[India’s next manufacturing leap will be about what it produces-The Indian Express The Ideas Page](#)

### Economy

#### Easy Explanation

India’s manufacturing sector is regaining momentum at a time when global production networks are being reshaped by geopolitical uncertainty, supply-chain diversification, and the return of industrial policy worldwide. This creates a favourable backdrop for India, whose recent manufacturing revival has laid a solid base for the next phase of industrial growth. As the **Economic Survey 2025–26** notes, sustaining this momentum will depend not just on expanding capacity, but on strengthening competitiveness and deeper integration into global value chains.

So far, India’s manufacturing policy has focused on lowering entry barriers — through incentives, infrastructure investment, and improvements in ease of doing business. These measures have helped attract investment and restore business confidence. The challenge now is to move beyond capacity creation towards **capability building**. Countries that dominate critical technologies, complex manufacturing processes, and trusted production capabilities enjoy greater strategic leverage. For India, this means prioritising technologically intensive and strategically important sectors, even if this requires greater experimentation and tolerance for firm-level failures.

Encouragingly, India’s manufacturing profile is already moving up the value chain. Electronics production has expanded several-fold over the past decade, with exports growing even faster. Pharmaceuticals have become another pillar, with India emerging as a global leader in vaccines and generic medicines. These sectors combine scale, technology intensity, and tradability. Replicating this success across a wider set of industries will require stronger private investment, higher R&D spending, deeper industry–academia collaboration, faster adoption of advanced technologies, and more robust skilling systems.

As capabilities deepen, **where** manufacturing happens becomes as important as **what** is produced. Industrial clusters remain central, but many existing clusters are too small or fragmented to generate productivity gains. The focus must shift from creating clusters to nurturing **large, integrated industrial ecosystems**, increasingly anchored in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. These locations offer advantages such as lower land and labour costs, better liveability, and improving infrastructure compared to congested metros.

Competitiveness also depends heavily on infrastructure and logistics. India has made progress, with logistics costs declining to around 8% of GDP and port efficiency improving. Initiatives like PM Gati Shakti and the National Logistics Policy are strengthening connectivity. Further gains can come from rebalancing freight towards rail and waterways, which are more cost-effective for long-distance and bulk transport.



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Quality Control Orders (QCOs) can also strengthen competitiveness by aligning domestic manufacturing with international standards, especially in strategic and safety-critical sectors. If well-calibrated, they can push firms to upgrade capabilities and build credibility in global markets, though poor implementation risks raising costs and constraining scale.

MSMEs remain the backbone of manufacturing, but face persistent credit and capability gaps. The next growth opportunity lies in integrating MSMEs more deeply into strategic value chains as suppliers of components and specialised services, supported by better access to finance, skilling, technology, and quality infrastructure.

Ultimately, firms respond less to rankings and more to the **daily experience of doing business** — speed, predictability, and consistency in approvals, utilities, land, and dispute resolution. As manufacturing becomes more spatially concentrated, state and local governments will play a decisive role. India's next manufacturing leap will therefore be defined not by how much it produces, but by **what it produces and how strategically indispensable it becomes**.

## Key Takeaways

### Global context

- Global supply chains are diversifying due to geopolitical uncertainty
- Industrial policy has returned to the centre of economic strategy
- India has an opportunity to reposition itself in global manufacturing

### Shift in manufacturing strategy

- Past focus: capacity creation and entry-barrier reduction
- Next phase: capability building and competitiveness
- Emphasis on technology-intensive and strategic sectors

### Moving up the value chain

- Strong gains in electronics and pharmaceuticals
- Combination of scale, technology, and export potential
- Need to replicate success across more industries

### Role of innovation and skills

- Higher private investment in R&D required
- Stronger industry-academia linkages
- Faster adoption of advanced manufacturing technologies
- Robust skilling and workforce development

### Industrial clusters and geography

- Existing clusters often too small or fragmented
- Need for larger, integrated industrial ecosystems
- Greater role for Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities

### Infrastructure and logistics

- Logistics costs declining and nearing global benchmarks
- Port efficiency improving
- Scope to reduce costs further via rail and waterways
- Multimodal integration is key

### Quality Control Orders (QCOs)

- Can improve standards and global credibility



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Useful in strategic and safety-critical sectors  
Must be phased, well-tested, and industry-consultative

### MSMEs and value chains

MSMEs are central to employment and exports  
Credit and capability gaps persist  
Opportunity in deeper integration into strategic value chains

### Ease of doing business

Firms value speed, predictability, and consistency  
Role of state and local governments is critical  
Daily operational experience matters more than rankings

### Bottom line

India's next manufacturing leap is about **what** it produces  
Strategic indispensability, not just scale, is the goal  
National Manufacturing Mission can align reforms for long-term impact [Green steel can shape India's climate goals trajectory-The Hindu Editorial](#)

### Environment

#### Easy Explanation

India is at a crucial juncture as it prepares to submit a more ambitious **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** under the Paris Agreement, a commitment announced by **Bhupender Yadav** at **COP30**. Meeting higher climate ambition will require economy-wide decarbonisation, especially in sectors that are hardest to clean up. Among these, the steel sector stands out as both indispensable for India's development and central to its emissions challenge.

Steel underpins infrastructure, manufacturing, and urbanisation. To realise India's long-term growth potential, steel production may need to rise from about 125 million tonnes today to over 400 million tonnes by mid-century. However, the sector already contributes around 12% of India's carbon emissions, largely because it relies heavily on coal-based blast furnaces. The risk is that continued investment in conventional technologies could lock India into high-carbon infrastructure for decades, making future climate targets costlier and harder to achieve.

Globally, the direction of travel is clear. Major economies are pushing steel decarbonisation through scrap-based production, green hydrogen, and carbon pricing. The European Union's **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism** will penalise carbon-intensive steel imports, threatening market access for producers that fail to decarbonise. Early movers in green steel will gain a competitive edge, while laggards risk losing export markets and investment appeal.

India's steel industry has begun responding. Large producers are piloting hydrogen use, increasing renewable energy sourcing, modernising furnaces, and exploring carbon capture. Yet, these efforts remain largely at the pilot stage. To align with climate goals, the sector must rapidly shift from experimentation to demonstration plants and then to full-scale deployment of low- or near-zero carbon technologies. Continuing to build new coal-based blast furnaces would undermine both climate commitments and long-term competitiveness.

Policy direction has improved but remains incomplete. India has released a Greening Steel Roadmap, launched a Green Steel Taxonomy, expanded renewable energy, rolled out the National Green Hydrogen Mission, and included steel units under the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme. However, strong incentives to decisively shift investment away from coal are still lacking. Meanwhile, other countries are moving faster, raising the risk that India becomes one of the few economies still adding outdated, carbon-intensive steel capacity.

The barriers to green steel are significant but manageable. These include the high cost and limited availability of green hydrogen, insufficient renewable power dedicated to industry, an underdeveloped scrap market, uncertain



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access to natural gas as a transition fuel, lack of shared infrastructure, shortage of low-cost long-term finance, and the need for workforce upskilling. None of these are insurmountable, as India's rapid renewable energy expansion over the past decade has shown.

What is needed now is a clear, credible policy framework. This includes firm short-, medium-, and long-term emissions targets for steel, early introduction of a carbon pricing regime, public procurement to create domestic demand for green steel, shared infrastructure hubs, and fiscal and financial support — especially for smaller producers. Green steel is no longer optional; it is a strategic necessity for India's climate credibility, industrial future, and global leadership.

## Key Takeaways

### Why steel matters for India's climate goals

- Steel is foundational to infrastructure and industrial growth
- Production may need to triple by mid-century
- Currently accounts for ~12% of India's emissions due to coal use

### Risk of carbon lock-in

- New coal-based blast furnaces lock emissions for decades
- Delays increase future transition costs
- High-carbon steel risks becoming economically unviable

### Global pressure and competitiveness

- EU's CBAM penalises carbon-intensive steel imports
- Export markets increasingly demand low-carbon production
- Early adopters of green steel gain a competitive advantage

### Industry response so far

- Large firms piloting hydrogen, renewables, and CCS
- Progress driven by top management
- Still largely limited to pilots, not scale

### Policy progress in India

- Greening Steel Roadmap released
- Green Steel Taxonomy formalised
- National Green Hydrogen Mission launched
- Steel units included under carbon markets

### Key barriers to green steel

- High cost and limited supply of green hydrogen
- Inadequate renewable power for industry
- Weak and informal scrap market
- Limited access to low-cost, long-term finance
- Need for skills and technology support

### What policy must do next

- Set clear emissions targets across time horizons
- Roll out carbon pricing early
- Use public procurement to create demand for green steel
- Develop shared infrastructure hubs



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Provide fiscal and financial support, especially for smaller players

### Strategic bottom line

Green steel is central to India's climate and growth strategy  
It can secure export competitiveness and global leadership  
Decisive action now can shape global industrial standards

[A job well done-The Hindu Editorial](#)

Economy

### Easy Explanation

Through the **Economic Survey 2025–26**, **V Anantha Nageswaran** has reinforced the value of calm, evidence-based economic analysis at a time of global uncertainty. Instead of sensational claims, the Survey focuses on reading current data carefully and using it to shape future policy — an approach well-suited to an economy that is relatively stable but facing multiple external and internal risks.

A central idea advanced by the Survey is that of an “**entrepreneurial state**” — a government that is agile, willing to take calculated risks, experiment with policy, and learn from failure. Having navigated the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Survey argues that India must now shift from crisis management to growth acceleration, with policy actively enabling innovation and investment.

At the same time, the Survey is far from complacent. It explicitly acknowledges global fragility, assigning a 10–20% probability that the world economy in 2026 could face a crisis worse than that of 2008. Even under optimistic assumptions, global conditions are expected to deteriorate compared to 2025. Against this backdrop, the Survey's relatively positive assessment of India's economy is grounded in data rather than rhetoric.

On macroeconomic issues, the Survey notes that the **falling rupee does not reflect weak domestic fundamentals**, but rather global capital flows towards countries with advanced AI ecosystems and safe-haven assets. While currency depreciation can help exporters, India's heavy dependence on imports means a weaker rupee also raises costs. The Survey candidly recognises that India is not yet strategically indispensable to global merchandise supply chains — a vulnerability exposed during trade negotiations.

To address this, the Survey outlines a long-term shift from **strategic resilience** to **strategic indispensability**, where India becomes too important to be bypassed in global economic networks. This ambition requires structural reforms, investment, and policy coherence over time.

On fiscal federalism, the Survey draws a sharp contrast between the Centre and the States. While the Union government has more than halved its fiscal deficit ratio over the past five years, many States have slipped into revenue deficits. The Survey warns against **fiscal populism**, especially the growing reliance on unconditional cash transfers, which may be politically attractive but fiscally unsustainable. This warning gains relevance in an election year for several major States.

Importantly, the Survey also flags emerging and unconventional risks — from the impact of ethanol production on food security, to the true costs of renewable energy transition, shortages of fodder, and even the economic and social consequences of “compulsive scrolling” on smartphones. By identifying such diverse challenges, the Survey demonstrates its role not as a cheerleader, but as an early-warning system for policymakers.

### Key Takeaways

#### Overall assessment

Survey avoids sensationalism and focuses on data-driven analysis  
Provides a medium-term framework for economic and governance strategy  
Emphasises learning-oriented and adaptive policymaking



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## Entrepreneurial state

- Advocates a risk-taking, agile government
- Encourages experimentation and acceptance of failure
- Aims to accelerate growth in the post-pandemic phase

## Global economic risks

- 10–20% probability of a global crisis worse than 2008 in 2026
- Even best-case scenario points to worsening global conditions
- Necessitates caution and preparedness

## Rupee and capital flows

- Rupee weakness driven by global capital shifts, not weak fundamentals
- Capital flowing to AI-heavy economies and safe-haven assets
- Depreciation raises import costs for India

## Trade and supply chains

- India not yet strategically vital to global merchandise supply chains
- Need to move from strategic resilience to strategic indispensability

## Fiscal discipline

- Centre has sharply reduced fiscal deficit ratio
- Many States slipping into revenue deficits
- Warning against fiscal populism and unconditional cash transfers

## Emerging risks flagged

- Ethanol production impacting food security
- Real costs of renewable energy transition
- Fodder shortages
- Economic and social impact of excessive smartphone use

## Bottom line

- Survey functions as a policy compass, not a political document
- Raises the right questions for sustainable growth
- Successfully balances optimism with realism

